

"How Gender Affects Decision Making - A Case Study of Tibeto-Burmese Women in Kobang VDC, Mustang, Nepal"



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Abstract

It is commonly presented in scientific literature that Tibeto-Burmese\Mountain women's status is higher than Indo-Aryan\Terai women. Findings of many studies indicates that Tibeto-Burmese women are traditionally afforded more freedom of movement, independent decision-making, wield considerable power and authority. Therefore, this study is based on the assumption that if it is the case then women of Tibeto-Burmese group are actively involved in the decision making process both at household and communal level institutions. Focussed on Thakali women of Kobang VDC, the study explores their participation in the decision making institutions.

Using feminist methodology of explanation through everyday experiences of women's life, an attempt has been made to present the local perception and the rate of participation of women which is affected by social construction of gender. It is found that despite the wielding of relative power and freedom, women in Kobang VDC are weighed down by structural constrains based on gender and negative ideologies. They are subject to the same levels of gender inequity as lowland women, and thus, essentialise themselves on how they are to behave. This attitude, together with numerous other factors, is causing low negotiating power among women in the Kobang VDC. The limits on women's everyday activities are structured by what society expects women to be. Concretely a main obstacle to decision making is the limit set by gendered daily working routines.

The study emphasizes that moving beyond essentialism is important. It points towards bringing change in perception to change the structures and ideologies that keep one gender subordinate of other. It argues that merely bringing women to the decision making level doesn't ensure their active input to the process. Therefore, women should be empowered in a holistic way so that women themselves become conscious to cross the boundary created by socially constructed gender ideology and negotiate in order to reduce the existing gender gap to make themselves free for participation in decision making level.

Key Words: Tibeto-Burmese women, Decision Making, Gender, Social Construction, Feminism, Feminist Methodology.

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Abbreviations:

ACAP	: Annapurna Conservation Area Project
CAMC	: Conservation Area Management Committee
CBS	: Central Bureau of Statistics
CSW	: Commission on Status of Women
GAD	: Gender and Development
HHs	: Households
HS	: Higher Secondary
I.A	: Intermediate level
ICIMOD	: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
I.Ed	: Intermediate in Education
INGO	: International Non-Governmental Organisation
KMTNC	: King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation
NGO	: Non-Governmental Organisation
MG	: Mother's Group
NTFP's	: Non-Timber Forest Products
NTNC	: National Trust for Nature Conservation
PhD	: Doctor of Philosophy
SLC	: School Leaving Certificate
SSNCC	: Social Service National Coordination Council
TU	: Tribhuwan University
UiB	: University of Bergen, Norway
UN	: United Nations
VDC	: Village Development Committee
VH	: Village Head
WID	: Women in Development
WSCC	: Women Service Coordination Committee
WAD	: Women and Development

Glossary:

<i>Aama Samuh</i>	<i>: Mother's group</i>
<i>Adhiya</i>	<i>: Sharecropping</i>
<i>Baini</i>	<i>: Younger sister</i>
<i>Bahun</i>	<i>: High class caste in Hindu Caste system</i>
<i>Bari</i>	<i>: Irrigated fields</i>
<i>Ban Samiti</i>	<i>: Forest Committee</i>
<i>Buwa</i>	<i>: Father</i>
<i>Chauri Gai</i>	<i>: Yak</i>
<i>Chori manche</i>	<i>: Girl child</i>
<i>Chulha</i>	<i>: Traditional stove</i>
<i>Dalit</i>	<i>: The untouchables</i>
<i>Dhara</i>	<i>: Common tap</i>
<i>Dai</i>	<i>: Elder brother</i>
<i>Didi</i>	<i>: Elder sister</i>
<i>Ferke</i>	<i>: Migrant Locals of the Kobang VDC</i>
<i>Ghundel</i>	<i>: A person appointed to disseminate information of the decision taken at meetings</i>
<i>Goan samiti</i>	<i>: Village committee</i>
<i>Kami- Damai</i>	<i>: The untouchable caste</i>
<i>Kuriya</i>	<i>: Original local land owners of the Kobang VDC.</i>
<i>Momo</i>	<i>: Tibetan steam food</i>
<i>Mua</i>	<i>: Mother</i>
<i>Mukhiya</i>	<i>: Village headman</i>
<i>Muluki Ain</i>	<i>: National Code</i>
<i>Nani</i>	<i>: Daughter</i>
<i>Purji</i>	<i>: Licence</i>
<i>Puja</i>	<i>: Ritual ceremony</i>
<i>Pathi</i>	<i>: Measuring unit</i>
<i>Raksi</i>	<i>: Local wine</i>
<i>Samiti</i>	<i>: Committee</i>
<i>Samaj</i>	<i>: Society</i>
<i>Sun</i>	<i>: Needles of pine trees used for making compost</i>
<i>Upa Ama Samuh</i>	<i>: Sub- Mother's Group</i>
<i>Upa Ban Samiti</i>	<i>: Sub-Forest Committee</i>

CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1 The Context

South Asia hosts the largest number of poor and disadvantaged people in the world. These groups lag far behind the average on all indicators of human development and empowerment. But in all groups, women lag even further behind. For all societies, the common denominator of gender is female subordination mediated by class and race (Momsen 1991). The finding of Momsen 1991 shows that the situation of women has been determined by not only patriarchal attitudes but also by forces of globalization. Traditionally, women were involved in housework and childcare, but new economic demands have created new opportunities and have increased women's workload in many cases.

With the establishment of Commission on Status of Women (CSW) at United Nations (UN) in 1946, guidelines were created for the first time to improve the situation of women in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational fields. The UN charter of 1945 called for the end of discrimination against women on the basis of race, sex, language or religion (Momsen 1991; Bhadra 2001).

The decades after 1960's saw the emergence of women/feminist movement in the West. It was Boserup's publication of Women's Role in Economic Development (1970) that led to the emergence of and development of the body of knowledge and field of research known as Gender and Development (GAD) (Moghadam 1999; Bhadra 2001). The study was based on extensive research work carried out in various developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. It was a response to the perceived marginalization of women from the economic development process (Singh 2007), which questioned the nature of development. It urged for change in UN focus from status oriented approach to protection oriented approach for the women of the world. The declaration of 1975 as the 'International Year of Women' followed by the declaration of the 'Decade for Women (1976-1985)' marked a change in UN's focus on women (Bhadra 2001).

The women's movement of 1960's that started and prevailed in the West went global during the 1970's and spread widely in terms of the dialogue and debate during the 1980's. Two

kinds of forces: the feminist movement of the West and the Third World WID (Women in Development) policies emerged during late 1970's and 1980's and it was during the Third World Conference at Nairobi in 1985 that a common ground was established- that women are not homogeneous. During this period an empowerment approach came forth as means to achieve gender equity and equality. The Rio Earth Summit (1992), Vienna Conference (1993), the Beijing Conference (1995) incorporated women's human right concerns like environment, education, health, access to and control over resources. However, even until today, equality towards women in most parts of the world is far less than what was promised (Momsen 1991, UNFPA 2007).

To talk about my country, Nepal is signatory to almost all international conventions on human rights, women's rights, and children's rights as well as to agreements on international goals regarding education, health, and poverty eradication. Nepal is committed to making rapid progress towards gender equality, non-discrimination and social justice (UNFPA 2007).

Nepal became a member of UN during early 1950's and formulated its first Five Year Plan for economic development in 1956. In the same year Women Training Centre was established (Pradhan 1979, cited in Bhadra 2001). In 1975, Nepal amended *Muluki Ain* (National code) to grant inheritance right to unmarried daughters up to the age of 35 years. In 1977, Women Service Coordination Committee (WSSCC) was established at the Social Service National Coordination Council (SSNCC) with an objective of promoting welfare activities for women (Bhadra 2001).

In 1979, the Status of Women Study by the Centre for Economic Development and Administration at Tribhuvan University (TU) incorporated for the first time the contribution of Nepalese women to the national economy. Consequently, in the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985) women's productive role was recognised. In 1980, the 'Women Development Section' was established at the Ministry (Bhadra 2001). In the Seventh Plan (1985- 1990) a participatory approach was adopted to make women active participant of development (Bhadra 2001). Along with the international community, the government introduced the GAD approach to its national development agenda in the early 1990s (UNFPA 2007).

Gender mainstreaming was advocated in the Eighth Plan (1992-1997), which emphasized increasing women's representation at decision-making levels. A gender approach to development was reflected fully only in the Ninth Plan (1997- 2002), which called for much

broader institutional, structural, and ideological changes than those implied by the earlier concepts of WID or Women and Development (WAD). Accordingly, the Plan adopted mainstreaming, eliminating gender inequity and empowerment as its major strategies. Gender concerns have been integrated in different sectors such as agriculture, education, health and added decision making positions into government service in the Tenth Plan (UNFPA 2007).

Although women's movement in Nepal was not visible on the streets, it is believed that the democratic political atmosphere provided opportunities for Nepalese women to express their increasing feminist consciousness and advocacy. After the restoration of democracy, the constitution of 1991 provided Nepalese women with the right to equality with men (Bhadra 2001)

Since the establishment of WSCC, when for the first time national plan for women's development was formulated, Nepal has achieved much in terms of human and gender development indicators. However, the progresses in increasing women's access to literacy, education, and health care services have been significant, yet disparities between men and women, castes and ethnic groups continue to exist¹ (UNFPA 2007).

Women are important agents of change and can be powerful leaders from community to global level. Recognizing the ability of women is the most urgent challenge to bring them into mainstream representation. Emancipation of women and economic growth is closely related. A gender perspective study women's participation in decision making institutions may provide guidelines to meet the shortcomings failing to bring women into mainstream criteria. It is important to understand gender perspectives and ideologies which vary among regions, generations, ages, classes, income groups, to bring changes for most marginalized sections of our society. Women make up the vast majority of the world's most impoverished group and face unequal access to and control over resources, technology, services, land

¹ Women's access to fixed assets, property, and credit is still very limited. Male-female disparities in education increase steadily from the primary to post-graduate levels. Discriminatory wage structures and unequal access to earned income have not been reduced. Women continue to face legal discrimination regarding the most fundamental rights, such as citizenship and inheritance. Women's representation in political or administrative decision-making bodies has not improved much either, except at the grassroots level in locally elected VDC assemblies. Although much progress has been made in ensuring women's participation in sector program, major issues of equity in access to resources (e.g., land, water, forest, etc.) and women's meaningful participation in resource conservation and management, land development and infrastructure projects have not been addressed effectively so far (UNFPA 2007).

rights, credit and insurance systems, and decision-making power. Despite national, regional and international commitments, we are far from achieving the goal of gender equity (UNFPA 2007).

In Nepal, a high proportion of people suffer from both income and human poverty, which impacts very unequally on women. Empowering women is an indispensable strategy for advancing development and reducing poverty. An empowered woman contributes to improved prospects for the next generation. Therefore, it is very critical to empower and capacitate women to ensure women's effective participation and presence in all phases of development process (UNFPA 2007).

"Post development" approaches in development theory emphasizes the equal participation of individuals in the decision making process affecting his or her life. The recent trends of development intervention strategies focuses on such issues as sustainable development, development from below, equal participation, knowledge sharing, empowerment and the like. Though there has been intense advocacy for the equal participation from all section of the society, still some significant sections such as women are still being excluded (Agrawal 2001).

Different rules, norms and perceptions define participation along with endowments and attributes of those affected (Agrawal 2001). The majority of women belong still to the most disadvantaged groups especially in backward regions of the world. This is true particularly in rural areas where they are bounded by various kinds of norms and traditions which make their position less important to those of men. Though women constitute an equally valuable workforce for the economy, their exclusion from the important decision making processes are common phenomena to be found.

Less attention has been paid to the barriers women face in achieving control over resources especially with in local organizations. Gender dimension of participation Viz., who uses, benefits and controls need to be explored. It would help us to know about the implications for gender differences for the local management of natural resources. The knowledge of gender differences in participation and in the local management as a whole could help us to explore and enhance forms of women participation and empowerment in local organizations for sustainable resource development.

1.2 Problem

Out of 26.4 million population of Nepal, women accounts for 50 percent (13.1 million) of the whole population (CBS 2007). Though women are equal in number to men in terms of total population, women can be said to be in background and men are in foreground (as per Frye's analogy cited in Rose 1993). Women's representation is severely limited in the formal sector of Nepalese economy (APROSC 2003). New constitution of Nepal supports for 33% female representation but despite of that three- half of the women population still to cross their household boundary (UNFPA 2007). However, it is women who are involved in most important sectors of our economy as invisible force with no economic returns.

Agriculture is indeed backbone of our economy where more than 82 percent of our populations are involved (CBS 2001\02). Out of total 82 percent, data reveals that 51 percent were women. Though the total farm population recorded in 2001\02 census of agriculture shows involvement of 97 males per 100 females, it is only 8.1 percent of women who owned agriculture holdings at the national level. Nepalese agriculture is basically subsistence to categorise which places question of livelihood security for the millions who don't have any other option for off farm employment. Furthermore, at the same time, livelihood for a poor in Nepal is something which has to be diversified to meet their ends and along with this, there is an added influence of globalisation which now has become a part of our daily life called 'migration'. Diversifying livelihood by expanding the share of income from non-agricultural activities such as rural trade and services is common for all poor these days.

Women bear all the responsibilities in both situations: in the presence and absence of her husband. In the absence of a husband, whether single or widow, women along with those whose husbands are out for off - farm job act as household head and perform all roles and responsibilities by herself. However, access to any kind of resources in Nepal, whether it is natural, human or social depends on the hierarchal structure of Nepalese society.

Women in Nepal are generally denied of land rights. Ownership of land usually goes to men. It is the son who is the only successor of his parent's property. Daughters are kept out of any share. It is believed that as daughters move out of home after her marriage, it is sons who are the sole care taker of his parents. Daughters are called '*Cheli Beti*', means who are there just for few days and have to move to their husband's house. Moreover, after marriage, women's relation with her husband determines access to land. While they live with parents, it is

brothers and while with in-laws it is her husband and in her old age it is her son who owns the property. Lack of ownership of land places them not only in sub-ordinate positions compared to men but at the same time make their life unsecure. Furthermore, in the absence of land rights, she is restricted to acquire institutional credit (Agrawal 1997). Women have to depend on men.

Most of the studies which have been carried out in the past about women in Nepal, presents the picture of Nepalese women as follows:

- Women's contribution to natural resource management is neglected.
- Women have no control over land and other resources.
- Women are not involved in decision-making process for natural resource management and conservation.
- Women lack education and technical knowledge on proper use of resources
- Women are less benefited from natural resources from economic perspective, since men control marketing of production.

We have not succeeded to come very far from the past findings. Still we find poverty persisting specially among women (Bhadra2001; 2007).² Women have limited access to income, credit, education and trainings. Due to lack of knowledge and ownership they rarely participate in public discourses and training (UNFPA 2007). They are dependent on men for information and technology. Women are far from decision making despite their key role in household as well as affairs outside their household. It is liable to question about the validity of all the programs and interventions which are operating since so many years. Why the same situation is prevailing among women? Do development agencies fail to involve the real poor or it is disempowerment of the excluded groups which is keeping them still in the marginalized category?

² Nepal Living Standard Survey (2004) showed still 31% of Nepalese fall below the poverty line. Firstly and fore mostly, the brunt of poverty falls disproportionately on women and girls resulting in human deprivation, in terms of access to food and nutrition, access to education, access to other human development opportunities and excessive work burden. Furthermore, even if a household does not fall below the poverty line but is in the poverty threshold, the share of women and girls in intra-household resource distribution is very low resulting in human deprivation poverty status, depicted by: Infant mortality rate (40.2 for girls as against 27.8 for boys); under 5 mortality rate (112.4 for girls as against 104.8 for boys); maternal mortality rate (415/100000 live birth); and the fertility rate as 4.1. (Bista, 2003; MOH, 2001; MOPE, 2006 cited in Bhadra 2007).

To add further, we must consider that there exist hierarchical differences among women's status, based on caste and gender. Gender relations are constructed differently in different cultures. Nepal presents extreme ethnic diversity: Hindu versus Buddhists, tribe versus caste, mountain versus middle hills, highland versus lowland (Levine 1987).

Nepal has more than 60 caste/ethnic groups (Pradhan & Shrestha 2005) and women's status varies among these groups. The life of the Nepali people is governed by traditional cultural values. In various ways, these stand as a barrier in the overall development of women. Women's status also vary by religion: women of Buddhist religion enjoy more freedom than Hindu women. Equality and freedom among Rai, Limbus, Sherpas have been found by many researchers. Women from these communities enjoy inheritance right in property (Acharya & Bennett 1981; APROSC 2003). Similarly, studies shows that women in communities such as Newar of Bulu, Tharu of Dang, Magar of Khabang and Baragoan are treated more equal to men within their communities (APROSC 2003). Above and beyond, it is the Tibeto-Burmese group, where the male population is mostly migrating either for seasonal work or abroad in search of employment. In such cases, women become the head of the household and she has to look after all the household affairs. So, can we assume that women who belong to these ethnic groups are leading over other women in terms of decision making at the communal level? Are women marginalized because of so called suppression or it is because of the local construction of gender roles? How far are women themselves responsible for their exclusion in different kinds of institutions?

Although various organizations are involved with working in this area to improve women's conditions still there is a lack of literature presenting a realistic picture of women's contributions and roles in managing different arenas of their lives, which in turn have failed to bring significant improvements in their lives? Unless and until women are not integrated and empowered at the decision making level, sustainability of all the developmental processes will be under construction forever. To sort out the constraints which forbid women to be a part of the decision making process is central to achieve development goals. Therefore, there is a need to study the women's roles in decision making processes. It is necessary to empower them so that they can participate in public life and institutions, which in turn will ensure their active participation towards sustainable development.

1.3 Objective and Research Questions

The main objective of my study is to sort out *the participation of women in the decision making processes in the communal institutions*. For this purpose, their position and power within the household as well as within the community has been tried to explore. An attempt has been made to know to what extent a women is involved in the decision making process outside her household boundary and what factors determines bargaining power. I have selected an area which is one of the hilly regions of Nepal and which is mainly inhabited by Tibeto- Burman ethnic groups. As mentioned before, research indicates that women belonging to this group enjoy considerable freedom of movement and participate in all types of economic activity (Agarwal 1997). If it is the case, then *I assumed that they are actively involved in the decision making process and if not, what are the reasons for their passiveness regardless of the absence of any kind of oppressive factors*.

However, women are not a homogenous group. Hence, the study also aims to find out if differences such as caste, ethnicity and social position conditions women's bargaining power influencing their participation in the decision making process within household as well as within community level. At the same time, *it also tries to find out how far existing gender ideologies have shaped women's participation including their access to different kinds of resources needed for overall progress. How gender ideologies have been shaped in Kobang VDC and how women themselves are responsible for keeping them alive? What are the factors which have brought changes in gender ideologies in Kobang VDC (if any)?* These are few sub-queries which has been tried to explore in this study.

1.4 Significance

Women's increased access to local institutions is important to bring social change. Gender aware local institutions are increasingly aiming at active participation of women in social and economic activities, so that the visibility of their involvement in decision making processes can be achieved. The action program having provision of 33 percent reservation for women is an example of it. Also, women's right has been one of the significant issues in the Maoist rebellion. Though there are institutions established to protect\ having provision of providing equal access to equal rights but the laws and institutions have only weakly benefitted marginalized groups including women who are rarely aware of their rights (Gopal 2001).

The role of women in environmental protection and preservation is becoming a hot issue for development organizations. Along with domestic work women are engaged in agriculture, forestry, livestock, and watershed management. However, even though their contribution is high, their work is mostly invisible and unpaid. Hence, for poverty reduction to be effective the varied roles of women, including their contribution to the household income generation through the use and management of natural resources, needs to be recognized (Dankelman, & Davidson 1988). Greater sensitivity to the gendered effects of poverty and the needs of both men and women can reduce gender differences in access to and control over resources and ultimately increase the welfare of women and the poor.

Studies shows that increase in women's education and improvements in women's status have increased control of women to different kinds of assets which have resulted in a positive impact on the next generation. But despite continuous efforts to build women's capabilities, gender gaps in entitlements: the resources that women can command through available legal means continue to persist (Quisumbing & Meinzen-Dick 2001). Also, women are confined to a limited number of occupations. Labour market challenges such as unemployment, wage gaps, and occupational segregation are greater for poor women. Poor and socially excluded women face more constraints (Deutch, Duryea & Piras 2001).

Continuous efforts have been made to increase opportunities and assure women's rights to natural and physical capital. However, ignorance, very often, on part of women themselves, restricts them from coming out of the orthodox worlds and from grabbing the opportunities. Emancipation of women is important. Emancipation of women means emancipation of the other female members of her family and subsequently her society. So, for the well being of women as well as for nations as a whole, the severe consequences resulting from prevailing disparities need tough solutions (Quisumbing & Meinzen-Dick 2001).

The role of women in the household front and their involvement in the communal decision making institutions is the main context of the present study. It is based on the assumption that sometimes the concept of empowerment may become more important than the concept of exclusion (Sometimes even when there is no restrictions, women keep themselves aloof from public space, Why?) and the study intends to illuminate the concepts of empowerment and exclusion, trying to influence the present practice of passive local participation in communal institutions.

I was interested in this issue because I assume that despite the many development interventions on the part of many national and international agencies, the programme has not been able to achieve its proper aim because still the actual needs of the excluded groups are unrecognised. I feel the study is worth doing for mainly two reasons. First I presuppose it would be important in the sense that it deals with the three important development issues at the same time viz. women, gender and exclusion focusing specifically on differences within and among women groups, which has attracted widespread attention all over Nepal. Second, Kobang VDC³ in Mustang⁴ is a place which is inhabited mainly by the Thakali ethnic group. Therefore, I can test the hypothesis of the relatively higher status of Buddhist women. Furthermore, the area has been characterised by both in and out migration. It would be definitely interesting to read the changing gender perception in the area both due to people moving out and also from people who are moving into the area.

I hope this study will not only be a landmark trying to reach the real excluded groups in Kobang VDC but at the same time it will be able to touch issues which might be helpful for the policy makers to frame programs and policies when it comes to include the marginalized sections of the society.

1.5. Organisation

I have started with a brief analysis of the problem, objective and significance of my study. In next chapter, I have tried to highlight the important theoretical concepts of gender, social construction and feminism. Chapter III presents my own experiences of fieldwork in the light of feminist methodology. Then after I have given description of the methods I have used for data collection. The next section revolves around the presentation of general demographic and infrastructural information about Kobang VDC. Chapter V shows the existing gender ideologies and tries to reflect, how it has shaped the life of women in the VDC. Chapter VI deals with the main part of my hypothesis, which reflects the participation of women in decision making institutions. In the last chapter, empirical findings have been summarized in the light of three important concepts: Gender, Social Construction & Feminist methodology.

³ VDC is smallest administrative unit in Nepal.

⁴ Mustang is located in the trans-Himalayan region and covers about 47% of the Annapurna Conservation Area. It is north-eastern district of Nepal, bordering China (Tibet) on the Central Asian plateau between the Nepalese provinces of Dolpo and Manang.

Chapter II

Gender, Social construction and Feminism

2.1 Social construction and knowledge

We believe that the world which we see today wasn't the same in the past. It has changed a lot, also; the categorisation within this world is not natural but humanly described as he\she has understood it, in his\her own way. Representations evolve out of human practices and it could have been in other way round. What is 'Reality'; this is something which enters into human practices by the way of the categories and descriptions that are part of those practices. Practices are institutionalised in one way or another as people talk it, write it and argue it. To judge the validity of these descriptions, it again requires comparison to the reality, which constitutes one more description, which would again raise the question of whether this new description is itself descriptive or constructive (Potter 1996).

Thus, if descriptions constitute knowledge which gives us the explanation of 'what is reality' then it is feasible to refer knowledge as a product of social construction. Descriptions and accounts construct the world and these descriptions and accounts are themselves constructed (Potter 1996). So, *the knowledge we hold is socially constructed*.

In this chapter, my attempt has been to deal with three important issues of contemporary social science: Gender, Social Construction and Feminism. Starting with an attempt in defining the term 'Gender', the effort will be to shed some light on 'how gender is a socially constructed term', and what constitutes 'Gender Ideologies' in the context of Nepal, then I will go with the philosophical part of 'Feminism'.

2.1.1 Defining 'Gender'

Sometimes we forget to make distinctions between sex and gender and very often find ourselves in trap of using the words synonymously. 'Sex' is used to refer biological and reproductive characteristics. We are born as a member of the male sex or the female sex whereas 'Gender' is a pattern of behaviours recognised as 'feminine' or 'masculine'. It is socially constructed, learned behaviour. Accordingly, gender differs between societies and across the social, ethnic and cultural groups within societies. Even for a single individual, gender behaviours change over time and within different social contexts. It is believed that

gender equity exists when both females and males have equitable opportunities and outcomes which mean that everyone, male or female, can pursue a broad range of interests, subjects, careers and lifestyles. Therefore, gender is a social construct. It is what culture and society make of the fact that you are a man or a woman. It refers to cultural, political, and economic arrangements, such as social norms, beliefs, laws, and institutional practices (England 2002).

From the day we are born, we are characterised according to our gender. Play things such as 'doll' is meant for girl and 'gun' is for boy. Toys, clothing, and various other daily routine disseminate notions of what is 'right' for girls and women; what is 'desirable' for men and boys. Gender is an analytical tool for understanding social processes. In other words, the concept of gender refers to the cultural interpretation of biological differences between men and women (Moore 1988). Gender and gender identity are socially constructed through processes of socialization, where by human beings become social persons. What men do and women do, how they behave and interact, together with cultural ideas and interpretation of gender differences constitute a 'gender system'.

Gender is institutionalised as a social institution by human society. One of the reasons given by Lorber 1994 is that, it is done because it is the major way human beings organize their lives. It is a way through which human society design division of labour. He further adds that beside different talents, motivations, and competence, the other way to design the division is on the basis of gender, race, and ethnicity. Every society classifies people and assigns them to different roles and responsibilities. The process of gendering and its outcome are legitimated by religion, law, science, and the society's entire set of values (Lorber 1994).

Social institutions are transformed by social practices. Culture and social practices transform socially constructed statuses. Social statuses are carefully constructed through prescribed processes of teaching, learning, and enforcement (Lorber 1994). Individuals are taught to be masculine or feminine. According to Lorber 1994, as a social institution, gender is a process of creating distinguishable social statuses for the assignment of rights and responsibilities. As part of a stratification system that ranks these statuses unequally, gender is a major building block in the social structures built on these unequal statuses. As a process, gender creates the social differences that define 'woman' and 'man'.

The decade of 1970's are seen as the dawn of the 'gender issues'. Gender was regarded as an explanation for persisting inequalities and different forms of social differentiation. The

increased representation of women among social scientists has resulted in flowering of research on gender (England 2002).

2.1.2 The Social Construction and Gender

Like 'culture', 'gender', is a human production that is maintained by individuals by constantly 'doing gender'. Throughout their lives, human beings learn what is expected, they do what is expected, they see what is expected and they react in expected ways and thus, all together they construct and maintain 'gender' order (Butler 1990 cited in Lorber 1994). Thus, Gender is something which is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction (West & Zimmerman 1987; Lorber 1994)

Gender is ascribed. The social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations. Even though individuals change their sex, accordingly they have to fulfil the expectations (Lorber 1994). To be born a man or a woman in any society is a biological fact with social implications. Women constitute a distinct social group. The biological sexes are redefined, represented, valued, and channelled into different roles in various culturally dependent ways. Feminist believe that "woman" is a creation of the masculine gaze therefore, before seeing how women thought of themselves and of their relations with men, it is important to find out how they were seen by men. The masculine conception of woman gave rise to idealizations and norms that strongly influenced the behaviour of women, who lacked the power to challenge the male view of their sex.

Gender is the most important component of structured inequality. Gender, constructed in a social form is deeply rooted in our lives. Gender divides work in home and in production. It determines the authority of one sex over the other and organizes sexuality and emotional life (Connell 1987 cited in Lorber 1994). This is all what has been socially constructed and socially accepted and thus, is regulating our lives. These days gender discrimination is discouraged in many countries but despite the fact, many major roles are still gendered; women still do most of the domestic labour and child raising. Even while doing paid work, women and men are differentiated according to job types appropriate for each sex and still in many places women's work is usually paid less than men's work (Lorber 1994).

Gender is negotiable. In almost every step of life, human beings produce gender. They behave in accordance to their gender, what they have learned what is appropriate for their

gender status. While resisting or rebelling also they keep themselves within their gender and act accordingly. Knowledge is created so is constantly changing. In a similar way gender is socially constructed. Scott 1988 argues and Lorber 1994 agrees that 'gender' as a process has room for not only modification and variation by individuals and small groups but also for institutionalized change. However, to mention here, resistance and rebellion have altered gender norms, but so far they have rarely eroded the statuses.

Again, upcoming research focus is also on the changing gender based division of work. The finding of such studies shows that gender ideologies regarding appropriate occupations for women and men are continuously adapted in response to a changing political economy. Gender ideologies or assumptions about gender-appropriate behaviour are time and place-specific (Mc Dowell 1997 cited in Overå 2007).

2.1.3 Gender ideologies

Philips 2002 assert that the study of gender ideologies is concerned with describing and explaining cross-cultural similarities and differences in human views on women, men, and alternative gender identities. It describes the proper roles and fundamental natures of women and men in human societies. The distinction between sex and gender is central to the concept of gender ideology (Philips 2002).

When a child is born, the biological differences between male and female assign their gender. A child is treated differently according to their assign gender. With growing age, they start to refer themselves as members of different groups of gender. Our actions have been shaped by gendered norms and expectations. Boys and girls behave as per gendered expectations. Everything has been gendered from our roles and responsibilities to our actions. Our roles, the work we do and our life experiences produce different feelings, consciousness, relationships, skills and the ways of being that we call feminine or masculine. All of these processes constitute the social construction of gender (Lorber 1994).

The gendered practices of everyday life reproduce a society's view of how women and men should act. Gendered social arrangements and associated invisible gender ideology are justified by religion and cultural productions and backed by law, (Foucault 1972; Gramsci 1971 Cited in Lorber 1994). For feminist, the use of the term 'ideology' reflects its roots in the feminist position that women are conceptualized as inferior to men, to justify and sustain

social and cultural systems dominated by men and the culturally constructed nature of gender. Gender systems and the gender ideologies that are thought to help sustain them are culturally variable (Philips 2002).

2.1.4 Gender ideologies in Nepal

There reside 103 caste and ethnic groups in culturally and ethnically diversified Nepal (Pradhan & Shrestha 2005). Research reflects differences in gender ideologies when we move from one region to another and similarly from one ethnic class to another. Recent findings suggest that there exist differences according to economic status of a household also. Whatever may the reason be I assume that these differences are interlinked and supports each other to maintain gender ideologies in Nepal.

As mentioned above, gender differences are a cultural construct and not a part of nature. The findings of various research suggest that geographic and agro-ecological conditions, ethnic communities, education, economic status and migration determine gender roles and access to and control over resources and benefits in the hill of Nepal (SNV 1992, Cited in Bhattarai, 2002). At the same time the findings of Acharya & Bennett 1981, suggest that gender differentiation, along with ethnicity and economic status, decision-making varies also in accordance with farm size. Studies in Nepal also show that gender ideologies differ vastly between Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burmese groups. It is accepted fact that women of Tibeto-Burmese origin are relatively free than women's of Indo-Aryan origin. Tibeto- Burman women, have more access to and control over resources and income than Indo-Aryan women (Vinding 1998).

In Nepal, as part of a stratification system, usually gender ranks men above women. Gender roles differ from one culture to another and one social group to another. Women generally have multiple roles: productive, reproductive and community roles. Inequality exist between the social status of women and men and where there is inequality, the status "woman" (actions and role) is usually held in lesser esteem than the status "man." In Nepal, gender is also intertwined with society's other constructed statuses of differential evaluation - race, religion, occupation, class, and so on. However, while men and women members of the favoured groups command more power, more prestige, and more property than the members of the disfavoured group, it has also been found that in poorer groups that have few resources,

women and men are more equal, and the women may even outstrip the men in education and occupational status (Almquist 1987).

Overall, there are few things to be highlighted. First, women activists as well as academicians they all suggest that though women contribute a lot to her house as well her society, but are always back of veil. It is men who are in forefront. We talk of human rights these days, and a feminist as well as activists both fight for women's right from which she was always devoid of. Equality and equal opportunity for all the women's in all the fields are demands for which everyone is working since decades.

Gender inequality has social functions and a social history. It is produced and maintained by identifiable social processes and built into the general social structure and individual identities deliberately and purposefully.

2.2 Defining 'Feminism'

Feminism is a movement and a set of beliefs which states that women should have political, social, sexual, intellectual and economic rights equal to those of men. It involve various movements, Theories and philosophies, all concerned with issues of gender inequality and advocate equality for women and the campaign for women' rights and interests. Feminists believe that women have been subordinated through men's greater power, variously expressed in different arenas. They value and work to improve women's status (DeVault 1999; Valentine 2007).

Current form of feminism is the result of the women's movement and consciousness raising groups of 1960s. Earlier contributors include suffrage and trades union movements (Kemp & Squires, 1997). Feminists and scholars have divided the movement's history into three "waves".

First wave of feminism is linked to both the liberal women's rights movement and early socialist feminism in the late 19th and early 20th century in the US and Europe. It all began in 1848 when for the first time more than 300 men and women assembled for the nation's first women right convention in New York. The convention was 'Seneca Falls Convention' and the idea was women should be granted the right to vote. It raised voice against the 'cult of domesticity', i.e., a true woman's place was\is in the home, meeting the needs of husband and

children and not to engage in public activities. The focus was on justice, equity, performing better roles, to be given access to the same resources and positions as men and be acknowledged for contributions and competencies. It is also known as 'equal-opportunities feminism' (Kroløkke & Sørensen 2006).

Second wave feminism emerged in the 1960's – 1970's. It was closely linked to the radical voices of women's empowerment and differential rights. It was during this phase, women of colour and third world women raised the issue of crucial differentiation. It was inspired by the liberal feminism. Second-wave feminism addressed a wide range of issues, including unofficial (de-facto) inequalities, official legal inequalities, sexuality, family, the workplace, and, perhaps most controversially, reproductive rights (Kroløkke & Sørensen 2006). The notion of standpoint theory and identity politics evolved during this phase.

The third feminist wave arose in mid 1990's onward, also known as 'New feminism', is characterised by local, national and transnational activism, in areas such as violence against women, sexual harassment, trafficking, body surgery, and so forth. It is concerned with new threats to women's right in the wake of new global world order. It criticizes earlier feminist waves for presenting universal answers or definitions of womanhood and embraces ambiguity, diversity, and multiplicity in transversal theory and politics (Kroløkke & Sørensen 2006).

Feminist philosophy has two sources- the feminist movement and traditional academic philosophy. The feminist movement opposes the deep and varied ways in which the ideals and institutions of our culture oppress women and the feminist philosophers examine and criticize the assumptions and presuppositions of the ideals and institutions of our culture (Garry & Pearsall 1992). Feminism demand equality for women and believes that to achieve equality for all a change in the human consciousness is strongly needed. Feminism is thus, a wave of revolutionary idea advocating social equality for all, in opposition to patriarchy and gender inequity.

Feminist pointed to the omission and distortion of women's experiences in mainstream social science, the tendency to universalize the experience of men and relatively privileged women and the use of science to control women. It was collective project of the feminist movement and traditional academic philosophy (DeVault 1999). Feminists believe that the research on men and women is distorted by sexist and andocentric bias. The exclusion of women from

well-rewarded and respected positions, the devaluation of activities and qualities traditionally associated with women, such as caring, and intersections of gender with inequalities of class, race, and nation are the three important themes in gender and feminist study (England 2002).

Feminist theory generally refers to theories of women's experience and of the subordination of women by men. England 2002, maintains that feminist theory includes two types of claims: 'positive' and 'normative' claims. The positive claims are the conceptual and theoretical part of empirical gender studies. It describes how gender systems work. Normative claims deal with questions of ethics and social justice and answer philosophical questions about how gender arrangements should be. Much of the work in recent decades deals with the second claim of feminist theory.

Feminism places high value on differencing experiences of diverse women: diverse in class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age or able-bodiedness. Feminist try to abstract knowledge from real lives and everyday experiences of women and seek to understand and explain women's experiences and women's practices. They see women's subordination as structural and work towards the liberation of women (Garry & Pearsall 1992). Feminist philosophers are trying in many diverse ways to reconstruct philosophy. Attempt has been to redefine the methods and subject matter of philosophy in ways that value women's experiences and enable women to move from the position of object to positions of subject, of knower, and of agent (Garry & Pearsall 1992)

Feminism has contributed to demonstrate the complexity and variability of culturally constructed taken for granted categories, and to emphasize that sets of analytical distinctions, like nature- culture, domestic- public which are problematic and distorting (Moore 1998).

Through the wave of feminism, academicians tried hard to make women's work visible. Since the 1970's, feminist scholars have spent considerable time focusing upon the power relations between men and women in society. In recent times, feminists have begun to turn to the academic lens upon them, examining the power relations in which they are involved as researchers (Deere, in Wolf 1996).

Today, feminism is a broad term which is associated with all the disciplines of social sciences. We refer it as larger interdisciplinary community of feminist scholars and this

community is called women's studies or less frequently gender studies or feminist studies (Garry & Pearsall 1992).

2.2.1 Geography and Feminism:

I find people always surprised whenever I answer to their questions about 'what am I studying? What is my topic of research? Being from geographical background from the very beginning, for them it is amazing that geographers also study social and cultural aspect of human life. I try to quench their astonishment by saying that I am a 'human geographer'.

It's an age old conception of many minds that geography deals with 'place', but the concepts such as 'people and society' is regarded as a part of other discipline of social science namely 'sociology and anthropology'. Though geography has its own distinctiveness in the academic arena, its tributary branches are yet to be recognised and popularised among general mass.

'Diversity is at the heart of geography. Diversity in geography includes the varieties in continents, places, climates and the interrelationships between natural resources and how people live, as well. Diversity is also central to human rights' (Buttimer 2002). Whatever the subject is, the contemporary as well as the colonial studies, all are directed towards welfare of men and his society.

2.2.2 Human Geography

Humanistic geography studies people's relationships to nature, space, place and time, their experiences, behaviour, feelings and perspectives on environment. It shares its concern with other branches of the discipline and its domains of interest overlap strongly with the humanities and social sciences. Human dwelling, nature and culture, mindscape and landscape, and also, the social construction of regional knowledge, form the core area of its enquiry field. It focuses on the interrelationship between space, place and people. Its scholarly value and main contribution to society consists in its ability to raise people's levels of awareness about taken-for-granted ways of life and thought, inviting critical reflection on humanity's relationships to the earth (Buttimer 2002)

According to Buttimer 2002, geographers have studied the earth for centuries where humans, exist with many other life forms, making it a terrestrial home. For each feature of humanness: rationality or absurdity, faith, emotion, power or competency, race, there is

geography and geographical interpretation. And there lies implicit hypothesis behind each geographical explanation about the nature of humanness.

2.2.3 Geographical Feminism:

Feminism also suffers from academic marginalisation when it comes within the academic field of geography. Though these days, it is well established internationally within the discipline, we as geography students never had this concept in our curricula (specially referring to Nepal). To utmost inclusion was 'women and development studies'. Feminism is not something which has been cultivated by geographers, we owe this field of study surely to sociology and anthropology but now it is one important part of geography known as 'geographical feminism'.

Gender and feminist studies in geography emerged in the 1970s in the political context of the women's movement, addressing the unequal status of women in society. At the same time, it has also claimed attention to women's marginal positions within the geographic professional arena (Zelinsky 1982, Cited in Monk, 2002; Valentine 2007)).

Rose (1993) starts her writing from the sentence '*The academic discipline of geography has historically been dominated by men, perhaps more so than any other human science*', in her work 'Feminism and Geography'. This is perhaps true still today. To talk about my department back home, there are altogether 2 female teachers out of 15 teachers and 21 percent female students every session (Maharjan, pers.com). In my batch (2003), we were only 5 girls out of 27 total students. The other reason of less female in academic sector in Nepal's case is that once they get married most of them quit their career and this is true for even students who don't continue their studies after marriage.

Feminists from the very beginning were against male dominance in every discipline. Women's representation was almost zero, against which feminism was a step together with the ongoing street activism for women's emancipation. Women have been and continue to be marginalized as producers of geographical knowledge. Feminist's geographers have long argued that the domination of the discipline by men has serious consequences both for what counts as legitimate geographical knowledge and who can produce such knowledge (Rose 1993).

Liberation movement of the late 1960's, including the civil rights movement and feminism were altogether attributed to open criticism of women's underrepresentation in geography. The argument was women's existence and concern was overlooked by mainstream geography. The initial demands were for women to have equal access to the discipline as its practitioners and for women to receive more attention in geographical research (Valentine 2007).

Feminist geography has produced a dynamic research which has introduced new themes about women's lives. It has recognized the importance of space and place in understanding gender, and increasingly elaborated its focus to include the intersections between gender and other social inequalities such as those originating in race and ethnicity, class, age, physical ability, religion, and nationality. Research addresses ways in which inequalities within societies are shaped by spatial relations and the specificities of place. It is concerned about inequalities of power between women and men. On the other hand, it examines how gendered ideologies and practices influence the creation of spaces and places. It deals with questions such as how lives of women and men are shaped by aspects of place and spatial relations and again, how considerations of gender are implicated in the creation of place and space (Monk 2002).

Feminist geographers advocated attention to arenas more central to women's lives, and introduced issues such as child care, housework, clerical employment, or women's fears in public spaces. Gender studies in geography have become global in scope with the documentation of differences between women's and men's spatial behaviour, for example, in daily travel patterns or migration. These days' mainstream geographic journals are well represented by feminist work. Geographical feminism alerts about the issue of difference among women. I strongly support this word 'difference', which though included in development intervention has not been paid attention adequately. Again, geographical feminism speaks of 'the concept of difference with the concept of space', which makes it different from the concept of feminism of other disciplines.

From the beginning geographical feminism has criticised the extent and nature of the masculine assumptions underlying the content, theories, methods, and purposes of most geographic research (Monk & Hanson 1982, cited in Monk 2002). It has also elaborated the

concept of patriarchy⁵ as the source of women's oppression with the substantive emphasis in research on women's live experiences.

Numerous geographical studies have been devoted to documenting and understanding gender divisions of labour and the ways in which productive and reproductive work were gendered. Attention to women's reproductive work such as child care brought new subject matter into the geographic literature. Research has been conducted in many geographic contexts especially in the Third World where scholars have identified relationships between the gendering of work and development.

The role of spaces and places in shaping women lives has been the main focus of geographical feminism against women's oppression and gender inequalities. Feminist scholarship has contributed to reveal the linkages between not only production and reproduction but also between 'public' and 'private' spaces, questioning the validity of seeing these as dual divisions. The feminist geographic literature on the environment reveals the importance of gender differences in access to and control over resources; how gendered knowledge is reflected in a science of survival; and the gendered nature of environmental politics and grassroots activism that is linked with women's redefinition of their identities and recognition of new environmental problems.

In the 1990s, feminist geography has been strongly influenced by interdisciplinary currents, by theoretical perspectives emanating from postmodernist, post colonialist, and 'minority' feminist scholarship. Scholars have questioned grand narratives, the presumed centrality of white, western feminisms, and the essentialism of the category 'woman.' They have focused on destabilizing dichotomous categories, such as man-woman, public-private, self-other, mind-body, and global-local (Duncan 1996, Cited in Monk 2002). Discussion includes home and workplaces, the public spaces of the street and pleasure, and the nation-state.

From the decade 1990's, geographical feminism has shifted its focus to the links between sexuality and space, especially homosexuality. Scholars have tried to examine the ways in which particular bodies: the pregnant, the homosexual, the disabled, and the non-white, are

⁵ Patriarchy is defined as a system of society in which women are dominated by men. It is a social system in which the father is the head of the family and men hold most or all of the power over women. In most appropriate words it defines the social control by men originating in the authority of the father (Mayhew 2004; www.wikipedia.com).

marked in space and also how 'performances' of gender and sexuality are place-related (Duncan 1996; McDowell 1999 cited in Monk 2002)

Hanson 1992, demonstrate three common cores in geography and feminism: finding significance in everyday life, appreciating the importance of context, and thinking about difference. She points out that geographical feminism illuminate how we think about gender, how we think about place, and how we think about work and has contributed powerful new insights about the world.

Gender and feminist studies have become well established in geography despite their marginal origins. Their critical perspectives have contributed to reshaping epistemological understandings in human geography. Work is expanding on gender and the body (including sexuality and health), on gender and human rights, trans-national cultural, political, and economic processes and their intersections, and constructions of masculinity. There is every indication that gender and feminist studies will remain a vital field within geography (Monk 2002).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

These days qualitative research is popular not only within social sciences but also gains recognition in scientific research in general. According to Flick 2002, qualitative research is characterized by appropriateness of methods and theories, perspectives of the participants and their diversity, reflexivity of the researcher and the research. Feminist principles and methodology go hand in hand with qualitative research. In fact, feminist research is itself a qualitative research. Feminists support qualitative fieldwork and encourage relationships between the researchers and researched that challenge the view of positivism and objectivity. It believes in cultivating, sharing, and closeness that would lead to a richer picture of women's lives.

3.1 Feminist methodology and epistemology

We can't put 'Gender and Women' in separate domains, as 'women' is within Gender. Specifically speaking of Asian context, we take 'Gender' synonymously with 'women'. But gender relates to men as well as women's rights. I don't say that feminism as a methodology for my study is best, but yes, like feminists, I am also interested in the emancipation of women. Being a woman, it's obvious to have interest in women's issues but at the same time I stress the significance of 'humanity and human rights'. To be very specific I am interested in issues related to 'doing and undoing gender'. Women as other part of the coin named 'Gender', bears inequalities not only at personal front but at the same time at the professional level. Recently, even though the process of 'feminisation' is taking place in different sectors such as agriculture, labour, migration, and so on, we find gender inequities everywhere. 'Gender' is a human construction. Why and how it came into effect, is difficult to answer but at least effort can be made into past, present and changing gender ideologies. I believe women's oppression in society and within household is not only the issue to be addressed but at the same time, the issue of empowerment seeks equal attention. Oppression of women is not only the problem; self-consciousness among women is also important agenda. Feminist methodology tries to address both of these issues.

Feminist methodology is an apparatus of knowledge production; knowledge against constructed and sustained women's oppression. The aim of feminist research has been to

disclose what has been ignored and suppressed about women and to make women's lives visible. It makes an attempt to include perspectives of all women. A key method for doing so suggested by feminist is consciousness raising suggesting involvement of personal statement of individual women, especially through methods such as ethnography, qualitative interviewing, life history, and narrative analysis (DeVault 1999). By gathering women's life histories, specifying their hours of work, and revealing the unequal burden of the gender division of labor, feminist assume that they are involved in a process of feminist consciousness-raising among those studied.

Feminist epistemology opposes positivism which assumes that the researcher can objectively see, and interpret the life and meanings of his\her subjects. It opposes the trust of positivism in value free science and the way positivism opposes the interest of the researcher and the researched. In sharp contrast, feminist believe that being objective and value free is not only impossible, since we all carry experiences and values that shape our vision and interpretations and since, by virtue of our presence as outsiders , we intervene in the normal flow of life, but it is also undesirable. Feminist methodology includes emotions. Feminists believe that objectivity is simply a form of male subjectivity. Feminist describes it as a reflection of male forms of interpersonal force: far-off, uninvolved, hierarchical, and unrelated (Wolf 1996).

Contemporary theoretical challenges are concerned about power and location: who produces knowledge and from what space and location? What are the politics of the production of this particular knowledge? What knowledge is produced, under what conditions, about whom and for whom (Wolf 1996; Cope 2002). Since the 1970's, feminist scholars have spent considerable time focusing upon the power relations between men and women in society. Recently, feminists have begun to turn to the academic lens upon themselves, examining the power relations in which they are involved as researchers (Wolf 1996). Questions about the ethics of research are important to feminist because they often are moved by commitments to women rather than merely pursuing their own careers and adding knowledge to the world (Wolf 1996).

Feminists have struggled with presenting and representing themselves and the problems, dilemmas, and contradictions. How researchers power and control offer them the choice to construct and reshape themselves to subjects, playing on the different positionalities of the researcher and the researched has been one of the main issue in feminist epistemology (Wolf 1996) Related to this issue, feminist methodology offers standpoint theory, which says that

ones positionality as woman is crucial in gaining knowledge and understanding of other women. It has been argued by the feminists that the only way one can know a socially constructed world is to know it from within. According to them, women researchers can fully and truly understand the lives of other women. Reflexivity of their own knowledge and experiences in understanding a phenomena and creation of knowledge is regarded as the main epistemological contribution of women researchers (Wolf 1996).

This epistemology of insiderness and somewhat essentialist view was placed into scrutiny blaming that it overlooks questions of difference and reduces women to homogeneous entities. Recently, awareness of class, racial, and ethnic diversity has increased and the discussion has broadened to 'standpoints', since there is no single standpoint for women of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds (Wolf 1996).

The 1990s have been a period of energy and growth in feminist methodology. Discussions have ranged through technical, ethical, and representational issues to the fundamental questions of how and what researchers claim to know. Feminist methodology has produced a perspective that calls attention towards problems of women. Feminist scholars insist that the answers to question should fit the contours of women's lives, including our own (DeVault 1999)

Feminist research involves change through activism and consciousness raising. Inter-subjectivity is something which many feminists have argued for. This is described as something which is compared with researchers own experience as a women and then sharing it with others, who then add their opinions (Wolf 1996). Feminists are among the few who articulate commitments and political priorities that invoke a better model of human behaviour that is as yet nowhere to be found (Wolf 1996).

There is strong agreement among feminist geographers along with feminist in other disciplines that there is something about the positioning of the researcher that matters in feminist methodology (Moss, in Nelson & Seager 2005). However, concerns about how the researcher is related with her research subjects were confined to western feminist during earlier phase of feminism. Important questions such as how they are treated in their fields? How they have overcome difficulties, were addressed along with the cases which show the feminist researcher doing her field research outside her country. During old days as well as even today, it is basically people from the western world who get chances to get involved in

research in third world country, whereas in contrary, third world people are rarely involved in research outside their home country. So, issues addressing third world views about first world is rare to find. However, concerns about how an insider carries out her research, what factors influences her has also been noticed.

3.2 My field work:

Fieldwork is a useful and important process that challenges fieldworkers to witness, record and try to understand vastly different and often harsh conditions; it opens worlds to which we would not otherwise be exposed (Wolf 1996).

In this section I will highlight the challenges which I have faced during my field work. How I struggled to be part of the community? How my statuses were given and frequently changed by and among different kinds of groups in the community? And what I actually have uncovered during and about fieldwork. At the same time this section also comprises some of the self-reflexive issues including those of ethics which I have uncovered as a researcher in my field. I will be discussing the challenges, favourable as well as unfavourable conditions and will try to jot down how I tried to overcome them.

3.2.1 First Phase: The start

It was a difficult start. My mind was conscious of the problems which I was going to face, when I started a return back from Bergen. I spent more than a week in Kathmandu. Within that week I tried to finish all my works at Kathmandu: making approval letter from the Central Dept. of Geography (CDG) and going to different libraries (TU, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development: ICIMOD, National Trust for Nature Conservation: NTNC), for secondary information. Forthcoming elections become a reason to move towards Butwal first. Election was over and soon after that I left for Pokhara. Permission letter from ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Project) head office, Pokhara, library search for secondary information, enquiry about the area and discussion on the topic with Mr. Lal Pd. Gurung⁶ were few steps towards collection of secondary information in Pokhara.

On 16th of April, I moved towards Jomsom. I stayed there for a day and visited ACAP office and gathered necessary information along with the permission letter from there. While taking permission letter from ACAP office at Jomsom, few names were noted down for initial start

⁶ The Project Director, KMTNC- ACAP.

of rapport building. Jomsom was beautiful. I observed it as much developed though remote. It is a touristic spot, small yet beautiful; remote but advanced and expensive when compared to other remote parts of Nepal.

On 17th, early morning I took a jeep to Kobang VDC. It was the place where I was going to do my field work. I experienced that it is very difficult to select an area when you are unknown to the place. I asked and explained my aims and my project to many concerned authorities at Kathmandu as well as in Pokhara and as per their suggestion I headed for Kobang. But when I reached Kobang and during my initial observation and enquiry, I began to feel that the study I wanted to do was not possible there. The context which I was expecting, both were missing. At first I have an aim to find out the involvement of women in decision making institutions especially in NTFP (Non-Timber Forest Products) context and secondly, basing solely on the main assumption of my project, I was very enthusiastic to do a kind of comparative study between Indo-Aryan and Tibetan-Burmese women.

The field area of my senior⁷ was also Kobang VDC. Beforehand, it was undecided that we will be in the same area. But, later on Kobang VDC was fixed as common study area by both of us. Sometimes I really felt that it shouldn't be like that. In one way, it was very helpful to be in his company. I was in high hills for the first time and I am really grateful to him for his rendered help. But in a way, I experienced that individuals have different qualities and skills in communicating with people and building rapport among community. We differ in our nature as well as in our gender. Feminist also argue that for a woman, entering the field is always difficult and may pose particular challenges because of their gender (Wolf 1996). In my society, where in any community it is men who are to be approached first and again men have an advantage to enter any community with an ease when compared to women. Though we entered the VDC together, my senior had an advantage of frequent communication with people in our introductory phase for two-three days. I was only listener and observer at that time. People used to think that we were there for same task. But later on we explained that we have different aims and we would work differently. As I have mentioned above, we had different communication skills. I wanted to be slow and steady and he was very fast in communicating with people. I had to pass through men first, to reach my respondents i.e., women.

⁷ Ph.D candidate in Geography Department at UiB(University of Bergen), Norway

As he was with me I haven't taken anyone to accompany me in my field work. But later on I felt as if it would have been better to take one as I experienced that it is difficult to stay for a long time alone without a friend in such a remote and distant area where you are an unknown person. I was desperately waiting for the day, when I will be at home with my family members. Though the people were good, everyone wasn't cooperative.

My senior was there for a week, later on he moved to Kathmandu for his works. Though later on he came again, it was hard to see each other physically as we were busy in our own works. I went downwards to Lete, the other VDC of Mustang and I made an enquiry about the area as well as other VDC nearby but found the situation same as Kobang VDC. The area wasn't suitable for my objective. Though I had started, I wasn't satisfied. It was difficult to decide after coming so far that should I leave the area or continue with it? Selecting a new area would be as difficult as to develop a new proposal. I had spent so much resources, time as well as money. I learnt a lesson that it is very essential to have proper knowledge of the study area where you are going to conduct your study. When you don't have enough resources and time you shouldn't come so far. Available data and other secondary information are not enough; one should have at least a round of the area. I was in a dilemma. After giving much thought, from 20th of April I started to talk and work with people. The thing I wanted was still missing. I had an aim when I started for Mustang, going back without achieving that would have been indigestible for me. Again, I was afraid if staying back, knowing the whole scene, will turn my achieved goal into actually not achieved. I realized Kobang VDC was a wrong selection from every angle. Later on with the help of my supervisor, I decided to omit the NTFP context and try to look at the overall participation of women in communal decision making institutions in the VDC. I started to talk with women and succeeded to get closer day by day. A kind of calmness has entered my heart.

Flick 2002 rightly claims that researchers' competencies are the main instrument of collecting data. The role a researcher acquires solely depends upon his\her competence in becoming a part of the community and the information which a researcher gains access to and which he\she remains debarred from depends essentially on the successful adoption of an appropriate role or position. According to him, acquired or assigned role is a process of negotiation between researcher and participants, which runs through several stages of his\her research.

Linton 1936 discusses the possibility of various kinds of statuses which any individual may have as he/she participates in the expression of number of patterns. In simple terms, he says that status means an individual position with relation to the total society, and it represents collection of rights and duties. Role is entwined with status. When an individual puts the rights and duties which constitute the status into effect, he/she is performing a role.

Table 3.1 My acquired\given status and associated role expectations:

1 st Phase	Phase	Acquired status\ position	Roles\ Expectations
1.	Initial entry	Domestic Tourist	Visiting different places\ Observation\ Enquiry
2.	Introduction	Student referred as 'Baini'	To study the life world of the villagers
3.	Introduction to villagers, passer -by, those who were working in fields, those who were in shops	'Nani' means like daughter for those who were of middle age\ 'Karmachari' means employee from any organisation	She has come to know something about our village and women
4.	Introduction and involvement with the students\ younger villagers	'Didi' means elder sister for those who were younger to me	Listen to their experiences and share mine, give suggestions and help them in their decisions.
5.	Introduction, involvement and trying to work with and receiving help from the teachers of Kobang school	'Miss' means highly educated teacher for the students and teachers of Kobang secondary school.	Teachers wanted me to share my experiences with the students and to take few classes, spend time with students.
6.	From rapport building phase to establishing myself as a Nepali student studying abroad and intend to work for her nation in future	Friend	Informal relation which turns out to be company for me to roam the VDC and to spend extra time in informal talks including my research.
2 nd Phase			
7.	Second phase entry	A student who is now well known among all the villagers and a good friend	Talk and spend time with locals. Help them in turn for their help in future.

I entered the VDC as an unknown visitor. I stayed in a hotel run by a teacher (female) of Kobang School. I choose the place considering its vantage point in terms of its accessibility to 5 villages (Khanti, Sauru, Kobang Sirkhung and Larjung) as well as in terms of security. Taking residence in a local house, I spent couple of days at Naurikot and Sirkhung. We were in a way fortunate to land directly in the teacher's hotel. She informed us about the scheduled meeting of forest committee for the 'Yarshagumba' tender. We were able to attend that meeting.

For the woman who owned the hotel and where I took the shelter, I was not more than a Nepali tourist in the beginning. Her name was suggested by the hotel owner in Jomsom where I have stayed for a night and had explained my purpose of visit. As she was a teacher, member of forest committee and most important a 'woman', I was strongly advised to meet her so that I could be safe and could get help from her for my initial works. As she understood my purpose, she introduced me in the same manner in front of other committee members and teachers present at Kobang School where meeting was held for 'Yarshagumba tender'. I was introduced as a student from UiB (University of Bergen), and called by the word '*Baini*', as I was younger than all of them.

For a week, I was accompanied by people who directed me to the different parts of Kobang VDC. I made myself acquainted with the place and the people, giving a strong impression that I will be living with them for a longer period and I need their help in my study. Even when I started my interviews I was accompanied by someone to explain, who I was and what my purpose is. This went like this for few days and then after I was alone on my way. As people were watching me, walking ups and downs, it was now easier to explain- where I was living, from where I was, what my purpose was of visiting them, and why I needed their time. I always tried to make my respondents flexible in terms of time and used to ask them the suitable time when I could talk freely with them. It was easier to introduce myself and my purpose to the respondents but it was really difficult to answer that how they will benefit from my study.

After I was familiar with the people and the place, I wanted to roam the VDC alone so that I can do participant observation. The other reason was that I felt that the people talk freely when I was alone with them. But despite of my wish, it was hard to find the respondents alone. Either they used to be with their family and friends or surrounded by their fellow villagers. And moreover the women were never free. It was difficult to acquire information.

People were busy due to blood drinking festival in the first phase of my field work. It was hard to find them at their places, so I decided to go to the festival with the teachers. Even after the completion of interviews the real scene was still hidden. It was a tough task. I planned to join people in their fields, in their gossips and at their residence. I tried to join people in every possible moments and places, whenever they were free to talk; however, it was very rare when I found them with spare time.

I was alone, surrounded and roaming with men always. It was a bit uncomfortable. But it always gave me happiness whenever my presence becomes inspiration for others. Though I had regret that I choose Kobang VDC as my study area, still I am happy at this point that my presence became inspiration for both old and young people. People were curious about me.

'I had heard about you. Someone, highly educated has come to our village'.

Respondent from Kobang Village

'I had seen you walking up and down this street several times. I feel to call you but I didn't know you so I didn't'.

Respondent from Kobang Village

Teachers of Kobang School were happy to see a female coming to a remote place like Mustang. Students were surprised to see me coming alone in their village; a female who is studying so far from her home and is highly educated. It didn't take time to get mixed with the students of 13-17 age groups and make them my friends. I felt most comfortable to be with them. I went to their classes and spent time with them. I told them to ask me anything they want. The first question they asked me was: *'how old are you'*, and then, followed a series of questions about my study, my visit, about higher education and so on. It was good to talk to them. Girls were shy; I tried to make them comfortable and started to share my experiences with them. I was surprised myself that I was talking to them, telling them different stories and different things. I realized perhaps, now I can do something for someone.

Mixing with the people and the place was over; I was almost finished with my interviews. I was not acquiring extra information and then I realize I need informal talks now. While walking up and down through various villages I used to have conversation with many passersby. I was known to everyone now. I felt comfortable. It was not like first week. I used to roam around the jungles and agricultural fields, hoping that I may catch someone and can have conversation with him\her.

I received a mail from my supervisor which my senior handed me in his pen drive. He suggested me to enquire about resource management by women. He suggested subjects like grazing, timber, water, harvest. But although I found them involved in these issues, they were far from decision making.

Then I planned to do resource mapping with the students of class 9 and 10 as a pre-test. Later I did that with women. It was fun to work with the students especially for two reasons. First, it was easier to make them understand. And second I choose to work with them as they were also involved in different kinds of work with their parents. Going forest for the collection of different kinds of forest products along with working in agriculture fields was common to all the students. Their cooperation turned out to be one of the important sources of information for me. Being befriended with the students was advantageous as the parents started to take me as their teacher and it was easier to talk with them.

Resource mapping with the respondents was really tough. I ask for help from a lady teacher, she agreed. As she was not free during day hours she had to seek permission from the head of the school. Then we left for the house of president of the mother's group (MG). She refused to help directly. *'Is it not enough to ask one person? No one have spare time here'*, she was shouting. We tried to explain her but she didn't get our point. So we left. Then we went to secretary's house. We explained her again: it is just to know how much knowledge women have about the resources available there. We will only do *'gaff-suff (chat)'* with a cup of tea and nothing more. It is just for the sake of my study. Conducting resource mapping with women's group wasn't good as with the students. It was difficult to bring them together in one platform. Women were busy in their fields because it was peak agricultural work season.

Later on I roamed the VDC with a girl. She has just finished her board exams and helping her parents in the fields. I wanted a girl with me from the very beginning, but no one was free to accompany me. I had a talk with a girl from Sirking. Teachers wanted me to meet her as she was very good student and wanted her to pursue further education. She was ready to accompany me, if her parents give her permission and for that she told me that her teacher and I must talk to them. I asked the teacher if he can do this for me. But unfortunately he couldn't get time to meet her father and she left for training.

It was hard to make the girl ready. She was from Sauru village. Her mother has gone for training and as her father was to go soon in the mountain pasture. She had to stay back to

look after house and field work. She agreed for a day on a condition of little money and food. It was a good opportunity to be close with someone. We had talk on various topics and it was beneficial for me. She was younger than me. She used to call me 'Didi', but still we became friends. I received a very heartily invitation for dinner despite of their very busy schedule when I was there for my second phase.

I stayed in Khanti most of the time and moved accordingly to different villages for interviews and informal talks. As Larjung and Kobang are nearby Khanti I didn't move to those villages. Sirkung Village is part of Larjung and there are only nine houses so that was covered by daily walks. I stayed in Sauru and Naurikot later on. During first phase of my field, the water in Kali Gandaki River was low so I was able to cross it but later on when I was there for the second time it was impossible for me to cross the river so I opted to stay there for few days. Naurikot and Nakung are nearby. A part of Nakung village which consists of only 3 or 4 houses lies near by Boksi Khola.

As I stayed in Khanti most of the time, I was like a part of them. People used to invite me at their homes. Once I went to *Mukhiyas*⁸ house. It was just back of the hotel I was staying. I went to meet *Mua*.⁹ She wasn't there at that time. Her husband was sitting on the chair and looking here and there. I asked him, he said she is in *bari* and said she will be back soon. I asked if I can go there. He showed me the way to *bari*. She was working there, taking care of her vegetables (staking her pea plants, removing the weeds and planting corn seeds in between to support pea plant). I asked if she is well (she was ill, suffering from cough and headache), she said she is taking medicine.

She started to tell me about the crops she has planted, green peas, beans, apple, cabbage, cauliflower, corn, potatoes, barley) she was well knowledged about agriculture.

R: You might know nothing about agriculture, do you?

Me: No, I haven't done, my Ma used to do.

R: Might be your mother is literate like you, is it?

Me: No, she isn't literate; she can read and write only.

R: Those who live in rural areas, they have to do agriculture. People like you who live in cities, don't know anything about it. When we were young, our parents didn't allow us to study. They used to say that if we will study then we will write love letters to boys.

⁸ Village headman

⁹ Elder women of the house is referred as 'mua', which means mother

I experienced that people feel more comfortable to speak to you when they know that you are also from same background, when you share your things with them. It's much better idea to let them speak more. Just keep fuelling. Give expressions and convince them that you are no different from them. It wasn't hard for me as I belong to no less different background from them.

Mustang is really a good place, beautiful and cool. But all the people weren't carrying the same characteristics. I gave thanks to all the locals. I went to meet them at their houses to say good bye. I arranged a small gathering and conveyed my thanks to all the teachers and my newly made friends. I won't say it was fun staying out there but it was surely not that bad either.

3.2.2 Second Phase

It was last week of June when I headed towards Mustang again. This time I was going to a known place, to a specific address where I was going to live and to meet known people with whom I was going to have conversations. Except for a few problems due to Nepal's ongoing situation and cancellation of flights due to bad weather I didn't faced any other problems. I reached the VDC; locals gave me a warm welcome. Besides, I had few friends there now. I planned to stay in different villages rather than to stay at Khanti only. I left my baggage at Khanti and moved according to my planned schedule. This time people were more cooperative than before. I had taken small gifts with me for those who have rendered a helping hand for me. From the very first day till last I was invited for lunch and dinners.

The foremost and basic challenge was being accepted by the hosts and the community which I have already crossed in my first phase. So, second phase was not so problematic than before. Time was still the major constraint. People were still busy in the fields. It was time for planting corns along with vegetables. I lived with my respondents and tried to work with them as far as I could without hampering their works. Sometimes I had to spend a whole day with them in their fields but still I didn't used to get time from them to enquire something. I used to sit with them for whole day, watching them ploughing, planting, singing, gossiping and so on. It was only at late night that I was able to have conversations with them in formal ways. It was difficult to live in village even along with all their family members that too without any rest rooms. But it was meaningful and I was satisfied.

The Maoist war is over. There is no more questionings in each sub-post. We don't have to carry our heavy luggage at each check post and face various questions of suspicion in our own country. The scene is changed now. Though we have government now to rule our country promising us peace and security, the country is still not peaceful. Frequent strikes are still major characteristic of new Nepal. Burning tyres instead of vehicles on the road is common. Besides, there are infrequent flights due to bad weather which is not because of human influence but neither free from human influence in a way. Due to strikes and different kinds of problems we are never able to perform our work on time.

Coming back home was a horrible experience for me. Walking down from Kobang till Pokhara had made my condition worse and forced me to lie down on bed for several days. I pray our country's situation to be better and we won't be discouraged to go in remote areas for research.

3.3 Experience as a woman researcher

Like many feminist, I do believe that it is always difficult to enter the field as there awaits lots of challenges especially for women because of her gender and specially when we are talking about countries like India and Nepal where men has to be approached first. Feminist like Daphne Patai, 1996, describes cases where the researcher in one way was united with her subject because of her race but again was divided because of her class. We have similarities off course because we all are woman, but at the same time differences counts whenever there is question to share some common ground. It has been experienced by many feminists including me that even when the researcher's gender, language, culture, nationality, and race match those of her respondents, class differences as well as differences of living in different kinds of places such as in urban and rural area usually prevail. My above mentioned example of *Mua* , express the same thing. We look for a common ground to share our things with each other and if we don't find any common ground they don't show any interest to share their life with us.

Feminists have also mentioned some tactics to be in the community. Wolf 1996 refers it as pressure in the field, like changing dresses, not speaking to men and so on. I personally feel that dressing according to the situation becomes necessary sometimes in the field to reduce the differences between you and your respondent. I felt that I should wear '*Kurtas*' instead of trousers in my field. I had taken couple of pairs but it was rare when I used that. Kobang is so

much influenced by tourism that there was no compulsion of wearing ‘*Salwar Kurta*’ (Cultural transmission from India). ‘*Salwar Kurta*’, is usually meant for unmarried girls in Nepalese society as it is considered a symbol of modernity. Wearing ‘*Kurtas*’, by married women is still considered awkward in rural corners of Nepal. It is usually ‘*Sari*’¹⁰ or ‘*Lungi*’¹¹ which married women wear. In Kobang, most of the married women were completely adapted to ‘*Salwar Kurta*’, and unmarried girls to western clothes, especially ‘*Jeans*’. The reason might be because Thakalis are mostly migrant (nationally or internationally), specially, youngsters, either for education or employment.

As mentioned by some feminists, I agree that, it is difficult for unmarried women to conduct her field due to various factors and I specially argue in case of our Asian societies. Our mind and perception are shaped by our society, our culture and our norms in such a way that we never try to come out of that. What has been considered as wrong by our society we give definitions to the things in the same way. There is no way to escape out from those habituated institutions as defined by many social constructionists. To whatever extent globalization brings changes in our dresses our thoughts few things remains intact for ever. Even though we know that it is of no good, we still try to be within that. I can’t cite anything about the women of other corners of the world, but women in Nepal for instance usually will not go against her husband even if she knows that there is something wrong. We have been taught certain do and don’t from our childhood and we are habituated to that. We think that what is going on is right because it was like that from the very beginning. My Ma worships Hindu god and goddesses so we do the same. We never asked the reason behind that. She taught us being a girl (*chori manche*) we should be perfect in all the household work which was not necessary for my brother as he has three sisters. In presence of them, he is not obliged to do any work. The environment in my home was (is) different from the customary trends (though like all the families male child always had his good place). As my Ma herself was not educated she wanted her kids to get educated and she never made any differentiation in that regard. But even we are educated, and we believe in equal human rights and equal division of work, we don’t allow our male counterparts to do the household works.

¹⁰ a long piece of cloth usually 5 meters long

¹¹ piece of cloth usually 1.5 meters long popularly known as wrappers in modern language

It is different when you roam around with your classmates and friends but it is sometimes uncomfortable for us to roam with men when you don't know them. This is especially to a case, when you are in a village not in a city. I was nearly fed up, myself being in company of men all the time. It is always men whom anyone encounters before entering any community. Kobang VDC was no exception. Despite of my effort to be with a girl (so that I can be closer with women, her thoughts, her perception and obviously for my convenience), I failed to get girls company and had to take male as a guide to make a tour of the VDC in the initial days. Later on also, it was men who became friends of mine. Girls of my age were already married and were busy with their works. Other girls who were doing their schooling, neither they were free to accompany me as they must assist their parents after school or during their off days and lastly, there were girls in between these two groups who were out of the VDC for their higher studies.

My friend used to drink almost every day and he used to go to different houses instead of asking at his own house. Being in his company brought both merit as well as demerit for me. It was advantageous as I gained much information while roaming with him. I got the chance to get a closer look at men's gathering. On the other hand, there were people perhaps who didn't look our togetherness in good sense. I surely felt bad the moment I realised that. People used to find me mostly with men while doing up and downs especially when the place was unknown to me during earlier days of my field work (later on I used to roam alone). There was a kind of thought in my mind what the locals have been thinking about me but I was helpless. I tried to get girls company but there were none. When I talk about these things with teachers they consoled me that I was doing my job, so don't bother about others. There was a lady teacher in Khanti. She used to share a lot with me. She told me once how a girl's marriage was broken when someone told her in-laws that she was seen with a guy eating '*Momo*'. I thank God that my parents trust their daughter and I have been able to do my job in Mustang.

About unmarried female workers it is experienced by feminist that they may feel pressures to get married or may be encouraged to marry. My case was a bit different. As I used to ask their age, in turn people also used to ask me about my age and along with that a kind of suggestion that now I must get married. Surprisingly, it were men who used to say that I am now crossing my age limit to get married, on the contrary, majority of women showed positive views saying that you are still studying and have time for your marriage. Whatever

their comments used to be, it was a part of my informal talks and always worked as an intermission points making people refresh and then after to continue with our talks again.

It is really difficult for a girl to travel alone to any unknown place. I wanted to take someone to accompany me but I didn't, giving a thought that it may deliver me a kind of second hand data as my work was more qualitative, observation was the main tool I was using and re-observing from someone else eyes would had been not trustworthy. But I don't think with these experiences I will be going alone to the field again.

3.4 Ethical issues

Ethical dilemmas and concerns are part of the everyday practice of doing research (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). Feminist discuss the issues of power differences. According to them, power and unequal hierarchies are maintained, perpetuated, created, and recreated during and after field research. The power hierarchy between the researcher and the researched is caused basically by class and educational privileges. There are questions about ethics in feminist research on less powerful respondents in contemporary feminist methods (Berik 1996). In my case, I was from same national background and according to me perhaps, there existed a symmetrical balance between the differences and similarities due to my family background but still my urban middle class background and my study in Norway were major distinctions that would have defined asymmetric field relationship for me. Furthermore, despite of differences and similarities, the main thing that should be kept in mind was that still the respondents have the power of possessing knowledge. Very often, it was difficult to interact with rich\ Thakali women. However, on the other hand poor\ low caste women usually gave me co-operative environment to be with them.

In my research I have examined the factors that have shaped women's decision-making power in the household, the changes in women's status and power and their participation in institutions. I was therefore interested in understanding the gender system, and the interactions among family members in determining women status. Ethics in qualitative research says that the research should be based on informed consent, not deceiving them about research aims and not invading informant's privacy (Flick 2006). Off-course before asking any question I used to explain them my aims and objectives, even then very often it was difficult to ask questions about gender differences among their family members. In those cases, observation is the only tool we can use. Again, how fair we are to our respondents also

depends upon the information in turn we share about ourselves. I tried my best to reduce power differences stemming from different positional ties between me and my informants (race, class, nationality, urban-rural backgrounds) trying to keep only one similarity of that is of 'Nepalese woman'.

One of the most important ethical code in qualitative research cited in Flick 2006, is that it should benefit the people more than the researcher and characteristics of feminist methodology which I have found most interesting is that it raises more questions about the ethics of research and are more committed to women rather than merely pursuing own careers and adding knowledge to the world. According to Wolf 1996, feminists are among the few, who yearns for a better model of human behaviour that is as yet nowhere to be found. But again, there are also some flaws in feminist research. Sometimes it avoids disclosing or sharing the results with the respondents and thus reproduces aspects of mainstream academic research (Wolf 1996)

According to me, in a way we try to interfere in our respondents' lives and internal affairs of their family which are sensitive issue itself. It is not only difficult to gather information on such issues but at the same time it is un-ethical. For example as I have mentioned in previous paragraphs and I will be mentioning again and again in my whole thesis that women (Nepalese) usually don't go against their husband. She will cite only positive points about him. However, when we try to validate our data through participant observation and informal talks, we find something which is different than what she says. In qualitative research sharing the findings of the research with the respondents is considered as a way to be ethical as well as a way to validate our data. But sharing our results like in above mentioned case doesn't seem reasonable. They may not like what we have observed about them.

3.5 Validity and reflexivity

Research is primarily an enterprise of knowledge construction. The researcher is engaged in producing knowledge. This is an active process that requires scrutiny, reflection, and interrogation of the data, the researcher, the participants, and the context. Reflexivity is a concept very much at heart of the qualitative social research (Guillemin & Gillam 2004). Feminists emphasize that although the research process can never be transparent, it is important to continue to make our best efforts to uncover the mechanisms of truth claim we produce, through the social and political process of academic knowledge construction.

‘What do I know’ and ‘how do I know what I know’, forms important questions of reflexivity in research. Reflexivity in research is a process which reveals how the text is produced. Harding (1986, 1987, and 1991) cites in Guillemin & Gillam 2005 that research is affected by our social as well as political location. He rightly points out that, ‘our interests, questions, choice of research design, methodology, theoretical framework, all are shaped by our values which influence the selection of our target population even. Not only this, but our interpretations how we choose to present our findings, the way of analysing and to whom we make our findings available needs reflexivity. Reflexivity in research is thus a process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how researchers place themselves and their practices under scrutiny, acknowledging the ethical dilemmas that influence the creation of knowledge’.

How I know the reality, what is knowable and how to acquire valid knowledge, my positioning in the analysis, are some of the methodological issues which comes within issues such as validity and reflexivity in feminist methodology. It also includes insider outsider debate and the validity of representation. As the main assumption of the study has been made out of my experiences, I feel that it is not possible to separate myself from my textual interpretation and therefore, I agree and argue the importance of incorporating my positioning in the analysis.

For geographers ‘context’ is important. Moss, in Nelson & Seager 2005, argues that instead of talking in conventional terms like validity, accuracy and triangulation, it might make sense to think about for example the momentariness of ‘how and when information gets collected’, the intention of the participants in being part of a project, or the research interaction process’.,

Like other feminists my goal of being reflexive in this sense is also to improve the quality and validity of my study and recognizing the limitations of the knowledge I have produced. I think reflexivity in research is important because being reflexive means giving a chance of critical scrutiny to the readers. I have tried to reflect myself in the process of knowledge creation including addressing other questions such as how the research is framed what methods are used, how the data has been interpreted and presented and in what context.

3.6 Interpretation

The interpretation of data is at the core of qualitative research. The interpretation of texts serves to develop the theory (Flick 2002). So, researcher should be very careful with his\her writing process.

Personally, I think qualitative interpretation is the most complex and difficult job. We need to interpret not only words uttered by our respondents but also the meanings hidden in their expressions, how they are uttering words, what actually their dialects express and obviously the explanatory marks which I think, differs from community to community. And we are really different from our western counterparts. I wonder how a person with western perspective and concepts could define our unseen thoughts and feelings: what we think, how we position ourselves in our society and home. Feminist methodology do reflects some lights on these issues and popularly the concept is known as ‘insider-outsider’ debate in feminist academia. Feminist methodology places great importance of researcher’s position to that of their respondents, as Deere (in Wolf 1996), writes- *It was realized that field research required attention to the diverse effects of class, race and ethnicity and in defining gender roles; we must question the process of our own interventions in defining the kind of knowledge that we produced which has been rarely paid attention.* Therefore, the question of ‘epistemology’, is at heart of feminist methodology, i.e. how I actually can claim that this is the true knowledge?

Qualitative techniques in social research speak about metaphor which according to Lakoff & Johnson 1980 is pervasive in our everyday life, in our language, thought, concepts as well as in action. What we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphors and to understand and interpret it plays a central role in defining everyday realities. Might be in a way outsider’s perspective is useful in while understanding and interpreting the text, as the researcher is never\ less biased because of his\her own feelings and experiences from which to deviate oneself is really difficult. But again born and brought up a similar kind of environment gives you some natural insights of the nature, perspective and behaviour of the people and society surrounding you.

I am a Nepali citizen, I am a woman, I am a student and in my field I was a researcher. My knowledge- is a product of my educational training as well as the practical training- which I

have gained through my practical experiences and observations in my life. I wasn't an insider, as I was not a part of their community (I am not Thakali or any other caste present in Kobang); neither can I place myself as an outsider, because somehow, though I live in Terai and have been educated in metropolitan cities, I am one among them: I am Nepali, we share some common social and cultural characteristics. And above that I am a woman, we share same gender, and same gender division of work applies to me also. Here I would also like to mention that I didn't find vast difference between my respondents and myself, might be because my family background is no less different than theirs. My grandfather was an agriculturist and so my mother before her marriage and my father like many Thakalis\ Nepalese, was a migrant. We had a common field but at the same time as Vante 1999 points out we had some separate fields also, and I agree with both Aase (1997) and Vante (1999) that it is difficult to reach a full understanding of another human being and we should be aware of not using our own category while describing the life world of informants. Though not an insider in true sense neither an outsider, in a way my effort was to be in a neutral position and to interpret the ideas expressed by my respondents. However, to what extent I may try to be neutral, my interpretations may reflect my own experiences and define my own subjectivity.

Moss, in Nelson and Seager (2005), argues that feminism is different approach to research because it addresses issues involving differences among women which have now become a central task to all feminisms. Thoughts on feminist methodology in geography have taken a different path than other disciplines. Feminist methodology in geography is influenced by both feminist theory and geographic knowledge and it is concerned about the discussions about epistemology (how I know the reality?), fieldwork and choice of method. According to her, questions such as who are knower, what can be known and how do we know that we know, are at the heart of feminist geography and feminist geographers explicitly addressed these issues through discussions about reflexivity and positionality.

When I was enrolled for this course last year, I had no intention of conducting feminist research. This is my first gender work. I was not familiar with the academic discourse of 'theories', methods and so on. However, I think it is not important whether I consider myself a feminist, neither I know that I will engage myself in feminist scholarship, what is important is that it has been beneficial to me as I have gained insights about gender and feminism from the critical understanding of what feminist academic scholarship is or can be.

3.7 Methods of data collection

The study is purely qualitative in nature. As the main focus of the study was to find out the participation of Tibeto-Burmese women in the decision making institutions, the study revolves around their daily activities (within and outside household), formal and informal talks and discussions with them about their perceptions and experiences about different arenas of their life. My research methodology combined participant observation with open-ended and informal interviews. Though women were the main respondents, informal talks have also been covered with men whenever the situation was found favourable. Participant observation was used as a major tool to gather information from all kinds of formal and informal meetings with individuals. Henceforth, the research produces social information using gender perspective of Kobang VDC. General information regarding demography was gathered and analyzed in quantitative form to gain understanding about population and ethnic composition, occupational status, literacy rates and so on.

3.7.1 Sampling

I have used snowball sampling using my connections and interpersonal relations between people. According to Browne 2005 snowball sampling is a recruitment method that employs research into participant's social networks to access specific populations. Within snowball sampling I have used purposive sampling. I was seeking respondents which match my predefined group and through snowball sampling I tried to verify, if the respondent does in fact meet the criteria for being in the sample. The reason for the selection was that I wanted to cover equal proportions of respondents from all caste as far as I can. Thakalis are in majority in Kobang VDC. But, at the same time there were few other castes like Magar, Gurung, and other lower castes. I was biased to give preference to non-Thakali caste because they were in minority. Besides, I have tried to include all the widows and single mothers in my sample.

The issue of sampling emerges at different points in the research process. It is related to the decision about which persons to interview and from which groups these should come. Furthermore, it emerges with the decision about which of the interviews should be further transcribed and interpreted (Flick 2002). I have interviewed more than 80 women but I haven't included all of them in my analysis. Some were incomplete due to non-cooperation on part of the respondents and some respondents lack information and few were just migrated

to the village. Not only was I biased in selecting my sample with regard to caste but I was also biased to select my respondent depending upon their economic status. However, my effort has been to cover equal proportion from each category i.e., rich: poor, Thakali: non-Thakali, Bhuddhists: Hindu. According to available data, there are 152 households in Kobang VDC. Total 85 households were interviewed but 80 interviews have been used for the study (Table 3.2: Appendix I).

3.7.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation is the most popular and reliable way of producing data in qualitative research. It involves spending time, living or working with people or communities in order to understand them (Laurier 2003). It involves the task of documenting actions and interactions. Building ability to remember things we see and hear is crucial to successful participant observation research (<http://www.unifem.org>).

Using this tool I have tried to place myself among local scenario by participating and observing the people and place. I tried to be a part of them and I tried to get into the minds of informants, trying to understand their categories. While applying this tool, it is very important to keep balance between two different tasks: participation and observation (DeWalt & DeWalt 2002). For the accuracy of data, it is very important researcher be the prime and direct instrument of data collection, and this ask for the full involvement of the researcher's self in the research process. It is difficult to get accepted role among the locals and at the same time there is a chances of emotional involvement of the researcher. Feminist argue that immersion may be useful strategy to attempt to view a culture from within. It's something different from observing from a distance but despite partial or complete immersion, inequality may still persist between the researcher and her subjects as she may leave her field after completion of her work. So, to keep myself aware of my role expectations was the major responsibility during the phase of data collection in my field.

3.7.3 Key Informant Interview

Key informant interviews are qualitative in-depth interviews with people who know what is going on in the community. The purpose of this type of interviews is to collect information from a wide range of people- including community leaders, professionals, or residents, who have firsthand knowledge about the community. (www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu). In simple

words, it is a tool of obtaining necessary information from socially recognized and experienced person, who knows the community and can give required information.

Interviews were conducted with both men and women who have leadership roles in order to obtain necessary information about the participation of women in communal institutions. An effort has been made to gain some insights on various reasons, responsible for passive role of women participants in decision making institutions. Altogether 15 key persons were interviewed (Appendix 4). Teachers, community leaders, NGO workers, Government Employees, Members of mother's group, Members of forest committee, and Officials of ACAP were interviewed.

3.7.4 Semi-Structured\ Open ended questionnaire

It is believed that if you want to know life world of other people, then talking to them is the best way out. Semi-structured interviews are one of the most commonly used qualitative methods (Vindings 1998).

Partially structured in-depth open ended questions were framed for conducting semi-structured interviews. With less pre-defined set of questions, through a way of free informal talks, I tried to remain flexible and allowed new questions which were not listed in my questionnaire during the interview and offered the participants the chance to explore issues they feel important. However, an attempt has also made to be within the framework of themes that I was aimed to explore.

3.7.5 Field Diary

The classic medium for documentation in qualitative research has been the researcher's notes. Such notes should be made immediately. All in all, the production of reality in texts starts with the taking of field notes (Flick 2002).

A field note was maintained to record necessary information observed during my stay in the field. It was useful in the collection of those information which I wasn't able to cover through interviews. It has acted as a means of reflection of my fieldwork experiences. Through this tool I believe I have been able to collect minor and most important details which were perhaps not possible to collect in a systematic way. Field note was taken during application of different techniques to gather information, whether during observation phase or during

interviews or during informal talks. It has acted as a major tool assisting me to recall all the minor and major useful information. Field diary was used to jot down all the important information whenever time and situation permitted me to do so.

3.7.6 Personal Narratives\ Life History

Narratives as data provide a way of approaching individual worlds of experience. Narratives allow the researcher to approach the interviewee's experiential world in a more comprehensive way (Flick 2002). Similarly, life histories reveal respondents past life experiences. It helps us to illustrate change over time (Rubin & Rubin 2005). Life histories are the basis of narratives (Flick 2006). It is considered a good way to capture the pasts of less literate and more marginalized groups whose histories might not otherwise be transcribed and have been especially utilized by feminist historians. (Wolf 1996)

Personal narratives of women are their expressed identities. Personal narratives are the actual voice of the women and are able to reflect even subtle differences between individual women (Singh 2007). Using this tool an attempt has been made to get a comprehensive version of events and experiences of my respondents. With the help of narratives an attempt has been made to highlight the differences in experience and expression among women living in the same social contexts. It was useful for me to detect the changes in women's social status within the community.

3.7.7 Resource Mapping

Resource Mapping refers to making a map by, with, or for any given local group, which aims to frame the infinite complexity of local places and people. According to Rocheleau (2005), it is an exercise of power by, within, and between units such as communities including researcher, in complex relations of power between her\his respondents with a community. Resource mapping helps to get a comprehensive picture of interaction of community with surrounding available resources and helps to generate qualitative as well as quantitative information.

After finishing interviews, I conducted resource mapping with my respondents. By then I was known to all the people in Kobang VDC. I had established a good rapport among the villagers. I acted as a facilitator and tried to gather information on issues like resource

distribution, use and access. Though this tool has a lot of importance, I used it in a very simple way. I used it simply as a 'Sketch Mapping'. Using a plain sheet of paper I requested them to make a map of their VDC and show the distribution of different kinds of resources; natural as well as human. I used this tool in order to know if women can identify existing resources that meet their needs. The tool was also useful in graphically manifesting the significance they attach to them.



Plate: 3.1 Mapping with students and respondents

3.7.8 Wealth Ranking

Wealth Ranking (also known as well-being ranking or vulnerability analysis) is a technique for the rapid collection and analysis of specific data on social stratification at the community level. It is counted amongst the most widely employed new participatory method in which a small number of knowledgeable community members categorize village households into wealth ranks using a set of pre-established criteria (Adams 'et al'.1997).

The tool was used as a means of assessing relative socioeconomic status of the households. Household interview was conducted first and when it was realized that it is difficult to access information on household wealth quantitatively, wealth ranking as a qualitative tool was opted to categorize the households according to the level of wealth.

Key informants were asked to assign each household into wealth groups based on their own criteria. Key informants themselves made the criteria for classification. They were asked to describe the attributes of each wealth group categorize by themselves. List of names of respondents were placed in front of them and asked to classify the households into groups. Key informants stratified 80 household into three wealth groups using their own criteria which are as follows:

Table 3.3: 80 households in three wealth categories

High	Medium	Poor
House	House	Rented House
Large land owned	Little land	Landless
Good business	Good daily wage	Sell labour, daily wage,
Foreign employment (abroad)	Small scale business	uncertain source of income
Household assets	Few household assets	-

Source: Field work, 2008

3.7.9 Informal Talks

Formal and informal interviews are the most important means of data collection. I have experienced that an informal talk counts a lot. It is the best way to come closer to the people. People talk more freely when the researcher is without pen or paper. The major drawback of this tool is that it is difficult to remember everything and there are chances that you may not be able to scribble down all the things when you are back to your room. In my study, participant observation and informal talks are the soul of my methods of data collection. These two acted as a very helpful tool to gather information especially with regard to gender differences within household level.

3.8 Selection of the Study Area

Being a part of Nepali society I have always found that women of Tibetan-Burmese groups are freer to decision making within their household when compared to Indo Aryan group. I was curious to know that if this applies the same when we step out of household boundary? And if it is not the same case, then what is the reason behind? This curiosity of mine has taken me towards the area populated by women of Tibetan-Burmese group. I wanted to conduct my study in one of the hilly regions of Nepal. I have conducted my last thesis in the city area (proper Kathmandu) so, I was keenly interested to move upwards this time. Though I could have found a better mixture of Indo-Aryan and Tibetan-Burmese group in Terai region and I could have done a comparative study much better there I opted for the remote district of Nepal for my study.

Selection of the study area was big a problem for me. I wanted to do my study in one of the hilly regions of Nepal, but where (the specific area) it was difficult to decide. Humla was my first choice as I found that it is a place where there is flood of donor agencies but in terms of

literature it is almost nil, and specifically, when speaking of women. But I have to abandon the idea, as it is not only difficult to access the area but at the same time it demands funding. With the help of my supervisor, Mustang was selected as the second option which was later fixed as my study area due to its less rugged accessibility as well as due to the presence of both groups of women (later I found that it is not the case).

While Mustang was decided to be my study site still the specific study area was yet to be finalized. The selection of the specific site was to be based upon the presence of both types of ethnic group viz. Tibeto – Burmese as well as Indo- Aryan and their involvement in the NTFP collection. I tried to gather information about different VDC's of Mustang by reviewing related literatures as well as seeking information through various concerned authorities from concerned organisation related to Mustang area and as per their suggestion I selected Kobang as my study area.

Before reaching Kobang, I had planned to limit my field work in only one village of Kobang VDC but when I reached Kobang I found the situations totally different from what I had expected. The context which I was expecting, both were missing i.e., the presence of both types of ethnic group viz. Tibeto – Burmese and Indo- Aryan as well as involvement of women in the collection of NTFP, so as per the situation I have decided to cover all the 6 villages of Kobang VDC.

Studies specifically on Kobang VDC are lacking. When I was in field I heard there were two more students from Tribhuvan University to conduct their field work there in Kobang but they were students of Culture and Linguistics. Independent of subject, I found it difficult to find available literature specifically on Kobang. As a substitute, there are studies on overall Mustang district where there is less description of Kobang VDC.

Available literatures showed that though local people are basically agrarian and in addition are involved in off-farm income generation activities, such as tourism business and in-country or regional trade and business; going abroad to generate remittances still they depend considerably on the local natural resources for sustaining their livelihoods(Vinding 1984; Pyers 1985). Specifically speaking of women, in this conservation area women are involved in a range of economic activities including firewood and fodder collection, agriculture, animal husbandry and domestic chores. Amongst the major focus of ACAP, gender development is one thematic area which aims at empowering women and marginalized and

socially outcast people in decision making process by enhancing their capacity through the gender empowerment activities (NTNC 2007). Despite their important role, however, many studies reveal facts about women's marginal participation in decision making (Lama & Buchy 2002). It was the basic point to start my field work.

3.9. Limitations:

Qualitative study is one which turns out to be the finest when given considerable time and thought. Participation observation is soul of most of the qualitative study. Becoming one among your subjects requires substantial time duration so that you can do in-depth study of your subjects as I believe human beings are the most complex creatures and to understand institutions developed or established by them is the most difficult task. Time limitation is most obvious obstacle which most Master students face. Within limited duration we cannot do in-depth study which is required by the issue, so to make generalization based on such studies is inaccurate always. The findings solely are applicable to Kobang VDC only. However, I also believe that these studies though not carried with big objectives can serve as a base for big projects or further research. Questions such as what the study is meant for in terms of giving message to society? Is the study only to describe the existing situation of the community or what sorts of problems it tries to solve? Does the study include what should be done to eliminate the problems? These and many other questions are obvious which we face before, during and after our field work. In spite of various limitations such as time, budget, available literatures, and other resources, I believe, I tried my best to make myself a part of the community studied by me. The study was not only beneficial for me in terms of learning but at the same time I guess I succeeded to influence\encourage at least some of my respondents in a positive way. Besides, I hope this study will benefit the community to form further action research projects based on its findings.

CHAPTER IV

Kobang VDC: Place and People

This chapter is directed towards general introduction of the community and the area. I will be presenting the demographic, occupational, ethnic as well as educational characteristics of my selected population. Beside this, I will give basic details of the natural as well as human resources available in the area. By human resources I mean the accounts of basic amenities accessible to the communities in the Kobang VDC.

4.1 Thak khola: Kobang VDC: Thakali

'Thak Khola', is the southern part of Mustang District which extends from Ghasa in the south to Jomsom in the north. The valley is surrounded by some highest mountains like Dhaulagiri and Annapurna. The southern part of Thak Khola is called *'Thaksatse'*. Kobang VDC falls within *Thaksatse* region which literally means seven hundred households.

It is situated at an altitude of 2650 meters, along the banks of river Kali Gandaki, north of the Himalayan main range. Thaksatse is traditional division of settlements inhabited by indigenous inhabitants called Thakalis (Vinding 1988). Research indicates that among the well-documented of Nepal's ethnic minorities are Thakali, characterised as an agro-pastoral and trading people of the upper Kali Gandaki river region of west central Nepal (Messerchmidt 1982; Vinding 1984). The Thakali and Thak Khola are the subjects of an exceptionally large literature. Thakalis in Kobang have classified themselves in 4 clans: Hirachan, Bhattachan, Gauchan and Tulachan.

The VDC consists of 7 villages (Naurikot, Bhurjungkot, Nakung, Larjung, Kobang, Khanti, Sauru) each having its own traditional village headman called *'Mukhiyaka'* (VH). Its adjoining VDCs are Kunjo as eastern boundary, Tukuhe as northern boundary, Lete as southern boundary and Myagdi District as its western boundary. Positioned in the lower Mustang, Kobang holds 152 households consisting of 679 population (318 female and 361 male) altogether (District profile of Mustang 2005). For this study, 80 households were selected which has included 190 females and 205 males in the VDC (Table 4.1: Appendix I).

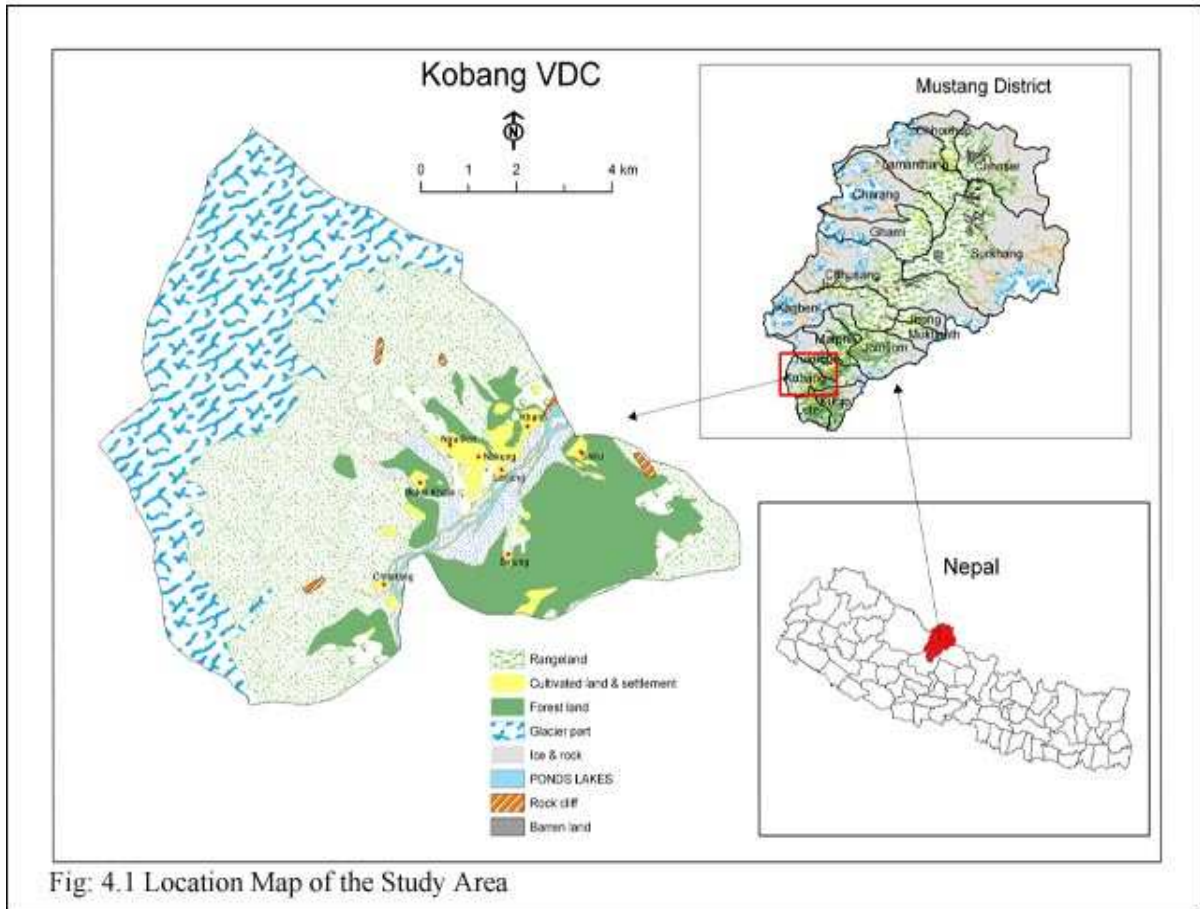


Fig: 4.1 Location Map of the Study Area

4.1.1 Ethnicity\ Caste

Research works on Thakalis is mostly focussed on their history and their traditional life. Nothing has been published specifically on Kobang VDC. In Kobang VDC, Thakali consist as a dominant ethnic group of the VDC representing 65% (District Profile, 2005) of total population. Besides, there are *Magars*, *Gurungs*, *Chettris* as well as marginalized *Dalits* in the community. Amongst *Dalits*, *Bishwokarmas* and *Pariyars* represent 15 % (District Profile 2005) of the total population. In addition, there are few upper Hindu caste people who work as civil servants (mostly teachers) and soldiers who live on a temporary basis.

As mentioned in methodology part, I was biased to select my respondents. The reason was to take equal proportion of the groups as far as possible so that an overall view of situation of women can be explored. Table 4.2 (Appendix I) shows the ethnicity as well as caste of my respondents. Basically, Magar and Gurungs follow both Hinduism as well as Buddhism.

4.1.2 Education:

Literacy rate of Kobang is 74.68% (Table 4.3: Appendix I), which is above national average (53.78%: NTNC 2008). Female literacy rate is also higher (68.42%; Table 4.3: Appendix I) compared to the national average (42.49%: NTNC 2008). Almost all children attend primary education. However, there is vast disparity with regard to male (80.48%) and female (68.42%) literacy rates in Kobang VDC (Table 4.3: Appendix I).

Women are still at disadvantage in this sector. Some are with no education. Not even a quarter of adult women have reached secondary level. As evident from the table, male-female disparities in education increase steadily from the primary to higher levels. Dropout rates are higher among the girls. At present, the school in Kobang VDC is only up to 10th grade. Students have to go to Jomsom, Tukuche, Pokhara, and Kathmandu for further studies. Rich household send their children for studies to Pokhara, Kathmandu and even India.

4.1.3 Occupation

Historically, the Thakalis are known as renowned traders and merchants of great economic and political intelligence holding tribal entrepreneurship in the Nepal Himalaya (Bista 1980; Messerschmidt & Gurung 1974 cited in Messerschmidt, 1982). This may be true for those who have already migrated to cities and doing great business and is still true for those, who are rich and are running their business along with agricultural activities in Kobang itself. However, in Kobang VDC, it is Kobang, Khanti and Larjung (a part) where people are more trade oriented. In other remaining villages, the main occupation of the villagers is still agriculture.

It has been observed since decades by many researchers that employment opportunities are better and salaries are higher in Thak Khola than in the hills further south. Poor people from



Plate: 4.1 A man working in a contract for logging in the forest of Sauru

southern hills come to Kobang for different kinds of work such as construction, agricultural work, servants and herdsmen. However, living cost is higher in Kobang. Once I asked my respondent, how she feels about people coming to Kobang for jobs. She answered that when

they go downwards to the south, they feel as if money have less value in Kobang and it increases when they are down. According to her, it is good to earn in Kobang and to spend downwards south. But for those, who live and work without any land and house in Kobang VDC, it is expensive and they have less chance for saving. Some work under contract, (build a wall, make a door, harvest a field) while others work on daily wage basis. In addition to daily wage, women and men who work as general helpers receive food. The labourers are from the south especially *Myagdi* who comes to work as masons, house builders, carpenters, electricians and plumbers.



Plate: 4.2 A girl working as a general helper in a Thakali household.

In Kobang School, among 12 teachers, 3 are *Thakali* teachers, one male and two female. Other teachers are from other parts of Nepal and the dominant group is of *Bahun*, only one teacher is *Gurung*. Since the teachers have been working for so many years, they are seen as a part of the community. One *dalit* woman from *Naurikot* works as a peon in the school. There are primary schools in *Sauru and Naurikot* also. In *Sauru and Naurikot*, majority of teachers are *Bahun*. *Sauru* primary school has two *Thakali* (Men) and one *Dalit* (women) working as teachers Two *Thakali* women, one as a care taker in ‘*Bal Sishu Kendra (child care centre)*’ and one as a librarian are working on permanent basis in Kobang Village (Table 4.4: Appendix I).

Messerchmidt 1982 observes that it was only with the expansion of trade in the south Thakali women began to establish small inns along the main trails to provide food and lodging for Thakali traders. The inn also served others including soldiers from British Army travelling home on leave. Hotels are still run by women in Kobang. A few men are also involved but it is women who perform the main role. In *Khanti, Larjung and Kobang*, there are few hotels which are comparatively well built and are meant for tourists. There is one big hotel in *Nakung*. But according to the respondents, these days due to increased transportation services, tourists don’t prefer to stay back in *Kobang*. In addition, in the VDC almost all the houses run a kind of hotel inside their kitchen. They usually sell small things (like biscuits, noodles and so on) including ‘*raksi*’. It is usually prepared out of apple, buck wheat and millet. Women produce *raksi*, however, it is consumed by both men and women locally.

The other occupations which people of Kobang VDC are involved in are carpenter, tailoring, cobbler, porters and drivers. These people have little or no land and their income is low. For few people mule business is the major source of family income. However, poor mule drivers don't own mules. Rich Thakalis hire them on a contract basis and the poor sell their labour. Some men work for long periods as herdsmen and some women as general helpers in Thakali households (Table 4.4: Appendix I).



Plate: 4.3 Mules carrying ration from Beni

Rich households in Kobang own lodges, shops/stores, apple orchards, agriculture farms, and livestock (yak, goats, cow, bull and mules). They work as construction contractors as well as take other forms of contracts such as those of logging, collection of mushrooms (in favourable seasons) and *Yarshagumba* (*Cordyceps sinensis*).



Plate: 4.4 Caraway(Carum Carvi)

A contractor in Kobang makes enough profit. Some are engaged in trading agricultural and non-timber forest products such as Jimbu (*Allium wallichii*), Caraway (*Carum carvi*), and dried Juniper. Most of them own lands or houses in Pokhara and/or Kathmandu. They are likely to have a member of the family working abroad, either in Japan or USA. Their abandoned houses and lands are also a kind of source of income for them, which they have rented in 'Adhiya'. On the other hand, poor households are likely to run inns, work in others field, take casual jobs, collect and sell fuel wood, NTFPs and take different kinds of job during off agricultural season to supplement their income(Table 4.4: Appendix I).

There were 16 female respondents who said that they don't do nothing and are engaged in household works only. These were mostly the aged respondents. Similarly, 9 males counted in the same category, who stated themselves sitting idle and without any occupation. However, even though women call themselves housewives they were involved in various kinds of outside work along with their household activities (Table 4.4: Appendix I).

Migration

There is an age old prevalent conception that Thakali don't prefer to have higher education, and it is only *Bahun* who study. They appreciate *Bahun* for their educational achievements and regret in true sense for their backwardness in this sector especially when we talk of the present context. As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, it is believed that, Thakalis are more experts in the field of business than involving themselves in education. Now, due to globalization, the trend of the young Thakalis is more towards international migration. Domestic migration is a common phenomenon for them due to their business transactions. These days education is also one of the major causes of migration to the cities of the youngsters. Formal and informal conversations with the villagers indicate that Japan is the most popular destination for the Thakali of Kobang VDC as an international destination. Beside, few have gone to Arab nations in search of employment opportunities. Altogether I have found 10 males and 4 females who have been abroad for employment. Rich Thakali doesn't face financial problems and they usually use mutual cooperation among them. Relatives help each other to go abroad. While for the poor it is very hard to arrange such a huge sum and the worst happens when they can't recover the amount. While I was in the VDC, I heard few cases, where a group of young men had to return back that too only after few months of their arrival in Japan. It had been hardly two months and they were deported back. One among them was son-in-law of a very poor family who has sent him after making much effort and after selling even all the jewellerys of the women in the household. They were so shocked by the incident that his mother-in-law had committed suicide. This had become an issue of conversation in the village for few weeks. Women in Kobang VDC hardly migrate internationally.

Literature on Thak Khola and Thakali shows that Thakali women used to migrate towards south in October after the harvest of summer crops and used to run inns at the bus stops along the highways and along the main caravan routes (Vinding 1984). Among my respondents, I found no one who migrated in winter for business purpose. They do migrate down to the south in winter. Pokhara, Butwal and Kathmandu are the popular destinations but migration is limited basically to better-off families and not for business purpose. Those who cannot afford stay back or there are households whose members go down in winter turn by turn. Respondents mentioned that it is difficult for the poor to go down in winter as they cannot afford flight and it is difficult to walk down due to snow.

The number of women who were abroad among my respondent's household were 4. Two of them were widows. They have left their children in the care of their in-laws. They had migrated as a domestic worker in Arab nations. There were few international migrants who already had returned back.

Many locals have either migrated more permanently to Pokhara or Kathmandu, or are working overseas. They may still hold properties but their presence in Mustang is insignificant. Youths are more interested to go abroad for jobs. Consequently, villages have more aged people. Interestingly, lands and houses that are left behind by out-migrants have created space for the poor people from neighboring places such as Myagdi, Dolpa and Baglung to secure their livelihoods.



Plate: 4.5 Migrant woman from Mayagdi. She came to Kobang with her husband who is working as a labourer at new school construction site.

Agriculture

Though locals are more inclined towards domestic as well as international migration and due to migration land abandonment has taken place in the VDC, agriculture still forms an important livelihood strategy for the left behind locals and the newly migrated population.



Plate: 4.6 A view of agricultural fields from Naurikot.

“40 % of the landholdings are now barren (Key informant: Gautam Serchan). It's difficult to get people to work in the fields”... this is the common comment given by majority of the locals.

Out of 183 females, 83 women are involved in agriculture. The frequency of males in agriculture is only half of this figure. Besides, as mentioned in the above paragraph, women



Plate: 4.7 Thakali woman who states herself as housewife busy in her apple orchids.

though they count them as housewives are still engaged in agricultural work.

Kobang harvest two crops in a year. Fresh vegetables are also grown in 'Bari' especially during summer. Similarly, it produces tons of fruits. Though Kobang is not famous for apple, it ranks third after Marpha and Tukuiche in lower Mustang (NTNC, 2008). Apple occupies a



Plate: 4.8 Flowering apple orchids in the month of April

dominant portion of cultivable land and forms the major income sources for the people. I met few people who complained about the declining apple production in the village and wanted to replace apple cultivation with some other profitable product. But, even though it has been reported that the production has declined in the recent years still almost all the household practice apple cultivation. Walnut, apricots, plum are other commonly grown fruits. Potatoes, cauliflower, cabbage, green beans, green peas, tomatoes are few types which are



Plate: 4.9 Apple Orchids, Plum and Apricot trees in the month of July grown in vegetable season.

As visible in the picture, apple trees are inter-cropped with maize and string beans. Irrigation is not used in Kobang VDC. All the fields are rain fed. Among 6 villages of Kobang VDC, only fields at Sauru village were found to be irrigated. But these days it is no longer practiced

Forest

Kobang VDC is situated in the cold temperate zone in the range from 2000m to 3000m (NTNC 2008). This falls among the wettest part of the district and is dominated by coniferous forest. Due to good rainfall, the landscape in this area is dominated by evergreen forests, particularly pine and fir species.



Plate: 4.10 A small piece of resinous Pine (Methang) is used for kindling.

Forests are still the main source of energy in Mustang. Approximately, 89% households still depend on fuel wood for cooking and heating purposes (NTNC 2008). The use of *diyalo* or pine wood for lighting is still in practice. Use of kerosene, LPG gas is limited to certain groups of people only. Solar water heating system is also becoming popular esp. among hotel and lodges owners.

Forest and agriculture in Kobang is inter-related as it was years ago. People are dependent on forest not only for fodder, fuel, and manure but at the same time they collect different types of NTFPs for self-consumption. Like other parts of Mustang NTFPs are not used commercially in large amount.



Plate: 4.11 Yarshagumba
(*Cordyceps sinensis*)

Gathered information shows that, it is Yarshagumba which is collected and sold commercially in the market with the consent of CAMC (Conservation Area Management Committee) as well as ACAP. All the villagers are eligible for the bidding of the Yarshagumba tender. With the consent of all the members of CAMC, day for bidding is fixed and the one, who gives highest bid, wins the tender. However, the contractor himself doesn't go for the collection of Yarshagumba. Interested persons take 'Purji' from him and go for collection. But again, they themselves cannot sell Yarshagumba in the market. Rules and regulations of CAMC don't allow them to do so; instead they again have to sell the collected Yarshagumba at prices fixed by the contractors to the contractors. They have to pay fine if it is disclosed that they have sold it to any other person rather than the contractor. Informal talks helped me to know that those who are smart enough, they somehow sell it outside and earn a good sum. One Yarshagumba is sold at Nrs. 45. According to the locals, it is low price when compared to the hardships they suffer to collect Yarshagumba in high altitudes. The price was a bit high in the adjoining VDC Lete. I was informed by the resident of Lete (who was brother of the hotel owner at Khanti) that it is Nrs. 100 there. The day I reached Kobang, they had meeting regarding the bidding of Yarshagumba. I was fortunate to attend the meeting on the same day. The tender was passed for 160,000 which according to the villagers was triple of the last year. The partners who won the tender were satisfied with the price as they believe that it's easy to recover the spent amount.

Women of Kobang VDC are not involved in the collection of Yarshagumba. The reason mentioned was the remoteness and difficulty in collection at high altitude. The people who go for the collection stay there for many days in groups and it is difficult for women. However, there were women who go for the collection of Yarshagumba but they are not locals, instead women come from different areas, especially Myagdi and Dolpa for the collection. In Kobang VDC, I heard name of two women who go for the collection. One was from Naurikot village, she was not able to go for collection this year due to her new born child and the second one was from Sirkung Village, whom I was not able to meet due to her busy schedule. I tried a lot to meet her and went to Sirkung many times but still I couldn't make it and was not able to involve her in my respondents list.

60 years old, the president of mother's group at Naurikot commented '*I worked a lot when I was young. Yarshagumba is collected mostly by outsiders. Women from outside the village are also involved in the collection. When we were young there were no such places where we had not reached*'.

Besides, Yarshagumba the forest of Kobang VDC also contains different valuable herbs like '*Jatamasi, Panch aaugle, Titepati*' and so on. Villagers told me that there are only few people who go for the collection as they have to be collected from distant places. These are collected in small quantity for home use only. Women never go to collect these item or herbs. Yak Herders who go to high altitudes basically are the people who collect these herbs. Though it has been told by many that the collection was only for home consumption, very often it was also mentioned by other few people that few bring them to the market also.

Beside, needles of pine trees known as *sun* in local language are used to make compost mixing it with cow dung. Village headmen with consultation with other members fix days for *sun* collection. The rules are different for different villages. A household can collect two *Dokos*¹² per individual in Khanti, Kobang and Larjung where as in other villages like Sauru, Nakung, Naurikot and Sirkung it is only two members from the family who are allowed to



Plate: 4.12 'Sun' mixed with cow dung.

¹² A kind of basket made up of bamboo used for carrying things

collect sun twice a day. It depends upon the availability of the *sun*. If the forest area is enough to cover everyone's need then dates are not fixed but in case where the forest area is small and it is not enough to meet the needs of villager's, dates are fixed for collection. People mentioned that the rules have become a bit flexible these days. Previously, it was those who fall within *Kuriya*¹³ category used to enjoy much freedom regarding sun collection. *Ferke*¹⁴, the other groups were not allowed to collect as much as *sun* as *Kuriyas*, but it was told that now there is no such differentiation.



Plate: 4.13 Stored wood

Firewood is other important product of forest which villagers solely depend on. According to the villagers, people don't face problem concerning the collection of firewood.' *There are plenty of dried wood for collection, all you need is your time. We can find plenty of wood on the bank of Gandaki and there is good amount of dried fallen wood also in the forest area*', the villagers informed about the availability of dried fallen wood. Respondent esp. from Nakung and Naurikot informed that due to limited access in nearby forests, they have to go in more distant forest in search of fodder and fuel wood. According to the rules of FUG,

villagers are allowed to collect as much as firewood as they can from the floor of the forest and they can cut dried trees but they are fined if they will cut the green trees for fuel.

'Green trees are not allowed to cut. Nrs. 50 is charged for the outsiders (those who don't live in village)',

Member of forest committee.

Regarding wood, for other use such as construction purpose people take '*purji*¹⁵, from the committee and pay per cubic feet. Respondents as well as other people who were part of informal talks favoured old rules. According to them the rules are good only for the well to do people. Poor suffer because they can't afford the prices.

'I don't know, if the rules are for good or not. I personally feel it is good for the forest but for the poor the rules are not favourable. We really suffer because of the new rules. In old days, we have to keep one rupees only and that was enough, now we have to pay big amount. I

¹³ Original local land owners of the Kobang VDC.

¹⁴ Migrant Locals of the Kobang VDC

¹⁵ License

have to mend my roof and wall (he showed me the wall and the broken roof) but for that I need 15, 000- 20, 000 Nrs’, mentioned a poor Thakali man from Larjung.

Illegal cutting of trees has also been reported but the cases have become very rare according to all of them. Half of the target population takes the rules in a positive way whereas half of them are not satisfied with the present existing rules and regulations.



Plate: 4.14 Jimbu, dried Morals, fresh Morals, Bamboo Sprouts, Tawai and fresh mushroom in the forest.

Other NTFPs (Non-Timber Forest Products) such as mushrooms, grass, green leafy vegetables, *Bamboo sprouts*, *dhokayo*¹⁶, Jimbu (*Allium wallichii*) and other edible things are additional forest products which are procured by the locals in the area. Among these, mushrooms are sold commercially both in fresh

as well as dried form. Different types of mushrooms are found in different seasons. Commonly found type is called ‘Tawai’. It is sold at Nrs. 300\ 350 per *pathi*. The most expensive is ‘Morals (*Morchellus*)’ which is locally known as ‘*Fertimo*’. It cost Nrs. 3000\ Kg. It is sold within the village area and served to the tourists. Morals are valuable export item to Europe. Dried forms of mushrooms are available throughout the year. It is specially used by those who run hotels. Majority of women and children are involved in mushroom collection.

Tourism

Mustang is the most popular tourism destination within the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) receiving almost 30% visitors trekking in ACAP (NTNC 2008). Tourism forms the largest service industry in the world. It is one of the very important aspects of the socio-economic life of the locals of the Kobang VDC. It has been presumed that it can not only help in ensuring environmental conservation but also helps to employ and empower women and ethnic minorities (Ringer 2007). There are 9 lodges/hotels in Kobang VDC. Besides, there are inns and informal lodges, which primarily serve the local, domestic tourists as well as other travellers.

¹⁶ Type of Spinach

Almost each and every household runs a kind of hotel in their own kitchen. Due to the impact of tourism, we can also find standard lodges and small hotels in the VDC. The number decreases when we go up steep slopes of Nakung and Naurikot village. But still during different kinds of festivities like blood drinking ceremony of yak all those who have yak as livestock asset place their stall at the spot where the ceremony takes place. It was observed that all the households which were enquired has taken tourism as a kind of livelihood strategy though it was said by the locals that business is down these days even at the main road due to improvement in transportation facilities. It was told that the business was very good when there were no vehicles. Tourists used to love walking down to Ghasa and would stay in the mid-way to take some rest. During those days it was informed that, it was hectic to manage the business at the hotel and the income was good.

4.1.4 Infrastructural facilities

On an average, the living conditions, in the Kobang VDC are much improved when compared to other villages of Nepal. Tourism might be stated as a reason for this. Secondly, it might be due to the ongoing ACAP project. The presence of mother's group in each and every village of Kobang VDC works for different kinds of aim's including environmental cleanness. The place is clean and has dustbins at different places placed by ACAP.



Plate: 4.15 Dustbin Placed by ACAP

Almost all the household in Kobang are electrified (except one). Hotel and lodges use solar power for commercial purpose. Each village has been consigned with one telephone line. But instead of keeping it for communal purpose, it has been informed that any person who win the tender keep and use it on personal basis. Basically rich Thakali from the village has kept the phone and they use it on a commercial basis.

These days, it has become easier to reach Mustang due to available transportation facilities. However, though we can find transportation to Kobang, the road (Beni-Jomsom road) is not metalled and is very bumpy and dusty with potholes with more rough conditions during winter. During rainy season, it becomes difficult to run vehicles, so people have to walk down towards south. The government has proposed to develop the ambitious Kali Gandaki National Highway along the Kali Gandaki corridor which has been assumed to take probably

Water mills are powered by running water. But all the villages don't have water mills. There is only one water mill in Kobang village.

People from Khanti, Sirkung, Larjung come to Kobang to grind their crops. Water is needed by all but it is basically women's need as it is women's duty to bring fulfil the water necessity of a household. Women are still responsible for the water supply within the family and it is women who generally use the water mills. Though situation revealing conflicts or violence because of water scarcity haven't been found, long trips to fetch water and to the water mills are still not just time-consuming, it also affect the physical health of the women. For those women who have easy access to water and have taps in their home, they face no problem, but those who have to cover a vast distance to carry water, for them time and energy counts a lot. This is specifically true for the villages such as Sauru, Naurikot, Nakung, Sirkung. Women are the main users of water and *Dhara* is gendered as womanly space. It is usually women who spend a considerable part of their day collecting and using water.

Sanitation

Improved sanitation is important as a protection against socially and physically degrading surroundings, health risks, and exposure to dangerous environmental conditions. In Kobang VDC, majority of the poor people do not have proper drainage and/or sewerage facilities. This is especially true in the case of *Sauru*, inner parts of *Larjung*, *Sirkung* as a whole, *Nakung*, and *Naurikot* as well. Rich villagers have toilets at their home but for poor it is a major problem and especially for females.

Thakalis are very religious people. They still follow social and religious traditions. Four clans of Thakalis have four monasteries in Kobang and people both at home and abroad donate to keep their religion flourishing. They still send their kids for monk education. Many of them are studying in India. It may be commented that people have made modernization and their cultural life as a part of same coin. Thakalis follow a supportive pattern in their society and make a helping chain within their community for economic prosperity. The social capital of the people is strong as they have a system of helping their members in need.



Plate: 4.19 Village map of Larjung/Kobang/Khanti

CHAPTER V

“It is your space”

Social construction and Gendering of space in Kobang VDC

Normally when the questions arises of ‘do and don’t’, regarding work division among men and women in Asian societies, it’s not surprising to have a common answer from all the regions of Asia. Women’s are regarded as the ‘*queen*’ of home and men as the ‘*king*’ of the outside world. In other words, women are confined to the household boundary busy with their domestic chores. But along with the passing time, woman has crossed her boundary and engaged herself beyond reproductive works. We use different metaphors today like feminisation of agriculture, feminisation of labour and even feminisation of migration. These metaphors indicate that now women are everywhere. Does this mean that now work division in our societies have taken its reversed turn involving men in the domestic chores? Most of us, will answer this question perhaps with a sweet smile on their face ‘No, not at all’, and few with rage, frowning their brows will answer, ‘No, instead, this has increased the burden for women who now have to look after their household affairs as well as to assist their husband in livelihood earnings. Then, this surely suggests that, women work more than men in Asian societies. Does more hour of work bring equal status as those of men for her? Why women are working hours and hours on the face of such inequality? Here, we use something which is called ‘Social Construction’ and ‘Gender Ideology’ (Chapter II).

A popular conception about ‘Tibeto- Burmese’ women is that they are comparatively free to decide than the ‘Indo- Aryan’ group of women. Thakali women belong to Tibeto-Burmese origin. In this chapter, based on the collected data I will make an attempt to discuss how ‘*Gender*’ is ‘constructed in Kobang VDC and how it has shaped the lives of women.

5.1 Gender Stereotypes in the Kobang VDC

Case I: (Suddenly on the way, walking down the street, in a group of four people, one suggested to buy some green leafy vegetables ‘*Saag*’).

M1: *oho! So good ‘Saag’ there, why not to buy one bunch for dinner.*

M2: *that’s good idea. Let’s go and buy.*

Cont..... M1: (He bought the 'saag', but refused to carry it). "Keti haru lai sabji bokeko suhau6". It doesn't suit me, it suits girls. You carry it.

F1: Ok (she carried the bag without any objection).

Case II: I had to walk down towards South because of the ongoing strikes and the bad weather. I was fortunate to have a company. The person was going to Kathmandu to make some documents. We were perhaps of the same age. He was carrying a very small bag while I was carrying a heavy bag relative to his bag. He was fast. He told me that when he was a kid he used to walk down to Kathmandu (he had his schooling from there). My steps were shorter and I was slow. He felt uncomfortable and asked:

M: Can I help you?

F: (Smiling...) No am ok. A person should carry his or her loads themselves; otherwise they will be habituated to it and will try to lean on the other person always. I will tell you if am tired.

M: Ok! But I suspect if the passer bys and other people at different village must be wondering looking at us that: the man is carrying such a small bag and the woman, she is with such a heavy load (... and he laughs...)

The above mentioned cases clearly depict the prevalence of gender stereotype in my study area. Traditionally, a division of labour based on gender has existed in most societies. This has resulted in one set of roles for women and another set for men and these socially constructed stereotypes, roles, opportunities and relationships associated with being male or female are referred to as 'Gender ideologies' (Pincha 2008). Gendering of work division or gendering of space is not written laws but we find ourselves following them. Gender doesn't speak itself, but we act according to it. Women are regarded as weaker and disadvantaged as they lack power and status. With the help of the above examples, I have tried to present the simple gender division of work which is common in most of the parts of Nepal and which exists in Kobang VDC also. It is not respectable for a man to carry items related to the kitchen. It is considered as womanly and suited for women only. The women also carry the vegetables without any objection as the prevalent ideology is within both of them. Again, it is unrespectable for a man to carry a lighter weight when compared to women. Existing norms says women are weaker and men are stronger so, heavier load should be carried by men not by women. A very good example can be found in the Eastern hills of Nepal where female porters carry 60 kilos and male porters carry 80 kilos of weight respectively.

Literature presents Tibeto-Burmese\Thakali\Mountain women's status higher than Indo-Aryan\Hindu\Terai women. Researchers like Messerschmidt(1982), Acharya (1983), Watkins (1996), Vinding (1998),Gurung (1999) and many others, all of them, have noticed about the degree of freedom which women of Tibeto-Burmese group have relative to that of Indo-Aryan group of women. Watkins (1996) have studied Nyeshangte women and found a solid power base of women in land ownership and control of money within the household. She calls it an 'equal opportunity society', where women wielded considerable power and authority and had effective control over their lives. She talks about symmetrical gender relations and hence of gender equality in Nyeshang community. A similar observation has been made by Vinding 1998, he points out that the cash and the key to the safe are all entrusted to women in Thaksatse. Thakali women play an important part in the village economy. Women are not restricted to agricultural and domestic work but also engaged in income generating activities. Thakali women contribute much to the income of the household and compared to the status of women in Nepal in general and Hindu women in particular, they enjoy relatively high status and much freedom. Likewise, there are more studies which show that many mountain women have more freedom of movement and independence in decision making at the local level than women in the lowlands. It is believed that less rigid indigenous beliefs have often led to greater status for mountain women (Sherpa n.d). This is still true, when we compare Thakali women to other Hindu caste women. But, like other communities in other parts of Nepal, community in Kobang VDC also has some do and don't for men and women. Work division has been made on the basis of gender.

Theories of modernization dictate that women and men were socialized and were fitted into different roles within the family or the society, within which they are most suited. This division was necessary for the smooth functioning of both family and society. The reason which theorists present is *that it eliminated competition between husband and wife, ensured the proper socialization of children and allowed the family to act in unison in relation to the rest of the world.* They were optimistic that with the passing time and with the advancement of modernisation *women will gain freedom from drudgery and can exercise her talents in the same way as men. But contrary to the expectations prejudice and preconceptions about women in the society persisted in spite of the forces of modernisation* (Kabeer 1994) and women are overloaded with extra work, inside and outside her house.



Plate: 5.2 Reproductive work of women: a woman carrying and the other feeding the child while at work.

Men prefer to wander around when not at work. When a man from Khanti was asked why didn't he work at home and help his niece and sister-in-law. He could see that they are busy with their works; at least he could help them with the cleaning and in the kitchen. It is better than to sit idle for the whole day. He answered, '*why to work when the 'Cheli –Beti'*¹⁷ are present in the house and above that it is women's job'.

Although men and women in Nepali village have culturally defined sphere of activities, the village women have heavier workload compared to men. Women have more responsibilities at home and at village (Acharaya & Bennett 1981; Shrestha 2001).



Plate: 5.3 Unpaid and invisible work of women.

She was working in her *bari*. I asked if I could help her. An old lady was working even though she was ill, it was awkward, standing there and watching her to work all by herself. She just uttered '*saknu huncha ra (I suspect if you can do)?*' She finished her work and we returned to her courtyard where her husband was still sitting on the chair. She went inside her kitchen. I sat beside him. He started to ask about my work. After a while I asked permission to leave.

'*Please come inside, nani!*' the lady urged. I went inside. She offered me hot water with a piece of bread. We started to talk bits and pieces of here and there. As I have been living in Khanti for so many days, I was now well updated with some sort of news about the village and the community. I asked if it is tea time for them. It was then 4. 30 pm. She told me that her husband (and other guests), just had lunch at

¹⁷ Daughters of the family

1 pm. After finishing all the works, she went to *bari*. There was a dumb¹⁸ woman in the house to help her but as she was ill, she has to do everything by herself. She went outside to bring fuel wood and told me to be there and that she will be back. She was coughing badly. I was feeling uncomfortable. I asked her to take medicine. Her husband went out with his brothers for a walk (*Ghumera aaune*) I asked, if he help her. She said ‘yes’, *but he doesn’t help when there are outsiders or guest in the house (pauna bhako bela ma ta k garnu hunthiyo ra)*’.

She continued; *‘The pain is relatively better now. Last week, we had guest all around our house. I used to take tablets to cook and serve them food. When it was unbearable I used to go inside and lay down in my bed, but again I thought, my works will not be over like this and again I used to come to the kitchen’.*

Thakali women from Khanti, from a better-off family

Women are never too old to handle a work but when a man is aged, he is old and he should not work. This is the case even when wife is elder than her husband. I have found several similar cases¹⁹ in Kobang VDC, where women used to work even when she was older than her husband and husband’s work was just to eat and attend the gossips in men’s gathering.

A man can sit unoccupied wandering throughout the day, but it turns out to be not respectable for him to help the woman in the kitchen. One woman works as a teacher, runs a hotel, and also has to work in her house and in her fields. She also makes a livelihood from selling TV channel licenses and since her husband has been abroad since a year, she is responsible for outside work too. Her father-in-law’s work for the whole day was only to take the animals from their shed and lead them to the jungle. In the evening, the cows themselves used to return back to their shed, so he was not even bothered to bring them back. He used to sit idle throughout the day, gossiping with other men and always waiting for his daughter-in-law to come and cook for him. But again, the case is applicable only when women are present in the home. When women are far gone or where there is no women in the house, men do everything by themselves. If a man is unmarried and people see him doing household chores, then it is usual to receive comments from the people that he should get married to get his work done by his wife (Observation: Kobang village).

¹⁸ In the VDC, I observed number of dumb people both male and female. They were in between 45-55 age groups. The reason may be iodine deficiency.

¹⁹ See Table 4.4 : Occupation of the selected households: Idle category

5.2 Gender as a Cultural Institution

Our cultural practices are important reflection of our lives. What kinds of roles we are awarded during different kinds of festivals and religious ceremonies also determine what kind of status we hold in our societies. I was told that during festivals like ‘*Fagun Purnima*’ only males go to ‘*Khimi*’²⁰, and female do the cooking jobs at home. Not only in *Fagun Purnima* but in any religious or cultural activities women’s participation is always less. Even in ‘*Bhado Jatra*’, one of the biggest festivals in Kobang, women’s jobs are always in the kitchen. Same as in the Hindu culture, the position of a priest is held by a male and all the religious rituals are performed by him. However, unlike the Hindus they worship young boys rather than young girls. I have been to the *Narsang Gumpa* which is also known as Maha laxmi Mandir²¹, above the village of Khanti where people were worshipping one young boy of 4 years as they believed that he was the incarnation of their former guru. The priest was involved in different kinds of rituals and the women at home were involved in cooking, cleaning and other household work. Like Hindus, in Thakali society as well, men are served first and after they finish eating, women take the food (I was exceptional as I was a guest). This custom of eating after male members is common in Hindu and even Muslim societies. This is a good example which shows how women are awarded lower status in society, which is in some ways very similar to how you show dominance to your pet dog.

I had also been to a *Puja* organised in the forest of Sauru village. The reason behind the *puja* was that due to the landslide the previous year, the forest, the apple orchids and settlement had all been destroyed. So, the *Puja* was organised to pray against that disaster. All the male members of Sauru village were present but during the whole processes until the end I couldn’t see any women in the crowd. I asked why the females were not present, men answered, ‘*because they have work at home and in the fields*’.



Plate: 5.4 Men sacrificing a goat in the puja at Sauru

²⁰ Temple

²¹ See Fisher 2001 Chap. 8 Pp. 185

Another important cultural event in the VDC is Blood drinking festival. The entire household which have Yaks, they establish inns at the spot and all other villagers, including people from different parts of Nepal, come to drink the blood. I went there with the teachers of Kobang School. Men were busy in playing different kinds of games such as *Tara*²², *Para*²³, eating and drinking and women's were busy in cooking, cleaning and serving their customers. Gender division of work was explicitly clear and it could be found even in the selection of games played by boys and girls. The Women\ girls were busy in the works in the festival, it were only men\young boys who were playing. It was explained that women usually play indoor games such as cards and girls play *goti*.²⁴ Similarly, women are not allowed to get involved in the initial days of funeral. When I was in the VDC, there were two incidences of deaths. The Mukhiya of Kobang village died suddenly and it was only male who went to Jomsom. Women went only after two days.

5.3 Gender, Social Norms and Perceptions

Gender roles and ideologies are part of social structure. Local ideology, social norms and values determines the overall status of women in her society which exuberate existing intra-household inequalities. Thakali women have higher status than the *dalits*, likewise rich women have higher status than the poor women in the society. However at household decision making level, sometimes the reverse case is found. Dalit women sometimes exercise more power in the household decision making (Almquist 1987) than the Thakali women.

She is working as a librarian in Kobang village. Her husband works as a teacher. At 26, she has three daughters of 8, 5 and 3 years of age respectively. She had to stop her studies after her marriage. But she couldn't stop herself from disclosing her interest to study further. She says, '*I got the chance to complete my I.A from Tukucho, I feel lucky for that as my husband was really co – operative*'.

She continued, '*In our time, girls were never encouraged to continue their studies. In our school, we had only class up to 8 and after that if we wish to continue with our studies we had to go to Tukucho. Parents think that when girls go out and study, they write letters and do many wrong things. This worries them. This way of thinking has not changed a bit. It still exists*'. Pointing towards gender imbalance in her society she says, '*this kind of case is usual in Thakali society. Though women have hold inside their household but they lack influence in society*'.

²² Archery \shooting

²³ Game like Ludo, played with the help of dices

²⁴ A game played with five pieces of stone

She agrees that her husband is cooperative and helps her when he has free time but again she disagrees with the popular concept about Thakali society that people have. Citing example of 'Nari Diwas (Women's Day)' she said, '*there was a program organised by ACAP on women's day few months back. One of the representative from ACAP, he was giving a speech. Men and women are equal. Both should treat each other with respect and equality and should not misbehave on the basis of gender. But in this District (Mustang), everything is in women's hand, in contrast, men has to ask for money from the women. Everyone clapped and there was a round of applause for him. But I was discontent and dissatisfied. In my case though my husband is a teacher, he still wants a son. I have three daughters I want to stop now, but our society (Thakali) still has different importance for a boy and a girl child*'

Gender has also been known to determine perceptions about abilities and to lead to discriminatory hiring and payment practices (Agrawal 1997). Similar to the other villages of Nepal, existing gender inequities are still prevalent in case of wage labour in Kobang



Plate: 5.5 Only man among 11 women in the field at Sauru Village.

VDC. Women are considered to be less productive. When I asked about the reason, a woman from Sauru said, "*Keta le chito kaam garcha, keti le ali dhila tei ho (boys works faster than girls, that set)*". But, my observation was something different. I was in the field with all the



Plate: 5.6 A man and women working in same pace in the field.

women in Sauru. There was only one man among 11 women. They divided themselves in a group of 4 at first according to the width of the row of the fields. Then, each group was assigned one row. All the four labours stood in same start point and start to plough the row together. The man was not an inch ahead of women. He was working together with them in the same pace.

'Men get Nrs. 100 and a packet of oil can be bought, women receive only 70 Nrs and she can't even buy one packet of oil from that earned money' the women continued.

As mentioned above, culturally defined gender roles and domain exist in Kobang VDC also. Many studies show that Hindu as well as Buddhist women are barred from ploughing and it has also been expressed how this restriction affects the autonomy of single or widowed women who have to rely on the good will of male relatives or hire male labourers to plough. In Kobang, widows and single women told that they cannot proceed to their fields until it is

ploughed and as they can't plough themselves due to cultural restrictions, they have to depend on men always. *"There is no alternative for us. We have to wait for them"* commented a Thakali widow from Sauru.



Plate: 5.7 Division of work on the basis of gender in Kobang VDC.

5.4 Gender and Land Rights

In 1975, Nepal amended Muluki Ain (National Code) to grant inheritance right to daughters if they remained unmarried up to the age of 35 years (Bhadra 2007). Finding of Acharya &

"Property rights belong to men till they are alive, it is not meant to be in our name before that, how could it be?" A Woman from Kobang Village

Bennett 1981; Gurung 1999, declares the difference between the Indo-Aryan and the Tibeto-Burman groups and the differences which exist even within each of these groups in terms of social relations governing gender relations. However, their findings suggests that in spite of this diversity, land is inherited universally in all communities from the father to the son and women lag far behind men in access to economic resources, knowledge and modern avenues of employment.

In my study area, meagre number of women has land rights. It is only widows or unmarried girls who sometimes hold the land and house in her name.

"Women don't have land rights in Kobang" Resident of Khanti and Teacher at Sauru School

Agrawal 1994 highlights something which she calls 'the gap between ownership and control'. In most cases though women have access to resources they are not entitled to it. *In our Thakali society everything is within women's hands. Even if it is in her name or is not in her name, it is her responsibility to look after the property'*, stated a Thakali woman from Naurikot

A wife can claim partition on basically two situations in Nepal. First, she can claim family property if her husband remarries and secondly, after her husband's death. The only condition which applies is that her husband should be the household head and has already partitioned (Agrawal 1994). However, there are examples where land inherited by women may not be formally registered in her name and sometimes mother's are deceived by their own son,

brother or any other family member (Agrawal 1994). Same kind of case was found in Kobang VDC. One widow from Naurikot, she still didn't have the house or fields in her name as it went directly to her son's name and now, she was obliged to move into a rented house along with her daughters and a son. Her elder son got separated after his father's death. The other two cases were also from the same village.

Ability to take decision regarding the use of land such as the disposal of land, sale, or mortgage reflects the issue of the gap between ownership and control (Agrawal 1994). Though women sometimes hold the control on different decisions regarding the use of land, they don't have freedom to sell or use it as collateral for a loan because she lack land rights.

She is not a widow, she is not even divorced. She is a young (29) single mother of three small kids. She had just returned back from her fields. She spoke, *'due to problems at home, I couldn't read as I was the eldest in my home, I had to bear my responsibilities. 'I don't have luck'!* She went on talking along with doing her works.

Her eldest daughter is 13, who study at Jomsom School. She has to pay for food and tuition fee only, the rest of the things are free. One daughter is of 10 years who is in 3rd standard and she has one son who is only 5 years old. *'Shriman le kanchi liyera baseko cha (my husband has a new wife)',* she uttered. *'I am busy whole day with my work. I don't have time for anything. I don't attend meetings as I don't understand anything. Trainings are good if you get hold of them otherwise it's useless'.*

She continued, *'You can never find me in my house; I lock my door and go to work. I have to do all the work myself either it is men's work or women's work. last month I went 'south' for 23 days, not even a month, there was no one to look after my cows, when I came back I found one cow in poor health, now it is about to die'.* I asked her about the property rights. She answered, *'the property is not in my name (lal purja nammsari gareko chaina).*

She was poor, living in the worst condition. Though she was the household head and she was the sole decision maker, her decision making has nothing to do with institutions at communal level. She has the burden of her children, their education, and their stomachs. She is busy in meeting the basic requirements of her family. She works in the field but the land is not hers. Even the house where she is living, she doesn't own that either. She is dependent on her parents for different kinds of decisions. She gets help from them. Her husband lives nearby, though he meets, he doesn't talk. It's been 6 years; she was pregnant then, when he left her. Now that child is of 5 and half years old.

Again, sometimes women do have the right to use the property but they lack ownership and in many cases, women are silent because the society respects those women who remain within societal norms and boundaries. Women thus prefer not to raise their voice against it, in fear of losing the respect and recognition they have in the society

She is now 42. She is very well known respected women in her village. It's been 16 years her husband went abroad due to weak economic condition but till now he hasn't returned back. She has brought up all her kids alone. As her father was involved in social service, she says she had learnt a lot from him but couldn't get the chance to gain formal education. As she was the eldest daughter and she must help her mother in her works, she couldn't study.

She continued, *"I suffered, I didn't wanted my kids to suffer like me so, I wanted my kids to be educated but the things didn't turned out differently from what I have dreamt or wished for. When I saw you for the first time a thought came to my mind that I wanted my daughter to be like you. I want her to study as far as she wants"*.

When her husband went abroad her in-laws were alive, now they have deceased. It's been a couple of years. At that time, she was not the household head. She has to act according to her father-in-law. Now, he is not there to decide. Though she takes majority of decisions by herself, she takes advices from her relatives and now, as her son is grown up, she also ask him.

As she was involved in social service (in her words) and communal works from the very beginning, she can speak well, with well built phrase. She is member of CAMC, MG and also other groups in the VDC. She herself told about her husband during our informal talks but she never uttered any bad word for him. According to the villagers, her husband has a second wife there. She still respects him. He sends money for his children. She still has dreams for the bright future of her children. She comments, if they are able to achieve anything in life that would be her greatest reward.

5.5 Gender and Mobility

Women's mobility is determined by existing social institutions and gender ideologies. In all societies, whether it is Indo- Aryan or Tibeto-Burman, women are less mobile than men. If ten boys go out of the village for further studies, it is difficult for even a girl to think if she can go or not, even if she has the interest. Similarly, in Kobang women are never mobile of their own. They move only during winter and there are still a few who are never mobile at all.

'Didi, it is good to study. When I was in school, we didn't give much importance to our studies and we used to get scolded by our teachers. But now I feel it was good to be the way it was. I want to study staff nurse. I have told at home about my interest. Let's see how it goes...'

She was carrying heavy load on her head, her both hands were busy and she was talking to me. We were on the way to Khanti. She was with me as I didn't know the way to Khanti. She was going there to grind the corns. I asked if I can help her, she refused.

She continued, '*we don't have son in our house, my father is never satisfied and at peace because of that. Son is after all son, this kind of thoughts still exist here. My sister got married to a boy from different caste. My parents don't think it is right and they worry about me that I will do the same. I have to bring my female friend even when I go for water mill. There will be a lot of rumours when I walk by myself and we never walk with boys as people will automatically think we have an affair. It is just the way life goes...Tell my teacher to talk to my father so that I can accompany you*'. A young Thakali girl from Sirkung, waiting for her results of board exam.

Women and girls go to collect mushrooms but not Yarshagumba as to collect it one has to go very far. And it is difficult for women. One very important reason for this is that because she has to work at home as well as fields. When man is done with only one task, she has to do several others. The example of two women from Kobang VDC and other women from adjoining district Myagdi shows that it is not that women cannot do this job, but it is because she should not do what is considered not suitable for her.

Molesworth, in Premchander & Müller, eds. 2006, shows that despite of having traditionally very high degree of gender equality, as well as controlling the cash traditionally, how women still suffers from generational deference and subordination and they still fall within certain culturally defined gender roles and domains, such as ploughing (male) and brewing and distillation of alcohol (female).

Exposure and empowerment is somehow related in very close way. '*Men outside and women inside*', this is general phenomenon to be found in gender literature. Women and girls travel far less than their male counterparts. The difference in female and male mobility creates gap between exposure and access to resources and information. Becoming bound to the village and family based subsistence production; women have much less access to information and resources than men. *Consequently, the differential exposure of males and females to outside world gives rise to very different gendered worldviews* (Molesworth, in Premchander, and Müller 2006).

5.6 Gender and Essentialism: '*the things are this way, because it is this way*'

Sometimes, it is women themselves, whose irrational prejudices and misplaced assumptions results in discriminatory outcomes (Boserup 1970, cited in Kabeer, 1994). Women never question the lesser social value given to them on the grounds of their gender (Sherpa n.d.). Research shows adverse implications of their irrationality for themselves as well as for the other female members of the family. Various studies present the cases where women find no

other choices than to pull her daughters out of school in order to get some relief from excessive loads and thus, deny the child the right to education (Gurung, 1999).

R: So you want to keep your daughter in hostel!

W: No I m not keeping her. My two daughters are already in hostel. I need at least one in house. She needs to take care of many affairs. There should be someone to cook at home. Besides, it is difficult to educate all of them (5 Kids)

A dalit woman from Naurikot

More than 80 % of my respondents showed interest to study, even though few were old enough to read and write. They told me that due to work at home, their parents didn't let them to study. Almost everyone agreed that this is the main reason for girl's dropout from the school. 'Cases where girls had to drop because of the burden of household work still exist in the VDC', reported teachers as well as the respondents. Gender plays a major role in the unequal access of education to girls. Girls face much more discrimination in access to education (UNFPA 2007).

'if I have to start, my life is itself a story (Mero ta bhanne ho bhane kahani nai cha)', said a 37 years old Gurung women, migrated from Myagdi and she is living in Kobang for more than 15 years.

She recalled, 'my father didn't used to let me study. He used to tear down my books if he used to find it in my hands. My younger brother used to help me. I used to sneak under my blanket with the help of small light and I used to read'. I read up to 3rd class. After that I couldn't continue my studies. Now, the days has changed. My husband himself wants our daughter to reach at least SLC. I don't want my kids to be like us. "Aakha dekhne banaune (I want to educate them)'

".. .. Sarita (false name) from Sirking, she was forced to leave the school as there was no one to work at her house", remarked one of my respondent at Khanti. I heard there were two girls in 10th grade but one had stopped coming to the class. This was of-course worse for the girl as she was now unable to continue her studies but it was not also good on part of the other girl who was still coming as she was

the only girl in her class. Teachers wanted me to meet the all the five girls who had appeared for SLC exams that year and were waiting for their results, so that they could be encouraged to continue with further studies.

Kabeer's (1999) assertion that "women's acceptance of their secondary claims on resources and their adherence to social norms and practices specially discrimination against daughters not only undermine their own well-being but also perpetrate further gender inequalities", brings out true picture of our society (Hindu), and this is true for other societies also, like

those in Kobang VDC. Adhering to social institutions, women teaches her daughter to be what it is called to be an ideal women and expects her to follow all the roles and responsibilities, which she has been doing since decades. Being a mother, sometimes unknowingly discriminates between her daughter and son, giving an extra load to her daughter and restricting her rights to different kinds of resources and thus, supports existing social ideologies and institutions.

She is 50, old, poor, illiterate. Her daughter died when she was only 14. She has 4 sons who don't live with them now. She remember her daughter and said, *'sons left us after marriage. Now only we two live here. If my daughter had been alive today, she would have cooked for us, it would have been help for us'*.
A Woman from Khanti

In Naurikot village, I interviewed a woman who was the president of MG for 8 years. She told that her husband also used to hold different positions in village community groups. Now, they both are old and are not interested. When I asked her about girls education she replied, *"Girls are not much educated in our village. It is not beneficial even if they are educated. So, it is good to allow them to read up to 7 or 8 classes and after that it is better to engage them in agriculture.....* She paused and then continued again, *'when they start to understand 'the facts of life'!*

Whenever I saw her, she used to be always busy with her household chores. I observed that she had a shop inside her house. She sold a packet of noodles and soap to a small girl in front of me. Her husband was lying down in the veranda. She continued *'we are only two persons at home, we are never free'*. She added, they hire people for the fields and even for the fuel wood collection. Her husband was listening to us. I enquired if he could tell me something about the village. She replied, *"My work is to do household chores, to cook, to clean and his work is to sleep, to eat, and to gossip. He doesn't know much about household stuffs, he eats if there is cooked food and he doesn't eat if the food is not cooked Poor him! According to her he is now old enough to do any works"*.

It is not new that usually women have to go through women first. At home, it is woman who significantly influences children's psychological development and emotional attachments, in the process reproducing gender (Lorber 1994). As a mother, she is the one who knows about her child's interest and she is the one who decides whether the interest \desires of her kids to be kept in front of her husband or other household head or not. Underestimation of her own

self, results in further underestimation of her daughter. Sherpa 2005 quotes “Often, not always, women are the promoters of patriarchy, simply because they lack the awareness and confidence to speak out against it. In most of the cases, women take their lower status for granted”. A woman from Khanti praises her daughter in these words. ‘Chora ta raja ho ni (My son is king, pampering her son)’, He doesn’t help me. My daughter does. She is very young still she does. It is now difficult to understand if she is praising her son or daughter.

As argued, often women’s own prejudices and preferences inhibit them from access to the outside world (Kabeer 1994). Women themselves essentialise differences, accept them and then maintain the same concepts into the next generation.

‘Most of the jobs done by men are rough. They are careless whereas those done by women are smooth and fine. There are jobs which men are supposed to do and women don’t like to do’.

‘Keta le gareko kaam khasro huncha, ani keti le gareko kaam masino’.

Women themselves keep the disparities alive by accepting the notion that ‘the task to be done by men is done by men and those which are meant for women are done by women’.

‘Don’t ask us about such issues as forest, NTFPs and so on. Ask these kinds of questions to men, instead ask us how much rice we cook, how much vegetable we cook. A woman said very rudely, and all the women out there supported and repeated her words with a round of laughter.

Female subjectivity and stereotyping is the same for the women in Kobang as it is for the women of Indo-Aryan group. The cultural values are shaped by patriarchal ideals in Kobang. Females in Kobang VDC are considered lower and inferior than men and thus have lower status than men. Men are the owners of production, while women are without property. A woman’s status depends on her ‘fallback position’ (Agrawal, 1994; 1997). The status of literate and earning women differs from those who are illiterate. Status also depends on age (Sherpa, 2005). Younger women’s statuses are always lower than those of older women. Women’s status increases as she grows with her age. A daughter’s status rises when she becomes a mother and again, mother’s status rises when she becomes mother-in-law, again when she becomes grandmother. Women’s roles are defined by cultural values and beliefs systems that have

evolved over generations as a response to the particular needs and experiences in the societies and her status depends on her role in the family.

On one hand, there are studies which point Tibeto-Burmese society as an ‘equal opportunity society’ where women wielded considerable power and authority in their own households and have effective control over their own lives. In contrast, there are studies which reveal that patriarchy is prevalent in Bhuddhist society also, even where women traditionally share more egalitarian relationship with men, patriarchal values have defined the gender relations between men and women. For example, as mentioned in pp. 75, the rule of land rights is equally applicable in both societies. Further, few studies reveals that there are same Sanskrit based proverbs in Tibetan language used by the Buddihist community in Humla (a remote district in Nepal), that describe women’s lower status (Thapa 1996 cited in Gurung 1999). Even in pure Bhuddhist societies like Bhutan, the notion of males having achieved a higher status at birth than females is commonly expressed (Roder 1997 cited in Gurung, 1999). Kobang VDC also contains some very popular proverbs which exist in Hindu society that expresses ascribed space and work for women in society.

The popular proverb in Nepalese society is still famous in Kobang VDC:

“Chora kul ko diyo, chori mutu ko diyo” (Son uphold the family traits; whereas daughter are always part of heart). Women from Khanti

The old perception that sons are the bearers of family traditions where as daughters go to their husbands’ homes and leave the parents’ home, so they are part of heart(metaphor), clearly replicate the gendered nature of “*ascribed space*” in Kobang for men as well as women.



Plate: 5.7 Ascribed work on the basis of Gender

CHAPTER VI

I am not free

Participation and Decision Making

Kobang VDC has been influenced by the various projects co-ordinated by government and non-governmental organisations. A prominent development effort has been made through ACAP, which was implemented in 1986. ACAP is the largest conservation area in Nepal. It covers 55 VDCs in 5 districts, including Mustang. It is Nepal's most popular trekking destination with over 23,226 trekking tourists(in lower Mustang) in the year 2007, which is over 42% compared to 2006 (NTNC 2008).

In this chapter, I am presenting different kinds of communal institutions that exist in Kobang VDC and I will try to make an effort to discuss various factors that ultimately affect women's role and their participation in decision making at household as well as at communal level in Kobang VDC. I will start with the list of main institutions followed with the participation and decision making issues within it.

6.1 Institutions

The primary communal organisations which have existed through decades in Kobang VDC before the introduction of the projects are:

Goan Samiti (Village committee)

Goan Samiti is the oldest and traditional organisation which has existed to solve many kinds of problems. The system of *Mukhiya* (Village Headman: VH) is still practised in Kobang. VH are elected on the basis of local consensus. They administer village affairs and act as guardians for maintaining local culture and tradition (NTNC 2008). VH is still counted as the head of the committee. As in old days there is no fixed number of members in the committee but VH and *Ghundel* are still kept as executive members to fulfil different aims. VH still has his reputed position among the villagers and all the decisions are passed through his consent. VH directs *Ghundel* to circulate the information in the village. *Ghundel* is selected for one

year, and after a year again new *Ghundel* is selected. The meeting is organised on 1st *Shrawan*²⁵ every year and then the selection takes place.

'People come directly to Mukhiya. It becomes easier to meet other people through him. Everyone listens to and follow his words and actions. Although system is on the verge of its extinct, however, it still exists. As the selection procedure passes through him and most of the decisions (esp. related to Thakali) are made by him. Indirectly he is involved in every matter including forest affairs. Besides, he still has much hold in his village and his decision still matters'.

Key informant, a government employee, working in Kobang District Ward

Thakali Sewa Samaj Samiti.

Thakali Sewa Samaj Samiti is basically meant for the upliftment of the Thakali group. The Samiti consists of 13 village headmen from 13 villages of Thaksatse area. They have one committee hall for organising meetings in Kobang village. Besides, it also has its advisory committee members. Six women regional representatives are also included in the *Samiti* along with the president of the mother's group as the 7th female member.

Aama Samuh (Mother's Group\ MG)

Respondents informed me that this kind of group had existed before the introduction of ACAP. Before the introduction of ACAP, it was called '*Mahila Sangha*' which has been renamed and reformed by ACAP since 1990s as '*Aama Samuh*'. It was established to address women's issues and to bring them in the main stream of conservation and development program. Through this program, it has been tried to activate women in income generating activities, trail construction, and plantation and clean up campaign. It is compulsory for all the women in the village to be member of the group. There are five executive members in the group (president, vice-president, secretary, vice-secretary and treasurer). In old days, for whole VDC, there was only one group, now along with main group, each village have their own sub- mother's group which is called '*Upa-Aama Samuh*'. The president is elected every five years. Under the supervision of ACAP, women have been able to involve themselves in different kinds of activities\ training such as: environmental, gender, vegetable seed production, agriculture development, adult literacy class, women group internal study tour,

²⁵ Mid July-Mid August according to English calendar

conservation and management, reproductive health program and world women day celebration.

The MG's gather once a month and discuss on the provision of loans to their members, and control the interest and loan repayments. The fund is additionally enhanced by collective savings, whereby each woman's group member has to pay a small monthly fee. In addition they are also involved in other village development activities. All the women's groups regularly clean their villages.

Other main organisations which exist in Kobang VDC are as follows:

Table: 6.1 Local organisations in the VDC

<i>Organisations</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Total Members</i>	<i>Female Members</i>
Vidhyala Wayawasthapan Samiti	School management committee formed for the management of school affairs.	9	2
Dhaulagiri Club	This group formed by the youths and work in interest of the youths, such as organising games, festivals or other social or religious activities.	11	5
Mustang Service Society	The organization is dedicated to bring sustainable development in Kobang through sustainable management of natural, cultural and human resources.	7	2
Fal-Ful Tarkari-Bari Samuh	Different kinds of training and information are provided to women concerning various kinds of vegetables	All Women	-
Bakhara Samuh	It works for the improvement and increment of the capacity of the domestic animals. It promotes consumption of healthy goat	All Men	0
Bhupi Pushtakalaya Sanstha	Related to the management of the library	11	0
Trust Corse Samiti	Same as in mothers group this acts for the provision of loan based on the fund enhanced by collective savings.	12	3
Dhara Samiti	Related to the management of drinking water in the village	All villagers	-
Chauri Palan Samuh	Related to the supervision and care related to Yak	6-7 HHs who are owners of Yak	-
Buba samuh	Similar to mother's group, this consists of male members of all the household and works for the welfare of the village.	Male household head of the family	-

Source: Field work, 2008.

Table 6.1 show the formal participation of men and women in different communal institutions in the VDC. In most of the institutions, a criterion has been made to include at least a few women. As the table depicts, women's participation in the institutions are far less than men. The women involved in the institutions are from rich Thakali households in the VDC.

6.2 Participation and Decision making

6.2.1 Household level

M: We heard that you have yak's tail. *baini* wants to buy Yak's tail. Do you want to sell?

F: Yes, We want to sell it.

M: What is your price?

F: It is good a tail. It is big and it has a combination of both black and white colour (mixture of black and white fur is considered good). So it will cost a bit more than the white one.

M: How Much?

F: Nrs.1200

M: That is expensive. Make it reasonable and she will take.

F: Look at the tail. .it is so good. We didn't sell in the festival because no one gave a good price for it.

(We had discussion about the price for a long time, and then I told her that I will pay Nrs. 1000 and if it is ok with her?)

M: ok, the deal is done; *baini* will give you 1000 rupees that is good amount for the tail. He told me to give 1000 rupees. I handed the note of 1000 to the women.

F: (taking the money in hand ... in a low voice) *my husband might get upset; we kept this tail so far to get the good price*

M: Don't worry I will talk to your husband.

Yaks are treated same as cow among Hindus in Nepal. It is not worshipped in the same way as a cow but its tail is considered very pious in any kind of religious ceremony. Those who have Yaks, they sell its tail along with its meat, milk and blood. We can find Yak's tail even in the market in Asan Chowk at Kathmandu. My *Ma*²⁶ wanted me to bring one tail for her. As, I didn't had idea about the price and quality of the yak tail, I seeked help from a local

²⁶ Mother

resident of Kobang.²⁷ He took me to the woman's house who wanted to sell Yak's tail. She was a young lady of 28. I remembered we had already met in blood drinking festival. She was running an inn there (all the HHs who keeps 'Yak' participates in the festival). We (me and all teachers) went to her tent and she had served them 'rakshi'. At that time, she was talking about her Yak's tail. She wanted to sell it but she was not getting good price for that.

She was young and literate Thakali. She is involved in an inn business along with agriculture. She lives in Larjung²⁸. But still she had a fear that her husband will be upset if he found out about her decision of selling the Yak's tail for 1000 rupees. She doesn't hesitate to talk with males. She has to talk to run her business. She is not shy to talk and she is a good entrepreneur. This quality didn't help her to gain confidence and make a decision on her own.



Plate: 6.1 Woman Serving in the inn at blood drinking festival

It is an accepted fact that men's migration has something to do with improved status of women and improvement in their decision making power. It has given her an image which is something different from and beyond the stereotype image. However, the absence of male counterparts, although this allows women to accept the role as the head of the household, they remain at this position temporarily, just as a mere substitute (Kaspar 2006; Sherpa (n.d.)). The findings of various studies show that although women act as household head in the absence of her husband, she keeps the important decisions for their husbands when he returns. In the words of Kasper (in Premchander & Müller 2006), women's autonomy is limited to *operational decisions* only. In the same way in Kobang VDC the dealings related to land, house, animals as well as credit are done solely by men. In case of widows, it has been found that either they seek advice from their maternal home or other relatives and friends. I have seen one single mother from Naurikot seeking advice for every concern of hers from a teacher whom she has adopted as a brother. Another widow from Sauru, although

²⁷ Local resident of Kobang village, who was well known among all the villagers and was a respected member of many organisations in the VDC and at the same time he runs NGO in Kobang village.

²⁸ Larjung is considered as a market place along with Khanti and Kobang.

she no more lives together with her in-laws, she is dependent on major decisions by them who live in the same village a little away from her house.

Nevertheless, there were a few cases where it was found that in the absence of men, women take all decisions but when her husband return, they hand back the roles which they took over to their husbands again. The husband's role as formal household head is usually unquestioned. Kasper 1996 finds in her study that although a woman takes over roles from her husband, she does not challenge his position within the household; a husband's position is always protected.

In patriarchal societies, men's status is always above women's status. It is almost impossible to revolt against deeply rooted ideologies and perceptions. In doing so, she might risk her image of a good woman. Woman can never go against their marriages. It has been observed that women can speak against society but never against their husbands. A woman from Larjung, complained a lot about her village and society -that they are discriminated in terms of economic and social status but when questions were raised -if her husband supported her, she didn't speak anything against him. I heard from teachers that her husband drinks a lot and creates scene every time.

At Sauru, one Magar household head of the family had come for a month from Saudi Arabia. I wanted to interview his wife but instead he was answering my questions. He was not aware of many things as he was out for so many years, but still his wife wanted him to answer my questions even when he was telling her to answer me.

It has been observed that though men are supportive in many cases, deeply rooted norms, customs and rules still exist. There is encouragement but still expectation is there that women shouldn't cross their boundaries. Again, as mentioned above, a woman has an idea about her husband's interests and she will not ignore his interests. His interests are taken into account even if he is not present.

Once, when I went inside a woman's house, a few teachers were already there and they were drinking *raksi*. I started the discussion about women's situation in Kobang VDC. One teacher was of the opinion that *Thakali Samaj* is far better than other *samaj*. He commented that women in Kobang are freer and men are under the pressure of women. We were discussing about this issue. Suddenly the woman spoke up and expressed her disagreement against his statement. She showed a different kind of facial expression showing her disagreement and said, '*it's the same!! We suffer from the same condition, everywhere is same. Women are always oppressed. Thakali is not a different case. Being Thakali doesn't mean that they are different*'.

El-Bushra 2000 (cited in Sherpa 2005) argues that small gains due to migration do not ensure equitable gender relationships. It gives her new roles but no institutional power to fulfil them. Thus, it fails to challenge the overall paradigms of gender differences. In general, women's access to education, health, communication still remains at a low level.

Sometimes, exposure to the outside world also determines a woman's status in her household and simultaneously it raises her decision making power (Molesworth, in Premchander and Müller 2006). As stated in chapter V, women in Kobang are less mobile. There are women who have been outside the VDC merely once or twice. Women are limited to their houses and to their village and still she has not been able to decide independently even at household level. *'I have to ask each and everything. After all, discussion and consent are necessary. My husband takes the household decision. All work outside household is done by him. Inside household I take decision on my own but I have to get approval of my husband for any decisions'*. This was the common answer from the respondents on the topic of independent decision making.

Decision making is one of the important aspects, which measures the relative status of the household members. On domestic expenditures where there is issue of running the household expenses (use of surplus, daily expenditures on food, clothes), women are held responsible. They take care of the tiniest necessities of their households. But when deciding over issues like her children's education, going for training, on disposal of household productions and capital transactions, she has to seek advice.

'Len-den ko kaam dai le garnu huncha (the transactions concerning capital and household productions are done by my husband)' A woman from Sauru

Example: *Parent Teacher Meeting*

The main agenda was the enrollment of students of class 8, 9 and 10 in a newly built hostel. As the water level has risen in Gandaki river, it was time consuming and difficult for the students to go to school. In addition, as students of grade 9 and 10 were in final phase of their study, teachers wanted them to stay at the hostel so that they could devote as much time as possible to their studies and can score good marks in their board exams.



Plate: 6.2 Parents-Teacher meeting

All the parents of the students from class 6 to 10 were invited. Among the participants most were females. Only few were males (6). Teachers asked them if they were interested to admit their children to hostel. They were discussing about the arrangements (food, beds, room etc) how they have planned to manage everything and what would be expected from the parents. Though the interaction was somehow going on between the members and the parents, most of the women were silent listeners. All the parents were told to give their consent to keep their kids at school hostel. Many gave their consent and some were confused. I talked to a mother. She was still with her thoughts. It is not uncommon to find in our society that though a child is always a woman's responsibility- both bearing and caring, she is not able to take independent decisions concerning her child's future.

She was talking about her elder daughter who is studying in 8th grade. She was wondering whether to keep her daughter in hostel or not.

'I need my daughter to do different kinds of household chores. She does all the works. But as we always have customers at our home, it affects her study. My husband has gone out of VDC. I have to discuss with him first before giving my decision at school. I am puzzled whether to keep her at hostel or not?' She was confused and unable to decide on her own.

As mentioned by many researchers, the caste system has some influence on the role and status of women. Chetri (2001) has mentioned in his study that how, among the lower caste people, economic imperative seems to put women next to their men in power status and for their contribution in maintaining their family economy. I had a conversation with another woman who was Dalit (chapter V Pp.85). When she was asked the same question, she had an immediate answer, *'no, I am not keeping my daughter. I need her at house'*.

6.2.2 Communal Level

Forest committee (*Ban Samiti*²⁹)

Kobang VDC, like other VDC within ACAP, has a Conservation Area Management Committee (CAMC), which has been formed according to the Conservation Area Management Regulations. CAMC addresses conservation issues. Within this committee, there are many other sub-committees or institutions such as forest management committee, women development committee, etc. There are altogether 15 members in main committee in which the VDC chairperson has been designated as ex-officio member. 9 members are

²⁹ CAMC is called Ban Samiti in Kobang VDC

nominated by people from 9 wards, and 3 members are represented from special groups: women, *Dalits* and social workers, and the remaining 2 are elected to complement the works of the chairperson and secretary. According to the locals, during old days, VH was the head of every institution at village. Reselection of the committee members takes place in every five years. In addition, each village has its own *upa-ban-samiti* (Sub-Forest Committee).

This is a photograph of the meeting of forest committee. The meeting was regarding the Yarshagumba tender. Among 15 members in the *samiti*, 4 are women. The president of the forest committee is a young unmarried woman of 30. One women member from Naurikot was absent. All the four women were Thakali and were from families with good financial background. Discussion was going on about ‘Yarshagumba’. Though the woman



Plate: 6.3 Meeting regarding Yarshagumba tender at Kobang School

was the president, all the important discussions were conducted by men. Women were sitting and listening to the discussion. They didn’t make any comments. Among them who was the wife of the elected secretary of Larjung village was totally silent. The president just said, ‘*Ok, this amount is final now*’, and noted down in the notebook which she was maintaining.

Various scholars including Bina Agrawal and Andrea Cornwall has stressed the importance of types of participation. According to them, involvement of women just doesn’t fulfil the process- the nature of their participation is equally important -reflecting their role in decision making process. Due to ACAP, there is a continuous effort to involve women in different kinds of activities and to empower them through the trainings. However, the participation of women, even in normal meetings of sub-forest committee is constrained by various factors such as gender, social, economic and educational status. These factors determine the level of interest of women to participate in meetings and other communal activities.

‘In the meeting of upa-ban-samiti, from each house one person should attend the meeting. The member disseminates all decision. No one is free from their work, so no one agrees to attend the meeting’.

A Woman from Naurikot

More than 75% of the respondents complained about getting no information about meetings. Half of them don't have any idea about forest committee: how and what it works for. They have only general knowledge about the rules and regulations like they are not allowed to cut green trees. If they cut green trees they will have to pay a fine and they should go to collect the *sun* only when the date is fixed and so on.

'I don't go, so I don't have any idea about what ACAP is for? I even don't know about forest committee'.

A woman from Kobang

'If a letter comes then we will know about the meeting and other stuffs, otherwise we are not informed about that. The forest committee members organise the meeting, we don't go. Only members participate. We are not informed about any decisions'.

The President of MG

'It is only men who go to the meetings. Women don't attend meetings', commented president of MG at Naurikot. Even though she is the president, she clarifies that she doesn't know anything about the forest committee. A similar statement has been given by the president of the MG and wife of village head at Sauru village. When I asked her, *'how do you buy the wood? she answered, I don't know exactly, mostly I heard people using the term 'cubic feet''*. It has been found that only one member from the household can attend the general meetings of *upa-ban- samiti* and it is men who always attend the meetings. There were women who even didn't know that what ACAP works for.

It was reported that those women who know have interest in different issues such as forest, village, different kinds of programs or trainings and those who don't have any interest they never ask and hence they don't have any information. More than 85% of respondents mentioned that their husbands never share information with their wives but wives have to inform about everything.

Sometimes, in the absence of husbands, wives attend the meetings. Those who attend the meetings very often just sit and listen to the on-going discussions and return back. Women do not have the information about what has happened in the previous meetings. Time as a major constraint has been reported by all the respondents. Women are constrained by

'I don't ask, neither he informs about the meetings and other things',

A woman from Sauru

various factors to participate in development activities. One of the reasons is that women are rarely free. Studies show that due to heavier workloads women are less able to appear in the meetings (Chetri 2001).

'Women can't wander around in the forest; neither have they time for that. They should have time to attend the meetings, at proper time when they are announced, so it becomes difficult for them. There is a rule to nominate at least one man and one woman from each ward in the samiti but being nominated is not enough, one should be able to fulfil his\ her responsibilities and that is the most important'.

The President of MG, Khanti

***Ama samuh* (Mother's group: MG)**

As mentioned in the above paragraph, it is compulsory for all the women to join the MG. But as noted by many researchers, in the Kobang VDC also, only one woman per household is the member of the group. It is only mother or mother in law who becomes the member. Others join the meeting only when the former is unable to attend it. For example: a daughter-in-law participates only when her mother-in-law is unable to attend the meeting due to some reason. Few cases have been found where women though participate in monthly\weekly cleaning activities organised by the group but they are not members nor do they attend the meetings. In all the villages, except at Naurikot, women informed me, that their presence in the meeting is compulsory because if they won't attend they have to pay fine. In case they are unable to attend the meeting, they are replaced by their husbands. In Naurikot, three cases were found, who informed that they hadn't joined the group and hadn't paid the fine also. Naurikot as mentioned earlier is a village where 90 % of women are involved in agriculture and people are poorer comparatively. Lower caste household counts at least 25% of the total households and caste discrimination was reported more from this village. This village has one more type of MG, it is called '*Dalit ama samuh*'. Respondents told me that it is compulsory to become a member of MG, but Dalit have their own Dalit MG. All Dalit women are member of this group. It works for the improvement for the Dalit women. Dalit women from this village emphasized that they are not informed about the meetings, so it's rare that they attend the meetings of MG, but they have regular meetings of their Dalit MG and they attend the meetings regularly. I observed that the meetings of the '*upa-ama samuha*' in villages such as Sirkung, Nakung, and Naurikot are not fixed at regular intervals. Regarding villages such as Sirkung and Nakung, villagers said that the reason is the presence of less number of households in these villages. All the women, however, cannot attend the meetings of main

MG. It is only the president from each village who attend the meetings and is held responsible to disseminate the information. But, in many cases, even the presidents don't attend the meetings. So, information flow to the interior remote parts of Kobang VDC district does not disseminated smoothly. However, the main reason for not attending the meeting was *'I am never free'*. This was the response from my all respondents.

She was president of MG in Naurikot village for 8 years. She said, *'those who can speak and those who have free time are suggested to be in the samuh. In our village, everyone is busy in their fields, so no one shows interest. Even when there are adult literacy classes, they don't go. Physically strenuous work in the field makes them tired and too busy.'*

The other notable thing, as mentioned in the above paragraphs, was that elderly and old women were nominated as the president of MG. The main reason behind the selection is their status due to age as well they are less busy than the young women. All the women who have been nominated for the post belong to well do Thakali household which gives us an indication of women's status based on caste and ethnicity. But these elderly women reported that it was not because of their interest that they hold the post but because they were forced to and now even when they want to quit the post no one is interested to take it. A few illustrations:

A 63 year old widow who is the president of MG of Nakung, uttered, *I was told to hold the post, so I am there. Otherwise I was not interested.* Now, she wants to quit the post. But no one is ready to replace her. She migrates frequently to Butwal, Kathmandu and Pokhara where her daughters and other relatives live. All the presidents of their respective MG's were seasonal migrants who are away from the VDC for 6 months during winter. I had conversations with all the 6 women who were president of their respective villages³⁰ : all of them repeated the same thing

'Ama Samuh is not the same what it used to be in old days. Every good thing has vanished these days'. We don't know anything and beside that we are busy with our own work. There is no one to replace us'.
The President MG, Sauru

'I am illiterate; I am holding the post because I was told to do that. It has not been long that I have become president. I was in Kathmandu for 17 years. I have come recently, though I used to visit in between also'.
The President MG, Khanti

³⁰ Note: president of Larjung and Sirkung is same

Thakali Sewa Samaj Samiti

Decision-making processes in the family and participation of women in political decision-making bodies outside the family context remain crucial (Sherpa, n.d). Women are not interested in local politics. First, it is their own negligence especially in case of educated women; second, women are never free to get involved in outside issues. The political status of women (and men) at local level can be examined through minor indicators such as political awareness, capacity to influence decisions in the family, and community. Lack of equal inheritance rights limits their access to property and economic resources, which in turn limits participation in politics (UNFPA 2007).

In the first phase of my field work I got an opportunity to attend and observe the meeting of Thaksatse in the VDC. Due to death of VH of Kobang village, a meeting was called to nominate new VH and to handover all the possessions to him. In the meeting, beside 13 VH from 13 villages, there were 6 women who were '*shetriya sadasya*', representing their respective regions. One women member was from main MG. The men were involved in conversation which was concerned with the affected position of VH in their VDC. Women were gossiping among them but not related anything to the concerned official issues. Few men raised the issue of '*thaksatse kosh*, the decreasing amount of the *Kosh(fund)*. They were upset about this and some pointed towards weak position of VH as a reason behind all the problems. One of the arguments they made was that there is condition of depositing 25% of each sale from the forest products. But as the forest committee handles everything and VH do not have any role to play, the Thaksatse samiti is not getting enough funds. It is becoming hard for them to sustain *mukhiya* system³¹.

There was hot discussion among men but women were not involved in the conversation. Later on during the process of transfer of the possessions to new VH issue regarding a gold lamp began



Plate: 6.4 Meeting of Thakali Samaj Sewa Samiti

³¹ 17 years ago Mukhiya system has been abolished by HMG; it is only in Mustang that it still exists.

³¹ United Nations Secretary-General, International Women's Day 2005.

and again discussion started. It was the only issue that women had discussion among them. None of them spoke on the floor. After few minutes, the speaker thanked the women's group for joining the meeting as it was an indication to leave the hall. We all left the hall. Only male participants remained back.

The sitting arrangements of the meeting can be seen in the photographs. I was sitting with the seven women on the floor. All the seven women in the meeting were holding important position in the village and were representing their areas but none of them showed their active participation in the meeting. I had a chance to interview few of them. One among them was president of *upa-ama-samuah* of Naurikot village. She told me that though she holds the post she is hardly aware of anything. It was interesting to note that there was a woman as a VH in the list. When query was made regarding this, I was told that there was no one at Bhurjungkot village. All the people have migrated from there and as according to the rule someone should be the representative from that village, Mrs. Ratna Sherchan was nominated just for the sake of name.

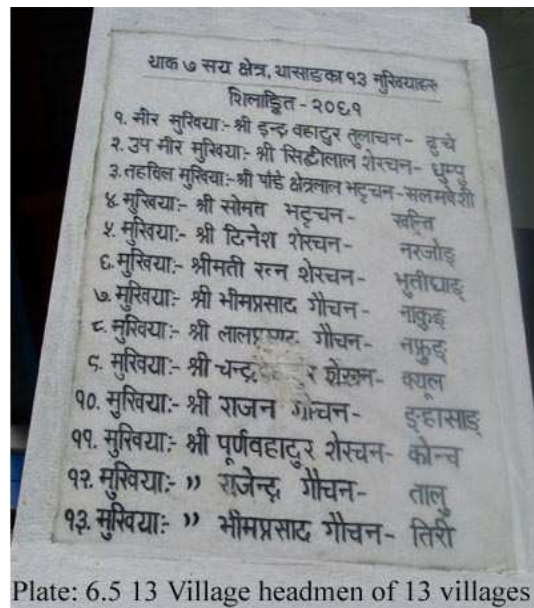


Plate: 6.5 13 Village headmen of 13 villages

6.3. Determinants of participation

Status: caste, norms, age, education and fallback position

Status of a woman matters when the issue of her participation in different kinds of institutions comes. Here I would like to quote what Hubbard (1984), cite about the persisting inequity in any society. According to him:

“Inequality in our society is multidimensional. It arises from any factors and changes with time. Sex is a crucial determinant of social role but many other factors also define an individual's position in the social hierarchy. Among them are race, age, and a number of aspects related to class such as education, income, the type of work one does and the range and type of choices available. A person's position in the hierarchy is the result of a complex interaction among all these factors as well as of

the social position of one parent. Thus, inequality is complex and no single, simple rationalization can adequately reflect its nature”.

According to women of other ethnicity and caste who have migrated to the VDC, the VDC is better in the sense that women have fewer restrictions and that discrimination based on caste is less. Women accept that after coming and living in Kobang VDC for so many years, there are changes in their husband’s perception also. Their husband themselves encourage them for their participation for different kinds of training.

Example: When I asked her, how her husband helps her. She said, previously, he didn’t help me. He encourages me now. But old days were not like this. He might have heard that male and females are equal so these days he encourages me. He says I can go. Mostly I look after household work. I don’t need to ask him rather he asks me.

I found many positive views about the VDC. Those who were not Thakali, they appreciated the VDC for less discrimination than other places. One of my respondents told me that she in fact like Thakali society. She said, *‘It is good here. In our village back in Mayagdi, we have to face too much caste/ social discrimination. People are more co-operative here’.*

There is no doubt that cultural transfusion occurs when a person from different culture merges with another culture. To some extent, women from Indo-Aryan group are true to acknowledge that Thakali society provides more freedom comparatively. But again, Thakali society, though Tibeto-Burmese by origin, seems to contain such norms and perceptions which are similar to Indo-Aryan orthodoxy. Gender perceptions are guided by patriarchal legacy. So, the assumed reasons for their given statement could be:

1. Studies indicate that poor women have a stronger decision making role as compared to economically better off women .Both husband and wife work for the betterment of household welfare and wife contributes equally.
2. No women were found stating any offence against their husband. Even from those women whose husband has been unfair to them (eg. Naurikot, Larjung). It is not because they are shy but because they don’t want to risk their family life.

When women were inquired if they have to seek permission from their husbands, most of the women admit that their husband encourages them to attend the meetings and trainings but

they are never free from their work and they attend only those meetings which are compulsory.

'There is no restriction from my husband's side. He always encourages me to attend meetings. If he had been here he would have send me to Jomsom for the training. He says that you can decide yourself whether to go or not. You understand well'.

In many cases, I found that caste discrimination exists in one way or other. Few examples are presented below:

'Her daughter comes to my house usually. Once she helped us to bring water. She is so young, that she doesn't know anything. She was scolded for working in a Dalit's house. She informed us that her grandfather has forbidden her to come here. I was upset. When they need us they call and we go without any hesitation. Now I will not go. We touch everything: barley, buckwheat... why to go there?' Dalit women from Khanti

She is from well do Thakali family. She was co-operative. I enquire about caste discrimination. She answered: *'I don't know what other think but when someone comes to my home to drink tea or rakshi, I tell them to wash the dishes used by them themselves. Back in old days, if kami damai eat and drink in our regular dish, it needs to be burnt by coal and then only the dishes were allowed to bring inside the kitchen. Now days, things have changed. People take these things less seriously and just sprinkling water on the used dishes by the untouchables is enough. Village is really small and these days' concerned person about this issue is really less'.*

In a similar way, another Thakali woman from Larjung told me the story of her *Chulha* that how she shifted her *chulha* from the front part of the room to the inner section of her house as she didn't used to like people of lower caste sit near her *chulha*. She showed me the old as well as new place where she has built her *chulha*.

A local resident of Kobang, working as a government employee, and ex-member of forest committee stated, *'Women were not included in the forest committee before and the inclusion of Dalit in the group is done only because it was commanded from upper level, and it became a compulsion for them'.*

All the Dalit women complained about caste discrimination while they are in group meetings, communal works or in the fields where they work together as wage labour. *Rich people are always powerful*, stated a woman working as a teacher at Sauru. She put forth her view like

this, *'Rich people can do anything as they wish; they can cut no. of trees and people say nothing whereas for poor people they make a big deal'* .One Dalit woman gave example of the on-going *Sasu-Buhari Antarkriya Talim* (Gender training) organised in Kobang VDC by Mahila Bikas Kendra, Jomsom.

'Didn't you see, today also, we were sitting together in the class but during tea time, they sat far from us'?

A number of women commented that discrimination exist on the basis of economic status.

'We face caste discrimination and at the same time there also exist discrimination between rich and poor. There are good as well as bad people. There are people who underestimate us because we are poor'.

A Dalit Woman from Sauru

Another woman cited an incident as an example:

Last Saturday, there was cleaning program in our village. Some sort of dispute occurred there. In other villages, everyone should join (president, treasurer and so on). But in our village, they send their child. In other villages, everyone join (president, treasurer and so on). But in our village, even if they are in their home, they don't come rather they send their children. Children can't clean properly because they are young. The rules and regulations should be same and equal for all: for rich as well as for poor. When I pointed about this, my words were taken for granted and I was underestimated.

Few reported that they were never able to loan money because no one agrees to be witness on behalf of them. They had complains that the group don't lend them money.

'I wanted to take small amount of loan and I also promised that I will pay the loan on 1st day of the month. I requested them to become witness on behalf of me but they didn't agree'. Till now we haven't been able to take loan'.

Along with caste, economic differentiation is prominent in Kobang VDC. The women who belong to low caste and are economically unprivileged possess lower status than Thakali and rich women. Another important factor which determines women status in the VDC is - education. Those women who are educated can speak and can well bargain. But regrettably, their involvement in communal decision is almost zero. This might be probably because these women who are educated are young to raise their status in front of old women. Factors, namely, age, caste and economic status are the constraining factors which forbid these

women to come forward. One most important factor, which is associated with all women, is lack of time. The president of forest committee is a young woman of 30 year in Kobang VDC. The post becomes favourable for her as she is educated, belongs to rich Thakali family and at the same time she is not involved in agriculture or forest sector directly. It is notable that there is no involvement of Dalit women in any institutions at prominent post. All the higher post which has been reserved for women has been occupied by the Thakali and those which has been reserved for Dalit, it is Dalit men who are at that post.

She is 27, unmarried women. She works as a Poen in Kobang School. After her father's death, her elder brother and her family, started to live separately. They had conflict about the property. Unfortunately, the property went to her elder brother's name. Now, they live in a small rented house. She has one younger sister and brother. All of them are engaged in agriculture. She wanted to study more but the circumstances at home didn't permit her to continue her studies. She recalls it's been 7 years that her father died and from then they are struggling hard to live their life.

She explained how she was offended by her own classmate because she is poor and she does not belong to the same caste. Even when she told him that she will pay the fair, she was not allowed to board the van that was run by her old classmate. She said, 'sometimes we really become helpless because of our low status. Even our friends and old classmates don't give us importance'. She was smart and literate but she is not involved in any kinds of communal institutions.

When I asked her about the caste discrimination issue, she said, '*it has been less practiced these days but discrimination based on economic status still exists. Non-Thakali is less valued than Thakali. Though everyone can speak these days, sometimes even if they want to say something they cannot because they are poor and their status is less valued in the VDC*'.

'Sometimes we really become helpless because of our low status. Even our friends and old classmates don't give us importance'. She was smart and literate but she is not involved in any kinds of communal institutions.

Kobang VDC has been stratified on the basis of caste, ethnicity, social status, economic status as well as gender. Formally, there are two categories in general in which residents are divided: *Kuriya and Ferke*. Kuriya refers to the original inhabitants of VDC and Ferke are the migrants to the VDC. Number of benefits is based upon these categories which Kuriya used to enjoy against Ferke group. These days Ferke can be turned to Kuriya by paying certain amount. I observed it differs from village to village, or in other words from person to person. Out-Migration has been prominent in Kobang VDC. Therefore, there was space for in-migration. As people started to move in and started to live and work, they were allowed to buy land and house and it was made a rule that those who have house or land they have to be

Kuriya and have to follow rules. But teachers of Kobang School comments, ‘*still we (the outsiders) are not allowed to buy a piece of land here. Otherwise, we are very interested to take a piece as the land is very cheap here and the place is really good*’.

Finding of Leach, M. (1998) shows that, social differences and other aspects of social identity within a community differentiate the access to and control over natural resources. Residents of the VDC informed that beforehand, there existed discrimination based on Kuriya and Ferke. For instance, the collection of ‘*Sun*’ should first be done by Kuriya. After three days only Ferke were allowed to collect and only one member from Ferke family were allowed to collect the *sun* instead of two members. Likewise, in any religious ceremony like *puja*, Ferke used to get smaller portion of meat. In the same way, some of the village responsibilities for eg. the role of *ghundel* are performed after becoming Kuriya.

A teacher from Sauru School told me, once there was a kind of debate among the villagers that what it means to be in Kuriya. At that time it was concluded that if they will become Kuriya then they can get good piece of land (she was indicating the extending settlement nearby the banks of Gandaki River). From that time, people pay and become Kuriya for various kinds of benefits.

Time: Participation in the meetings and the trainings

I had attended mother’s group meeting in Khanti. In the meetings all the members were not present. Few members were replaced by their husbands. Women discussed about weekly cleaning programme and fixed a new day for cleaning the village path. It was decided to clean



Mothly Sub-MG meeting in Khanti

on every Saturday at 10 am. They also discussed about the punctuality and fund collection. They decided that they will now stop their monthly collection of Nrs.10 instead the money will be collected in December every year and the amount will be Nrs. 100. The meeting didn’t last for long. Women seemed to be in a hurry. The president and the treasurer asked if anyone has to say anything. Everyone gave their consent and they left.

Public meetings are not only important for deciding about future activities, but also for obtaining information. But due to extra work load and lack of knowledge women show little interest to get involved in public space.

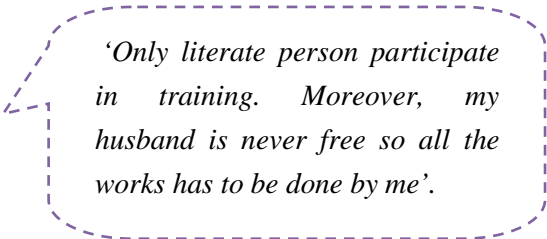
The key informants were positive about the trainings which come in the VDC through ACAP or *Mahila Bikas Kendra* at Jomsom, but on the contrary respondents asserted that trainings were not productive. Few key informants stated that *women were not interested to participate. There is a lack of awareness among them and Dalit women are still under men's control.* One of the responded said that she goes to the meetings only when it is compulsory. *'I am always busy with my work. Domestic and field work never leaves us with free time. She continued, my husband never does household works. It's only me'.*

According to Sherpa (n.d), it is due to this reason that there is a lack of gender balance in negotiations concerning family and community matters. Though men don't object women's participation in training, they are unable to understand that women are more laden due to extra involvement in trainings and meetings. Moreover, women do not try to challenge or change gender relations. The finding of Shrestha and Amatya, 1998(cited in Sherpa 2005) states that women of Nepal in mountain regions sleep in average four hours in 24 hours, with no leisure time. Therefore, in such circumstances, it becomes difficult for her to expose herself to outside world.

'How can we say that we want to go? There is no one to work at home. I got selected by the samiti members for the training. We have a lot of domestic and field work. We don't have time for all these things',

A woman from Kobang

Locher (in Premchander and Müller 2006) finds this as the reason for women's exclusion from influential positions in the groups, such as chairwoman and secretary. This is also the reason for men substituting their wives in



'Only literate person participate in training. Moreover, my husband is never free so all the works has to be done by me'.

women's group meetings. Sometimes participation is restricted by factors such as traditional norms or stereotypes of the 'ideal' woman and very often socially constructed ideology of shyness (Sherpa n.d) has been found as an important factor which is preventing women from attending training or any institutions. Participation is important as it allows women to gain access to knowledge, management skills, negotiation skills, information, and education, which supports processes of challenging norms and negative constructs such as shyness. It gives a basis for new negotiations.

In our village, in MG only president is there i.e., me. There are no other members. Once I received a letter. There was a call for training. I needed to send someone. Now it was a big problem for us: whom to send? I selected someone from our village, make her understand and sent her to attend the training. In the training, she was asked something about 'MG', she couldn't answer, and she felt embarrassed. She told her experiences in these words:

I nearly died out of shame. ('Mom, laaj ko mornu vayeko malai ta') Even educated women felt shy to speak, then how can people like us who don't know anything and who are uneducated can attend and speak?

For the women here trainings and meetings do not hold any meanings. It is useless', she added.

The President of MG at Nakung

Many women said that they are interested in different kinds of training but time never permits them to do so. A respondent comments that she is interested to take different kinds of trainings but as she is never free of household chores as well as her agricultural work, she never attends. In her words, 'a place where people are engaged in agriculture they rarely get time for other things, the samiti decides who will go for training. Yesterday the other women, she told me that the women are afraid of saying even a word when trainings are organised. They even fear to introduce themselves.

We have examples from adult literacy classes: the non-formal education programme for illiterate women and men. Women do appreciate this programme but still the participation rate is low. Women are unable to invest their time due to their ceaseless work. It was reported that in the beginning of classes everyone tries to join but with passing days women stop to come. All they have learnt is to write their name only. Lack of time has been found to be the main cause for their irregularly even at the women's group meetings.

There was an adult literacy class. But we went for only 3-4 days. We learn to write our names only. In the beginning all were present. Later on everyone was absent.

A woman from Sauru

When adult literacy classes were organised she said, 'there were more men in the class, and women were rare. They don't used to attend. And men used to be drunk. The classes ran for only one and a half month. If it would have been for 5 or 6 months we could have learnt better. Selection of the candidates for the samiti and for different kinds of trainings is based on how well a person can speak. People don't show interest even if any kinds of programs are introduced.
President of MG

I observed that many women are willing to attend the training because of the daily allowance they received in return of the time they spent there. Women refused to attend meetings which are without allowance.

'Women enquire for allowance first, and then only decide whether to go or not, one interviewee stated.'

Women even have conflict because of this issue. Many complained that while selecting for different kinds of training also, committee members are biased. Poor and low caste women are always discriminated.

When I asked a young women teacher who is 26 years old, why she is not involved in any communal work? She answered, *'for 6 days a week, I am busy in school. I would have joined the group if the meetings would have been organised in my off days. But nobody listens so I don't take any interest. Besides, I was\ I am not informed about anything. If you don't go even if you are informed then it's your fault. If we had informed, we would have gone. I am busy in school throughout the day. If they would have organised the meeting on Saturdays, then perhaps we would have informed about that. She complained, 'where there is a provision of allowance, we don't have any chance of participation, they select for their closest ones. I even didn't know that the president of CAMC gets monthly allowance of Nrs. 2000'.*

6.4 Whose Voice:

Inclusion of women in committee does not necessarily involve women in decision making. According to Agrawal (2001, 2007) having voice and influence in group decisions is important for the actual meaning or participation of women which she terms as *Interactive \empowering participation*³². The ability to speak in meetings and gatherings and to participate in interactions depends upon how a women hold knowledge about the issues, as Kabeer (1999) points out that women participation in development activities are not only barred by women's prejudices but also by the lack of proper qualification. They feel that even if they go it's of no use as they don't understand anything.

'People are not literate, they neither hold knowledge. Neither we understand the talks nor we can speak, we sit like dumb people and return back'.

A woman from Larjung

³² See, Agrawal 2001

Women are so much busy with their workloads that they ignore their participation in public meetings and thus devoid themselves from access to obtaining information (Sherpa, n.d). Though a woman speaks but her voice is confined to herself only. Respondents comment that those who are able to speak they always speak either in old days or now. On the other hand, those who were not able to speak then couldn't speak now too.

When the issue was raised about freedom of speech and power of being heard, a men from Larjung spoke out, 'I don't think there is such discrimination based on rich – *I do understand a lot but I lack expression*'.
poor, Kuriya- Ferke. Everyone can speak equally. The main thing is, one who is literate, who can understand everything is heard by everyone. I don't understand anything, neither my wife so, we don't have any work there'.

However, there were women who stated that powerless is never heard. Few statements:

'The decisions are made by the upper level people: those who are rich and have status in village. What can we say? The Decision is theirs .she indicates a proverb, 'Those who have money the forest is theirs (jasko dhan tesko ban'). And even if one speaks it doesn't make the situation better'
Woman from Sauru.

'I don't take part in discussions. I don't have anything to say. Moreover, there is nothing to say. Thakali society is dominant. The gap between rich and poor is also prevalent in society. Our voices never get heard and never get validity'.

A woman from Larjung

Not only education and economic status but also a women's role and status in a household and community level are also important determining factors to influence a decision. During my interactions with my respondents, in many cases, it used to be husband who used to answer my questions. In many instances, women didn't show up even to speak-up with me and in other cases, at first women didn't speak but later on when her husband started to speak with me, they also try to add something to her husband's statement, try to shed something of her view, ending up with a question mark- isn't! as if she is asking her husband if what she said is correct. The most interesting and ironic part of those incidences was that the women belong to rich Thakali household whose husband holds a reputed position in the village.

Making one's voice heard is important in decision-making processes. In Kobang VDC though trainings have benefitted women, they still have passive participation in institutions

except mother's group. Also in mother's group half of the women have only *consultative participation*³³. So far they have not been able to influence any decisions.

6.5 Perception of change in Kobang VDC:

There is inter-dependency between status and progress/empowerment of women. Sherpa (n.d) defines the term 'as a process aiming to change unequal relations between women and men'. According to her, it means taking into account power relations, decision-making processes, conceptions and distribution of resources, responsibilities and rights. Though, there had been an effort through development intervention of making easy access to resources and change in rights and responsibilities, women's situation is still the same due to unchanged and unequal power relations between men and women.

During my interviews I asked my key informants about the change in women's situation in the VDC. According to women as well as men, the MG has proved out to be a positive platform for women. Women has won their timidity and learned to speak out in groups. They got a platform to participate in trainings and to gather and exchange information. They have learnt how to manage the collected funds and this has definitely increased women's status within the community. They agree that there have been lots of positive changes. Earlier in meetings there was involvement of men only. Now they try for equal representation.

Remembering old days, the 66 years old president of MG at Khanti remarked, '*there was more discrimination between girl and boy at that time. Girls were not allowed to read. Now everyone can attend school and all the youngsters want to go to the city for job. The mobility of women has increased. These days I go out. Otherwise I never used to go out*'.

'Trainings were beneficial in terms of learning many things like how to run a household, how to speak to people. Previously, women were afraid to introduce themselves. People came and they made us to introduce ourselves'.

A woman from Sauru

'Women's situations have improved a lot these days. 5 girls have gone abroad from our village. They finished their 9th grade. They went to work there'

A man from Kobang.

Women have progressed a lot. There have been various changes with regard to women's situation. Women were not able to tell their name in the past. They didn't use to pay attention to cleanliness.

³³ See, Agrawal 2001

Trainings have also brought improvements in cleanliness among women. There is no exploitation against women these days. Family members are more co-operative. In old days, there was more illiteracy so there was more oppression of women. Hotel industry has also brought improvement in our situations. We have to speak to our customers and because of that our communication skills has improved. Even though we don't know English, we try to communicate with tourists.

A woman member of the School Management Committee

But despite of these positive sides, critical reflection on the situation of women denote that women situation has not improved in true sense. For illustrations, the following statements and cases have been selected:

'Women are active within women's groups only. They gather make groups, make decisions but they are not involved at communal level. Till now, women have not been able to go hand in hand with men in the society at communal level. (Purush sanga aayera, samuhik rup ma kaam garna sakeko chaina)

Local resident working as a Government employee living in Kobang.

According to a woman member of CAMC, *'women now equal men but in social or communal works, it is men always who are in majority. For example; women don't take post in communal institutions themselves. In these kinds of cases, still the situation is same. Women should be at home. Both men as well as women lack of awareness'*.

Recalling old days, president of MG at Naurikot stated, *'in old days, rice was something which we used to eat occasionally. I did not expect that I could see the vehicles coming up to Mustang in my life, however with regards to women's situation, it is same as usual there is no difference even after the foundation of mother's group.*

Similarly, the president of Kobang MG said, *'women who have studied up to 9-10 classes, even they don't seem interested. We have not been able to achieve anything so far. It's true that women have learnt to speak little bit now, but they can hardly speak in gathering or any kind of meetings. It is only Sukhdevi who speaks on behalf of all the women. She is our secretary'*.

'For women everything is same. I had to perform tonnes of works before also. The only difference is that now my kids are grown up. They help me and it has become easier than earlier days'.
Women from Sauru

According to the Head Master at Naurikot village, *women in Kobang VDC are still limited within household boundary. Females run hotels from the very beginning. It is true that involvement of females is more than males in tourism industry but still women are confined more in household chores. Most of the outside works are done by male'*.

In the words of a Thakali teacher at Kobang school, *'in terms of literacy, there is improvement otherwise the situation is same for women. She does the same thing which she used to do 50 years ago'*. He accepts that a Thakali woman is able to speak but when I asked if the case is same with his mother he answered, *'no, she has become old. She doesn't go to attend meetings neither she pay fine. Fine are to be paid by only members. People can stay away from women's group'*.

6.6 Final words:

We find different pictures of Tibeto- Burmese women in literatures than those of Indo- Aryan women comparatively. Women of Kobang VDC 'Thakali women', belong to Tibeto-Burmese origin, but still suffer from same taboos as associated with 'Hindu women'. Is it the result of cultural transmission from south (as cited by many researchers, how Tibetan- Burmese group have changed themselves to bring their status equal to those of Hindus at the central level (Messerschmidt 1982) or is it true for all the women in Nepal equally?

Participation rate of women in the communal institutions at Kobang is same as in other parts of Nepal. Participation has been affected not only by gender, but at the same time it has been affected by caste, ethnicity and economic status as has been discovered by many researchers. When we try to look at intra-household dynamics at household level in Kobang VDC, it shows the same picture, absolutely true to several findings about Tibeto-Burmese women, that the cash resides in the hands of women. Both men and women accept and announce this fact proudly. Not only Tibeto- Burmese women, but all the women of all other different caste and ethnicity said that they hold power on household cash. They believe that in Kobang men are equal to women. It is customary for women to handle their households' cash and the key to the locker is always in women's hand. They say that this is because of the influence of Thakali community. Before they migrated to Kobang VDC, it was not like that but after migrating to Kobang and living with Thakali brought a difference in their social life. But still universal law of gender is applicable in Kobang's case also.

It is women who do all the internal business for her household. All the small deals from buying match sticks to selling her farm products like potato and other vegetable (in the local market) is done by her. But when it comes to making big decisions and going outside household boundary, it is always her husband.

At 21 years of age she has 3 very young kids. Her father was herder, never used to stay at house. He used to look after other's livestock. Her mother died and father married again. She used to work as a general helper in Thakali house whom she refers as her *Sau* (Boss). Her husband works with his contractor. He works in the forest as a wood cutter and rarely comes down.

She has one sister and one younger brother. They didn't get chance to study and her brother dropped out of his studies. She is well aware that education is important for women's progress. She says, *during old days, women were not literate, now a days they get chance to get literate', so the situation is getting better'*.

She is so young with burden of small kids that she hardly gets time for any community work. She attend mother's group meeting only because if she will not go she has to pay fine. She almost doesn't know about ban *samiti* and other issues. Along with household work and load of taking care of children, she work in her own fields as well as a wage labour very often. She goes to the jungle for firewood, Jimbu, mushrooms and other available forest products, which she sell sometimes in the village. In addition, she is also responsible for outside work in the absence of her husband.

"Dai basnu hudeina, ma bachha haru sanga nai waista chu (my husband doesn't stay at home, and I am usually busy caring my kids)"

As she is living in *Thakali samaj*, she regards herself no different from Thakali people (she is Chetri by caste). She is poor. She had served her kids plain rice only. But she says *everything is good here*.

Feminists talks about the importance of *fallback position* in decision making. How many women have challenged existing gender norms or the gender based division of labour within their households negotiating the mobility and the space is also an important issue which reflect the issue of changing gender dynamics. However, at the same time it is also important to analyse how far a woman is able give continuity to her negotiating power and creating a space for herself outside domestic arena. Education is a proven asset in the constellation of power when it comes to arguing with men thus decisive in decision-making and negotiating on values, norms, and entitlements. But again, very often, the deeply rooted traditional practices appear to be so strong to keep the existing gender divide that it marginalises women from their share of benefits. Patriarchy plays a significant role in increasing gender disparity, depriving them from getting equal opportunities at all levels from household to society (Sherpa n.d).

She is a teacher by profession. When I met her for the first time, she was working as a teacher in Jomsom Boarding School. Her daughter is only two years old. She found it difficult to work in Jomsom as there was no one to look after her daughter. As she has to be in school during school hours she was not able to feed her baby at proper time. *'It was only during tiffin hours, I was able to feed her'*, she said. She was looking for a teaching position at Kobang School. Because of her daughter, she wanted to be at Kobang. When we met again, she was employed in Kobang School as an English teacher. She disclosed her interest for further studies. After 10th grade, she got married. Her husband has promised her that he will allow her to give continuation to her studies after marriage. She was convinced and gave her consent for marriage. But after marriage, the

scene was changed. Her in laws were against of her idea for further studies. She said, ‘*I felt as I was deceived. I wanted to go for further studies even at cost of divorce. My in-laws told me, ‘why you need to study further’. I was determined enough to study further, so after two years they let me go Jomson for my further study. When I think of my friends, they might be in good position. I felt I lacked behind of my friends. When there was revolt for democracy in the country, I was studying I. Ed. Due to ongoing revolt, our scheduled examination dates were postponed and when it was re-scheduled, I could not appear for the exam due to my delivery. I had even urged to appear for my last paper by taking pain killers, but my efforts went in vain. My friends appeared in exam instead I gave birth a baby girl. My daughter is of same age as of this democracy’.*

‘*Sathi haru le jach diyu ani maile chori janmaye. Yo loktantra jati barsa ko huncha meri chori pani teti barsa ko huncha’*

All over the world, argument continues over the appropriate sexual roles and social place of women (and default, men) as the cultural attraction. Ringer (2007) speaks of this issue specifically with regard to tourist culture. He states that *enjoyment or employment – are shaped by cultural constructions, perceptual images, and social practices of gender and sexuality, including prescribed clothing and physical appearances, ritualized behaviour, and notions of work and equity.* I argue for wider female dominated social space where she acts as an attraction for a business. It is questionable that this freedom of interacting with more people gives her more power in independent decision making issue at household as well at communal level or not? Thakali women are considered freer because they do not have ‘*purdah* or veil system’, like those of Hindus and Muslim women. They can talk freely. They keep the cash. However, in other cases, her situation is no less different from women of other ethnicity. Women’s access to literacy, education, and decision-making roles is far below than that of men. Lack of land rights, the gender gap in work, access to education and health expresses women’s perceived inferiority.

Every woman has her own story, her own situations, and her own circumstances. Women are heterogeneous. So, generalisation is never going to work to uplift their situation. Support and motivation from male members at house as well at community level is important to involve women in development activities (Chetri 2001). However, encouragement on part of male member is not enough bring women into equal power relation. There is a need to bring changes in the perception and attitudes of both men as well as women towards gender division of work. Encouragement and empowerment should go hand in hand.

Chapter VIII

Conclusion: Summing up

In this chapter, I will make an attempt to discuss my findings briefly in the light of my main assumption- trying to link it to the concept of gender, social construction, feminist methodology and other related studies on gender and decision making as well.

As findings of many studies indicates that Tibeto-Burmese women were traditionally afforded more freedom of movement, independent decision-making and higher status than women of Indo-Aryan group, my study is based on the assumption that if it is the case then they should have greater say in decision making both at household and communal level institutions relative to Indo-Aryan women.

Compared to various studies (for instance, Agrawal 2001; Chetri 2001; Lama, A & Buchy, M. 2002 ; Sherpa, n. d; Giri, Pokhrel & Danhofer 2008) based on gender and decision making in Nepalese context, my findings seems no different than those studies. Chapter V and VI are the main part of my discussion where I have tried to present existing gender ideologies and the rate of participation of women which is affected by social construction of gender. Using feminist methodology of explanation through everyday experiences of women's life, I have tried to show the local perception regarding gender in the community.

The most important issue which I have showed in my thesis is that why despite of relative freedom women's participation in local institutions is passive³⁴. My findings in chapter 6, correlates with the finding of authors such as Agrawal 2001(South Asia: India and Nepal); Chetri 2001(Sindhu Palanchok and Kavre Palanchok: Central Nepal), Shrestha (2001); Lama & Buchy 2002 (Sindhu Palanchok: Central Nepal); Giri, Pokhrel & Danhofer 2008 (Kavre District: Mid-hills) that representation of women and poor in communal institutions doesn't necessarily provide them access to resources and the various kinds of benefit derived therein. Moreover, my finding also advocates that those who are in fact in daily interaction with agriculture, forest and those who are poor have not benefitted from the concept of community participation. Still, similar to earlier findings, village elites are the sole decision makers and benefitted there from.

³⁴ See Agrawal 2001

As discussed in chapter V, few studies point Tibeto-Burmese society as an 'equal opportunity society', and few other reveals that even in Buddhist societies gender defines the relation between men and women. The most exemplary example is the findings of Acharya & Bennett 1981; and Gurung 1999 which reveals that either it is Buddhist or Hindu, land is inherited universally in all communities from the father to the son. Likewise, the prevalent Sanskrit based proverb describing women's lower status in the Buddhist community in Humla and the notion of males having achieved a higher status at birth than females in Bhutan has been expressed in the studies of Thapa 1996 and Roder 1997(cited in Gurung 1999). Kobang VDC also contains some very popular proverbs like "*Chora kul ko diyo, chori mutu ko diyo*" (Chapter V, Pp. 82) which exist in Hindu society that expresses ascribed space and work for women in the society. These findings about Tibeto-Burmese women opens a new floor for discussion concerning the lower status of women universally.

Very similar to the finding of Gurung (1999) about women of HKH region, I argue for a contradictory picture of Thakali women in Kobang VDC, where the notion is popular that men are under pressure of women. Despite of wielding relative power and freedom, women in Kobang VDC are weighed down by structural constrains based on gender and negative ideologies. They are subject to the same levels of gender inequity as lowland women, and thus, essentialise themselves on how they are to behave. This attitude, together with numerous other factors is causing low negotiating power among women in Kobang VDC. The limits on women's everyday activities are structured by what society expects women to be and concretely a main obstacle to decision making is the limits set by gendered daily working routines. However, my findings are applicable to the Thakalis present in Kobang VDC only. Various factors have contributed to passive participation and restricted input of women in decision making process. '*It is your space*' and '*I am not free*': defines not only interrelated factors which has obstructed women to be part of decision making process but also shows the comparative lower status that is ascribed to women. It clearly shows the inability of choice among women. Though very often they are encouraged they are not empowered to negotiate their space.

Ascribed space is a product of gender and gender is a product of social construction. The framework of gender dynamics and social construction was indeed helpful to gain insights upon gathered information. Using feminist methodology, I have tried to connect the concept of gender and social construction to everyday experience. My findings are informed by real

lives and experiences. However, as mentioned in chapter III, I can't deny the influence and intervention of my own experiences in the production of this study. All knowledge is partial. The important thing which should be considered is that epistemological base in producing that knowledge should be questioned. My reflexivity was important, my back ground as well as my space.

In my knowledge, deeply rooted and socially constructed gender ideologies which differs from one society to another, defines space for individuals. I agree with Lorber (1994) that everyone does gender without thinking about it. Our life has been influenced by gender dynamics. Gender matters in our day to day life. Gender signs and signals are so pervasive that we usually fail to note them. In other words, we have essentialise it ourselves. We accept, *'the things are this way, because it is this way'*. However, we must not forget that gender is constantly created and recreated out of human interaction. Gender is negotiable. Socially constructed gender institutions and ideologies are modifiable.

Gender as a social institution is good as far as it maintains equality among both men and women. Ironically, the links between a society's gender ideologies are closely tied to wider systems of power and prestige which has created gender gap in development. Low status caused by gender as well as prevailing caste division especially for the women from poor families results in low self-esteem which in turn forbids women not only from access to resources but also institutions. Gender inequality and subordination is largely the result of structural forces operating at the level of culture, society, economy and politics (Hust 2004). Gender bias is a primary cause of poverty because it prevents women from obtaining the education, training, health services, legal status and other capabilities and opportunities to combat it. Thus, the efforts to empower women and to bring them to decision making level challenges existing hierarchies of power and requests equitable gender relations so that women could have control over their lives.

According to Kabeer (1999), the central to the idea of empowerment is the idea of power. It means ability to make choices. Empowerment leads to a process of change. In the words of Kofi Annan³⁵, *'the empowerment of women is the only way to all sorts of development'* (AusAID 2007). As I have argued in Chapter VI, brining change in perception is necessary to change the structures and ideologies that keep one gender subordinate of other. The final goal

³⁵ United Nations Secretary-General, International Women's Day 2005.

of empowerment is to transform the ideology and practice of domination and subordination; to challenge and transfer existing power structures, systems and institutions which have upheld and reinforced discrimination (UNFPA 2007).

Feminism strives for equal representation and emancipation of women. It believes that if women play a minor role in community decision making, they may be marginalized unless steps are taken to include them. So, it is important to reduce the gender gap and make an effort to eradicate poverty, enhance economic growth and achieve sustainable development. Gender equality is at the heart of economic and social progress and is widely accepted as essential to sound development practice. I argue that the issue of empowerment weighs more than the issue of exclusion\inclusion. As mentioned before, and as expressed by many cases in my study (Chapter V & VI), merely bringing women to the decision making level doesn't ensure their active input to the process. Therefore, women should be empowered in a way that women themselves become conscious to cross the boundary created by socially constructed gender ideology and negotiate in order to reduce the existing gender gap to make themselves free for participation in decision making level. Moving beyond essentialism is important.

Gender is not only important for emancipation but it also strives for explanation: Why these are important? I feel my study was worth doing in the sense that it is not conducted for any political reason but only in search of explanation i.e. why and how things are?

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Table 3.2: Total no. of household in Kobang VDC

Villages	Total Households	Household covered	Interviews included in the sample size
Naurikot	34	19	17
Nakung	14	7	7
Larjung	26	17	15
Sirkung	8	3	3
Kobang	26	15	15
Khanti	23	13	12
Sauru	21	11	11
Bhurjungkot	-	-	-
Total	152(100%)	85 (55.9%)	80 (52.6%)

Source: Samudayik Bikas Kosh, Kobang, Falgun 2064 (mid Feb. – mid March 2008)

Source: Field work, April-July, 2008

Table 4.1: Age and Sex Composition of the selected households

Age Group	Female	Male
0-10	35	48
15-20	45	45
25-30	39	34
35-40	33	34
45-50	12	15
55-60	08	09
65-70	16	11
Above 80	02	09
Total	190	205

Source: Field work, 2008

Table 4.2: Distribution of selected household based on caste and ethnicity

Ethnicity	Religion\Caste	No. Of Households
Tibeto-Burmese	Bhuddhist	
	Thakali	49
	Magar	04
	Tamang	02
Indo-Aryan	Hindu	
	Scheduled caste	19
	Magar	04
	Gurungs	01
	Chettri	01
Total		80

Source: Field work, 2008

Table 4.3: Educational Status of the total population selected

Level	Female	Male
Infants	07	08
Child care	05	06
Illiterates	48	26
Read and write	11	11
Primary (1-5)	54	55
Lower Secondary (6-8)	31	29
Secondary (9-10)	28	45
Higher Secondary (11-12)	05	12
Bachelors	01	03
OTHER		
Lama	-	07
Engineering	-	02
Overseas	-	01
Total Population	190	205

Source: Field work, 2008.

(Literate: those who can read and write beyond the age of 6)

Table: 4.4: Main occupations of members of selected households

Occupations	Female	Male
Teacher	06	06
Student	60	82
Agriculture	83	49
Housewife	16	00
Abroad	04	10
Business	09	07
Government employee (Peon, Secretary)	01	04
Tailoring	01	-
Cobbler	-	01
Potters	-	03
Driver	-	03
Shepherd	-	06
Carpenter	-	04
Mule Drivers	-	07
Lama (Bhuddhist priest)\ Nun (Jhuma)	01	03
Contractor	-	03
Librarian	01	-
Child caring job in Child care centre	01	-
Idle persons	-	09
Total	183	197

Source: Field work, 2008.

Appendix 2: Checklist for household interview

Name of the respondent:

Caste/Ethnicity:

Origin:

VDC/ Village:

Household Number:

Date:

A. General Information:

Demographic and Economic characteristics of the respondent and her family members:

B. Daily activity of the respondent:

C. Information on decision making within household:

Control over household cash

Decision over borrowing and lending

Medical treatment

Social and religious ceremonies

Household decision

Consent of male members before doing any work

Kinds of work free to decide on own

Decision regarding children

Support from male members

D. Decision making outside household:

Agriculture:

Land preparation

Transplanting\ Sowing

Applying Manure

Weeding

Harvesting

Threshing

Drying

Selection of crop

Use of fertilizers

Irrigation

Sales of Product

Control over income\ product of labour

Ownership of property

Off farm activities

Outside income

Benefit

Control and management

Investment and expenditure

Social support

Livestock:

Livestock purchase

Grass collector

Feeding management

Veterinary services

Milking and disposal

Over all care taker

Livestock ownership

Water:

Mills

Common tap

Problems\ Conflicts

Forest products:

Where:

When:

What:

By whom:

Its use:

Distance from the house:

Problems\ Conflicts:

E. Information about institutions and participation:

List of institutions in the VDC

Are you a member of the institution? What are the criteria for becoming a member?

Community forestry / ACAP

How often you participate in FUG activities? Have you participated in last FUG assembly?

Are you informed about the decision made? What are your views regarding the decision?

How do you perceive community development progress? (For e.g. different kinds of training)

Do you receive the information's about the meetings and trainings on time?

How different participation in different kinds of trainings has been beneficial to you?

F. Information on the level of women's participation in meetings and discussions:

Do you feel that you have an equal say at the meetings and that anyone can say what they want to?

Has involvement in decision making process has changed the role of women in the area?

Do you feel that you are achieving equal status to men in the village?

Are the men supportive of your involvement? Has this always been the case?

Are you involved with women development programs? Which member of your family attends the mother's group meetings? What activities do you take part in?

What difference you find in the past and present situation of women in the VDC?

Appendix 3: Checklist for Key Informant Interview

- Gender reflection in different field
- Local ideology
- Social norms and values
- Perception of men and women's on right on land, water and resources
- Land rights
- Agriculture
- Wage labour
- Local politics
- Social works
- Religion
- Local institutions
- List of institutions in the village
- Purpose of those institutions
- Women's role and participation in those organizations.
- The participation rate of women in meetings? And who speaks and whose voice is heard?
- The achievements of capacity building and awareness raising activities\ trainings organized in the village to mobilize community participation?
- Selection procedure for selection of candidates for trainings and executive posts in the institutions.
- Do we have any other institution regulating access to the forest resources affecting the locals (Other than ACAP)?
- What are differences between traditional and newly implemented forest management practices? Which one was better?
- How do they manage forest now in present context?
- Number of FUG committee members and other members of the CFUGs, percentage of women's involvement in the committee and their background.
- How the decision of committee meetings takes place? Does it involve the consent of all the members?
- Are they able to make themselves heard in the communal level?
- To what extent women are able to influence management decisions?
- How information and awareness flow operate among the members of local organisations?
- What has been done to raise the critical understanding on equity at community level?
- What has been done to ensure equal participation on part of all the stakeholders?
- To what extent tourism has been beneficial for the women?

Appendix 4: List of Key Informants

Key Informants	Position\ Post
Manish Kumar Pandey	Head of ACAP Jomsom
BhuddhiRantna Sherchan	Ex-Horticulturist, General member of Thaksatse Samiti, Foundation, member of Bhupi Thak Pustaklaya, Kobang.
Gautam Sherchan	Member of Library Management Committee, School management committee, Head of Mustang Samuh (NGO)
Budhhi Singh Nepali	Ex-Member of Forest Committee and a government employee at ward office Kobang
Thasang Sherchan	Teacher in Kobang School
Uma Kanta Sharma	Teacher in Kobang School
Santa Thakali	President of CAMC
Sunita Bhattachan	Member of Main CAMC, Teacher of Kobang School, Treasurer of Mother's Group Khanti
Padam Sharma	Teacher at Naurikot Village
Pramila Tulachan	Secretary of Mother's Group Sauru
Narsangmah Gauchan	Member of CAMC
Indra Bahadur Tulachan	Mukhiya of Khanti
Sunita Giri	Teacher at Sauru Village
Om Kumari Tulachan	President of Mother's Group Kobang
Sunita Bhattachan	Member of CAMC, Treasurer of Mother's Group Khanti, Teacher in Kobang School.
Maharjan, G. R.	Central Department of Geography, TU, Kathmandu.