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Beyond parity: Understanding the construction of gender identity and gender relations in two secondary schools in Dhading district, Nepal

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my dear father *Prayag Datta Acharya* who passed away during the writing process of this thesis.

I am eternally grateful to you for being there for me through good and bad times, always encouraging and supporting me in the pursuit of excellence. Although you could not see the completion of my work, I hope that I have made you proud.

You have and always will be my inspiration, I miss you.

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ABSTRACT

A majority of academic and non-academic studies and debates on gender and education at international and national level centers around gender parity in education. Thus this study is an attempt to move beyond this vantage point towards understanding students' activities, interactions and experiences regarding their gender, caste and/or ethnicity from their own perspectives. This qualitative study was conducted in two governmental schools in *Naubise* village development committee of *Dhading* district of Nepal. The study focuses on 'how' grade nine and ten students of Nepali governmental schools reaffirm or restructure their gender identity along with caste and ethnic identities in multiple spaces and contexts both inside and outside schools.

The findings of this study show that student' gender identity, and also their caste and ethnic identities, is fluid and changing from one context to another. Depending upon the contexts and situations the students are in, their gender along with caste and/or ethnic identities becomes more or less relevant among them. In a majority of occasions, the construction of gender identity and relations among students was an active and ongoing process often facilitated by themselves through performing gender in their activities and interactions. Such gender specific behaviors and acts were further supported by teachers, school authorities, curricula which were guided by the existing patriarchal norms and values in Nepali society. Nevertheless, students also were actively negotiating their gender identity and relations depending on the place where they are conducting their activities and people who are witnessing such activities. But it was difficult for students to challenge the dominant gendered norms and values that remain unchallenged in society and, to some extend also in schools.

The national and local educational plans and policies in Nepal largely focus on social inclusion in education by increasing access of the disadvantaged groups including women, *dalits* and ethnic groups. But with too much focus on access, the national and local level educational plans and programs often tend to overlook other crucial aspects of gender inequality in schools. In such context, through this study, I illustrate and argue that along with gender parity, it is equally important to focus on gender dynamics of the students in the schools by taking account of their activities, interactions and experiences of gender in multiple spaces and context inside and outside the schools.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPEP   -   Basic and Primary Education Program

CASP   -   Community Alternative Schooling Program

CBS   -   Central Bureau of Statistics

CDC   -   Curriculum Development Center, Nepal

CEIR   -   Centre for Educational Innovation and Research in Nepal

CERID   -   Research Center For Education Innovation and Development in Nepal

CPN-M   -   Communist Party Nepal - Maoist

DEO   -   District Education Office, Nepal

DOE   -   Department of Education

EFA   -   Education For All

FGD   -   Focus Group Discussion

GLSEN   -   Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

GoN   -   Government of Nepal

HIV/ AIDS -   Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection / Acquired Immunodeficiency
                 Syndrome

HMGN   -   His Majesty Government of Nepal

IFAD   -   International Fund for Agricultural Development

JICA   -   Japanese International Cooperation Agency

MDG   -   Millennium Development Goal

MGEP   -   Mainstreaming Gender Equity Program

MOE   -   Ministry of Education, Nepal

MWSCW   -   Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Nepal

NGO   -   Non- governmental Organization

NOK   -   Norwegian Kroner

NPC   -   National Planning Commission, Nepal

NPR   -   Nepalese Rupees

NSD   -   Norwegian Social Science Data Service

OCHA   -   Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Rs   -   Rupees (Nepali)

SDRC   -   Social Development Research Center

SDSSS   -   Shree *Dilli Sabitri* Secondary School

SMHSS	-	Shree *Machindra* Higher Secondary School
SSRP	-	School Sector Reform Plan
UN	-	United Nations
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	-	United States Agency For International Development
USD	-	United States Dollar
VDC	-	Village Development Committee

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Background of the study

Much of the available research, debates and conferences on gender and education so far, at the international and also at the national level in Nepal have primarily focused on equal access and parity in terms of closing the gender gap in enrollment (see e.g. Subrahmanian, 2005; Unterhalter, 2007; Education For Change Ltd., 2013; Acharya, 2007). In order to make gender equality in education a reality and just not a mirage, it is necessary to emphasize, as indicated by Subrahmanian (n.d. cited in USAID, 2008), not only equality of access, but also equality in the learning process, equality of educational outcomes, and equality of external results. Therefore, in recent years, there has been an increasing interest to explore issues related to gender equality in terms of retention, educational achievements and quality of education in more depth (See: UNESCO, 2009; Subrahmanian, 2005; Unterhalter, 2007). However, in this context, the issues regarding gender equality in education repeatedly begins with and also ends on the concept of parity. Such an approach has often left out other crucial issues regarding gender and education that includes construction of gender identity and relations among students in schools. This study follows this path as it explores experiences of grade nine and ten students at two government schools in *Dhading* district of Nepal. By doing so, this study aims to move beyond the statistical approaches on parity, and analyze how students perform gender in multiple spaces both inside and outside the schools, and thus construct, reaffirm or restructure, their gender identity and relations in ways that might, or might not, be conducive with the goal of gender equality in and through education.

In the context where students' voices are not often consulted, either in educational policies or in practices, as pointed out by Cook-Sather (2002), this study hopes to cast a unique and distinctive light upon schooling, by focusing on the students. This study examines students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender in multiple contexts and spaces inside and outside the classrooms including playground, libraries, nearby cafes, their home to school journeys and also their educational experiences at home. Thorne (1994) has emphasized that organization and meaning of gender not only differs from school to neighborhood to families, but varies in different sites in school, from classroom to playground to lunchroom settings. Thus by exploring students' experiences in such multiple contexts in this study, I elucidate the variations in their experiences of gender depending on the peers they interact with and the

place they conduct their activities. I also take account of the ways students' gender identity intersects with other social identities, such as caste and ethnicity, to create their diverse experiences inside and outside the schools among grade nine and ten students in two Nepali government schools. Thus I believe that this study contributes to an exploration of the construction of gender identity and relations among secondary school students.

1.2 The national context

1.2.1 Gender and caste in Nepali society

Nepal is a landlocked sovereign country in Southeast Asia with the population of around 26.5 million according to the National Population and Housing Census 2011 (CBS, 2012). The Constitution of Nepal has acknowledged all the citizens' equality irrespective of their sex, caste, ethnicity, class and color. It assures that all the diverse ethnic groups and castes have the equal space to express their opinions openly and to assert their identities and rights as citizens. However, in practice, Nepal retains its centuries-old patriarchal and caste system influenced by the Hindu religious ideologies that, according to the National Population and Housing Census 2011 (CBS, 2012), is followed by 81.3 percent of the population. As explained by *Samuhik Abhiyan* (2008), a Nepali non-governmental organization, the classical Hindu scriptures, including the earliest textual tradition of Hinduism, '*Manusmriti*', primarily establish the hierarchical relationship between sexes by portraying men as dominant breadwinners and placing women in secondary position and confined in the households. Such gender discriminations, deeply rooted in the Hindu religion, are further put into practice through various cultural norms and customs. Such practices include the notion of pollution related to menstruation and childbirth, customs regarding only male being allowed to perform death-related rituals, the prevalence of dowry system, early marriages and polygamy, social custom of girls leaving the parental home after marriage and thus not continue the parental family name. Such patriarchal norms and values are exhibited and regularized in everyday lives through popular sayings such as 'never mind the delay as long as it is a son'; 'when a son is born, celebrate by eating goat (regarded as expensive and valuable) and when a daughter is born, serve pumpkin (regarded as inexpensive and invaluable)' and 'if no sons are born, families die'. As elucidated by Niraula (2007, 2011), most of the Nepali women hold the triple work responsibilities of reproduction, domestic chores and employment mainly in subsistence agriculture or low earning works. Being confined within their homes with

reproduction not treated as work and domestic chores not considered as economically valuable, this results in women's lack of mobility in the public sphere, resulting furthermore, into their lack of confidence and lack of equal access to opportunities. In such scenario, as Acharya (2007) and Bennett (2005) indicates, other factors, such as lack of property ownership, equal access to politics, inadequate implementation of 33 percent women representation in all sectors along with the limited educational and managerial skills, attribute to confine women to the private spheres with male dominance in the public spheres.

The caste system, a traditional system of social stratification that categorize people in hierarchical endogamous groups, is another predominant feature of the Nepali society. According to Gray (2011), the terms, caste '*jat*' and ethnicity '*janjati*' are in Nepali used interchangeably without any clear distinctions. It can be seen in the National Population and Housing Census 2011(CBS, 2012) as it shows that there are 125 castes and ethnic groups with the upper castes, *kshatriya* and *brahmans*, being the largest groups. As explained by Bennett (2005), the existing caste system categorizes people into four levels based on degrees of purity and pollution has its roots in the Hindu ideology. The priestly *brahmans* are at the top with the *kshatriya* (kings or warriors) just beneath them; next comes the *vaishya* (merchants) and then the *sudra* (peasants and laborers). Beneath everyone are occupational groups, considered 'impure' and 'untouchable' who call themselves the *dalits*. Generally the *janajati* (ethnic groups) who have their own language, culture and religion do not follow the Hindu caste system, and thus are also considered as 'impure' but most of the ethnic groups are not regarded as 'untouchables'. According to Acharya (2007) and Stash & Hannum (2001), the untouchable castes, *dalits* and some ethnic groups, suffer from various social restrictions such as prohibition from touching the possessions of people from higher castes and also using public amenities such as temples, restaurants, public taps and toilets. With defiance of such customs often resulting into violence, *dalits* and ethnic groups is regarded as being excluded in the social and economic development, and *dalit* and ethnic women thus endure a double burden of caste and gender discrimination.

However, as elucidated by Bennett (2005), the armed conflict in Nepal from 1996 to 2006 against feudal, caste and patriarchal institutions as claimed by the Maoist party, who had initiated the conflict, helped to bring the issues of 'marginalized' groups, that generally include women, *dalits*, ethnic groups, disabled, poor and geographically disadvantaged

people, out in the public debate. Likewise, increase in trend of collective mobilization of women through women's groups and mother's groups, as stated by Niraula (2011), helped to increase women's mobility in the public spheres, and also provided them the opportunities to question and challenge existing gendered and caste-based discriminations. Such efforts towards of weakening the caste and gender discriminations was further supported by the programs targeting women and *dalits* initiated by the government and the non-governmental organizations, the institutional changes after Nepal being declared a secular state, and increasing number of inter-caste love marriages. With these endeavors, the issues regarding gender and caste-based discriminations have been gradually recognized in public. Thus in an attempt to readdress the social inequalities based on gender and caste, women, *dalits* and ethnic groups are subject to positive discriminations such as quotas in jobs and educational institutions. Furthermore, to highlight the situation of *dalits* and ethnic groups, there has also been an increasing trend of classifying data and information into three main categories – the *dalits*, the ethnic groups and the others, that include *brahmans, kshatriya, vaishya* and *sudhra.* As most educational data and information at national, district and school levels have employed such pattern, I have used it to classify students' caste and ethnicity in this study.

1.2.2 The education system in Nepal

As elucidated by Tuladhar (2011), Nepal does not have a long history of modern education as schooling for the general people started only after 1951 which before that period was limited only to members of ruling families and aristocrats. Under the School Sector Reform Program 2009 (MOE, 2009), the Government of Nepal has been initiated twelve years of school education with first eight years (grade one to eight) referred as the basic education, and rest four years (grade nine to twelve) as the secondary education. Students are supposed to begin grade one at age five and to complete the school education by age eighteen. Before this arrangement, ten years of education was in practice, and included the primary level from grades one to five, the lower secondary comprising grades six to eight and the secondary levels incorporating grades nine to ten. Furthermore, there are mainly two types of schools in Nepal. The first one is the government schools that receive government grants and follow governmental rules and curriculum while the private schools are funded by individuals and have their own rules and curriculum. This study focuses on grade nine and ten students of the secondary level of two government schools at *Dhading* district.

According to the National Population and Housing Census 2011 (CBS, 2012), the overall literacy rate (for population aged 5 years and above) has increased from 54.1 percent in 2001 to 65.9 percent in 2011. But the male literacy rate is still higher with 75.1 percent compared to 57.4 percent female literacy rate. In the case of school level education, there has been fairly balanced composition of students at all levels. According to the government report the Flash I[1] 2012/13[2] (MOE/DOE, 2012), girls' enrolment constitutes 50.6 percent at the basic level (grade one to eight) and 50 percent at the secondary level (grade nine to twelve) with 49.8 percent in grade nine and ten. Based on this scenario, I believe that it is important to look beyond parity and focus on student's experiences related to gender and caste inside the schools. Shilling (1991) claims that schools are organized on the basis of patriarchal rules and resources, along with the socially accepted and legally sanctioned adult-child norms. Taking this aspect into considerations, this study explores the ways girls and boys draw on and/ or contest the existing patriarchal rules and resources in various spatial contexts within and also outside schools to reaffirm or to restructure their gender identity and relations.

1.3 Overview of the two schools in the study

Nepal is administratively divided into five development regions which are divided into fourteen zones. It is further subdivided into seventy-five districts, an administrative division of zones managed by the local government. *Dhading* district is situated at *Bagmati* Zone of the central development region and is further divided into fifty Village Development Committees, the lower local administrative division. The *Naubise*, one such Village Development Committees, is situated at the south east corner and is adjoined to the capital, *Kathmandu*.

As stated in by *Naubise* Resource Center (2012), there are seventeen government schools in the *Naubise* Village Development Committee. Out of these schools, there are twelve primary schools (grade one to five), three lower secondary schools (grade one to eight), one secondary school (grade one to ten) and one higher secondary school (grade one to twelve). There are

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[1] Flash I and II are government reports prepared by the Ministry of Education. Flash I, published at the beginning of the school year, provides nationwide school level enrolment, pass rates, repetition and survival rates. Flash II, published at end of the school year, compares the educational status of students (e.g. total, d*alit*, ethnic groups and students with disabilities) in relation to their retention and performance at individual grade.
[2] Nepal has its own calendar called *Bikram Sambat* which is about 57 years ahead of English calendar. The Nepali months fall under two English months, for instance, the first month of Nepali calendar (*Baishak*) falls between 14th April and 14th May.

also many private schools but due to lack of the Village Development Committee profile[3] and also the District Education Office focusing only on the district level data, I could not find the exact number of private schools in the area. I have selected two schools situated at the *Naubise* Village Development Committee for this study which are *Shree Machindra* higher secondary school and *Dilli Sabitri* secondary school. I selected these two schools due to its locality as it is close to the capital, the long history of these schools in the area, and high girls' enrollment ratio which is further explained in the following sections.

1.3.1 *Shree Machindra higher secondary school (Urban School)*

Shree Machindra higher secondary school was established on March 11, 1971 under the name of *Machindra* Middle school. It is currently located at *Khanikhola* in ward 7 of the *Naubise* Village Development Committee. According to the School Improvement Plan of *Shree Machindra* higher secondary school (SMHSS, 2009), this school started grade nine and ten classes in 1976 and from 2002, the classes of grade eleven and twelve were started, only in the mornings, with specialization in Business Administration and Education. This school is located in the urban area, adjoined to *Prithivi* highway, one of the busiest highways that connect *Kathmandu* to *Pokhara*, with the main markets, government offices and banks located nearby. For this reason, this school is referred to as the 'urban school' throughout this thesis. As stated in the School Improvement Plan (SMHSS, 2009), after the latest reconstruction of school buildings in 2003, it is one of the biggest schools in the area. *Naubise* Resource Center, responsible for twenty-seven government and nine private schools in *Naubise* and *Thakre* Village Development Committees, is also situated inside the compound of this school. According to the *Santwona* Memorial Academy (2011), a Nepali educational research and consultancy center, the resource center is a local educational body under a resource person who is responsible to integrate the scattered schools in a cluster to enhance the quality of education, and also to work as a bridge that connect schools to the District Education Office through updating necessary data and information, and providing trainings to concerned person within the catchment area.

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[3] When I went to the *Naubise* Village Development Committee office, there the officials told me that they had not yet prepared the Village Development Committees profile that contains the geographic, social, economic, and educational details of that Village Development Committee.

According to the *Shree Machindra* higher secondary school Flash I report 2012/13 (DEO *Dhading*, 2012a) submitted to the District Education Office in *Dhading*, there were 515 students in this school. Among them, there were 276 girls and 237 boys with higher number of girls at all levels. There were 64 boys and 58 girls at the primary level, 112 girls and 95 boys at the lower secondary level while 100 girls and 84 boys were studying at grade nine and ten of the secondary level. The majority of students in grade nine and ten were mainly from the ethnic groups *Tamangs*, the dominant ethnic groups in *Dhading*. The grade nine and ten students' caste and ethnicity details is presented in the following table 1:

Table 1 - Caste and ethnicity wise distribution of students in grade nine and ten

Castes / ethnic groups	Grade 9			Grade 10		
	Girls	*Boys*	*Total*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*
Dalits	6	4	**10**	4	3	**7**
Ethnic groups	40	37	**77**	44	30	**74**
Others	2	3	**5**	4	7	**11**
Total	48	44	**92**	52	40	**92**

Due to the high number of students in both grades, each grade was further divided into two sections. Grade nine and ten students in Nepal have to study eight different subjects with six compulsory courses including English; Nepali; Math; Science; Health, Population & Environment Education; and Social Studies as compulsory courses, and two optional courses. In this school, students had the option of choosing subjects from Economics, Accounts, Education and Optional Math.

1.3.2 *Shree Dilli Sabitri secondary school (Semi-urban school)*

Shree Dilli Sabitri secondary school is situated at *Lankhu Fhedi*, ward 4 of the *Naubise* Village Development Committee. According to the School Improvement Plan of *Shree Dilli Sabitri* secondary school (SDSSS, 2009), it is the oldest school of the whole district as it was initially established around eight decades ago as *Shree Ruping Thuli Hidi* Sanskrit[4] language school. However only in 2004, it got the government's approval to conduct grade nine and ten classes. This school is located in the center of the farm area with only a couple of tea shops

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[4] Sanskrit is the primary language of Hinduism and Nepali language is considered to be developed from it.

around the school and the nearest settlement being about twenty minutes' walk away. It is about one hour downhill walk from the *Prithivi* highway and a small trail leads to the school from the highway. Due to its location, hereafter this school is referred as 'the semi-urban school'.

According to the *Shree Dilli Sabitri* secondary school Flash I report 2012/13 (DEO *Dhading*, 2012b) sent to the District Education Office in *Dhading*, there were 180 girls and 172 boys with higher number of girls at all levels, especially the lower secondary and the secondary level. There were 83 girls and 78 boys at the primary level followed by 83 girls and 62 boys at the lower secondary level and 54 girls and 32 boys studying at the secondary level. The caste and ethnicity wise details of students at grade nine and ten is presented in table 2:

Table 2 - Caste and ethnicity wise distribution of students in grade nine and ten

Castes / ethnic groups	Grade 9			Grade 10		
	Girls	*Boys*	*Total*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*
Dalit	5	2	**7**	2	2	**4**
Ethnic groups	10	8	**18**	15	4	**19**
Others	6	6	**12**	16	10	**26**
Total	21	16	**37**	33	16	**49**

As in the case of the urban school, grade nine and ten students in this school also had to study six different compulsory courses including English; Nepali; Math; Science; Health, Population & Environment Education; and Social Studies. They had to choose two optional courses among optional math, economics and accounts.

I believe that conducting this study in these two schools; one in an urban locality and another in a semi-urban locality, of the district adjoined to the capital helps to highlight the gender issues, and also students' opinions and perspectives on such issues in two different localities. Besides the higher number of enrollment of girls and also students from ethnic groups in both schools made me curious to analyze students' activities, interactions and experiences related to gender and caste.

1.4 Research problem and research questions

Over the last three decades, the Government of Nepal has formulated its educational plans, policies and programs to make education, especially at primary level, free and accessible to all children with a focus on reducing gender disparities in enrollment (an issue that will be further discussed in the literature review chapter). According to the Flash I Report of 2012/13 (MOE/DOE, 2012), the net enrollment rate of the basic level (grade one to eight) is 87.5 percent with 95.3 percent in grade one to five. Despite the comparative lower net enrolment rates with 54.3 percent at the grade nine and ten, as mentioned above, the data shows girls' enrollment constitute almost 50 percent at all levels. In this context, I believe that there is a need for an analytical shift from questions of equal access to examine the ways students' experience gender and caste in school that shape their identities, expectations and aspirations for the future.

As stated by Bhuiyan (2007), schooling is an important socialization processes that a child goes through outside her family as it shapes that child's understanding of self in relation to others. As illustrated by Thorne (1994), and also by Shilling (1991), schools can be regarded as a crucial social arena that marks conventional gender differences and reproduce gender roles and expectations. This takes place through the curriculum, teacher's relationships with students, allocation of the school tasks, timetable and even the peer group activities. Likewise as stated by Kessler, Ashenden, Connell & Dowsett (1985), schools can also provide settings for enactment of various types of masculinity and femininity, not just the hegemonic sex-role pattern. Furthermore, schools, as shown by Thorne (1994) can also provide spaces for boys and girls to work together cohesively to cross the gender boundaries and even to challenge the existing gender norms and values. Moreover my work experience[5] in the education sector in Nepal also made me curious about the construction of gender identity and relations in the government schools. As part of the work, I had to visit schools in both urban and rural areas of Nepal and got the opportunity to have firsthand experience of gendered socialization processes that take place in these schools. With a majority of conferences and workshops on education that I attended focused on gender equality in education as a statistical parity issue. However I strongly believe that, in order to achieve gender equality in education in terms of

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[5] I have worked at Aasaman Nepal, a national non-governmental organization working to abolish child labour through education from 2007 to 2008, and with an international non-governmental organization Japanese International Cooperation Agency in Community Alternative Schooling Program (CASP) from 2008 to 2009.

access, learning, outcome and external results (cf. Subrahmanian n.d. cited in USAID, 2008), gender equality needs to be dealt with in an integrated manner, which also includes the issue of how female and male gender identity is reproduced and/or challenged in school.

On this background, this study aims to explore the activities, interactions and experiences of gender of grade nine and ten students inside and also outside the schools, and thus analyze the ways students construct or negotiate their gender identity and relations. In order to discuss the above mentioned research problems; I explore the following research questions:

i)   How do students use the classroom space along with peer relationships and classroom interactions to construct gender identity and relations?

ii)   How do students use space outside the classroom, including playground, library, lunch areas and journeys from home to school, to construct gender identity and relations?

iii) How do students' other identities, like caste and ethnicity, intersect with their gender identity to form their experience both inside and outside the classrooms?

iv) How do students, government officials, school authorities and teachers perceive and understand the term gender, gender identity and gender equality in schools?

v)   How is gender integrated in the educational policies and programs at the local level?

1.5 Significance of this study

Over the years, focus on gender parity have largely overlooked the construction of gender identity and relations among students, which have an impact on their studies and peer relationships as illustrated by Adler, Kless & Adler (1992). Thus, in this study I argue and illustrate why it is high time to shift our focus on understanding students' activities and interactions from the perspectives of gender identity and relations. Here, I want to stress that I do not intend to emphasize that numerical equality or equal access is not important, as it obviously is a starting point. But in the scenario where equal access to school is increasing in many countries, including Nepal, it is often assumed that, as elucidated by a non-governmental organization Centre for Educational Innovation and Research Nepal (CEIR, 2007), increased equal access inevitably helps to enhance quality, relevance and equity aspect of the education. However, with too much focus on equal access, the other crucial issues related to gender and education, including construction of gender identity and relations among students and its impact both in their education and their everyday lives, goes unquestioned.

Thus, this study focuses on students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender and caste in multiple spaces and contents both inside and outside the schools to explore variations regarding construction their gender identity and relations. In order to understand and explain such variations, I focus on 'how' students conduct their activities in various spaces both inside and outside the schools, and not on 'why' students behave the way they do. As Thorne (1994) argues, I also believe that such approach can highlight the importance of social context, collective dynamics and shared practices in construction and/or negotiation of gender identity among students, while focusing on 'why' often centers on individual motivations and thus neglects these crucial perspectives.

1.6   Structure of the thesis

Chapter I has included the background, national context on gender, caste and education, overview of the two schools in this study, research problem and significance of this study. Chapters II presents the literature review on gender identity formation in schools. Chapter III outlines the theoretical framework for this study. Chapter IV describes the research methodologies including access to the field, various data collection tools and techniques and challenges during this study. Chapter V presents the ways local educational policies include gender issues and my informants' understandings of gender, gender identity and gender equality. Chapter VI discusses students' experiences of gender inside the classrooms while Chapter VII focuses on students' experiences of gender outside the classrooms. Chapter VIII is the conclusion based on the study findings.

CHAPTER TWO - REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

In this thesis, I focus on students experiences of gender in the various spatial dimensions inside and outside the schools and argue that gender identity and relations are crucial issues that need to be addressed to achieve gender equality in education. In this chapter, I elaborate on the relevance of this study by presenting the international and the national educational policies, plans and programs that primarily focus on gender equality in education in terms of parity. I also review previous studies related to the construction of gender identity in schools, and present the gap in the literature that this study hopes to fill. As explained by Chris Hart (2003), I believe that an evaluative discussion of previous studies help to illustrate my familiarity with the issue under study, and justify the research questions discussed above.

2.2 Gender equality based on parity – A review of trends at the international and national context

2.2.1 *Equal access to education as human rights – the primary international trend*

The article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UN, 1949), the first global level expression of rights entitled to all human beings, declares that everyone has right to education irrespective of gender, and identifies education as a means to develop human personality, and also strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms. Such universal right to education was further supported by the Convention against Discrimination in Education 1960 (UNESCO, 1960) and also the article 28 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UN, 1989). Both advocate the right of every child to access education without any discrimination based on gender, race, religion or language. Along with these international human rights treaties, various international declarations under the United Nations also urged to make education universally available, and especially to protect and promote the rights of women in education.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN, 1979) urges to guarantee girls' equal rights in education, and also commends to take appropriate measures to eliminate gender stereotypes at all levels of education to increase equal access. The Beijing Platform for Action 1995 (UN, 1996) also advocates education as a

human right and identifies education as an essential tool to achieve the goals of equality, development and peace. Although it primarily emphases on equality of access, it claims that equal access along with gender sensitive educational resources and social environment would be effective to eliminate discrimination against women. The World Conference for Education for All (EFA) in 1990 (UNESCO, 2013) held at Jomtien is another global commitment to universalize primary education and reduce illiteracy by the end of 2000. The EFA framework for Action had six goals including universal access to education; a focus on equity; emphasis on learning outcomes; broadening the means and scope of basic education; enhancing the environment for learning; and strengthening partnerships. However due to only little progress in achieving the goals in the ten years that followed, the World Education Forum 2000 in Dakar (UNESCO, 2000) re-affirmed the commitment to achieving Education for All goals by 2015. With focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access in basic education, it also identified six education goals among which four are applicable to formal schooling. It includes expanding early childhood care and education; providing free and compulsory primary education for all; achieving gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015; and improving quality of education. The Education for All underlies the global pursuit of Millennium Development Goals (UNDP, 2013), among which two have direct relevance to education[6]. There are goal two that aims to achieve universal primary education by 2015, and goal three to promote gender equality and empower women with a target to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

As we can see, over the years the international human right treaties and other global level conventions on education and gender have predominantly focused on gender equality in terms of parity. Even though such global conventions incorporate the goals of achieving quality education and gender equality in education, these goals are generally linked with equal access. With the primary focus on equal access, there has been insufficient attention towards other issues including gender dynamics inside schools, construction of gender identity and relations in schools and its result in retention, achievement and quality of education. Even in the case when they are addressed, they most likely are not given as much priority as gender equality in

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[6] The other six goals include to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; to reduce child mortality rates; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development by 2015 (see: UNDP, 2013)

terms of parity. It is from this perspective, I now will focus on Nepali educational policies and programs to review the ways they incorporate the issues of gender equality in education.

2.2.2 *Equitable access to education – the prime goal of national level educational plans, policies and programs*

The government of Nepal has signed and declared its commitment to adopt all the international conventions and declarations on gender and education. I found that the national level educational plans, policies and programs largely focus on equitable and an inclusive approach to education with the aim to increase equal access of groups lagging behind in education. It generally included women, *dalits*, ethnic groups, disabled, poor and geographically disadvantaged people. I also found that overwhelming number of educational policies and programs centers on increasing access at the primary level through various scholarship or incentive programs. The Education Act 1971 and the Education Regulations 1992 with its sixth amendment (MOE/GON, 2011) have provisions of free primary education, and also include provision of scholarship for girls and students from *dalit* and other groups lagging behind in education to increase their equal access to education.

As stated by Ministry of Education (MOE, 1999) and discussed by Acharya (2007), I also found that a majority of the renowned educational programs, including the Education for Rural Development project 1980, the Primary Education Project 1984/85, the Basic and Primary Education Project Phase I from 1992/93 to 1997/98, the Primary Education Development Project from 1992 to 1998, the School Sector Reform Project 1999, and the Basic and Primary Education Project Phase II from 1998/99–2003/04, all predominantly focused on increasing equal access to and improving equity and quality of basic and primary education. Under the Basic and Primary Education Project, the government initiated schemes such as free textbooks, scholarships for females and *dalits*, introduced a decentralization process of educational plans and programs at the local levels and also established Department of Education in 1999. One of the few projects that focused on the secondary level was the Secondary Education Development Project from 1992 to 2000. According to MGEP (n.d.), this project centered on grades nine and ten, especially in regards to curriculum, textbook and laboratories development; enhancement of teacher effectiveness and competency and improvement in learning assessment and examination systems. It also had provisions to

increase girls' enrolment, to appoint a gender specialist, and to revise curriculum to remove gender bias.

Furthermore, the five years development plans started to incorporate gender equality in education from the Fifth Five-Year Plan (NPC/HMGN, 1975) from 1975 to 1980. It advocated increased equal access of girls and women to education, and also proposed to appoint female teachers to increase girls' enrolment. The subsequent development plans also proposed to make basic level education free, equitable and accessible to address the gender and social inequalities in education, and also recommended ensuring free education gradually up to the secondary level to increase equal access to secondary education.

In order to fulfil its commitment regarding children's right to education, especially to increase access of girls and *dalits* to education, the government of Nepal has launched various scholarship programs. One such scholarship programs is the girls' scholarship program for all girls up to grade eight studying at government schools. This scholarship was distributed only to 50 percent of the girls but from 2011 all the girls studying up to grade eight receive Rs. 400 (about 24 NOK or 4 USD) [7] per year as scholarship. When girls reach the secondary level, they become ineligible to receive this scholarship. However, in some parts of Nepal, there are special scholarships for girls studying at the secondary levels. But both schools under this study did not have such scholarship programs. There is also the *dalit* scholarship program for the students from the untouchable castes studying in the government schools. Both *dalit* girls and boys from grade one to ten, get the same amount per year as of girls' scholarship program.

As in line with the global level conventions on education, the educational policies and programs at the national level also predominantly focused on increasing equal and/or equitable access to education. By categorizing women, *dalits* and ethnic groups as groups lagging in education and providing them with scholarships and incentives, the educational policies and programs have acknowledged existing gender, caste and ethnic disparities in education. However, they mainly focus on such disparities in terms of equal access and do not tend to look beyond parity measures of gender equality. Moreover, by using a blanket approach, while defining such groups, i.e. covering a whole group instead of one or more

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[7] The calculation is based on exchange rate 1 NPR = 0.0609361 NOK and 1 NPR = 0.0100929 USD of 03.03.2014

issues mentioned individually, they are not acknowledging the social and economic variations inside those groups. As illustrated by Center for Educational Innovative and Research, Nepal (2007) and Acharya & Luitel (2006), the scholarships and incentive programs have helped to increase enrolment, promotion and decrease repetition and dropout rates of its target groups. But distributing the scholarship under pre-defined categories based on gender, caste and ethnicity do not generally cover those students who are in need of support due to low economic conditions and those who do not fall in under those categories, a point I will return to later in this chapter.

2.3 Gender equality beyond parity – A review of previous studies at the international and the national context

2.3.1 The international context – predominance of construction of gender identity at the elementary levels

The reviews of the studies on construction of gender identity and relations in schools in the international context reveal that students actively perform to develop their gender beliefs and roles through everyday practices at schools. Their learnings of such gendered perceptions and roles were further encouraged by peer relationships, teacher-student interactions, curriculums, playing activities and school's rules, regulations and structures. In this section, I have included the studies that focus on these issues at the primary levels to show their dominance in the literature and thus pointing out the significance of also studying the issue of gender identity and relation on the secondary level. Furthermore review of such studies also helps to understand and explain my findings regarding the ways students reconstruct or reshape their gender identity and relations when they reach adolescence.

i) Primary levels and construction of gender identity and relations

I now present an overview of international studies that focus on the construction of gender identity and relations at the primary levels. Renold (2000) illustrates the ways dominant notions of heterosexuality underlined students' identity formation and peer relationships to be regarded as a normal boy or girl at primary schools in an English semi-rural town. Lloyd & Duveen (1992) reveal that classroom activities and interactions shape students' development into gendered identity and sex-typed social behavior during their first year of schooling in England. Chase (2009) highlights the formation of gender appropriate roles in thoughts and

belief schemas among the elementary level in the United States of America students despite less frequency of sex segregation in their play. Jon Swain (2000) illustrates the ways boys in junior school in England used the game of football as a way of constructing, negotiating and performing masculinity. It was found that football formed a large part of boys' school life, which was associated with hegemonic masculinity traits due to the exclusion of girls and other subordinate boys from it. Martin Ashley (2003) shows that younger boys in the primary grades in England were socialized into the norms of hegemonic masculinity. It resulted into homophobic and sexualized bullying among peers being an unrecognized issue in school. While reviewing literatures on the influence of peers on children's socialization to gender roles in schools, Susan D. Witt (2000) found that peer groups strongly encouraged children to adopt traditional gender roles in schools. It was again reinforced by parents, schools and media. Another study by Witt (2001) concluded that influence of school and reading materials encouraged and perpetuated traditional gender roles and identity among students in the United States of America.

Ke Chen (2007) found gender disparities during classroom interaction at the primary level classrooms in Northeast England. He found that boys were more active and concentrated more in the earlier classes in opposition to girls who were more concentrated during the later classes as they received more positive responses from teachers compared to boys. A study by Mcclowry, Rodriguez, Tamis-Lemonda, Spellmann, Carlson & Snow (McClowry et. al., 2013) discovered that temperament mediated relationship between student's gender and disruptive classroom behaviors as primary grade students in the United States of America, irrespective of their gender, with high temperament were more likely to receive negative teacher feedback. Nevertheless irrespective of students' temperament, teachers provided more positive feedback to boys compared to girls. The studies so far have regarded schools as a crucial social arena where students at the primary level construct and validate their gender identity and relations mainly through peer relationships, teacher-student interactions, play and curriculum. Below I shift my focus to literature concentrating on the secondary level students, and elaborate on the ways students carry on gendered believes, roles and identity to their adolescence.

ii) *Secondary levels and construction of gender identity and relations*

Brutsaert (1999) shows that schools' structure, in terms of sex composition, and the socialization process play a crucial role in construction of gender identity among girls at the secondary level in Belgium. Moreover compared to single-sex schools, girls in coeducational schools identified themselves more strongly with feminine traits while boys' perception of their gender had nothing to do with sex composition within the school. A study conducted by Burke (1989) on gender identity, sex, and school performance among sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in England showed that there was a general trend that if boys and girls were more feminine, they had good chances for their better performances across all subjects. Máiréad Dunne (2007) reveals that secondary level students in Botswana and Ghana performed gender appropriate roles and behaviors in schools, which were further regulated by school's structures, curriculums, peers and teachers. A study by Younger, Warrington & Williams (1999) that analyzes the gender gap at eight secondary schools at United Kingdom found that teachers had not given equal treatment and support to boys during the learning process. Likewise in most schools, boys appeared to dominate in classroom interactions while girls participated more in teacher-student interactions that supported their learning.

A study by Etaugh & Liss (1992) shows that regarding the school subjects' preferences, most girls at the secondary level of the United States chose subjects related to gender stereo-typing of occupational choice but that this was not the case for boys. They found that with increase in age, both girls and boys increasingly preferred masculine toys and male friends. Deborah Youdell (2005) explores the ways gendered and sexualized identities were constituted among girls in a south London secondary school. She reveals the inseparability of sex–gender–sexuality and shows the ways students' day-to-day practices, including bodily deportment, physical games, linguistic accounts and uses of clothing, hairstyles and accessories, were caught up in the discursive constitution of student subjectivities in gendered ways.

In the midst of the international trend that focus on equal access and with limited research to date in the construction of gender identity and relations in schools, especially at the secondary levels, it can be said that there is a need to focus on students experiences inside the schools. With only focusing on equal access, there is a risk of withdrawing efforts to achieve gender equality in education. The studies discussed above show that students actively tend to develop gender identity, and relations through everyday practices at schools. Furthermore it is often

encouraged by the gendered learning environment, curriculum and attitudes of teachers that serve to reinforce and not challenge the prevailing gender stereotypes. These studies also reveal lack of studies that focus on students' experience of gender in multiple spaces as almost all of these studies focus on one singular space, either classrooms or playgrounds.

2.3.2 The national context – predominance of girls' access to education

During the review of studies in Nepal, I found that there were only nominal studies that focused on construction of gender identity in schools, and not a single study conducted in *Dhading* district. As illustrated by Bista (2004), I found that most of the studies on gender equality in education of Nepal focused on barriers to girls' schooling; role of female teachers to increase girls' enrollment; impact of scholarship programs on girls' enrollment; and gender disparities in terms of equal access in line with the international discourse on girls' education.

i) Barriers to girls schooling

Samira Luitel (1999) points out that girls education had not progressed as desired due to socio-cultural factors included parents taking girls as their husband's property after getting married; possibility of love affairs and inter-caste marriages and fear of family disintegration due to preference of well-educated daughter in law to live independently. The economic barriers included high cost of schooling; children as source of earning in poor families; and girls being engaged in household chores. The long distance between school and homes was geographical barriers while personal barriers included lack of motivation and support of same gender peers going to school. Another study by Chapala Koirala (2003) describes impact of different religions, mainly Hinduism and Buddhism, on girls' equal access to education. She shows that Hindu religion had given more importance to men from the early period, as only men were allowed to be educated. Although Buddhism was more liberal, it also encouraged men only to be educated. As majority of people follow either of this religion, the gender relationship in terms of power had not changed that much resulting in a negative impact on girls' education.

ii) Female teachers

A study by Social Development Research Center (SDRC, 2007) on the status of gender equality in twelve schools of six districts in Nepal shows that presence of women teachers was beneficial to promote gender equality as it encouraged parents to send their daughters to

schools. Mo Sibbons (1998) in his study illustrates that girls' enrollment was high in schools having female teachers in the rural areas of Nepal. Another study by Research Center For Education Innovation and Development (CERID, 1996) reveals that availability of female teachers in school contributed to boost girls' attitudes towards education and thus increase their enrollment. Another study by Laba Prasad Tripathi (2004) also highlights that female teachers, especially in the rural areas, help to increase girls' enrollment and retention. These studies show that female teachers have positive influence to increase girls' enrollment in schools of Nepal.

iii) Scholarship programs

A study done by Centre for Educational Innovation and Research (CEIR, 2007) shows that scholarship programs had positive impacts on enrolment, attendance, achievement, and also had minimized dropouts and repetition rates of girls. Moreover, scholarship recipients were more interactive and communicative and had improved health and cleanliness. Acharya & Luitel (2006) also indicate that the government scholarships had increased girls' enrolment and school attendance, but also highlight lack of information about availability of scholarships, inadequacy of the fund and lack of budget release on time as primary constraints of successful implementation of such programs. Another study by Research Center For Education Innovation and Development (CERID, 1997) also criticizes the scholarship policy for covering a whole group with the blanket approach as the actual need areas and communities were still suffering due to lack of adequate scholarship quota. These studies show that scholarship programs in Nepal had both positive aspects of increasing access and retention but in the meantime, such programs had many shortcomings.

iv) Gender disparities (regarding equal access and dropout) in education

Sunita Shakya (2004) explores gender disparities in terms of enrollment and dropout from primary to secondary school level in the *Kathmandu* valley. She reveals an increase in awareness among parents regarding educating both sons and daughters, but there was a general tendency, which also Mona Shrestha (1991) noted, to send sons to the private schools and girls to the public school with better standards and high tuition fee. Shakya (2004) further points out the major reason for girls' dropout as early marriage but for boys, it was due to labor outside the home, not affording schooling and not wanting to go to school. Another study by Mona Shrestha (1991) also shows that despite substantial improvement in girls'

education attainment, they were sent to government schools for the governmental scholarships while boys were generally sent to the private schools. Pritam Raj Pun Magar (2008) discovers that boys' school completion rate was less even though parents tended to pay more attention on extra tuition classes for boys compared to girls in *Pokhara*.

Similarly Tuladhar & Thapa (1998) show significant gap between boys' and girls' enrolment rates the all schools levels due to lack of efficiency in administration; unclear scholarship policy; lack of awareness on gender sensitivity in educational materials and lack of basic infrastructures. A report by Meena Acharya (1997) on gender equality and empowerment of Nepali women points out that the proportion of educated women in general was increasing, but still female literacy rate was lower than men with minimal proportion of women in higher education in the rural areas. Anila Shrestha's (2011) study also shows higher enrollment ratio of girls at all levels of school but girls' enrollment at higher level was far behind their male counterparts with minimal female enrollment in technical and vocational subjects. Shashi Aryal's (2001), on the other hand, shows that equal access, favorable condition and opportunities could develop the educational potential of individual girls. She points out that encouraging conditions at home along with motivation and support by parents and teachers were more essential than intelligence for girls to high performance in the schools.

v) *Construction of gender identity in Nepali schools*

One of three studies that I found on construction of gender identity in Nepali schools included Debra Skinner's (1990) 'Nepalese children's construction of identities in and around formal schooling'. In this study, she discovers that schools in Nepal were acting as arenas where new identities were being constructed, and traditional notions of gender and caste being contested. Even though children were highly encouraged to be 'good children' and follow traditional gendered roles and responsibilities, they were also regularly attempting to redefine their parents' traditional ideas and were convincing their parents to allow them to continue their schooling. Schools were, however, also providing an arena to negotiate more nontraditional caste and gender identities in opposition to other arenas of social life in the community. Due to interactions with teachers, reading course books, organizing through cultural performances against dominant norms, they were questioning such traditional identities and roles, and thus forming cross gender and also cross caste peer relationships.

The second study that focuses on construction of gender identity in Nepali schools is 'Gender experiences in public schools in Nepal' (CERID, 2004). This study reveals gender separations in the government schools regarding seating arrangements along with their subject choices. In addition boys would get hard punishment for not completing their homework compared to girls, whereas teachers would not pay much attention to girls' performance, especially at the secondary level. Girl's attendance and performance were affected by lack of proper toilets, frocks as part of their uniform mainly at games and sports, and household chores. Likewise, boys' dropout rate was higher in public schools due to their transference to private schools. The third and last study by Renu Kumari Thapa (2007) on 'Changing gender relations in schooling and local development' shows that although number of students, both girls and boys, had increased in schools, there were still certain forms and intensity of gender discrimination. She finds that boys were dominated by girls in classrooms as girls interacted more with the teachers. However, lack of physical facilities like proper toilets and their involvement in household chores affected girls' regular attendance and learning opportunities. As mentioned in the above studies, parent generally sent boys to private schools and girls to public schools. Regarding the caste based discrimination, unlike in community; there were no incidence of caste based discriminations in schools both between the students and also among teacher and students.

These reviews reveal that along with the great strides that have taken place to increase parity and overall enrolment, there is need of studies, such as this one, that focus on students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender in schools of Nepal. With only limited studies focusing on the construction of gender identity and relations, and not a single study conducted in *Dhading* district, this study hopes to reveal the actual experiences of grade nine and ten students of gender at the government schools of the *Dhading* district.

2.4 Looking beyond parity - bridging the gap in existing literature

I believe that this study, that focuses on students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender, sheds new light on the construction of gender identity and relations in government schools of Nepal. Rather than simply counting the number of boys and girls enrolled in schools, this study focuses on the students and present their perspectives and experiences. Thus it provides access to what exactly happens in the daily lives of students inside and also

outside the schools, and the ways such experiences shape their life aspirations. In the context where the majority of international studies on the construction of gender identity in schools focus on the primary levels and only very limited numbers of studies in Nepal focus on this issue, I believe that it is important to understand the secondary level students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender. As mentioned by authors like Downs (2003) and Attard (2010), during the transition from primary to secondary level, many students experience physiological and social changes associated with adolescences. Such significant changes can lead to diversity in students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender. This study hopes to understand and highlight such changes among the adolescence.

As shown above, rather than focusing on a singular dimension of students' experience in the schools or outside the schools, I focus on the students' interactions in the multiple contexts and spaces to examine the variation in their activities. Furthermore there are only a few studies that analyze intersections between students' gender, ethnicity and caste that create diverse gender and caste-based experiences among students. As discussed earlier Nepali society is still marked by patriarchy and caste discrimination to a large extend. This study that also analyzes the ways students' gendered identity insects with other social identities, caste and ethnicity, can highlight the construction of students' multiple experiences. In such scenario and with lack of studies on gender identity construction in schools of *Dhading* district, this study expects to bridge the current gap in the literature and to create new knowledge in the field of gender and education in Nepal.

CHAPTER THREE - THEORTICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

I have employed several theories and concepts to present a systematic understanding and interpretation of information and data collected in this study. Thus, this chapter explains the theories and concepts that I have employed to analyze the ways students construct their gender and caste-based identities in various spatial settings inside and also outside the schools This is followed by reflections on the relevance of these theories for my study and also explanation of limitations of these concepts that I found while applying them in this study.

3.2 Theoretical foundation for this study

This study primarily focuses on the construction of gender identity and relations among grade nine and ten level students of the two government schools in Nepal. Thus I begin this section by outlining the meaning of gender, gender relations and gender identity, followed by the predominant perspectives to understand the construction of gender identity. Gender, as explained by Ridgeway & Correll is "an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference" (2004:1). As both Thorne (1994) and Connell (2002) emphasizes such social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female are context specific, time-specific and thus changeable. Similarly, according to International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2000), gender relations is a complex and continuous social system that validates male dominance and power over material resources that creates unequal power relations between women and men within the society.

Gender identity, on the other hand, as defined by the Transgender Europe (TGEU, 2014: 1-2), is "a person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms". There are two predominant perspectives, psychological and sociological, to understand the ways gender identity are constructed in everyday lives. The psychological perspective on gender identity development, according to Bussey (2011), focuses more on the

psychological processes through which individuals relate to and adopt any conceptions of gender prevailing in their social contexts. As illustrated by Martin & Ruble (2004), Bem (1981) and Bussey (2011), the cognitive developmental theory that is developed under this perspective, states that children are inevitably led by their cognitive processing that leads to develop gender concepts as organizing principle that govern their own and their peers' behavior. Likewise, another theory developed under this perspective, the gender schema theory, as Bussey & Bandura, (1999) and Bem (1981) state, suggests that children assimilate information that they learn about gender and then organize such new information according to their knowledge of appropriate gender behaviors that forms a schema in their minds. On the other hand, from the sociological perspective, gender identity, as stated by Parson & Bales (1955), is developed and maintained by division of labour, particularly in family where husband/father adopt the instrumental role and wife/mother take on the expressive role. While West & Zimmerman (1987) define gender identity development as a product of society that supports status quo and power differences. As this study centers around construction of gender identity and relations, I believe that these perspectives can help to understand and explain the ways students in this study learn about gender identity and relations, and then apply such learnings in their activities, interactions and experiences of gender in the multiple spaces and contexts inside and outside the schools.

On this background, I employ Thorne's (1994) *borderwork,* West & Zimmerman's (1987) *doing gender* and Shilling's (1991) *space and production of gender relations* to understand the ways gender is regulated through students' school activities and interactions inside and also outside the schools. I also use *intersectionality* to understand the complex relationships between students' ethnicity and caste identities on their gendered experiences in schools.

3.2.1 Concept of 'borderwork' and its use in this study

Barrie Thorne (1994) presents an ethnographic study of the ways boys and girls evoke gender differences by outlining borders between the sexes in her book 'Gender play'[8]. While defining practice of 'play', she develops the concept of *borderwork*, from the work of Fredrik Barth[9].

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[8] She had conducted her study in two elementary schools in late 1970s and 1980s in the United States.
[9] Fredrik Barth observed social relations between the Saami and Norwegians and learned that social relations were sustained across ethnic boundaries without weakening the participants' sense of cultural difference and of dichotomized ethnic status (Thorne, 1994).

She uses *borderwork* to conceptualize interactions between boys and girls based on, and also strengthening the gender boundaries. She illustrates the ways hegemonic view of gender is acted out, reinforced, and evoked through several forms of borderwork, *contests, chasing, pollution rituals,* and *invasions.* Thorne uses *contests* to describe the nature and meaning of encounters between boys and girls as two opposite teams when they are organized in separate teams during any activities and such teams are given names with gendered meanings. She asserts that such oppositions invite gender antagonism reinforcing gender boundaries. Thorne states that *chasing* often becomes a gendered structure as boys and girls most often become separate teams while playing the game of chasing. It significantly affirms gender boundaries as most often boys are the ones who chase the girls, and regarding the same gender chasing, chasing between boys get more physical and aggressive compared to girls who tend to avoid such incidents. Thorne also illustrates the ways students, mainly boys, use various *pollution rituals* such as naming an individual or groups as having cooties, stigmatize due to bodily characteristics like being overweight or stinky, or treating objects related to femininity as polluting to maintain gender relations. Moreover, as Thorne states, it was mainly girls who were regarded as being polluted or contaminated which marked the gender boundaries but sometimes such pollution rituals were also enacted inequality in terms of social class, race and bodily characteristics. In the case of *invasion*, Thorne shows the ways gender is most often acted out and reinforced by boys through controlling playground spaces, 'teasing the girls' as a named activity in the playground, and deliberately disrupting girls' activities. Moreover when girls complain about such interventions, it helped to limit boy's aggression but it supported boys' view of girls as weaker and tattletales. Additionally she emphasizes that gender separation tends to reach at its peak during adolescents due to major shifts in settings like entering higher grades, and prescribed desires of teen culture.

Thorne argues that the notion of *borderwork* should be tied with a parallel term – *neutralization* as gender is often situational and fluid. She uses the term *neutralization* to explain the processes through which girls and boys undermine a sense of gender as division and opposition by crossing and also challenging gender boundaries in cohesive ways. She argues that when level of analysis shifts from individual to groups, or in certain situations, like less crowded spaces and with fewer potential witnesses and participants, gender becomes less relevant or contested. Moreover, she claims that taking part in such gendered play and

rituals can offer flexibility for the participant to gain critical perspectives on dominant cultural images providing them with the opportunities to comment on and mock on its assumption.

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│  How do students reinforce or reshape their gender identities? │
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Thorne's *borderwork*	Neutralization (suggested by Thorne)
Reinforcing gender boundaries	*Reshaping gender boundaries*

Thorne's *borderwork*
Reinforcing gender boundaries

- *Contest*
- *Chasing*
- *Pollution rituals*
- *Invasion*

Neutralization (suggested by Thorne)
Reshaping gender boundaries

Gender becomes more fluid when analysis is shifted

- *from individuals to groups (other identities are more relevant)*
- *from public situation to less crowded spaces with fewer witnesses & participants*
- *to practices that bring boys & girls together in relaxed & integrated way*

Figure 1 - Applying Thorne's borderwork in this study

I use Thorne's *borderwork*, as presented in figure 1 to explain the ways grade nine and ten students employ gender as an oppositional dualism in everyday activities and interactions at the two schools. I employ the four forms of *borderwork*, *contests, chasing, pollution rituals* and *invasions,* to analyze interactions between students and their experiences in various spatial contexts both inside and outside the schools. However, as this study primarily focuses on the adolescence students and Thorne had focused on the students from the elementary level, all four forms of borderwork are not equally applicable in this study which is explained later in this chapter. I also apply Thorne's term *neutralization* to examine the processes and situations through which boys and girls cross the gender boundaries and neutralize their gender identity and relations.

3.2.2 Concept of 'doing gender' and its use in this study

Ethnomethodologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) propose the idea that gender is an ongoing achievement which is central to the organization of every social interaction. For West & Zimmerman, gender is not a trait or variable, gender is an accomplishment and we are all the time accountable to the sex category we are believed to belong to. Moving beyond the traditional sex/gender distinction, i.e. biological difference vs achieved status, they present a new framework that distinguishes between sex, sex category and gender. According to them, sex is a socially agreed upon determination based on biological criteria while sex category being a categorization established and sustained by identificatory displays. They define gender as "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (West & Zimmerman, 1987: 127). They claim that *doing gender* is informed by social structures and it is embedded in every aspect of our daily interactions. Thus one's actions in *doing gender* simultaneously reproduce, sustain and legitimate the social meanings accorded to that gender by often reinforcing a hierarchical social structure of male dominance and female subordination. Quoting Spencer Cahill, the authors argue that gender is not a product of socialization; rather it is a process of 'recruitment' into the established gender identity. Through this process, individuals learn to participate in 'a self-regulating process' to monitor their own and also others' gendered conduct. The authors claim that doing gender is unavoidable. Emphasizing the notion of accountability, they stress that the notion of *doing gender* helps to provide an account of gender: it names, characterizes, and formulates what gender is and how gender exists as gender. For instance when we present ourselves as a gendered person, we are making ourselves accountable by acting in a way that displays traits of that particular sex. In the case of deviation of the performance from the behavioral 'guidelines' for their sex category, individuals will be called to account for their actions, which in turn, will affect their ability to obtain the resources available to that particular sex category.

I use this concept of *doing gender,* developed by West & Zimmerman's to investigate the ways students achieve or do gender in the various spatial contexts within the schools. This concept of doing gender helps me to understand the ways if and how students perform gender in line with the expectations of other people that being their peers, teachers, family members or other community people which results in validation and naturalization of attributes

associated with each sex. It also helps me to analyze the ways institutionalized frameworks and physical features of the social setting of school and also community serve to maintain such distinctions between sex and reinforce the "essentialness" of gender. I also employ the concept of recruitment into gender identity to analyze the ways students are involved in the 'recruitment' process into the established gender identity and roles. In addition, West & Zimmerman's notion of accountability guide my analysis of how the students are accountable to their sex, i.e. to explain or excuse any behavior that fit and / or not fit into their specific sex category and subsequent gender.

3.2.3 Concept of 'space and production of gender relations' and its use in this study

Chris Shilling (1991) illustrates the relationships between space and gender inequalities in schools through a number of ethnographic studies. He argues that space is widely implicated in the construction of relationships of domination and subordination within schools. He claims that the study of space is essential to examine relationship between educational differentiation and social reproduction as all social interaction occurs in certain spaces and it is impossible to think of social life independent of spatial contexts. By focusing on the relationship between space and gender inequalities in schools, Shilling illustrates how boys and male staff employ patriarchal rules and resources in using space as a way of establishing dominance and control over girls and women teachers. In order to do so, Shilling draws on Giddens' theory of structuration that reconceptualizes structures as sets of rules and resources. Giddens suggests that human agency and social structure are inseparable. He argues that 'structures' are not external forces which constrain social relationships, but sets of 'rules' and 'resources' which actors continually draw on in the process of social interaction and that it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents which reproduces the structure.

Shilling relates school and spaces within them as gendered locales. 'Locales', a term Shilling borrowed from Giddens, are the contexts in which interaction occurs that includes not just physical settings but are embedded with social meanings which serve to facilitate specific interactions. Shilling argues that the practices that take place in particular locales within the school, for instance classrooms, playgrounds, both facilitate and reflect the gendered activities which are in turn produced by the individuals located within them. He illustrates both the physical and symbolic appropriation of school spaces as part of the construction of gendered power relations. For instance, when boys displace girls from playground to play football, they

are dominating the physical space, and by labelling playground as an area where football is played, they are justifying girls' displacement as these rules are generally approved by the senior male school authorities. Shilling claims that formation of gendered identity and relations in schools are closely related to prevailing patriarchal rules and resources in other locales in society including home and community. Due to such proximity, schools are most likely to reinforce such patriarchal norms and less likely to be able to challenge them.

I apply Shilling's concept of space and production of gender relations while analyzing the spatial dimension of students' activities and interactions in schools and the ways these spatial experiences construct their gendered identity and relations. I believe that Shilling's concept is very useful to show if and how boys use the existing structures and rules to establish dominance over girls in the schools and the ways girls react to such domination. I also examine the ways students' activities, interactions and experiences that take place in schools reflect those of the society, especially in terms of gender inequality and caste discrimination. As stated by Shilling, I also analyze the ways students, and also school authorities use both physical and symbolic appropriation of school space to construct gendered power relations and gendered identity.
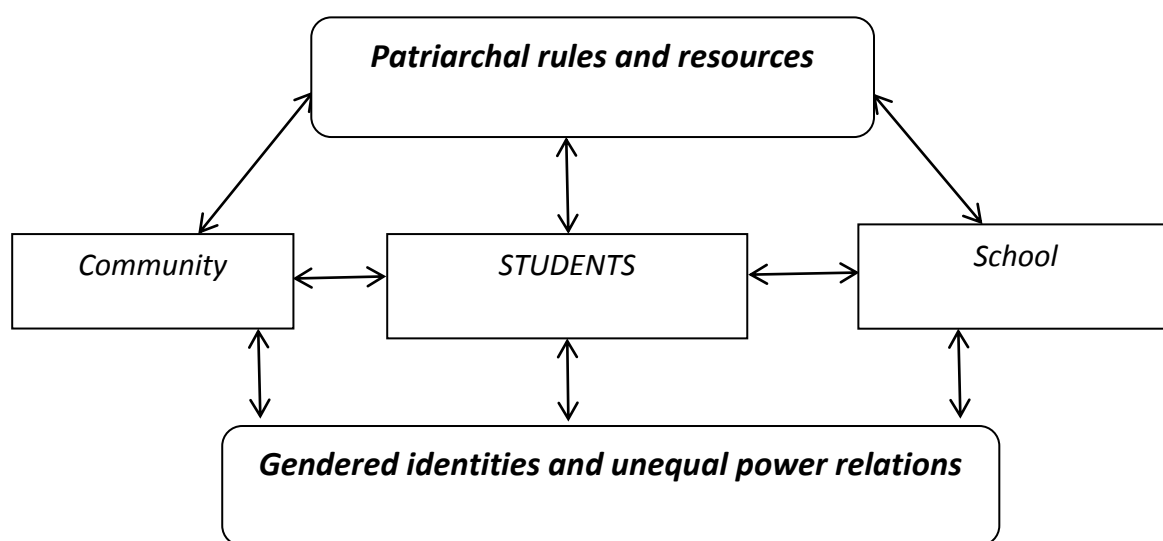
Figure 2 - Applying Shilling's concept of 'space and production of gender relations' in this study

3.2.4 Concept of 'intersectionality' and its use in this study

The term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 to address the multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination of women of color. Later in 1990, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) integrated this term as part of her discussion on black feminists. Much like Crenshaw, Collins argued that cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity. Feminist scholars have been using intersectionality as a theory to analyze how social and cultural categories like gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and class are intertwined, and how such intersections place multiple levels of discrimination and oppressions on women (Knudsen, 2006 cited in Lanehart, 2009). As several authors note, intersectionality has not been that much employed in research relating to education and gender (e.g. Patel, 2001; Davies, 1993; Bishwakarma et al, 2007 cited in Mitchell, 2011).

Regarding the intersections of caste, ethnicity and gender in relation to education in South Asia, Rao and Robinson-Pant (2006) found that the special provisions for indigenous people have benefitted boys over girls. In case of special provisions for girls and women, as illustrated by Mitchell (2011), they have rarely benefited women from indigenous groups. Students' identities, such as gender, caste and ethnicity, are not separate and additive, as also suggested by Thorne (1994) rather interactive and multiplicative to create diverse experiences in the school. I, therefore, use *intersectionality* as a supportive analytical tool to understand how the intersections between students' gender, caste and ethnicity contribute to their unique experiences of oppression and privilege in schools as presented in figure 3.
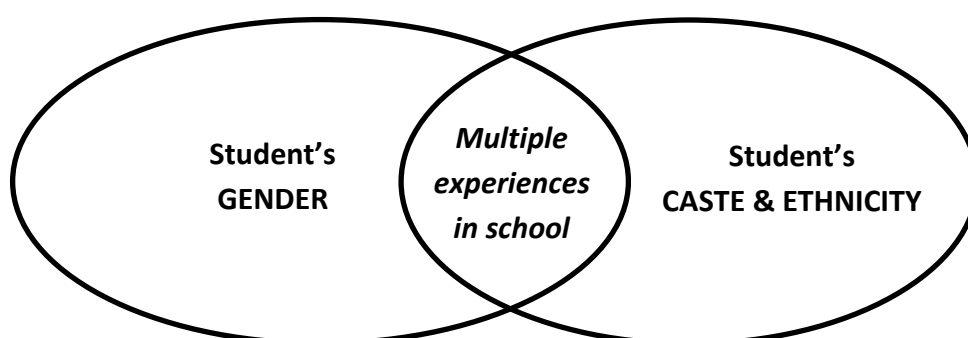
Figure 3 - Applying concept of intersectionality in this study

3.3 Reflecting on the theoretical framework – its relevance and limitation

I have used the triangulation of these different theoretical perspectives to explore the research questions from more than one angle as well as to validate findings of this study. Moreover, I believe that interpreting my findings with the help of these different theoretical perspectives can not only provide a more detailed picture of the situation but also create a bridge to individual experiences in this study. As also mentioned above, Barrie Thorne's (1994) concept of borderwork including her notion of neutralization has helped me to make the experiences of students regarding the construction of their gendered identity and relations both visible and understandable. However, employing her concept that is based on a dated publication using research from the 1980s that focuses on the elementary level can raise the question of relevance for my study. Nevertheless, I employed her concept as I believe that it would be useful to explain differences and also similarities regarding students' experiences of gender relations and also to show the ways students were actively negotiating or crossing the gender borders. However, Thorne's all four forms of borderwork were not entirely applicable for my study that concentrated on the secondary level students. Among the four forms of borderwork, I mostly apply contests and pollution rituals to analyze student's experience regarding reinforcing or reshaping of their gender identity and relations. But I also analyze the fact that the adolescence students did not perform chasing and invasions as illustrated by Thorne.

Despite being published in 1987, I have found West and Zimmerman's notion of doing gender useful as it helped me to analyze and explain the recruitment process of students into the established gender identity and to show the ways students are accountable to their sex category. As stated by Francine M. Deutsch (2007) in 'undoing gender', West and Zimmerman have not taken account of agency or acts of resistance performed by men and women when they claim that gender can never be 'undone'. In such milieu, I believe that Thorne's notion of neutralization can help to explain the ways students cross the gender boundaries and negotiate their gender identity. Similarly I have used Chris Shilling's (1991) concept of space and production of gender relations, even though he seems rigid in his claims about schools as resource in the production of gender identity and unequal power relations that reinforce prevalence patriarchal rules and resources. I believe that it provides a useful perspective for this study that focuses on analyzing the spatial dimension of students' experiences of gender along with caste and ethnicity in the two secondary schools under

study. Moreover, patriarchy being a predominant feature of Nepali society, as explained in first chapter, it will be interesting to investigate Shilling's argument of schools, as one locale among many others in society, facing a difficult task in altering patriarchal rules and resources since they might remain unchallenged in other arenas. Finally intersectionality help me to examine the ways student's gender identity intersect with other social identities, like caste and ethnicity, to form their unique and diverse experiences in school.

CHAPTER FOUR - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter incorporates details and rationales behind selecting particular methods in the research process and the choice of qualitative research methodology for this study. I provide a detailed account of various data collection instruments and data analysis methods that I have used during the study. As stated by Silverman (2010), it is unlikely that any researcher will go into the research field without any past experiences or ideas about the study topic. Thus, I reflect on the ways my prior knowledge, assumptions and positionalities influenced this study. Then, I also present various challenges and dilemmas that I faced during this study and explain the ways I tackled them.

4.2 Access to the field

The access to the research field is crucial as it involves developing rapport with the possible informants and convincing them to provide information during the research. This section gives an outline of the process of getting access to the field, as the ways a researcher gains access determines, according to Renganathan & Johl (2009), the type and quality of information gathered during the study. As mentioned in the first chapter, I have several years of work experience in the education sector of Nepal. During that time, I had the opportunity to work in different Village Development Committees in Nepal, including in the *Dhading* district. However, I had not worked in *Naubise* Village Development Committee where this study was conducted. Nevertheless, the experience from working in *Dhading* district provided me with useful knowledge and insight into the education sector in that district. Moreover I already had some contacts with officials working in the Ministry of Education and the District Education Office in *Dhading*. Due to my previous work experience, knowledge and relationships, I did not have to spend any considerable amount of time gaining access to the field, as other researchers without earlier knowledge or contacts might have to do. Moreover as I spoke the same language, Nepali, it helped me in developing rapport with the informants. However, I faced some dilemmas due to my previous experience which will be explained later in this chapter.

There is no need to get an official research permit for Nepali students to conduct educational research in Nepal. However I asked for the oral permit to conduct this study from the officials of Ministry of Education and Department of Education.

I conducted my fieldwork in Nepal from July 2012 to September 2012. I started my fieldwork by interviewing officials in the Ministry of Education and Department of Education and collecting various secondary data, documents and information in *Kathmandu*. It helped me to gain insight into the current plans and policies regarding gender equality in schools, and the government officials' understanding of current situation and practices in the education sector. This knowledge helped me later on when interviewing informants at the District Education Office *Dhading* and the school authorities. In addition, both schools were closed for monsoon vacation in July, so this was a good way to make use of this period.

4.3 Data collection tools and techniques

4.3.1 *Selection of places and informants*

In this study a purposive selection procedure was adopted as the informants were selected according to pre-selected criteria relevant to the research objectives. Furthermore, such procedure helped to seize the variation in the phenomenon under study as illustrated by Silverman (2010) and Flick (2007). At the initial stage of the selection procedure, I chose *Dhading* district due to my previous work experience there. While the reason behind choosing *Naubise* Village Development Committee was mainly due to its close proximity to the capital, it had both urban and rural traits. As explained earlier, I selected these two schools due to its locality, one being in urban area while another in semi-urban area, and also due to both schools' long historical presence in the area. The higher number of girls and also students from the ethnic groups, as explained in the first chapter, was another crucial reason for the selection of these two particular schools.

Regarding the selection of informants, I selected 29 informants for interviews. Out of them 21 were students from the two schools while the remaining 8 were teachers, school authorities and other officials. There were 11 girls and 10 boys among the main

informants who were selected based on the criteria of grade, gender and caste or ethnic groups. Details of the selection chart used to select the informants are presented in the below table:

Table 3 - Selection chart to select students[10]

Selection criteria	Urban school	Semi-Urban school
Informants	***11 students* (6 girls + 5 boys)**	***10 students* (5 girls + 5 boys)**
Caste / ethnicity	*4 Dalits (2 girls & 2 boys)* *3 Ethnic groups (2 girls & 1 boy)* *4 Upper castes (2 girls & 2 boys)*	*2 Dalits (1 girls + 1 boys)* *6 Ethnic groups (3 girls + 3 boy)* *2 Upper castes (1 girl + 1 boy)*
Grades	*6 from grade 9 (3 girls + 3 boys)* *5 from grade 10 (3 girls + 2 boys)*	*2 from grade 9 (1 girls + 1 boys)* *8 from grade 10 (4 girls + 4 boys)*

I also interviewed the school authorities and three teachers who taught in the secondary level, particularly Social Studies, and Health, Population and Environment Studies. I focused on them as the curriculum of those subjects included lessons on gender, gender issues in Nepal, women's empowerment and health related issues (reproduction, sex, sexual diseases). The remaining three informants included one official each from the Gender Equality Section in the Department of Education under Ministry of Education, the District Education Office of *Dhading* district, and the *Naubise* Resource Centre.

4.3.2 Research Design

This study employs qualitative methodology as the main method of data collection as such methodology can provide deeper understanding of my informants' perspectives and experiences as stated by Silverman (2010; 2006) regarding the research questions of this study. I used a combination of three major qualitative data collection tools to collect the primary data that included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observation. Such 'methodological triangulation' helped me to understand and analyze the issue which was not possible by using only one method. I also used it, as Silverman

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[10] For more details of informants of urban school, see annex 1 and for semi-urban school, see annex 2.

(2006) suggests, to cross-analyze and validate the findings by confirming if the findings obtained by using these multiple methods point to similar conclusions.

i)   *Semi-structured interviews*

I used semi-structured interviews as one of the main data collection tools. As Kvale emphasizes, such interviews helped me to "understand something from the subjects' point of view and to uncover the meaning of their experiences" (Kvale, 1996:1). I prepared three different interview guides with semi-structured and open-ended questions that included one each for students, teachers, and school authorities along with policy makers. Then I translated these open-ended questions to Nepali to be able to discuss more openly and freely with them. As I already had contacts, arranging time for interviews with the government officials and school authorities was not difficult. I interviewed the students mostly during the lunch breaks and few even during class hours as they could neither come early to school in the mornings nor stay after the school. Most schools in the remote hill areas were either primary level or lower secondary level schools. So the students from these areas had no other options than to walk a long distance to come to study at secondary level. The same was the case with the teachers, as most of them came from their homes in *Kathmandu*, which is around a two hour bus ride. Others were busy with extra tuition classes after school. The interviews ranged between 25 minutes to 45 minutes, and all of them were recorded with consent from the informants. During the interviews, I felt that the majority of my informants opened up really quickly and clearly spoke their minds. However, I felt that in the urban school grade ten students opened up more during the interviews compared to grade nine students. Thus I interviewed more grade ten students in the semi-urban school as data collection there took place last.

According to Elwood & Martin, "the interview site itself embodies and constitutes multiple scales of spatial relations and meaning, which construct the power and positionality of participants in relation to the people, places, and interactions discussed in the interview" (Elwood & Martin, 2000:1). By bearing this in mind and in order to minimize power-imbalances and pressure on the informants, they took place in separate meeting halls further away from the classrooms and teachers' lounge. As the age of

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students that I interviewed ranged from 15 to 18, I sought their oral consent directly as advised by Norwegian Social Science Data Services (Bollman, 2012) and did not seek permission from the gatekeeper such as principal or parents.

ii) *Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)*

I prepared and translated the checklists for the focus group discussions (FGDs) and as both Kitzinger (1995) and Barbour (2007) noted, acted only as facilitator during the whole process. During the discussions, girls, who seemed a little hesitant during the interviews, opened up a lot regarding problems like teasing from boys, lack of response from school authorities regarding their complains, and about feeling humiliated during menstruation period. I conducted a total of four FGDs during this study. One FGD with only students, eleven participant that included five girls and six boys in the urban school and eight participants including four girls and four boys in the semi-urban school was conducted in both schools. Both FGDs included some participants who were not interviewed and a few who were also interviewed. Another two FGDs were conducted with teachers and parents, one in each school. There were seven participants, including one female and six male participants, in the urban school, and eight male participants in the semi-urban school. In all four focus group discussions, I tried to include participants from both sex, different castes or ethnic groups and grades to ensure that the participants had enough in common for a lively discussion but still had differences in experiences, in order to generate interesting discussions.

However, I faced some challenges including difficulty to arrange a suitable time that worked for everyone. As in the case of interviews, I conducted the FGDs with students during lunch time and provided lunch for them. Regarding the FGDs with teachers and parents, they were conducted after classes as parents had to go for work in the afternoon. As it was after classes, female secondary level teachers in the semi-urban school, and there are only a few in both schools, did not participate as they were in a hurry to go home, and it was the same case with female students. So, a planned FGD with teachers, parents and students was not practically possible but during the FGDs with teachers and parents, I put forward the views and concerns raised by the students. Before the

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fieldwork, I had also planned to conduct one FGD at policy makers' level. But it was not possible due to the end of Nepali fiscal year as the officials were busy in other programs and workshops.

iii) Observation

Observation was used as another major data collection tool in this study. In line with Marshall (2006), it was a non-participant observation because I only acted as an observer and did not make any specific efforts to take part in the natural settings of the study. I started the observation before conducting the interviews, but I continued to observe throughout the study period in both schools, and the information gathered from the observations has been systematically noted in the field notes. This method helped me, as Marshall (2006) and Angrosino (2007) emphasize, to look beyond what my informants explained during the interviews and also to discover complex interactions in the social settings. I divided my observations into three parts –inside the school including class rooms, playgrounds and the library; outside the school especially in cafes as well as during the interviews and focus group discussions. During these three phases, I observed student's physical gestures, tone of voice and posture with their fellow students of same gender and caste, and if possible, with other students from different genders and castes. I also observed students' activities, peer relationships and seating arrangements, student and teacher interactions, use of instructional language. However, it was not possible to observe the students journey from home to school due to the limitation on time. In the initial phase, I found that students were both curious and shy but gradually, when they knew about me and the objectives of the observation, they became friendly and started to behave normally. It was difficult to observe the students during lunch break as there was no canteen in the school and students were allowed to go outside the school compound.

I took some photos during the observation and have used them in this thesis. As the saying, 'one photo can speak thousand words', I believed that these photos can explain issue of space visually and convincingly. But I took few photos as both me and the teachers thought that taking photos in the classroom would disturb the classroom activities while at the playground, it might make students feel uncomfortable and would

also disturb their activities. I also did not want to take photos of students outside the schools, in the cafes during the lunch period as the locals and café owners might take it as suspicious behavior by an outsider.

iv)   Secondary data & information

Secondary data and information were collected from relevant books, journals, thesis, reports, published and unpublished materials. The educational plans and policies of Nepal and various reports and journals related to education were mainly gathered from Ministry of Education, Department of Education, District Education Office *Dhading.* Relevant thesis, national and international studies and reports were collected from the *Tribhuvan* University library, *Kathmandu* University library, Research Centre for Education Innovation & Development library, UNESCO library and various internet sources.

4.4   Data analysis and presentation of material

Regarding the analysis of the interviews, I transcribed and translated the interviews from Nepali to English. According to Kvale (1996), there are five methods of analysis that includes meaning condensation, meaning categorization, narrative structuring, meaning interpretation, and generating meaning through ad hoc methods. However, in this study I only used meaning condensation and meaning interpretation to analyze and interpret the findings. According to Kvale's use of these terms, I applied meaning condensation during the analysis as the longer statements of my informants during their interviews were rephrased in a few words and compresses into briefer statements. Regarding meaning interpretation, I elucidated the meaning of the interviews and observations to provide their deeper understanding based on the aims of my study, the available literature and the broad social and cultural Nepali context. After the interpretation, I categorized the findings into three themes and presented them as empirical chapters that include review of local educational policies and informants' understanding of gender; students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender inside the classrooms; and students' activities, interactions and experience of gender outside the classrooms.

4.5 Challenges and dilemmas during the study

4.5.1 Researcher's reflexivity and positionalities

As Lal (1996) has elaborated in her research, being a Nepali citizen who was studying in Norway and returning to my home country for fieldwork, I was constantly negotiating and switching between multiple identities and positions of 'insider' and 'outsider'. As mentioned above, I entered the research field with some pre-existing knowledge about the study area, and the existing education situation; I knew the language and customs and had some relations with government officials. All these factors made me an 'insider', which eased my access to the research field. However, I was aware that my various positions as insider could influence the research process. In order to minimize such influence as much as I could, I used my prior relationship with officials only while gathering secondary information as it is easier to receive data and information if one already has contacts. At the same time, I was very conscious of the danger of misunderstanding in a familiar setting as Silverman (2010) has emphasized, and thus I always tried to have an open mind. Besides, as Davies (1999) suggests, I chose the students for interviews myself during the observation and to minimize the 'gatekeepers' influence on them.

On the other hand, my position as an upper caste, educated, married male studying abroad made me a 'powerful outsider' as illustrated by Lal (1996:196). I found that at the early stage of the fieldwork, students seemed a bit shy as they considered me as an outsider, but conducting observation before interviews helped a lot for rapport building. As Lal also discusses, due to me being from an upper caste and also due to my age[11], I thought that there might be a possibility that my informants, particularly the students, might exaggerate their responses to suit their own agendas and to portray themselves as they wished. So while analyzing the interviews, in order to avoid the stereotypes, I have, as Lal suggests, placed my informants' responses to larger historical and societal framework regarding the situation of gender and caste in Nepali society that I have explained in the first chapter. Due to my gender, I felt that some girls were a little reluctant to talk about personal problems such as menstruation and teasing by boys, which was discussed openly

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[11] I am 30 years old and the students whom I interviewed aged between 15 to 18 years.

later during the focus group discussions. Moreover, while my position as a student from a foreign university helped me a lot to get acceptance in the community and in both schools, the school authorities had expectations of financial assistance. I constantly throughout the fieldwork informed them that I could not assist them financially as this study was a part of a MPhil degree. Instead I told them about all the procedures to apply for further studies in Norway as they, including most of the government officials and other community people, were interested to know about it.

4.5.2   Ethics and Ethical Dilemmas

This section reflects upon various ethical considerations such as informed consent, trust and anonymity, confidentiality and other ethical issues that were applied during the study. As proposed by Davies (1999) and fulfill the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) requirements, I informed my informants about the nature and overall purpose and design of this study and possible consequences of their participation. I made sure that their consent was taken without any compulsion and based on their understanding of my explanation of the study. Their consent was taken orally. In Nepal there is no practice of written consent as people generally do not respond positively if they have to sign papers of legal nature. I assured my informants of their anonymity and confidentiality by using pseudonyms instead of their real names when coding their interview. All the interviews and FGDs were recorded and transcribed, with the consent from the informants. I took consent from the school authorities and the students of both schools to put the photos of observation, and write the real names of both schools in this thesis.

4.5.3   Practical challenges during the study

There were lots of practical challenges that I encountered. One of the constant challenges that I faced during the fieldwork was road blockade due to constant strikes and landslides. On many occasions, I had to spend more than three to four hours in traffic jams or return back home as the roads were closed. Therefore, I stayed in the study areas most of the time even though it took only about two hours to get there by bus from my home. As the study area was so close to *Kathmandu*, people from outside generally did not stay there overnight. Therefore I faced problems finding lodging and food. However, I adjusted to

whatever was available there, even though I got sick a couple of times due to food poisoning. Emotion and stress were another factor that affected me during the fieldwork. I felt isolated and lonely as I was away from my family and friends even though I was in my home country. With the constant expectations from the informants, I felt guilty for not being able to do anything for them while they were investing their time and experiences in me and my study. As mentioned by Rager (2005), I dealt with such emotions by writing journals, using relaxation techniques like meditation, regularly meeting friends and family during weekends and discuss the research progress with them.

During the writing process, I experienced two of the most unforgettable moments of my life. First being the birth of my son, the happiest moment of my life; and then the death of my father, the saddest moment of my life. Being in a foreign country, Norway, away from the family at the time of my son's birth, I had to allocate all of my time to take care of my wife and the baby which diverted me from the writing process. Then after a few months the shock of my father's death shook up my whole world and made me both physically, I went to my home country for few months, and mentally unavailable to continue writing for some time. However, now I feel that in a certain way both of these events inspired me to be more focused on the issue under study. I had firsthand experience of gender differences in the birth rituals. According to Hindu traditional beliefs, if the baby is a boy, his rice feeding ceremony, a crucial ceremony, is celebrated at least one month later than in the case of girls. Generally before this ceremony, mothers only feed milk to babies. It is believed that mothers should feed more milk to sons to make them stronger as they will be a provider in the future and continue the family line. I also experienced differences in the responsibilities of sons and daughters during the death of parents. According to Hindu rituals, only sons are allowed to cremate the dead body; perform thirteen days of rituals after the funeral and a yearly ritual to celebrate death of parents. It is regarded that if sons do these activities only then parents go to heaven, one of the main reasons for son preference. These personal experiences helped me realize the deeply embedded patriarchal norms and values in my culture. It made my urge to understand how we, as individuals or in groups, produce and reproduce gender, and in turn how social structures reproduce and sustain such gender ideologies became deeper.

CHAPTER V – GENDER PARITY IN EDUCATION: FROM LOCAL EDUCATIONAL POLICIES TO INFORMANTS' UNDERSTANDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The review of national level educational plan, policies and programs, addresses in Chapter II, shows the predominant focus on equitable and inclusive approach to education that centers on scholarship and incentive programs for targeted groups including women, *dalits* and ethnic groups, to increase their access to primary education. This chapter analyzes the local level educational policies and programs at district level, village level and school level, and reflects on the ways they have incorporated gender related issues and issues of discrimination in education. I believe that such analysis can help to examine if and how the institutionalized educational frameworks serves to legitimate or negotiate the social meanings accorded to gender in Nepali society as discussed in Chapter I. It is followed by my informants' reflections on gender which helps to show, in the words of West & Zimmerman (1987), if and how my informants were displaying traits of their particular sex, and making themselves accountable to their sex category.

5.2 Gender equality based on access and parity – Primary goals of local level educational policies and programs

5.2.1 District Education Plan

According to Research Center For Education Innovation and Development (CERID, 2002), the District Education Plan was developed and implemented in all districts of Nepal after the implementation of the Basic and Primary Education Program phase II in 1999. From that time, the District Education Office, *Dhading* has been articulating a five years district education plan to analyze the existing educational situation of the district, and to formulate the educational plans and programs. At the time of this study, the District Education Plan for 2009/10 to 2013/14 was being implemented. According to this plan (DEO *Dhading*, 2008), it was formulated with synchronization with Education For

All National Action Plan 2001 to 2015, Three years Interim Plan 2010 to 2013, National constitution of Nepal 2007, School Sector Reform Plan 1999, previous District Education Plans, School Improvement Plans, Village Education Plans along with Flash I and II reports. It basically provides general overview of demographic, social, economic situation of the district followed by the school enrollment, promotion, repetition and dropout ratio of 2008/09. This District Education Plan, which mainly focuses on providing quality and child friendly education, has split its visions in four parts that includes vision for students, for teachers, for school and for parents. In case for students, it states, "*be able to study in child friendly environment, increase in students' attendance in the schools along with improvements in retention rates, and be able to integrate in the society with quality education*" (DEO, 2008:296). In the vision for school, it mentions that "*schools will be inclusive without gender, caste and linguistic discriminations*" (DEO, 2008:296). On the other hand, there was not any explanation or elaboration on this point.

However, in order to achieve its visions, the District Education Plan of *Dhading* presents several aims including "*implementation of special educational incentive programs for girls, dalits, special targeted groups, marginalized groups, disables, ethnic groups and conflict affected children*" (DEO, 2008:297). Such incentives include distribution of scholarships, stationaries including pencils and copies, and school uniforms, organization of lunch programs, seed money, skill generating programs and construction of girls' hostels. This plan mainly focuses on improving the physical infrastructures like school buildings, drinking water taps and separate toilets for girls to increase girl's enrollment in schools. It also plans to conduct awareness programs, such as children rallies, street dramas, video exhibitions and folk song competitions, to increase equal access for girls and *dalits* to schools. In the meantime, the District Education Plan has identified the existing gender, caste, social, economic and geographical discriminations in the district as its main challenge to successfully achieve its vision. However, it is not clear on the ways it plans to reduce the prevalence of discrimination in the district.

5.2.2 Village Education Plan

After the District Education Plan, the second level of decentralization of educational programs at the local level is the Village Education Plan. As in the case of the District Education Plan, it is prepared with coordination with the national, district level and local level educational plans and policies. According to a non-governmental organization, *Aasaman* Nepal (2008/09), such plans are prepared as five years working plan to ensure every child's access to quality education with overview of demographic, social, economic and educational situation of the Village Development Committee. In case of *Naubise* village development committee, this plan was not formulated until the time of this study. During the interview with the officials at *Naubise* resource center, I found that due to lack of locally elected bodies as there has not been local level election in Nepal since 1997, the Village Education Plan of *Naubise* was not prepared as in case of many village development committees of Nepal. However, in its absence, the *Naubise* Resource Center was in a process of formulating the Educational Program Implementation Strategy Plan 2013/14. According to the officials at *Naubise* resource center (*Naubise* Resource Center, 2012:1), this plan was under preparation with an aim "*to operate classes both more effectively and regularly at all the schools under the resource center*". The Village Education Plan of *Naubise* intends to implement the government scholarship programs and textbook distribution programs effective and timely to increase enrollments and decrease dropouts in the schools. There was not anything particular mentioned about gender and caste and/or ethnicity in this plan.

5.2.3 School Improvement Plan

The School Improvement Plan, also introduced under Basic and Primary Education Program II, is the lowest level of local decentralization process of education planning and programs. Such plans, as stated by Education Improvement Commission (2000:6) can be regarded as "a road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement, and shows how and when these changes will be made". In the following sections, I present the overview of the School Improvement Plan of the two schools where this study was conducted.

i) *School Improvement Plan of the urban school*

During the time of this study, the urban school, Shree *Machindra* Higher Secondary School, was implementing the five years School Improvement Plan from 2009/10 to 2013/14. On the whole, according to this plan (SMHHS, 2009), it provides an overview of grade-wise and age-wise enrollment, achievement and dropout ratios of the 2007/08 along with the historical and geographical outline of the school. This plan aims "*to improve physical and educational aspects of the school to create child friendly learning environment*" (SMHHS, 2009:5). It indicates parents, teachers and students were all pleased with the current educational aspect of the school and performance of both students and teachers. It points out that in order to improve the teaching learning environment, six prerequisites needed to be fulfilled including construction of school compound and newly purchased playground; construction of new building; construction of toilets, computer room and science lab; teacher trainings; increase in educational materials and extracurricular activities; and construction of girls' and teachers' hostel. Expect for the construction of girls' hostel, the topics related to gender and caste and/or ethnicity were not brought up in this plan.

Regarding the structure of administrative bodies, as stated in this School Improvement Plan (SMHHS, 2009), there were twenty six teachers in the school. Out of nine teachers at the primary level, seven were female whereas both teachers at the lower secondary were male. Among ten teachers at the secondary level, some of whom also taught at the higher secondary levels, there were only two female teachers who taught Nepali and economics. It has also been mentioned that there had been nineteen head teachers since its establishment but none of them were female. Regarding the School Management Committee that is responsible for formulating and monitoring the policies and programs at schools, out of the nine members including the chairperson and secretary, there was only one female representative appointed as a member. Moreover, there had not been a single female chairperson since its establishment. It was the same in the case of the Parent Teacher Committee intended to facilitate parental participation in schools. During the time of this study, the old committee was dissolved and the new had not been formed.

ii) *School Improvement Plan of the semi-urban school*

The School Improvement Plan from 2009/10 to 2013/14 of the semi-urban school, Shree *Dilli Sabitri* Secondary School, was quite similar both in structure and in content to the urban school. It provided an outline of grade-wise and age-wise enrollment, achievement and dropout ratios of 2007/08 and also the historical and geographical background of the school. This plan had primarily focused on increasing the equal access of girls to the school as according to the School Improvement Plan, (SDSSS, 2009:4), it aimed "*to create a child friendly learning school environment and concentrate on continuing the current trend of increase in girls' enrollment*". In order to do so, it planned to organize welcome to school programs, extra curriculum activities for the students, distribute prizes to encourage students, conduct high school (+2) level classes in near the future and improve the school infrastructures. There were not any specific plans or programs related to caste and/or ethnicity in this plan. This plan mentioned that although the educational and administrative aspects of the school were impressive, there was need of more trained teachers to increase quality of education.

As regards to the school administrative bodies, the School Improvement Plan (SDSSS, 2009) mentions that there were thirteen teachers at the school. Out of six primary level teachers, only two were female teachers, and in case of the lower secondary level, there were one female and two male teachers. At the secondary level, out of three teachers and only one of them was female who taught Nepali. Regarding the School Management Committee, there was only one female representative who was in the member position. As in the case of the urban school, there had not been a single female chairperson in the committee since its establishment. It was the same case in the Parent Teacher Committee where there was only one female member out of total eleven members. There had not been a female chairperson in that committee till to date.

5.2.4   Efforts to promote gender equality at both schools

During the interviews, the school authorities and teachers of both schools stressed that due to more number of girls at each level, they had achieved their goal of gender equality. They stated that situation of gender parity in their school had changed a lot during the last

decade as there were times when there were a lot fewer girls compared to boys in the school. The head teacher of the urban school summed up:

> *You can see our data about gender equality. There are more girls in the school now compared to a decade ago when most of the boys were at schools and girls were at home. The situation of gender equality in our school is a lot better and we are proud of it.*

The school authorities of both schools stated that governmental scholarship programs especially targeted on girls and *dalits,* as explained in Chapter II, is a crucial reason for increased number of girls and *dalits*. As part of girls' scholarship program, all girls of both schools studying up to grade eight received Rs. 400 (about 24 NoK or 4 USD) per year as scholarship while all *dalit* students, both girls and boys, till grade ten received the same amount under the *dalit* scholarship programs. However, during the interviews, most of the scholarship recipients and also non-recipients did not seem enthusiastic about the scholarship due to its nominal amount. As *Ganga*, a grade ten female student of the urban school, said:

> *We get nominal amount as scholarships. The money is not even sufficient to buy stationeries for the whole year or even one school bag or school uniform. Yes, I get the scholarship but it is very insufficient.*

Most of the other scholarship recipient students had similar thoughts as of *Ganga*. A majority of them, both boys and girls, added that it was not the scholarships but their motivation to learn new things that urged them to come to school. When I probed the school authorities about the higher number of girls in government schools, they believed that it was mostly due to parents' consciousness about importance of educating both girls and boys. But at the same time, they also stressed that despite such consciousness, parents were more likely to send their sons to the private schools and daughters to the government schools as the head teacher of the semi-urban school stated:

Yes, we have more girls in our school (....) You know, our culture and social belief of sons being the breadwinners of the family while daughters leaving them after getting married. This is one of the reasons for sending boys to private schools where quality of education is allegedly better than here. I think that government scholarship programs targeted for girls also motivate parents with low economic status to send daughters to our school. You know, a little extra money always helps (laughs).

During the interviews, the school authorities in both schools also elucidated their efforts to convince parents to send girls to school through door to door campaigns which I could not observe as they were organized before start of the school year in April. In such campaigns, the teachers and the school authorities, along with some members of political parties, mothers groups and other local organizations, would go to the community for home visits to inform parents about the importance of sending children, especially daughters, to the school and also inform them about different scholarship schemes.

5.2.5 Gender in grade nine and ten curricula

Even though I do not intend to do an in-depth analysis of the curricula, I briefly outline the grade nine and ten curricula of social studies; and health, population and environment studies in this section. I have chosen these two particular curricula as during the interviews, while putting forward their views on gender, most of my informants regularly referred to them. I found that both these curricula have given a lot of focus to women's equality and various traditional gender issues as they have highlighted various gendered social problems in Nepali societies including *deuki pratha*[12], *chhupadi pratha*[13], *badi*

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[12] It is an ancient custom practiced in the far western regions of Nepal in which a young girl is offered to the local temple in hopes of good favor from the gods. After the offering, *deukis* do not have any contacts with their parents and without education, money and even being considered as unfit for marriage, they are forced to survive as prostitutes (Khadka & Middleton, 2014).

[13] It is a social tradition among Hindus of western Nepal which prohibits women to participate in normal family activities during menstruation and are forced to live in a shed as they are considered impure (Khadka & Middleton, 2014).

pratha[14], dowry problems, girls' trafficking and prostitution. Regarding the status of Nepali women, the grade nine social studies states:

> *Nepal traditionally being a country of male dominated societies, women are in many respects discriminated. Discriminations exist right from family to all hierarchies of important government organizations. Due to social inequalities, women are comparatively backward in every aspect. Laws relating to gender equalities have not yet been effectively implemented* (CDC, 2012a:43).

Grade nine and ten social studies curricula (CDC, 2012a; CDC, 2012b) discuss and illustrate roles of local organizations, like mothers groups and women's groups, to bring women together to fight against alcoholism and gambling, and encourage women to work outside their homes to become self-reliant. The grade ten social studies emphasizes equal participation of women in development and also points out the provision of 33 percent women's participation in every sector; provision of equal right to property; provision of reservation for women in various services along with civil services; provision of citizenship from the name of mother; and provision of right to safe abortion. However, the grade nine curriculum of social studies (CDC, 2012a) cites only male hero figures like *Bhimsen Thapa, Balabhadra Kunwar, Amar Singh Thapa* and *Bhakti Thapa as* war hero during Anglo-Nepal war. Likewise as important Nepali political figures, apart from *Sahana Pradha* a female politician, the grade ten curriculum (CDC, 2012b) names only male politicians including *Matrika Prasad Koirala, Tanka Prasad Acharya, B P Koirala, Puspa Lal Shrestha* and others.

The grade nine and ten curricula of health, population and environment education (CDC, 2012c; CDC, 2012d) emphasize women's participation in family planning; appropriate age of marriage; birth control methods; birth spacing; symptoms of pregnancy; problems of pregnancy; safe motherhood; and prenatal, postnatal and child care. The grade nine health, population and environment curriculum also describes the existing status and education of women and points out the current situation of violence against women and

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[14] *Badi* caste is a *dalit* 'sub-caste', known as the prostitute caste. Originally a caste of entertainers – dancers and musicians, *Badi* women are forced into prostitution and end up being trafficked to the sex industry (Khadka & Middleton, 2014).

issues regarding women and property rights. Both curricula were designed to make students aware of the adolescence, especially women's sexual and reproductive health. In spite of this, as stated by the teachers, students of both schools, both boys and girls, tended to be a bit timid and shy when these topics are discussed in the class as illustrated by one of the male teachers in the semi-urban school:

When it is time to teach about sexual and reproductive health, the whole class becomes silent. Even the talkative students become quiet (...) Generally, girls have their heads down looking at their books with their faces all red, and boys tend to show that they do not care (laughs). It is always like that with every class, I doubt that it will change soon.

The review of the local level educational plans and programs shows that gender along with caste and ethnicity have been key focus areas of educational plans and programs at all levels. However, in line with global and national level educational frameworks discussed earlier, the local educational plans and programs have also primarily focused on the equal access aspect. On occasions, some of these plans and policies mention commitments towards creating child friendly learning environment and providing quality education, especially in the case of the district education plan. However, such commitments are often linked with a lack of vision to achieve it along with lack of commitments towards it. As a matter of fact creating gender, caste and ethnic discrimination free school environment was only mentioned in the District Education Plan. Moreover, at the first glance of some of the programs, such as construction of separate toilets for girls, and construction of girls' hostel, organizing awareness programs to increase equal access for girls and along with distributing girls scholarships, it seems that they focus on creating gender equality in schools in terms of increasing girls access to schools. Then again all of these programs are related to, or are regarded as means to increase gender parity in terms of equal access. In one way, it can be said that such plans and policies attempt to challenge or resist the dominant social norms regarding gender inequality as it aims to increase girls' equal access to education. However, with just focusing on the equal access aspect, they are ignoring the possibility of gender disparities

inside the school that reproduce gender inequalities among students, and also lead to girls' low achievement rates and dropouts.

According to Shilling (1991), actors draw upon rules and resources in specific spatial contexts that are themselves ordered in ways which effect the production and reproduction of gender and social class inequalities. This can be seen in the case of the governmental girls' scholarship programs intended to help girls. When parents decide sending their sons to private schools for better education and good careers, and send their daughters to government schools just for the scholarship based on the social customs related to girls being other's property after marriage, they are reproducing the gendered norms and values that the girls' scholarship programs aim to eliminate. The under-representation of women in the school bodies and limited numbers of female teachers illustrate the ways, as illustrated by Shilling, school authorities were establishing dominance and control over women in the school administrative bodies and among teaching staffs. Likewise, the examples of mainly male figures as war heroes and politicians in the grade nine and ten social studies; and health, population and environment studies curricula illustrate gender, in the words of West & Zimmerman (1987), as a powerful ideological device that produces, reproduces, and legitimates choices grounded on accountability to the sex categories. Such occurrences are legitimating of the existing hierarchical arrangements intersecting with gender in Nepali society and thus, encouraging students, as stated by West & Zimmerman, to do gender appropriately.

So far I have described the local level educational plans and policies, i.e. structural rules and regulations, and the ways they have incorporated gender issues and its implications. Now, in the next section and coming chapters, I present grade nine and ten students' experiences of gender inside and outside the schools to analyze if and how they become, in West & Zimmerman's wording, accountable to their sex categories and thus recruited into the established gender identity and relations. This analysis can also help to reflect on if and how students were, as stated by Thorne (1994), undermining a sense of gender by challenging gender boundaries.

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5.3 The Gender spectrum: From textbook understandings to displaying accountability

In line with Wood's (2009) argumentation, I believe that it would be crucial to understand my informants' views on gender considering that meaning and understanding of gender varies across cultures, and also even within a single culture or social group over time. I consider that their interpretation of gender would directly or indirectly support in shaping their everyday behaviors, believes and experiences. Thus I began all the interviews with students, teachers, school authorities and policy makers by asking them to explain their understanding of the term gender '*laingigta'*, gender identity '*laingig pachichan'* and gender equality in school '*bidhalaya ma laingig samanata'*.

5.3.1 Interpretation of gender and gender identity

A majority of the students were able to differentiate gender from sex as they explained gender as different roles and responsibilities that societies attribute to women and men based on their sex. As students had to study gender and various gender issues in their course books as explained above, they were very precise and clear while explaining their interpretation of gender. Almost all of the other student's replies resembled *Rajan's*, a grade ten male student in the semi-urban school, as he stated:

> *Gender is about different roles that a certain society thinks a man and woman should have. It is about difference between men and women in every aspect of their lives and such differences are socially and culturally constructed.*

When I asked *Bipana*, a grade nine female student of the urban school, to explain her understandings about gender, she replied:

> *Gender is hmm… when we label men as income earners and women as child caregivers, that is gender. Gender is the discrimination that society does or a certain perception that a society has just because he or she is a male or female.*

Regarding the representatives of the school authorities, teachers and policy makers, their replies were identical and also similar to the students. As explained by one of the teachers in the semi-urban school, he knew the definition of gender by heart as a majority of

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trainings and seminars included a segment on gender and gender issues in school. He expressed a textbook definition of gender as he answered "*gender is the ways society categories human beings as a man and a woman and then defines their rights, responsibilities and identities based on this categorization*". One of the female officials at the Department of Education also shared similar views as she exclaimed gender as "*socially and culturally learned believes, expectations and actions related to one being either male or female*".

Interestingly, when I asked students about their views on gender identity, they seemed more hesitant as most of them had not heard that particular terminology before. At that point, I asked them whether they would identify themselves as a 'boy' or a 'girl'. Then without a slight hesitation, girls responded that they would identify themselves as girls and boys as boys. When I asked them for the reason for it, they seemed confused as most of them replied '*what sort of question is that?*' '*just because I am a boy*', '*I don't know*' and '*hmmm… that is because that is who I am*'.

When I asked them to tell me the best thing about their gender, all of the girls were hesitant and struggled to respond. Their frequent replies were, '*I don't know', 'I can't think of anything now', 'for me, I can be a mother one day'* and *'taking care of the family'*. Boys, on the other hand, seemed more quick and eager to reply as most of them answered *'I can go wherever and whenever I want', 'I am stronger than girls', 'I can play as much sports as I want'* and *'I do not have to worry about girls stuffs like getting pregnant or monthly periods'*. Regarding their views on the worst thing about their gender, girls were instead quicker to reply as they said, '*I cannot come home late or do whatever I want to do like boys*', '*people thinking that boys are better than girls', 'girls are not supposed to go out of their homes even for work*' and '*getting pregnancy and monthly cycles*'. Most of the boys thought that it was great to be boys as they replied '*nothing*', '*everything is great*' and '*I can't think of anything now*'. While some of them said that '*I have to do all the tough works*', '*being able to provide food and money for my family when I grow up', 'I feel lot of pressure from family and friend as to do good in all areas of life'*.

When I asked the representatives of school authorities and teachers about the role of school in construction of gender identity, all of them shared similar thoughts regarding schools being the reflections of society. One of the members of school management committee in the semi-urban school stated that students, parents and teachers were products of society which was generally being managed by traditional patriarchal norms.

5.3.2 Understandings of gender equality in schools

Students emphasized gender equality as the way to eliminate unequal distribution of power and positions between men and women at all levels. Moreover their responses indicated gender equality as ways to empower women as they were being discriminated and marginalized by the patriarchal norms and values for decades. *Nisha*, a grade ten female student in the semi-urban school, thought that gender equality was about women breaking the shackles of control over them and receiving their rights, respect and freedom. *Kiran*, a grade ten male student in the semi-urban school, also defined gender equality as about giving equal opportunities to men and women. Regarding gender equality in schools, his views was similar to other students as he defined:

Gender equality in schools means girls should be given equal opportunities as boys to come to school. So, all girls and boys are able to come to school. You know if it is my right to come to school, so it is for my sisters.

As mentioned above, the representatives of school authorities and teachers in both schools considered that they had achieved gender equality in their schools due to the higher proportion of girls' enrollment. One of the representatives of the school authorities in the urban school explained the situation of gender equality in their school as he stated:

We have more girls in the secondary level than boys […] They do everything together except one thing. Boys and girls have separate toilets; that's it.

When I asked the teachers about the situation of gender equality in the classrooms, their replies were quite different as one of the female teachers of the urban school elucidated:

I preach about gender equality in the classroom but when I reach my home, I am the one who is doing all the chores and taking care of my son. I do not complain

about my husband not helping me out as I was taught not to do so. This is what happens. Students learn and we teach about gender equality in the classrooms and it stays there, in the classrooms and not in practice.

One of the teachers in the urban school gave an example of gender segregation in classrooms as he stated that they were able to bring girls to school but if they compelled students to sit with cross gender peers, they would face criticism from students, parents and the locals for boosting love affairs, which is further described in the next chapters. According to the government officials, the government was working hard to promote equal opportunities to learning for both boys and girls. One of the officials at the District Education Office at *Dhading* thought that government's plans and policies to make school a place free from gender-based discrimination were not being translated in practice as he claimed:

The government is promoting gender equality in national education laws and policies. But gender equality in education in Nepal is limited to data and figures of gender parity and has not been able to move beyond it.

According to West & Zimmerman (1987), once the biological differences between men and women have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the "essentialness" of gender. Despite the textbook understandings of gender among my informants, girls and boys identified and described their gender identity based on their sex. Thus they were, as illustrated by West & Zimmerman, legitimizing the social arrangement based on sex category as normal and natural. When the girls responded that the best thing about their gender was to be a mother or to take care of the family; and boys as being able to play sports, they were following the common expectations of Nepali society regarding how a person of a particular sex category should act (as discussed in the Chapter I). Such accounts of my informants were validating and reproducing the patriarchal ways of organizing social life in Nepali society.

Shilling claims school being a gendered locale which is closely related to prevailing patriarchal rules and resources in other locals including homes and communities. The

instances, when the school authorities referred to schools as being mirrors of society as a socially produced framework that reproduce gender inequalities, or when teachers indicated the pressure from parents, community members and also students to create gender demarcation in seating arrangement due to rumors of love affairs, or stating about gender division of labour in household, prevailing gender relations are reproduced.

5.4 Summing up

In accordance with the global and national educational plans and policies that largely focus on parity to achieve gender equality in education, the national level educational plans and policies along with the school authorities and teachers focus on equal access. The local educational plans and policies aim towards achieving social inclusion in education by increasing access of the disadvantaged groups including *dalits* and ethnic groups who are regarded as lagging behind in education. On the one hand, as shown by the district and school level data, such plans and programs were being successful in increasing the equal access aspect. On the other hand, with too much focus on equal access, the educational plans and programs tend to overlook other crucial aspects of gender inequality in education, such as students' experience of gender, male dominance in school bodies and gender biased curricula, which existed in the two schools. Thus, students as in this study, to paraphrase West & Zimmerman (1987), continue to make themselves accountable to their gender despite having textbook knowledge about gender and gender equality by describing their gender identity based on traits related to their particular sex. In addition, it is often not acknowledged that girls scholarship programs, designed to create gender equality in education, are in fact serving to legitimate the social meanings, men being breadwinners and women being other's property after marriage, accorded to gender in Nepali society as discussed in Chapter I. On this background, the next two chapters further analyses the students' activities, interactions and experiences regarding the construction of gender identity and relations along with any forms of caste based discriminations both inside and outside the schools.

CHAPTER VI – SIDE BY SIDE BUT WORLDS APART: CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED IDENTITY AND RELATIONS INSIDE THE CLASSROOMS

6.1 Introduction

So far this study shows that the national and local educational policies, regulations and programs heavily focus on gender parity. There has been only a little research on construction of gender identity among the secondary level students in the multiple contexts and spaces inside and outside the schools as indicated by the review of global and national literature in Chapter II. In this context, this study hopes to throw light on the everyday activities, interactions and experiences related to gender, including caste and ethnicity, among secondary level students in *Dhading* district of Nepal. With this purpose, this chapter focuses on the students' activities, interactions and experiences inside the classroom mainly focusing on seating arrangements, seating partner and classroom interactions. By doing so, it seeks to analyze whether the students use the classroom spaces to reaffirm or to restructure their gendered identity and relations.

6.2 Gendered views on seating arrangements

This section provides an overview of the secondary level classes seating arrangements at the two schools under this study. It analyzes students', both boys and girls, views on such seating arrangements and its effect on their behaviors and performances. As analyzed by Anderson (2009), Lei (2010) and Baron (1992), the classroom seating arrangements can encourage interactions and mutual learning among students; and also to facilitate teaching and learning process among students and teachers. Thus, I believe that it would be interesting to examine the similarities and differences among the boys' and the girls' experiences of the seating arrangements.

During the observation, I found that both schools had adopted rows and columns seating arrangement, as noted by Singh, Gurung and Koirala (2010), the most common seating arrangements for students in schools of Nepal. It is explained further in my field notes:

When I entered in the classroom for the first time, it reminded me of all the other classrooms that I have been to. The classrooms arranged in regular rows and columns where students have desk and benches for seating. Students sat in rows facing the teacher who sat on a chair in front of the whole class. Almost all of the classes were of 'T' shaped with a small open space for teachers and students to walk between two rows, and also in front of the two rows with girls on one side, boys on the other (part of field note from 12th June, 2012).

When I asked students about their views on seating arrangements, almost all of the girls in both schools shared positive thoughts regarding row and column seating arrangements. They thought that such seating arrangements had helped to maintain discipline and create a good learning environment. *Ramila*, a grade nine student in the semi-urban school, preferred rows and column seating arrangements as she elaborated:

Yes, such seating arrangement is fine [.....]. It is really helpful for us (girls). We are the quite ones, we are not like boys who are always talking and making a scene. So in such arrangement, a teacher gives us lecture and we keep on listening. We do not have to speak that often (smiles).

Sarita, a grade ten student in the semi-urban school, on the other hand, stated that she liked such seating arrangements as she was used to it ever since she had entered school. However, she also added that it was not the seating arrangement but students' intention and commitment to studies which helped them to get good grades. Boys, on the other hand, seemed more critical to such seating arrangements, and they were also outspoken enough to let me know their thoughts and disappointments about teachers and school authorities regarding such arrangements. Some of them agreed with *Sarita* and criticized the school authorities for not experimenting with other types of seating arrangements. *Rabin*, a grade ten student of the semi-urban school, in a furious tone stated:

It is teacher's duty to think of the seating arrangements. We only know about rows and columns from the beginning of our school days. I cannot say which one works as I do not know about its options. Teachers should think about it but either they do not know about it or they don't have time for such important issue, I guess.

The remaining other boys in both schools considered that such row and column seating arrangements increase talking among peers, especially among those seated on the back benches. They thought that it brings an unseen division among the students as front benchers and back benchers. During the interview, *Prem*, a grade nine student of the urban school, who usually sat at the last bench thought that teachers had a general conception that back benchers, like him, were 'average' or 'poor' students while front benchers were 'good' students. He thought that the front benchers were more likely to get attention from teachers than the back benchers. After the focus group discussion[15] with students in the semi-urban school, the boys thought that having a circular seating arrangement in their classes would help to increases friendship, communication and assistance among students.

During the observations in both schools, I found that when teachers were teaching, the back bencher boys were more in action as they were generally passing cheats among friends or sometimes even copying homework from their peer's copies as presented in this field note:

> *Majority of students are copying the notes that teacher was writing on the blackboard. But Prem and Amir were busy with carving their names on the benches. When they finished the carving, they started making small paper balls and threw it to their same-gender peers sitting in front of them and then started to giggle. When the teacher turns around, they stop and start writing. But as soon as the teacher starts writing again, they start to throw the paper ball again. When the ball hit their peers, they generally turn around and point their finger and ask them not to do it but with a smile. In contrast, the back bencher girls seemed quieter and more attentive to the lecture (part of field note from 05th August, 2012).*

Regarding the teachers and school authorities, they thought that the rows and column seating arrangements were applicable in their classrooms. They also admitted that they

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[15] All of my participants were seated in the circular seating arrangement during all the discussions.

had never thought of changing the existing arrangements as both teachers and students were not used to a different settings. The head teacher of the urban school thought that students were able to concentrate more on their studies and less on gossiping in row and column seating arrangements. When I asked them about the front benchers and the back benchers, the school authorities in both schools agreed that although subconsciously, they might have considered front benchers as better students but denied carrying any discrimination among them in the classrooms.

As we can see, girls seemed mostly supportive of row and column seating arrangements while most of the boys had more critical views towards it and also the school authorities for not experimenting with other alternatives. With such differences in views, as stated by West & Zimmerman, it can be said that they were being accountable to their gender by acting in such a way that displays traits of that particular sex. I will later in this chapter explain that being positive, calm and silent were regarded as feminine characteristics associated with girls, and boys were regarded as having masculine traits such as being critical and vocal. Shilling (1991) illustrates space as not only simply an environment in which women and men interact but as a constitutive of gender relations. From this perspective, when the teachers and the school authorities accepted such gendered seating arrangements in both schools primarily due to their convenience, they were creating and legitimizing the gender boundaries and reproducing gender relations among students.

According to Shilling, the spatial setting is central to the reproduction of patriarchal structural rules and gendered social relations and identity as agents draw on such structures in social interactions and reproduce them by their activities within such spaces. Bearing this in mind, in the next section I illustrate if and how the students draw on the existing rows and column classroom settings to form gender identity and also to strengthen the gender boundaries.

6.3 Gendered peer relationships: The 'girls'' side and the 'boys'' side

As noted by Stromquist (2007) and Goetz & Grant (1988), when boys and girls enter schools, they separate into gender segregated same gender groups, customarily operated

by peer-driven rules. From this perspective, this section examines the secondary level students' choices regarding peers and seating partners, and analyzes the ways such choices reinforce gender identity and relations inside the classrooms.

During observations in both schools, I found that there was a general tendency among students to form close friendships with only same gender peers. Both boys and girls seemed more interactive and sociable when they were in the presence of same gender peers. When I asked them about their criteria of forming close friendships during the interviews, almost all of them cited gender as their topmost priority. Both boys and girls believed it was easier and better to form friendships with same gender peers. However girls gave more emphasis on having same gender peers as they thought that only same gender peers would be able to understand their situations more clearly and deeply. Almost all of them stressed that they felt comfortable to talk about 'girly issues' like menstrual periods, fashion, make up tips and household chores only with a girl. *Sikha*, grade ten female student of the semi-urban school, elaborated more as she said:

> *If my friend is a girl, I can tell her every details of my life. Imagine it is the time of my month, I hope you know what I am talking about (smiles) [I nodded], I can tell about it to another girl but not with a boy. Sometimes I get lots of pain in the class when it happens. I am embarrassed to tell about it to a boy.*

Girls of both schools stressed that they were friends with everyone in the class. But as *Rekha*, grade nine student of the urban school, claimed that girls did not have close friendships with boys not only as they felt comfortable to share everything with girls but also due to fear of rumors regarding friendship turning into love scandals. *Sarita* elaborated more during an informal chat during the lunch break as she stated:

> *My best friends are girls. I do not know any boy in our class whose best friend is a girl. What is the use of having a boy as my close friend? I cannot tell him everything, so it is not a close friendship. There has always been that demarcation line between girls and boys which prevents very close friendship. I do not want any love scandals. It is always better to be safe than to be sorry (smiles).*

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As in the case of girls, boys also preferred to have peers with same gender and avoided close friendships with cross gender peers. They believed that it was both easy and fundamental to have close bonds with same gender peers. It would help them to understand each other better and would be easier to open up with one another. However, during the interviews boys, in both schools, viewed their peer relations with boys was quite different in nature than those between girls. As *Amir,* a grade nine student of the urban school, explained:

Photo 1 - All girls sitting in same column

If there are two girls who are best friends, they generally would come to school together, sit in the classroom together and always share lunches. They would be holding hands all the time and gossip about everything. It is not what boys do. But for us, best friends would not normally mean staying together all the time.

Photo 2 - Girls and boys in same column but not in same row during optional course

As in the case of peer selection, students in both schools actively segregated themselves from each other by gender in terms of seating partners in the classrooms. Boys would usually sit on one column and girls in another separate column in the secondary level classroom of both schools, see photo 1. However in the case of more number of boys or girls in a class, boys and girls sit in same column but not in the same row as shown in photo 2.

Moreover, there was also gender segregation regarding the choice of optional subject. While there are two types of math courses, one being compulsory course and another

optional, majority of boys chose math as their optional course in both schools. Furthermore, a majority of girls took education as the optional course in the urban school and in the semi-urban school took economics, generally regarded as subject that studies behaviors of individuals, households and organizations. When I asked the students about their reasons for choosing particular optional course, the major factor for both boys and girls was the peer pressure. It was followed by a majority of boys wanting to be accountants or start their own businesses, thus preferring optional math while girls dreamt of being teachers, thus were studying education. Interestingly those girls, who were studying economics, also aspired to teach economics in the future.

When I asked the students about their preference of seating partners, both boys and girls said that they sat with the same gender peers, preferably with their best friends who were of the same gender. *Sapana*, a grade nine female student of the urban school, stated that none of the students wanted to sit in the same row with cross gender peers. She believed that sitting together with a cross gender peer was 'silently forbidden' as it most often would bring regretful consequences. She elaborated more as she stated:

> *What would happen if I sit with a boy? (smiles) Hmmm.. at first it will be very uncomfortable for both of us. I will not know what to talk about. Then the rumor of us being boyfriend and girlfriends. Our names will be painted in the desk, wall and sometimes even on the blackboard. Most importantly my friends (girls) will start to ignore me for leaving the 'girl's camp'. I do not know what teachers will think? (shaking her head).*

Boys shared similar views as none of them thought that they would ever sit with girls in the same row. *Ananta,* a grade nine student of the urban school, thought that despite being friends with the girls, neither he nor any of his friends would feel comfortable to sit with girls. He shared an incident when he had to sit with girls for some time during the school anniversary. He thought that it was excruciating as he could hear his friends teasing him from the back rows. They were chanting '*Ananta ta tesro po bhayecha*' (*Ananta* has become a 'third gender'). He felt so embarrassed that he changed his seat within ten minutes.

Rabin, a grade ten student of the semi-urban school, also thought that sitting with girls in the same row as he would not know what girls talk about with each other. Moreover, it would also mean that he did not have any boys as his friends or she (with whom he would sit with) would be his girlfriend. During the focus group discussions with students in both schools, I let them choose their own friends and seating spots. Not surprisingly girls chose to sit with girls and boys with boys. During the focus group discussion in the urban school, *Bikash*, who had joined the discussion a little late, had to sit with girls due to lack of space. During the five minutes interval, he brought a chair from the head teacher's office and sat with the boys. When I asked him for the reason for not sitting with girls, he said:

> *I do not mind having girls as my friends. I talk with them both inside and outside the class. I do not think that there is any particular harm to sit with them. But maybe because boys have been sitting with boys and girls with girls eversince we joined the school, we have continued to do so. So I do not feel comfortable sitting with them.*

As also mentioned in the previous chapter, the teachers and the representatives of school authorities of both schools were concious about exising gender seggragation in the classrooms. One of the male teachers in the urban school took such seggregation as a natural phenomenon and said that both students and teachers were used to such gender seggregated seating arragements. He further added that it had never been a matter of discussion either in the classroom or even among the teachers. The headteacher of the urban school did not think that such gender seggregation in class had negative effect for the students as he explained:

> *When boys sit with boys and girls with girls, it is only sometimes they distrub the class by chatting. But when a boy has to sit with a girl or vice versa, they do not feel comfortable and cannot concentrate on the studies. Moreover, they are labeled as 'lovers' or even 'transgender' (smiles) you know how our society and customs view this sort of matter, they become the matter of conversation among their own peers and are mostly teased. It has negative effect both in their studies and their lives.*

Most of the teachers and school authorities agreed with the headteacher's thoughts. So, rather than intervening to reduce gender seggregation in the classrooms, they encouraged them to sit with same gender peers. Most of them thought it would not only make students happy but would also reduce the likelihood of their parents blaming teachers and school for ruining (rumors of girlfriends and boyfriends) their children's lives. Despite letting students choose their own seating spots and partners, one of the teachers in the urban school said that occassionally when students did not obey them, they would switch their places. In such case, students at the back had to sit in front with the same gender peers, not with cross-gender peers.

In line with Thorne's (1994) study, prevalence of gender segregation in the patterns of friendship between peers was quite striking in my study. Secondary level boys and girls in both schools were in daily physical proximity and were familiar with eachother, but they treated each other as 'familiar strangers' (Schofield, nd cited in Thorne, 1994:47) with little real knowledge about one another and with no deep peer relationships or stable alliances. The gendered division among the choice of seating partners and the seating spot had resulted into splitting up 'boys and girls' into 'the boys' and 'the girls' as separate and reified groups and thus as illustrated by Thorne evoking gender boundaries. As emphasized by both Shilling (1991) and Thorne (1994), by labelling and also permitting to create the 'girls' side' and the 'boys' side', the teachers and the school authorities were attributing symbolic meanings to a spatial area that justified gender boundaries within the classrooms.

When most boys choose math as the optional course to become accountants or businessmen, and girls studied education and economics with the goal of becoming teachers, they were, in words of West & Zimmerman (1987), attempting to live up to the normative conception of femininity and masculinity by choosing the courses that lead to professions commonly marked for each sex. By doing so, students were actively performing gender and thus placing themselves within the existing patriarchal framework of Nepali society, as explained in Chapter I. Moreover, on some rare occasions when boys sit with girls, although due to no other alternative, they were marked as contaminated and labelled as being 'third gender' or 'transgender'. Despite being

legalized in 2007, according to Bista (2011), homosexuality is largely attributed to social taboos and superstitions associated with being the sinners in past life. By being labelled 'third gender', students were being called on, to follow West & Zimmerman (1987), to account for their actions in case of deviation of the performance from the behavioral guidelines for their sex category, which in turn, affected their ability to obtain the resources available to that sex category.

Throne (1994) states that the seperation between boys and girls reach its highest point in their adolescence as same-sex peers were more likely to share common interests and behavioral styles. The findings of this study resembles her argument as there was a general tendency among students to separate into groups by gender and the interactions with the same-sex peers resulted into solidified, lasting and acknowledged friendships. This study so far has also found that the likelihood of being teased as potential romantic partners, as illustrated by Thorne, had pushed the cross gender interactions apart, increasing social distance and strengthening gender boundaries. Moreover, if such accusations were regularly repeated in schools, and in the presence of peers and sometimes also teachers, it would bring shame and pain. Such incidents encouraged the avoidence of further interactions with cross gender peers to escape such teasing and rumors.

6.4 Teacher - student interactions: Portraying picture of 'silent' girls and 'disobedient' boys

This section focuses on the observed interactions between teacher and students in the secondary level classrooms and analyzes the ways such interactions reinforce or reconstruct students' experiences regarding construction of gendered identity and relations. During the interviews, the representatives of school authorities and teachers of both schools stated that they never had seminars and trainings that solely focus on gender issues. Nevertheless the majority of seminars and trainings included gender as a small component which focused on the general concept of gender, its relevance in school and use of gender neutral langauge in classrooms. Most of the teachers in both schools stated that they were concious about using gender neutral words in the classrooms. During the

observation of classroom interactions, I found that most of them used the terms like "*goodmorning everyone*"; "*has everyone done their homeworks?*" and "*how are you all today?*". However, occasionally some teachers tended to make statements just addressing one gender, mostly while giving the feedbacks. Generally, it was girls who would get most of the positive feedbacks and boys would get the negative feedback. Some of the regular feedbacks were such as "*boys in this class…*"; "*boys, learn from girls and keep quite*"; "*…. that is why girls are better students than boys*".

According to Flanders's (1970) the two-thirds rule of teacher-student classroom interaction theory mens that, about two-thirds of classroom time is devoted to talking; about two-thirds of this time the person talking is the teacher; and about two-thirds of the teachers talk is "direct" that consists of lecturing, giving directions, asking questions and controlling students. The situation of teaching learning practice in both schools under this study also reflected Flanders's two-thirds rule. It was the teacher that spent almost all of the time for lecturing in non-interactive and 'transmissive' mode as stated by Barnes (1973) as the main mode of teaching-learning practice. Teachers would generally write notes of the lessons on the blackboard or dictate it to the students orally while students would copy it in their textbooks. In case of seldom interactive conversation, those were initiated by the teachers while asking student questions or giving feedback on the assignments.

During the obervation in both schools, I noticed that boys were most likely to present extended explanations of questions asked in a loud and firm tone compared to girls who were mostly very shy and were limited to simple statements of fact. Boys were even not afraid to display critical perception of teachers' attitudes in the classroom. There was an incident in grade nine of the urban school when a teacher had given Math class assignment. *Amir*, a boy sitting on the second last row and *Bipana*, a girl sitting on the first row finished their assignments in almost the same time. At first *Amir* stood up followed by *Bipana* and both of them asked the teacher to check their assignments. Teacher checked *Bipana* assignment first. *Amir* was very upset and showed his disagreement verbally in the classroom. Teacher pretended not to listen to him and checked his assignment after he was done with *Bipana.* During the interview, *Amir* was

furious with the teacher's treatment towards him as he claimed that there were always differences in teacher's attitude towards boys and girls. He added that girls were most likely to get more praise and appreciation for their homework or class assignment. Moreover, in the case of not finishing homework or not being able to answer the question, teachers would most likely hear girl's excuses and sympathize with them while boys would generally get punishments.

During the interviews and informal talks, I noticed that almost all of the teachers and school authorities already had certain images or perceptions of boys and girls in both schools. When I asked them to describe general characteristic of girls, they were portrayed as silent students, independent learners who were generally consistent with their submission of homework, more obedient and organized but lacking the confidence to speak up. Despite the fact that there were less number of boys at the secondary level of both schools, boys were perceived as being vocal and energetic who generally dominate the classroom interactions, having more confidence, answering teacher's questions even if answers were not correct and also, if seldom, asking questions to teachers. Boys were also described as being disobedient, irresponsible for prioritizing school work less and for being more concerned with peer-group image. During interviews school authorities of both schools clearly stated that they gave equal treatments to both boys and girls. However, some teachers also indicated that they might have unintentionally to some extent, favoured either one of the gender during the teaching learning practices. One of the teachers in the semi-urban school explained his behaviours in the classroom as he said:

> *You know, when I think about it, maybe it can be said that I favor girls a little more than boys. They are generally very obident and are very good students but they are very shy and hesistate to ask questions in the class. So I ask them individually if they have understood the lesson. Some of them even come and ask me questions after the class. I explain them the answers in more detail then. So I guess I might have unintentionally given them more priority.*

On the contrary, teachers in the urban school mentioned that they had to focus on boys more than girls as they were more likely to misbehave in the class. So in order to control

them, they had to monitor their every move and regularly shout at them. One of the teachers who taught health, population and environment studies told that he always faced problems during classes on sexual and reproductive health. When he started to teach, generally boys would start to giggle among themselves while girls look down on their benches the whole time. Moreover it was also because boys were the ones who would raise their hands if teachers asked the questions compared to girls who would not generally raise their hands even if the girls knew the answers. However, some teachers thought that the students, both boys and girls, got more attention in the class not due to their gender but due to their class performance.

According to West & Zimmerman (1987), gender is embedded in every aspect of everyday interactions, and that doing gender, simultaneously produces, sustains and legitimates the social meanings accorded to gender. When the teachers were charactering girls as being silent, obident, organized but lacking confidence; and boys as vocal, energetic and confidence, they were legitimizing the existing gender stereotypes. Moreover when teachers were favouring either one of the gender during the teaching learning practices, either girls due to their shy nature or boys as they were likely to misbehave, they were encouraging the students, as illustrated by West & Zimmerman, to be accountable to their sex category by acting in such a way that displays traits of that particular gender. In line with West & Zimmerman, when most girls were hesitant to respond to teacher's questions while boys were being vocal and critical in their replies, they were in the process of 'recruitment' into the established gender identity. They were learning to participate in 'a self-regulating process' by monitoring their own and others' conduct by sex.

When teachers were making statements just addressing one gender or giving positive feedback mostly to girls and negative feedback mostly to boys, they were, as suggested by Thorne, emphasizing gender as an oppositional dualism and thus reaffirming prevailing gender identity and relations. The students also tended to mark gender antagonism and portray boys and girls as two opposites as in the case of *Amir* who claimed that girls get more praise and appreciation for their homework and their excuses being heard in case of unfinished homework while boys generally get punishments. The

next section further investigates the interactions among students to find out if and how these interactions reaffirm or reconstruct students' gender identity and relations.

6.5 Student – student interactions: Glancing at two different worlds

As also stated above, there was very little interaction between boys and girls in the gender segregated classrooms of the two schools under study. During the observations, I found almost no cross gender interactions among students during the class hours. On the occasions when a teacher would leave the room for some time after giving class assignments, boys would start to talk with male peers, especially those sitting with them in their rows or in rows ahead and behind them. I found out that their talk generally revolved around football matches and planning that evening's activities. Boys generally would start to chat in loud voices and not so much concentrate on the task itself. Some of them would even go to their peers, who were 'good' students and copy their task. Girls, on the other hand, also chatted with their peers but mainly through whispering and limited to peers sitting in their own rows.

During the break time, most of the students, at least the boys would leave the class rooms and go to the playground. Some of the girls would stay in the classroom, gather around together and chat. Other girls would get out at the balcony or the corridor and form groups to chat or roam around. These interactions were mainly concentrated among the same gender peers. Only on some occasions (it was three times during my observation), the boys who had not completed their homework stayed in class to finish it. They generally asked for the completed homework from their peers of their own gender and copied it. Girls on the other hand mostly attended classes with finished homework. On one occasion when another boy refused to share homework, the boy asked girls for the completed homework. Boys generally tended to share their homework without any hesitation. Girls, on the other hand, were more hesitant and always asked not to totally copy the task when they shared it to peers from either gender. During my observation, I did not find any single incident of girls asking for or sharing the homework among girls.

Many studies have shown that students can benefit academically from interaction achievable during collaboration in group based tasks has beneficial consequences (e.g.

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Damon & Phelps, 1989; Howe, Rodgers & Tolmie, 1990; 1992). As already stated, teaching-learning practices in both schools were mostly based on non-interactive lecturing by the teachers. During the whole study period in both schools, none of the teachers gave any group-based task to the students. During the interviews, students also criticized teachers as they would never assign any group-work task to them despite curriculum on social studies has been designed for students to conduct community level group based tasks.

According to West & Zimmerman (1987), gender is produced and reproduced by mean of activities and interactions, and is displayed through social interactions and performances. With very little interactions among cross-gender peers in the classrooms, as illustrated by Thorne (1994) and also Shilling (1991), students in both schools were actively performing gender and evoking gender boundaries. The spatial separation between sexes due to the seating arrangement, as described earlier, had constrained the students to initiate cross gender interactions resulting in the reinforcement of prevailing gender identity and relations in schools. Such separations channeled 'informal byplay', as suggested by Thorne (1994:38), such as chatting and casual visits among the same-gender peers and not cross-gender peers.

According to Thorne (1994), when boys and girls work together for group tasks, most often gender boundaries were dissolved and they come together to become part of the same world. But due to the teaching-learning practices in both schools and lack of group work activities, boys and girls in both schools did not get any opportunities to interact, reflect and learn mutually in a group and thus dissolve the gender boundaries. In some rare occasions as when asking to copy homework, boys were attempting to cross the gender boundaries and neutralizing the gendered relations.

6.6 Intersecting identities inside the classroom

Up to now I have illustrated and analyzed the students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender inside the classrooms. Now I will address if and how students' gender identity intersects with other social identities, mainly caste and ethnicity, to create diverse experiences in the classrooms. During the interviews and classroom observations,

I found that caste did not play any part in the segregation among students. The peer relationships among students were basically formed on gender, not on caste caste/ethnic groups. As mentioned in the Chapter I, the majority of students in the urban school were from the ethnic groups, followed by the upper castes and *dalits*. In case of the semi-urban school, there were similar number of students from the upper caste and the ethnic groups followed by the *dalits.*

During the observations, I found that the close circle of friends of the same gender included students of higher caste, lower caste, untouchable caste and ethnic groups. When I asked *Manju,* a grade ten female *dalit* student from the urban school, about the influence of caste in forming peer relationships, she replied:

> *Everyone has realized that all of us have only one caste. We are humans and all of our blood is red (smiles). I do not care which caste my friend in the urban schools come from as long as we share similar views and interests.*

I also found that students were aware of caste-based discriminations and the same-sex peers from the upper castes, the *dalits* (untouchable caste) and ethnic groups would all sit together in the classroom. During the teacher-student interactions and student-student interactions, issues of caste/ethnic groups or economic class did not come up even once inside the classroom during my study period. All students, teachers and school authorities condemned any forms of caste based discriminations during the interviews.

According to an intersectionality perspective, gender identity are embedded within other identities such as class, race, age, caste and religion and thus it makes one's experience of gender varies with his/her other social identities (Rao & Robinson Pant: 2006 cited in Mitchell, 2011). However, when this study examined the experiences of students from lower or untouchable castes, it did not find any forms of caste based discriminations or social exclusion based on caste or ethnicity inside the classrooms. It did not find any sort of structural discriminations or social segregations by their own peers or teachers from the higher castes towards students from the lower or untouchable castes. Students were aware against caste based discrimination and were conscious to eliminate it. On this

basis, it can be said that it was mainly students' gender, not so much of caste or ethnicity, which contributed to students' experiences of oppression and privilege in the classrooms.

6.7 Summing up

This chapter has discussed that construction of gender among students inside the classroom is an active and ongoing process often facilitated by students themselves through performing gender specific conducts. The prevalence of gender segregation regarding peer relationships and seating partners often resulted in reproducing gender identity and relations among students. Moreover, by choosing the courses that lead to profession commonly marked for each sex, boys and girls were, following West and Zimmerman (1987), being accountable to their sex category by attempting to live up to the normative conception of femininity and masculinity. Students' acts were further validated by teachers and the school authorities, as on most of occasions they associated the masculine and feminine characteristics to the particular behaviors. Due to lack of group assignment, no opportunities were provided for boys and girls the opportunities to work together in cohesive way. However, no forms of discrimination based on caste or ethnicity among students inside the classrooms were found. As proposed by the title of this chapter, boys and girls sit side by side in the classrooms but their worlds were far apart in terms of their activities, interactions and experiences of gender.

CHAPTER VII – MOVING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOMS: REAFFIRMING AS WELL AS NEGOTIATING GENDER IDENTITEIS AND RELATIONS

7.1 Introduction

So far, this study illustrates classrooms as gendered locales where hegemonic view of gender is generally acted out, reinforced, and evoked among students and teachers. Keeping in mind that gender is, as claimed by Throne (1994), often situational and fluid depending upon the situations and circumstances, this study examine students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender in multiple contexts and spaces both inside and outside the schools. Thus, this chapter shifts the analysis of construction of gender identity and relations among secondary level students to outside the classroom. From this perspective, it analyzes students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender in various spatial dimensions outside the classrooms including playgrounds, lunch cafes, library, home to school journeys and also regarding study opportunities at homes, to construct their gender identity and relations.

7.2 Playground experiences: From reaffirming to challenging gendered identity and relations

Playground experiences are regarded as a significant factor to social and physical development in children's and youth's lives. Chase (2009) regards that gender segregation during play occurs at schools and such segregations is not generally questioned neither by students nor teachers. As Thorne (1994) has argued such segregation is considered to be a natural phenomenon and is regarded as appropriate behavior of students that later develops into a crucial part of their lives. Thus, this section analyses various playground activities to find out whether students enact the normative expectations or traits related to masculinity and femininity, or challenge such behavioral 'guidelines' related to their sex category.

7.2.1 The gendered play: Gender division of space and activities

As discussed in the previous chapter, this study found that there was a general trend among students to form close friendships with the same-sex peers and not with cross-gender peers. Moreover, students' identification with their female or male gender often results in engaging in gender-specific plays. During the interviews and informal talks, I found that football was the dominant feature of playground activities which was mostly played by boys. The other games like '*chungi*' (game in which a player hits a ball made of rubber band by foot), hide and seek and badminton were most often regarded as 'the girls' game'

Photo 3 - Girls and younger boys watching the bigger brothers play football

and were popular among the girls, mostly from lower grades, and also some younger boys from the lower grades. During the observation in both schools, I noticed that there were only a few girls, almost all of them were from lower grades, who were playing in the ground during the breaks or lunch times. It was only a couple of times in the urban school, I found girls from the secondary level playing badminton. During the break times, as illustrated in photo 3, the majority of the secondary level girls would gather at the balcony or corridors with the same-sex peer groups and gossip or watch the boys play on the ground. In both schools, shown in photos 3 and 4, boys were the ones who

Photo 4 - Boys occupying the playground space

occupied the majority of playground spaces, generally playing football. It is further explained in my field notes through my observation of the semi-urban school:

As I in the case of the other school, playgrounds are covered by boys. Some are playing football and others are just standing around and talking among each other. But there are only boys. Even the male teachers are also there talking with the boys but I did not see any female teachers there. Girls, on the other hand, are either in their classrooms or in the balcony with their same-gender peers. (part of field note from 30th August, 2012)

Although boys from all grades played football, they had their own teams, composed of same-sex peers from their age group. However, if the secondary level boys, *dai haru* (bigger brothers), would come to the ground to play, other boys from the lower grades would either move their play to another part of the playground or stop their game to watch them play. It was only in rare occasions, just one time during observation in the semi-urban school, boys from secondary level and lower secondary level played against each other. Thus with football being played by boys taking majority of the space, girls and younger boys of both

Photo 5 – Boys playing after the school hours in the urban school

schools were largely restricted to the margins of the playgrounds. On some occasions, boys would also come back to school after the school hours to play football with their same-sex friends from other schools as shown in photo 5.

Both boys and girls perceived football as 'boys' game', as explained by *Ganga*, a grade ten female student in the urban school, a game designed and played by boys and just for boys. I did not find a single girl in both schools who was interested to play football. During the focus group discussion in the semi-urban school, both boys and girls laughed

at the idea of having a mixed-sex team for football as *Rajan*, a grade ten male student, stated:

> *A mixed team? Football is just for boys. We are strong and have stamina for it. We can run like horses. Girls are not like that. [Looking at the girls] I do not mean to disrespect but girls cannot play football. Look at their bodies. It will be a comedy as they run like tortoise [everyone laughs] that is why they play badminton.*

Like *Rajan,* almost all of the boys from both schools regarded *chungi*, hide and seek and badminton as marginalized and downgraded games compared to football. *Bikash,* a grade ten male student in the urban school, elaborated in a proud voice as he said:

> *Badminton implies games for the weak like the girls and younger, fragile boys whereas football is a game for strong boys like them.*

Upon my curiosity regarding whether the secondary level girls did not play '*chungi*', hide and seek and even badminton that often, *Usha*, a grade ten female student in urban school, regarded such games suitable for younger girls at lower grades and not for grownup girls like them. She stated that playing such games at their age would be an embarrassment. During the interviews and focus group discussions, most of the girls expressed their dissatisfaction against the school authorities for not providing them with other sports equipment more suitable for girls. They considered skipping, hand ring (like frisbee), chess, snake and ladder to be more appropriate for girls as *Nisha*, a female student in grade ten in the semi-urban school, thought such games did not involve using physical strength and power to play.

7.2.2   The gendered interface of chatting

During the observations, I also found that almost all the time, girls would be in their groups of two or more same-sex peers. They were much more likely to be holding hands, hugging also as shown in photo 6 (in the next page) and also sometimes combing each other's hair, putting eye makeup on each other. As mentioned above, the secondary level girls spent most of their break times by chatting with peers from their same gender in balconies or at the playgrounds margins as shown in photo 7 in the next page.

Photo 6 - Girls holding hands and hugging

Regarding the recurrent topics during the chatting, girls mentioned gossiping about other students and people in their community, sharing their problems like menstruation, talking about the television shows and sharing beauty tips. *Nisha*, grade ten female student in the semi-urban school, thought that it was a good time-pass and also informative to talk about other students and other community people. As she elaborated, they frequently talked about the grades, regular or irregular attendance and attitudes of other students. Moreover sharing the personal problems mainly about menstruation, other health related issues and also incidents of harassments by the boys outside the school helped them to deal with it. Nepali family dramas and comedy serials like '*tito satya*', '*jire khursani*' and '*meri bassai*' on television, and Nepali along with Hindi movies were another recurrent topic for discussions among them. I believe that due to such craze, when I asked them to name their role models, almost all of the female students in the urban

Photo 7 - Girls at corridors during break time

school and majority of students in the semi-urban school named television and movie actresses including *Karisma Manandhar* (Nepali movie actress), *Deepa Shree Niroula* (Nepali television actress) and *Ashiwarya Rai* (Indian actress and former Miss World). Only few girls named *Anuradha Koirala* (Nepali social worker), *Chari Maya Tamang*

(Nepali social worker) and *Pasang Lamhu Sherpa* (Late Nepali Mountain Climber) as their role models.

During the interviews, most of the girls stated fashion as another popular issue for chatting. I observed that girls were interested and responsive whenever the topics of fashion or make-up came up during the interviews and informal chats. In the urban school, there was a group of three girls in grade ten who appeared to be more fashion aware in their outer appearance. During the interview, *Manju,* one of those girls, stated that she was very conscious about their looks and the way others perceive them. She thought that it was important for girls to look beautiful and to have a good figure. While most of the girls were in school dress (blue skirts, white shirts and black shoes with simple school bags), they usually wore different color tights and sneakers, sometimes also sandals and had colorful side bags. During the observations, I found that during the break times, those three girls would generally gather their same-sex peers and teach them hair styling and how to put eye and lip make-up. The other girls seemed very excited to learn the art of make-ups and hair styling. There were also some girls like *Ganga,* a grade ten female student in the urban school, who thought that only those girls who had homes around the main highway had access to and also could afford to be beautiful, as she explained:

> *Some girls are more worried about their self-image. They think that wearing make-up and fitting dresses increases their maturity and popularity. I do not believe in that, and to be honest, I cannot believe in that. I do not have money to buy those expensive make-up kits and dresses.*

However, a majority of the girls in the semi-urban school did not give that much importance to make-up and fashion in the school as *Nisha*. As a grade ten female student in the semi-urban school, she thought that the purpose of coming to school was to get education, not to be beautiful. *Sarita*, a grade ten female student of the same school also stressed the inner beauty not the outer appearance, and thought that it was time to concentrate on studies not on their appearances.

In the case of boys, during the observation I found that apart from occasional shoves in the playgrounds, they would never touch each other. Despite being close peers, teasing and making jokes about each other was also popular among boys. As *Rabin,* a grade ten male student in the semi-urban school, stated, rather than forming a group and chatting, they would be involved in sports activities. Boys, in both schools, regarded forming groups and gossiping as a 'girly thing' to do. They spent their time mostly playing football or taking about sports including football, cricket and the latest wrestling matches. They told that often they had gatherings at a friend's house who had cable to watch sports on television after the classes or during days off at school. When I asked them about their role models, almost all of them named players which included *Cristiano Ronaldo* (footballer from Portugal), *Lionel Messi* (footballer from Argentina), *Sachin Tendulkar* (cricketer from India), and United States' wrestlers and Hollywood actors like *John Seana* and *The Rock*. Unlike girls, most of the boys in both schools did not give importance to their looks or fashion. During the interviews, *Rajan,* a grade ten male student in the semi-urban school, thought that their age represented maturity, so being a 'man' meant to be rough in their appearance and he wanted to represent such an image. However, a few boys like *Amir* in the urban school thought that boys should also maintain their looks. He showed me his comb in his pocket which he thought would help him to have good and stylist hair and get noticed. He added that none of his peers teased him for having comb.

7.2.3 *Enacting masculinity through the 'heroic' stunts*

Photo 8 - Boys performing the 'heroic' acts

Apart from playing football, the secondary levels boys were involved in other activities in the playgrounds which showcased their physical strength and skills. Such activities included walking on the narrow ledge, climbing pillars of the building and even jumping from the first storey as shown in photo 8. It was mainly the

older boys from the secondary levels and also a few younger boys from the lower secondary level who were involved in such activities.

During the observation in the urban school, such stunts were often appraised by applauds by other boys and girls from the secondary level as well as by younger boys and girls from the lower grades. Later on some boys from lower grade also attempted to duplicate such stunts. When they could not perform them properly, occasionally I noticed the older boys would assist them as in photo 9. Another popular lunch-break activity for boys was

Photo 9 - An older boy helping younger boy to do stunt in front of other students

stealing seasonal fruits from the backyard of the nearby houses. They would steal the fruits for themselves and also share these stolen fruits among same-sex peers and also among cross-sex peers. During the informal talks, I asked *Rishi,* a grade ten male student in the urban school, if the reason behind stealing the fruits was him not being able to afford the lunch. He laughed and replied that all of the boys could afford to buy lunches but they loved the adventure and adrenaline while stealing the fruits. *Bikash,* a grade ten male student in the urban school, related stealing fruits as bonding activities among boys and a chance to boost their popularity and prestige as it was also considered a 'heroic act' by other students.

7.2.4 Cross gender interactions: Negotiating the gender norms and values

There were occasions, although rare, when boys and girls would dissolve the gender boundaries to initiate cross-sex interactions in the corridor and playground as shown in photos 10 and 11 in the next page. During the interviews, students in both schools stated that both boys and girls participated together to form mixed gender teams and take part in extra-curricular activities like quiz contests and dance competitions for the school's anniversary and teachers' or parents' days.

Photo 10 - Boys and girls having a meeting at the margins of the playground

Photo 11 - Girls and a boy in front of the classroom

In order to prepare for such events, boys and girls would organize meetings during lunch-break that were mainly held in the corridor or at the corner of the playground as shown in these two photos. Such meetings or rehearsals were most often organized in groups due to the probabilities of love affair rumors. Explaining reasons to be in a group while having conversation with boys, *Ramila,* a grade nine student of the semi-urban school, stated:

I will never do rehearsal alone or sit in a classroom and talk about our strategy with a boy by myself (……). You know, if someone sees me doing that everyone in the school will think that I have an affair with that person. I don't know what my family will do after hearing this rumor. May be they will not let me come to school again. So we have to be careful when talking to boys.

During the interviews, almost all of the girls thought that rumors of love affairs was embarrassing for a girl and her family which could even affect their marriage chances in the future as most of the marriages would be arranged by their families. Boys also seemed cautious about being involved in any scandals in school. When I asked them whether they had girlfriends, a majority of them denied it. A few boys who disclosed that they had girlfriends revealed that their girlfriends were not girls from the same school, as it would increase their chances of exposure of their relationships. During the interviews, none of the girls admitted having boyfriends. During the observation, I

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found that there was not a single incidence when a girl would go alone to talk with a group of boys. However, a single boy would come up to a group of girls and talk with them as in photo 11 but not that often with a single girl.

The analysis of the playground activities in both schools under this study shows the students were actively engaged in establishing gender binaries maintaining gender identity and roles in the playgrounds and corridors. As grade nine and ten boys occupied the playground and displaced girls and other younger boys, they were, as stated by Shilling, not only dominating the physical space of the playground, but symbolically marking playground as an arena where football, labelled as the 'boys' game', is played. Such gendered spatial separation marked playground as a site for the construction of gender identity and power relations among students where boys took control over the main playground.

Furthermore, as suggest by Thorne and also Shilling, demarcation between 'the boys' and 'the girls' games and activities was reinforcing a sense of gender as an oppositional dualism that strengthen gender antagonism among the students. In view of West & Zimmerman (1987), when both boys and girls associated playing football with boys as it needed power and strength; and playing *chungi*, hide and seek and badminton as 'girls' game', that did not requiring physical strength, they were performing gender by associating masculinity with strength and endurance; and femininity with the lack of those traits. According to Thorne (1994), gender separation tends to reach its peak during adolescence and it can be seen in this study too, as girls did not want to play certain games that they used to play at younger ages since they did not fit their femininity status any longer. Thus, it can be said that students in both schools were generally being accountable to their sex-category as they were being in accord with culturally approved conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Likewise, it can be said that they were participating, as stated by West & Zimmerman (1987), in 'a self-regulating process' of recruitment into established gender identity. In addition when boys were performing 'the heroic stunts', and girls and other young boys were applauding such activities, masculinity was in the process of being constructed. Furthermore, when boys treated certain activities associated with girls as polluting or a label for low status, as stated by

Thorne (1994), they were not only creating gender boundaries but also marking gender relations as hierarchical.

On some rare occasion, students were initiating cross-sex interactions and forming mixed-sex teams to take part in extra-curricular activities. By doing so, they were, in the words of Thorne, neutralizing the gender boundaries in cohesive ways and discouraging gender antagonism. Moreover, such cross-sex interactions were possible when boys and girls were in groups, and also as suggested by Thorne, in less crowded space with fewer potential witnesses and participants were present. However, as such cross-sex interactions meant deviation of the performance from the behavioral 'guidelines' for their sex category, these acts, as discussed in Chapter VII, were discouraged by naming the relationship between a boy and a girl as lovers and associating such relationship with shame and embarrassment.

7.3 Reaffirming and negotiating gender identity and relations through other activities outside the classrooms

7.3.1 *From gendered use of library to dissolving gender boundaries*

Both schools had one library each which was supported by an international non-governmental organization (INGO), Room to Read. During the study, I found that students of both schools generally preferred to play or even just sit in classrooms rather than going to the library to read. So the library was mostly used by the teachers. Among the few students who visited the library, they often went there to read the daily newspapers and monthly magazines. Most of the times, those students would bring newspapers out of the library for everyone to read. Due to the lack of newspapers, students often formed mixed-sex groups to read it and would generally distribute the pages among themselves. However there was a distinct difference of choices among boys and girls regarding the selection of newspaper sections. Girls seemed to be more interested in the horoscope and entertainment section while boys generally snatched the first page and sports section. But they would swap the pages with each other and read the whole newspaper. They would even discuss about the news among themselves and from

time to time continued their discussion in the cafes while having lunch. I found that inside the library girls were interested to read books related to the curriculum or read magazine like '*Nari*' which had tips for beauty, home decoration and cooking. Boys, on the other hand, were more interested to read magazine like '*Madhupark*' and '*Himal*' which focused on political issues and issues for youths.

7.3.2   *From gender segregation to cross-sex interactions during lunch*

Both of the schools did not have canteens inside the school compound. Thus, students went to the nearby small cafés to have lunch. I observed that after the bell rang indicating the lunch break, girls would generally wait for all of their peers of their group to finish packing books. Some of the girls who had brought their own lunches stayed in the classroom and shared it among themselves. *Sarita*, a grade ten female student in the semi-urban school, thought of bringing home-made lunch as a 'girly thing' at school, but she liked it. She revealed its advantages as lunch from home was not only hygienic but also saved money for her to buy a new dress. *Usha*, a grade ten female student in urban school, told that she was compelled to bring lunch from home as she stated:

> *We are not given allowances. So we have to save for it. Even if some get allowance,*
> *it is not enough to go to the café every day. Who would not want to go to a*
> *restaurant and have a full delicious lunch?*

Girls who did not bring their own lunches would generally collect money and then head towards the nearby cafés. They normally ordered light and less expensive meals such as *roti* (tortilla) and curry. They most often share both their meals and bills among the group. On the other hand, after the bell rang boys would put the books in the bags and, generally, be the first ones to leave the classroom. They would go out of the classrooms individually and would not wait for their peers. Almost all of them would go straight to the playground and when their peers had arrived there, they would head towards the adjoining cafés to have lunch. During the study period, I did not find a single boy at the secondary level in both schools who would bring lunch from home. *Rabin*, grade ten male student in the semi-urban school shared his thoughts that bringing lunch from home was a 'girly thing' and he would be embarrassed among his peers if he would do so.

Almost all of the boys told that their parents gave them some pocket money to buy lunch. *Ananta,* a grade nine male student in the urban school, stated that his parents gave him substantial money for lunch as they knew that he would never bring lunch from home and, generally, he had to proceed to the field to work after the classes. There were also differences in lunch choices ordered by the boys compared to girls. Boys generally ordered tea, cold drinks, *chiura* (beaten rice), *sel* (small dunots made of rice flour) and curry which is regarded as hearty and expensive meals. Besides they would place their order separately and also pay individually.

Even though there was clear gender segregation during the lunch time, there were a few moments when there were cross-sex interactions among students. During the observations, I found that occasionally boys and girls would be together in a group on the way to café. They talked to each other more openly during the walk. Most of the times it was boys who initiated the conversation. During the observations, I noticed that they generally chatted about lecture-notes and courses. Sometimes they also talked about the last night's television serials or news on the newspaper. I did not find any frequent teasing between boys and girls, except on one occasion on the way to a café when *Hari,* a grade ten male student in the semi-urban school, told his classmate *Nisha* that she was looking gorgeous that day. *Nisha* turned all red with embarrassment as other boys in the group started to tease them saying, *"ohhhhh!!!! really Hari, we had not noticed". Indu,* studying in the same grade, interrupted in the middle and defended *Nisha* as she said *"yes, she always looks gorgeous, so what?"* Then everyone laughed and when they reached the café, they sat down on different tables. Most of the times boys and girls would sit with the same-sex peers in different tables. However, they occasionally chatted with cross-sex peers sitting on the next table. During the interviews, students told that it was only on rare occasions that they used to sit in mixed-sex groups and have lunch together. It mostly happened during the school exams as they would exchange each other ideas and would guess for next day's teaching.

7.3.3 Gendered teasing: Boys as both teaser and rescuer

During the interviews girls, however, complained about boys teasing them about them being someone's girlfriend, writing their names all over the desks and walls, sometimes they even gave blank papers saying it is a love letter from someone in the community and on rare occasions throwing paper balls from behind. I asked them whether they would report such incidents to the school authorities. Most of the girls said that they did not report it to the school authorities, and even if they would report it to the teachers, they knew that it would not be taken seriously. While some thought that the best solution was not to do anything and forget about it as they considered it as just a playful act by the boys. When I asked the school authorities about punishing the misbehaviors, they accepted that they were not able to control it. They thought that as such incidents involved mainly verbal teasing; they did not know what actually happened. Thus due to lack of any evidence, they were not in a position to punish guilty students.

As mentioned above, boys and girls had their separate spaces and activities in the playground and it was rarely that boys interact with each other, let alone invade and disrupt in girl's activities and vice versa. During the observation, I witnessed an incidence when a group of boys hit the football towards the group of girls who were busy chatting. As the ball hit one of the girls, she grabbed it and threw it back to boys yelling in a low tone "*don't you have eyes to see where you are hitting the ball?*" Then boys just laughed at them and continued their play. According to both students and school authorities, there were no incidents of physical aggression among students, both among same-sex peers and mixed-sex peers in both schools.

During the interviews, my informants, mostly girls, stated that among the same-sex peers, in case of disagreements or even sometimes jealously, they punished the other peer by excluding them from the group, ignoring or not talking to them, or sometimes, even spreading rumor about them. Such kind of punishment was popular among girls. In the case of boys, they were more likely to use verbal insults or name calling which were most frequent in same-sex interactions. However, during my observation period, I did not find such kinds of behaviors, or any other sorts of mixed or same-sex aggressions in both schools. But during the interviews in the urban school, most of the students narrated an

incident when some boys from outside the school entered the school compound and started teasing girls. There was physical confrontation between the boys from outside the school, and the boys of the school who defended the girls. According to the students, due to the political pressure there were no charges against boys outside the school as those boys were members of the youth organizations under one of the leading political parties in the area. And boys from the school were given a warning by the school authorities that if such incidence would be repeated, they would be expelled from school.

As in case of playgrounds, most of the times students from both schools were, to follow of West and Zimmerman (1987), accountable to their sex categories and were participating in a 'self-regulating process' of 'recruitment' into the established gender identity also in libraries and cafes. For instance, girls were interested in entertainment while boys were interested in sports of the newspaper. The fact that girls chose beauty magazine while boys were more interested in political reading materiel illustrates their display of behaviors that are conventionally linked to male and female spheres, as explained in Chapter I. Moreover, as discussed in last section, boys associating bringing lunch with femininity and not bringing lunch based on this assumption, shows as illustrated by West & Zimmerman (1987), their accountability to sex categories as they do not wanted to be associated with the conducts related to the other sex category and thus reproduce the routinized gendered identity and behaviors. In the case of the incident regarding boys from outside the school teasing girls and boys from the school, defending them illustrates the hierarchal relations between sexes as it portrays girls as weak and unable to defend themselves without help from boys, while boys are represented as both oppressors and rescuers.

However, on some occasions boys and girls interacted and worked together, for instance while reading newspaper in mixed-sex group, discussing about the news, going to cafes together and talking about the class notes, news or television shows. When students were by themselves and in situations with fewer potential witnesses and participants, they were, as stated by Thorne (1994), able to perform activities to neutralize or cross the gender boundaries together in cohesive ways

7.4 Experiences outside the school: Creating or challenging gendered identity and relations?

7.4.1 Home to school journeys: Breaking through the gendered boundaries

As mentioned in the first chapter, there were only two secondary level schools in the *Naubise* village development committee. Due to lack of secondary level schools near the villages, many students had long journeys, ranging from one to two hours, between their homes and the available secondary level school. In such situations students from the same community generally formed a group while traveling to and from the school. Such groups, which incorporated students from all classes and different age groups, was even further divided into sub-groups on the basis of sex and grade. When I asked the students about their interactions during their journey, students stated that although there were more conversations with peers from same-sex of the same grade, there were also plenty of incidences regarding mixed-sex conversations both from their own grades and other grades. Moreover students thought that they felt most comfortable to talk with mixed-sex peers during their journey to and from the school than in the schools. *Indu,* a grade ten student of the semi-urban school, whose house was about two hours walk from the school explained about their journey as she said:

> *It is fun. We talk, tease and laugh. What if they are boys, we are all friends. On the way, there are only trees and rocks. So there is no one to judge us. You know but we cannot even talk like that in front of others. So if we see anyone else on the way, we don't talk like that to the boys. If they see us doing that, they will take us a 'bad and characterless' girls.*

Usha, a grade nine female student in the urban school*,* also shared about friendly teasing and joking incidences among girls and boys, particularly upper grade boys teasing girls from lower grades. For her, the most memorable part was sharing breakfast (popcorns or bread) together with both boys and girls on the one-and-half hour walk to school. *Rekha,* a grade nine female student in the urban school, who also had to walk about one-and-half hour to reach the urban school shared one incident when she was alone with *Ananta,* her classmate, on her way to school about one year ago:

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There used to be four of us that came from my village to this school but that day it was only me and Ramesh. It was in the winter season and quite dark when we started our walk on the slippery road. I was holding Ramesh's hand as I had hurt my legs when I slipped on the way. I did not realize that my uncle had seen us like that. When I reached back home that day, everyone in my family was very upset as they thought that I was having an affair with Ramesh. My father even beat me, see this is the scarce [showing her arms] and I did not come to school for two weeks. They did not believe that I was hurt and I think they still don't believe it.

7.4.2   Study opportunities at home: Mirrors of gendered norms and values

Students in both schools claimed that they were involved in different chores in their households. During the interviews, my informants revealed that girls were more involved in domestic chores while boys helped in the chores outside their homes. Interestingly, neither girls nor boys regarded such division of chores as gender inequality. Moreover during the focus group discussion in urban school all of the girls thought that a girl doing the household chores was indication of her being a 'good' daughter who helped her mother in every way she could. It was the same with sons as them helping their fathers was considered to be the duty of a 'loyal' son. *Usha*, a grade ten female student in the urban school, who had always looked up to her mother said:

My mother has been through so many things in her life but she was always able to fulfill her responsibilities [do household chores] towards the family with a smile. I want to be able to be like that. So when I am doing the household chore, I am helping her and also teaching myself to be like her in future.

Sapana, a grade nine female student in the urban school, whose elder and younger brothers go to private schools, also thought that it was her responsibility to help at home. She thought that as her brothers always had lot of homework and they did not have time to help. But even if they had time, she did not think that they would be able to do the chores as they had never done that before. *Kiran,* a grade ten male student in the semi-urban school, thought that his mother and sister were better at doing household works as he said:

I do not mind boys doing the household chores but I do not have to do it at home. My mother and my sister finish everything by themselves. I do not think that I will be able to do a good job on it. They get skills to do such work naturally. I know I can do a good job helping my father in the farm and I do that.

On the other hand, most of the boys were involved in agricultural works after the school and during holidays. Some of them also had to take grown vegetables to the market to sell. Regarding the household chores, boys like *Bikash*, a grade ten male student in the urban school, who was the only child in the household tended to help their mothers in every household chores including cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and feeding animals. In the households with more than one son like that of *Ananta,* a grade nine male student in the urban school, and *Rajan,* a grade ten male student in the semi-urban school, generally the oldest brother was more involved in the household chores as they are regarded as physically stronger and fulfill the family responsibility.

Regarding the study opportunities at home, most of the girls were able to finish their homework even after completing the household chores, and they would even take time to do extra studies after finishing their chores. *Sarita*, a grade ten female student in the semi-urban school, said that as her chores did not take much time and she was already at home, she was able to allocate plenty of time for the studies. While a majority of boys claimed that, due to more physically involvement in the chores, they were tired by the end of the day. Thus, they were not able to concentrate on the studies at home which affected their education. Ananta, a grade nine student at the urban school, elaborated:

I get so tired after more than two hours of walk to and from school; then full day of study at school and working at the farm after school. I just want to lie down and watch television. I know I might get punished but it is fine. That is why teachers are there in the school [laughs].

Others like *Rabin* and *Kiran* who lived near the highway spent their leisure time at home, watching television, listening to the radio or playing football with their friends. They were not even afraid of teachers punishing them for not doing their homework.

According to Shilling (1991), school is just one of the locales among others in the society and thus schools have close proximity related to processes, norms and values including patriarchy, occurring in other locales. This study found similar findings as there was clear gender demarcation with most girls were being involved in the domestic chores for helping their mother, while most boys performing chores outside the households to help their father. Surprisingly, both female and male informants, who were aware about meanings of gender and gender equality, were accepting such gendered division of labour without any slight hesitation and were also labelling them as their responsibilities. By doing so, they were approving the essential characteristics associated with being a male or a female and as explained by West & Zimmerman (1987), being accountable to their sex category by acting in such a way that displays behaviors and traits of that particular gender. West & Zimmerman claim that doing gender is informed by social structures and it is embedded in every aspect of our daily interactions. So when students perform gender in multiple spaces and contexts inside and outside the classrooms, they were simultaneously reproducing and legitimating the social meanings accorded to their gender, and thus, were sustaining the gendered identity and relations that exist in their homes and communities.

However, when students were by themselves and in situations with potential witnesses and participants, for example during their journeys from home to school and vice versa, as explained by Thorne (1994), boys and girls interact in cohesive and friendly ways to dissolve the sense of gender as boundary. Although boys and girls were interacting with each other, sharing food and teasing each other, they were still performing gender, in the words of West & Zimmerman (1987), as it was boys who were active and generally initiated such teasing. Moreover, the incident illustrated by *Rekha* shows that social sanction on girls, and also boys in case of the cross-sex interactions and relationships indicate that in case of deviation of the performance from the behavioral guidelines for their sex category through cross-gender friendships, individuals are called to account for their actions. It shows that doing of gender is essentially attributed to external social pressures to conform to the societal expectations.

7.5 Intersecting identities outside the classrooms and the schools

During the observations in both schools, I did not find any forms of caste discriminations in the playgrounds, libraries or cafes where students went for lunch. As in the case of the classrooms, I found that the segregation among students was based on gender and not on caste or ethnicity. As also mentioned in the previous chapters, students, teachers and school authorities were conscious about the caste-based discrimination and the upper caste had positive attitudes towards peers from the lower caste and vice versa. Almost all the students stated that students from all the caste and ethnic groups were working together to eliminate the caste-based discrimination not only in the school but in the community. *Prem*, a grade nine student from the urban school, summed up:

I do not discriminate or exclude any of my friends based on their caste. We sit, play and chat together. We go to cafes and have lunch together. We drink water from the same tap in the school. I do not know anyone who discriminates another student just because they are from a lower or untouchable caste. We know that we are all human and we are equal.

However, according to both students and teachers, despite the schools being free of caste-based discrimination incidents, the situation was rather different in the community. Almost all of my informants stated that there were still some caste based discriminations in the community, especially at homes where the older generations (grandfathers or grandmothers of the students) were still alive. Some of the students from higher castes in the urban school stated that although they were very good friends with the peers from untouchable castes and had no feeling of discrimination towards them, they would not invite them to their homes. They felt that it was difficult to convince their parents, mostly grandparents, to let them enter inside their homes. As *Bikash,* a grade nine male *'upper caste'* student from the urban school, explained:

You know, my best friend, Rishi, is dalit. It is not a problem for me but my grandfather does not know that. I know there is no use of trying to convince him, I have tried. Both Rishi and I understand that. So mostly he does not come to meet me at my home. We meet at the tea shops or the playing fields.

During the interviews, almost all of the *dalit* students, both boys and girls, thought that they had not received any forms of discrimination either by their peers or teachers in the school. However, while they stated that they were sad when discriminated against in the community but were hopeful that such discrimination would gradually reduce with time and awareness.

7.6 Summing up

As in the case of the experiences inside the classrooms, this chapter has shown that it was mainly students' gender, not so much of caste or ethnicity, which contributed to students' experiences of oppression and privilege outside the classrooms in the school. The students from the lower or untouchable castes had not experienced any forms of caste-based discriminations or social exclusion based on caste by their own peers and teachers from the higher castes in the playgrounds, libraries or even in cafes.

However, the caste-based discriminations and social exclusion was still prevailing in the community, especially among the older generations. Moreover, students who were opposed to such caste based discrimination and followed it in schools were unable to carry on such efforts in their homes and communities due to the pressure from their families. This shows that students from the lower caste or untouchable groups were facing multiple levels of discrimination and oppressions in the community where the caste based discrimination and gender inequality still prevails.

According to Thorne (1994:29), as individuals, we always display gender but such difference of being a male or female may be more or less relevant and also relevant in different ways from one context to another. This chapter also portrays a similar situation as students were actively participating both to reaffirm and also to reshape their gender identity and relations outside the classrooms depending on the place where they are conducting their activities and depending on who are witnessing and participating in such activities. Gender becomes less relevant when students were out of sight by themselves in a group and in situations with less potential witness and participants. Despite in those situations when gender became less relevant or contested neutralizing the gender identity,

students were negotiating, not challenging, the existing patriarchal norms and values. Schools in Nepal are, to follow Shilling (1991) here, also just one locale among other locales like homes, communities in the society. Patriarchy and caste system are the predominant characteristics of those other locales. In these other locales, students were actively participating to establish gender binaries maintaining the gendered identity and gendered boundaries outside the classrooms.

CHAPTER VIII – CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding gender and education in Nepal by deepening understandings of grade nine and ten students' experience of gender and caste based discrimination in multiple context and spaces inside and outside the school. As discussed throughout this thesis, there has been a lot of focus on the gender parity in education at both national and international levels. As a result, this study is an attempt to move beyond parity, and focus on students' activities, interactions and experiences of gender in multiple spaces inside and outside the schools.

8.2 Reflecting on the study

So, do students reaffirm or reconstruct their gender identity and relations in the schools? This study found that there is no singular or definite answer to this question. Students are always actively engaging in mostly reaffirming, but sometimes reconstructing gender identity and relations in schools. Thus in order to understand students' experiences of gender, one has to focus on their activities and interactions in multiple spaces and contexts. A singular dimension study which focuses on students' activities and interactions either in classrooms, or playgrounds, or other spaces in schools are not able to cover the variations and complexities of the students' experiences regarding gender, caste and ethnic identities. As illustrated by Thorne (1994), gender is often situational and fluid. Thus, depending on the contexts and situations the students are in, gender becomes more or less relevant.

As patriarchal norms and values being the central attributes of the society, schools, to follow Shilling (1991), is just one locale among other locales that reflects similar or other norms and values. Moreover, students themselves are actively involved in acting in accord with culturally approved conceptions of masculinity and femininity related to each sex. Such 'self-regulating process' of recruitment, as stated by West & Zimmerman (1987), into the socially sanctioned sex categories female and male are further encouraged by teachers, school authorities and also curricula. However, in certain

contexts, either being in small groups or being out of sight and by themselves, both inside and outside the schools provided students opportunities to cross gender boundaries. In such situations, students were negotiating with exiting gendered norms and values to restructure their gender identity and relations. Though, in most cases when students were not being performing according to their sex category, they were called to account for their actions through rumors of love affairs, or being labeled as 'third gender'. This shows that it was a difficult task for students to deal with the dominant social gendered norms and values that remain unchallenged in society and, to some extend also in schools. It was, however, quite different in the case of students' experience of caste-based discriminations. Although incidents of caste-based discriminations and social exclusion based on caste in the community prevails, students and teachers openly criticized this in schools, and I did not observe a single incident of caste-based discrimination in the schools during my fieldwork.

In order to achieve gender equality in education, as indicated by Subrahmanian (n.d. cited in USAID, 2008), four dimensions of equality in education must be addresses including equality of access, equality in the learning process, equality of educational outcomes, and equality of external results. Nevertheless, focus of majority of international and national debates, policies and programs heavily focus on increasing gender parity in terms of equal access only and do not include the other three aspects pointed to by Subrahmanian. As shown in this study despite the national and majority of local level educational policies centers around ensuring inclusive education in terms of ensuring equal access of girls and children of low castes and marginalized ethnic groups, such commitments are often linked with a lack of vision to achieve it along with lack of commitments towards it. Furthermore, in some local level educational plans gender and caste and/or ethnicity were not even mentioned. There is no doubt that equal access to education is important but it is equally important for researchers and policy makers to focus on what happens in the schools in terms of construction of students' gender identity along with their caste and ethnic identities which will affect their learning and success in and through education. I believe that such analysis of the construction of gender identity and relations in the schools can offer more possibilities to tackle the existing problems with quality and outcome of education.

Being a Mphil thesis, the study area was limited within two government schools of *Dhading* district. Thus, it may not represent the entire picture regarding the construction of gender identity and relations in all schools of Nepal. Therefore it is a need to conduct comparative studies on construction of gender identity and relations in the government schools and the private schools of Nepal. Keeping this in mind, based on the findings of this study, there are other areas concerning gender and schooling that needs to be further researched. It would for example be interesting to further examine why students' experiences of gender inequality or gender identity and relations are changing less in schools than their opinions on caste-based discriminations.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 - *Details of informants (students) at the urban school*

Code no	Fake names	Sex	Grade	Caste	Religion	Family members	Parent's Occupation		Parent's Education		Sibling's Education[16]	
							Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Sisters	Brothers
3	**Sapana**	F	9	Upper	Hindu	7	Farming	Farming	Illiterate	Illiterate	9 (C)	12 (I) 7 (I)
4	**Ganga**	F	10	*Dalit*	Hindu	5	Farming	Farming	Illiterate	Illiterate	None	6 (C)
5	**Manju**	F	10	Upper	Hindu	7	Farming	Business	Primary	Illiterate	BA (C) 12(C);10(C)	None
6	**Prem**	M	9	Upper	Hindu	9	Farming	Business	Illiterate	Secondary	10 (C)	11 (I)
7	**Amir**	M	9	Ethnic	Hindu	9	Farming	Farming	Illiterate	Illiterate	9 (C)	6 (C)
8	**Bipana**	F	9	*Dalit*	Hindu	5	Farming	Farming	Illiterate	Primary	6 (C) 4 (C)	None
9	**Ananta**	M	9	*Dalit*	Hindu	6	Farming	Business	Illiterate	Lower Sec	None	5 (C) 5 (C)
10	**Rekha**	F	9	Ethnic	Hindu	8	Farming	Farming	Illiterate	Illiterate	12 (C) 5 (C); 5(C)	9 (C)
11	**Usha**	F	10	Ethnic	Hindu	6	Farming	Driving	Primary	Primary	7 (C)	6 (C)
12	**Bikash**	M	10	Upper	Hindu	3	Farming	Farming	Primary	Secondary	None	None
13	**Rishi**	M	10	*Dalit*	Hindu	4	Tailoring	Tailoring	Secondary	Primary	None	4 (C)

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[16] C stands for community/government schools and I stands for institutional/ private schools

Code no.	Fake names	Sex	Grade	Caste	Religion	Family members	Parent's Occupation		Parent's Education		Sibling's Education[17]	
							Mother	*Father*	*Mother*	*Father*	*Sisters*	*Brothers*
18	**Hari**	M	10	*Dalit*	Hindu	4	Farming	Business	Illiterate	Illiterate	None	11 (I)
19	**Sarita**	F	10	*Dalit*	Hindu	5	Farming		Illiterate	Illiterate	6 (C) 5(C)	None
20	**Kiran**	M	10	Ethnic	Hindu	4	Farming	Farming	Illiterate	10	8 (C)	None
21	**Sikha**	F	10	Ethnic	Hindu	7	Farming	Farming	Illiterate	9	9(C)	10 (C) 10 (C) 8 (C)
22	**Rajan**	M	10	Ethnic	Hindu	5	Farming	Driver	Secondary	6	None	5(C) 4(C)
23	**Nisha**	M	10	Ethnic	Hindu	6	Farming	Farming	Illiterate	4	9(C)	4 (C)
24	**Rabin**	M	10	Upper	Hindu	4	Farming	Driver	Primary	9	None	12 (I)
25	**Indu**	F	10	Upper	Hindu	7	Farming	Painter	Illiterate	8	8 (C)	6 (C) 3 (C)
26	**Ritesh**	M	9	Upper	Hindu	4	Farming	Farming	Literate	2	8 (C)	None
27	**Ramila**	F	9	Ethnic	Hindu	9	Farming	Farming	Primary	2	10 (C) 2 (C)	5 (C)

[17] C stands for community/government schools and I stands for institutional/ private schools