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Understanding some cultural barriers to women's access to education

A case study in rural Nepal.

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Abstract

This empirical research carried out in rural area in Nepal, and examines how cultural barriers influence on women's access to education. This study is based on data collected through interviews with local Nepalese women in rural area of Nepal and is attempting to answer the question: "In what ways might cultural barriers influence Nepalese women's access to education in rural areas?" A qualitative method was chosen for the study using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questionnaires as data collection methods. The empirical findings have been clarified with nine Nepalese women from rural area in Nepal.

Based on the data from interviews, some cultural barriers influenced women's access to education. These cultural barriers are as follows: early marriage, caste-based gender discrimination, household work and the high value of a son. It was also found that daughters were not valued by their parents when it comes to educational opportunities because of traditional cultural beliefs and practices in Nepalese society. The findings of this study indicated that early marriage was major problem for women's access to education in rural area. In this regard, parents held traditional cultural beliefs of early marriage before first time menstruation of their daughters.

On the other problem is household work, since early age, the women in this study were engaged in household work helping the mother in the kitchen and working in agriculture fields. Parents forced their daughters to stay at home and become proficient in household work rather than pursuing their education. Likewise, the high value of son and caste- based discrimination also influenced women's access to education. This thesis discussed and analyzed that these cultural barriers were major challenges and problems for women's access to education in rural area of Nepal.

Key words: Rural Nepal, Women, traditional culture and Education

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List of abbreviations

ADB	:	Asian Development Bank
CBS	:	Central Bureau Statist
CRDHPA	:	Centre for Research on Environment Health and Population Activities
DFID	:	Department for International Development
EFA	:	Education for All
HDI	:	Human Development Index
HDR	:	Human Development Report
INGOs	:	International Non- Governmental Organizations
IRIN	:	Integrated Regional Information Networks
KM	:	Kilo Meters
MOE	:	Ministry of Education
NCR	:	National Census Report
NGOs	:	Non- Governmental Organizations
SLC	:	School Leaving Certificate
UNDP	:	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	:	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	:	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	:	United Nations Child’s Fund
UN	:	United Nations
VDC	:	Village Development Committee
WB	:	World Bank

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Women are very important agents in their families and society. Education of all people – both men and women - is one of the most necessary factors for the complete development of the individual's personality and the maintenance of stable relations between the society and its members. Yet in the Nepalese context, especially in rural area, many women are still illiterate. This is because of cultural beliefs and practices that present serious problems for women's access to education. Bista (2004) asserts that in Nepalese society, religious beliefs, cultural practices and parents' attitudes do not favor daughters' education to the same extent as sons'. The dominant social structure influences all aspects of the social, cultural, educational and economic life of women in Nepalese society. This structure allocates women restricted roles, which most often involve in household work and family responsibilities. Within the framework of their traditional household work and family responsibilities, Nepalese women have received a disproportionately small share of family resources and educational opportunities.

Many Nepalese women have internalized the attitude that household and family responsibilities make it difficult for them to gain access to education. Discriminatory practices against women are deep rooted in Nepalese society. Unequal treatment prevents women's access to opportunities in life because women in Nepal bear a subordinate position in society (Pandya, et., al. 2006). In the traditional view of many parents in rural area of the country, daughters must be engaged in household chores instead of education. Moreover, although girls often must spend many hours every day in domestic chores, this fact is not reflected in the conventional definitions of work in Nepalese society (Assaad, et., al 2010).

Women's household responsibilities are often seen as benefits for the family that cannot be put at risk for women's education (Basnet et al., 2013). In this study, daughters of all ages and abilities energetically care for younger siblings and perform household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and feeding etc. On the other hand, men control the decision-making process, property ownership and other resources, whereas women's tasks (which mainly include domestic work, subsistence agriculture and services) have low productivity, are unpaid and are not even considered to be of economic value.

Moreover, marriage is one of the social institutions that is culturally determined, and so is regarded and carried out differently in different cultures. There is a significant difference in what constitutes marriage in western countries and developing countries. Important changes that are common in the West have not occurred in Nepal. Even though the people regard marriage as a social institution for the regulation of rights and duties in relation to inheritance and succession, due to the patriarchal socio-cultural and religious practices of early marriage, marriage gives no rights and duties of inheritance and succession to girls in Nepal. Marriage is regarded as a contract between kin groups, not individuals in a Nepalese context. This tradition cuts off girls' childhood and deprives them of the opportunity of an education, thus compromising on their fundamental human rights (Keesing ,1998). In this study, the religious beliefs and cultural practices favored the marriage of daughters at a very early age, often before their first menstruation. The practice of early marriage prevails mostly in high-caste families, because it is a matter of honor for them (Acharya et., al 2007). There is also the concept expressed in the word "Kanyadan,"¹ which signifies the giving away of daughters.

Although UNICEF has defined marriage under 18 years of age as an "early marriage", 51% Nepalese girls marry as children (UNICEF,2011). Such a practice carries with it devastating results for young girls' health and well-being, yet the social, economic and cultural pressures connected with rural local culture and tradition in Nepal makes the situation difficult to change. Officially it is against the law to marry under the age of 20, but the law is often ignored, particularly in rural areas (Ingber, 2011). In addition, various factors interact to cause early marriages. Among these causal factors are economic survival, the protection of young girls' virginity, family pressure, controlling female behavior and sexuality, and socio-cultural and religious values. When girls are married as children, they are denied an education and opportunities to develop their potential at a pivotal life stage (Baysenge,1998).

The socio-cultural reasons, Nepal is one of the highest indices of son preference country in the world (Pandey, 2011). In this practice, the preference for sons are believed that they are believed to be the old age support for parents, and way to preserve the family name. Also, they are carry out rituals after their parents die. In contrast, daughters become part of other lineages and households when they get married. Sons are believed to be equally important for the family's economic benefit through their employment, whereas daughters are the source of

¹ "Kanyadan" is associated with the marriage system and means 'The gift of a virgin'

expenditure mainly through marriage ceremony and the dowry system. Thus, many parents preferred to send their sons, rather than their daughters to school.

Moreover, son preference is generally viewed as a socially determined bias. In a patriarchal society, the parents' priority is the male child, who has culturally admired characteristics, familial duties, social status and economic potentiality. This preference often influences sons' behavior and may result in gender biases that negatively impact women's educational opportunities (Basnet et., al 2013). In this sense, women are disadvantaged in the patriarchal society which results into gender discrimination by their parents and brothers. Apart from the negative impact of gender discrimination, the preference for the male gender deprives many women of their right to education. In this regard, Pandey (2006) argues that parents do not see any future value in education for their daughters.

Caste based gender discrimination is also major social problem for women's access to education in rural area. There, getting access to education for lower-caste women is difficult due to the traditional cultural values and practices of the society. Lower-caste children are not allowed to go to school with high-caste children. Moreover, lower-caste parents with limited resources cannot afford the necessary clothes, books, paper and writing materials, and so on for daughters' education. Besides, higher-caste women feel humiliated if they do the same tasks as low-caste women. One must remember that high-caste people do not hesitate to beat lower-caste people in public places if they are found to break religious norms and values (Dalit Welfare Organization, 2010). Because of these practices in the Nepalese society, lower-caste women do not have the privilege of access to education, which limits their opportunity to get jobs and social opportunities.

Furthermore, lower-caste women face multiple forms of discrimination, as women, poor people and as members of the lower caste. They are forced to live in the most vulnerable conditions. They constitute the major part of the workforce occupied with hard manual labor and every day are engaged in agricultural work with high-caste families. They suffer from a vicious cycle of poverty over many generations and long-term inhumane behavior from high caste people.

Education plays an important role in reducing negative socio-cultural values from the society and helps promote positive thinking towards women's education. Abera Regassa, (1999) says education plays an important role in promoting respect for human rights, creating the preconditions for equality, mutual understanding and cooperation among people. Moreover, education also changes women's childbearing behavior (Subedi,1997). Delaying child-bearing and having fewer children are more common among educated women.

Education has not only helped women to gain a better understanding of their socio-cultural roles, but also helps them to reduce social and economic dependency (Pokherl, 2012). Men often hide information from illiterate women even when it could be important for family relationships and plans to share it with them. This secrecy makes women less able than men in terms of knowledge and understanding, to participate in, and take advantage of various activities and services (Rodda,1991).

This study demonstrates how several cultural barriers influence women's access to education in a rural area of Nepal. The primary influential factors in question are early marriage, the burdens of household work and agriculture, poor economic conditions, caste-based discrimination, and the much higher value Nepalese culture gives to having a son than to having a daughter. Many NGOs and INGOs working in rural area of Nepal implement various programs in the name of women's development that avoid marginalizing women's education. The government of Nepal has made policies that create opportunities for women to gain better status in the society. Yet the fact remains that there is still a huge difference between men's and women's literacy rates. If we look at the situation of women in rural area, we find that many women's lives are characterized by a low level of access to social, political, educational and healthcare opportunities due to the lack of education. This research project attempts to understand how cultural barriers influence women's access to education in one such rural area.

1.2 Personal Interest

To start with, I am from a rural area in Nepal and this is part of my personal experience. I was born, grew up and completed my secondary education in a rural area of Nepal where cultural beliefs and practices have played vital roles in women's lives and their right to education. I have seen and learned a lot from that experience. I witnessed many women facing

a lot of problems at home and in society due to their lack of education. They wake up early in the morning, two hours before the rest of the family. They finished all the housework, cook breakfast and get prepared to go the jungle to collect grass and firewood. After they get back from the jungle, they go to work in the family's agricultural fields.

They never ate their full. They had to cook for all family members, but were not allowed to eat together with them because they had to wait until all the other family members finished eating. After they get married, their parents-in-law and husband behaved violently toward them. They were not permitted to talk to Nepalese men. Their lives consisted of a round of household tasks and caring for farm animals. They became very sad from their life and said, "if we had gotten educational opportunity, we might have had a job and happy life." However, I was the eye-witness to much violence toward women in the family and society due to lack of education.

From a personal standpoint, this research is interesting to me because it deals with the rural area in Nepal that I knew and where I found many problems for women without education. This rural area that is not new to me. This thesis is an opportunity for me to document and analyze how cultural barriers there influence women's access to education. I also believe that I have the potential of providing new positive change in these women's lives due to my higher education from Norway.

1.3 Research Question

This dissertation is focused on one main research question:

In what ways might cultural barriers influence Nepalese women's access to education in a rural area?

Through this project I try to answer this question by analyzing some culture barriers that have influence on women's access to education in a rural area in Nepal. I have used qualitative research methods for data collection and conducted semi-structured interviews.

1.4 Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to understand some cultural barriers that influence women's access to education in rural Nepal. This topic is of high importance considering the situation

of women without education in rural areas of the country. Officially, the government of Nepal recognizes that the realities of the situation of uneducated women in rural areas and offers women equal educational opportunities, but existing traditional cultural beliefs and practices nevertheless limit them to access to education. To change the situation, we should examine how some cultural barriers and gender inequality act as major hindrances to women's education in rural Nepalese society. This dissertation draws attention to the ways that the cultural barriers documented here are at the heart of the problem of educating rural women in Nepal.

In Nepal, early marriage is still a very common cultural practice, especially in rural area. Parents there usually believe that to marry off daughters before their first menstruation is a good deed will open the door to heaven for them after death. This conviction still exerts a great deal of influence in Nepalese culture. This belief appears in the data from the study because it continues as a common practice in the culture where all my participants grew up. Women in the rural area recognized it as a problem for their access to education. Regarding another influential factor, the preference for having a son and seeing to his education, many parents were conscious about their sons' education and required daughters to learn and carry out all household work. These are two of the issues that lead me to choose this topic for my thesis.

Through analysis and discussion concerning how some cultural barriers influence women's education in this specific context, I hope to contribute to the evaluation and development of the situation. My aim is to add to current knowledge of the impact of cultural beliefs and practices on rural women's education, since access to education plays an important role in bringing change to women's lives in rural area.

1.5 An Overview of Research Methods

The researcher adopted qualitative methods to answer the research question. Qualitative methods helped to explore in depth issues surrounding traditional cultural attitudes regarding women's education and yielded new insights into the topic. Qualitative data was collected from local Nepalese women in the rural area. A total number of nine informants were purposefully chosen and interviewed using an opened- ended interview guide.

Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire for the interviews and before the interviews were carried out, an interview guide with some clear questions was prepared. The construction of data collection tools was guided by the objectives of the study and ethical issues. During the process of data collection, the researcher observed all the rights of respondents. The ethical considerations included the respect for the respondents' freedom, privacy, confidentiality and avoidance of harm.

Data analysis for the qualitative data began with including themes from the recorded semi-structured interviews. I recorded all interviews on a tape recorder and coded all answers. The recordings were transferred subsequently to a computer and through it, transcribed and analyzed. Short notes were also made during the interviews to aid the transcription. The transcriptions were read several times to ascertain the facts and make appropriate interpretations. Conclusions based on the qualitative research findings allowed me to make recommendations to promote women's education and women empowerment in the rural area. Methodological issues will be further dealt with in chapter three.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters outlined as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter introduces of the thesis. It provides a personal interest, research question, purpose of research and an overview of research methods.

Chapter Two: Background of the Study

This chapter outlines the geographical and socio-cultural context of Nepal. It provides a detailed account of religion, ethnic diversity and caste system, together with a short description of socio-political situation in Nepal. In addition, it presents thereafter the situation of women in Nepal. This background material serves as a part of the framework for the debate and discussion later in the thesis.

Chapter Three: Methodological Considerations

In this chapter, I will introduce the methodological choices I made during the research process. First, I will present research design, which includes discussions of validity, reliability, the role of researcher, and qualitative and quantitative methods. Thereafter, I will

focus on the methods used for producing data collection tools and techniques, mainly the selection of participations, ‘situating’ myself as a researcher, interviews, use of tape recorder, and transcription of interviews. I also present the overview of participants. I continue by describing choice of qualitative method and discuss why this method was the best for my research. The last section of the chapter, I describe the data analysis method and discuss ethical considerations that arose during the interviews.

Chapter four: Theoretical Considerations

This chapter presents theoretical concepts related to the research question and objectives of the study. First and foremost, I will start with the conceptual framework whilst focusing on culture. Thereafter, I will discuss the Caste System, Household Works, Son Preference and Early Marriage. The last section of the chapter, I will present the empowerment theory focusing on women empowerment will be given.

Chapter five: findings

This chapter includes the description of views and experiences derived from research participants, as well as the data obtained from semi-structured interviews. I have interviewed nine women from rural area in Nepal. The quotations are used to present the views and experiences of participants in their own words without any alteration. The author translated all quotations from the Nepali language.

Chapter six: Discussion

This chapter presents the main findings from the interviews I conducted with nine informants, discuss these in relation to the theories presented in chapter four, and on this basis, attempt to answers my research question. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I will not able to discuss all the findings from the interviews, but focus largely on those problems that can help to understand cultural barriers to women’s access to education in rural area.

Chapter seven: Conclusion

This chapter concludes some of the major findings that emerged from the interviews with nine local Nepalese women in rural area.

Chapter 2: Background of the Study

This chapter outlines the geographical and socio-cultural context of Nepal. It provides a detailed account of religion, ethnic diversity and caste system, together with a short description of socio-political situation in Nepal. In addition, it presents thereafter the situation of women in Nepal. This background material serves as a part of the framework for the debate and discussion later in the thesis.

2.1 Geographical Context of Nepal

Nepal is a small, landlocked country boarding Tibet (China) to its north, and India to its east, west, and south. Nepal has diverse geographic landscape covering approximately 147,181 square km, which varies from 60 to 8,848 meters above sea level. Despite its small size, Nepal is an extremely diverse country. Geographically, the country contains three regions: Mountains, Hills, and Terai. The southern lowland plains of the Terai have a subtropical to tropical climate. The Mountain Region, situated in the great Himalayan Range; make up the northern part of Nepal. It contains the highest elevations in the world, including the 8848-meter-high Mount Everest. The Hill Region is mostly 1,000 and 4,000 meters in altitude. Nepal's major North-South- flowing river systems intersect these ecological East-West belts. The average annual precipitation varies from as little as 160 millimeters in the rain shadow North of Himalayas to as much as 5500 millimeters on windward slopes (Dahal, Hasegawa 2008). Politically, Nepal has five development regions and multiple lower levels of government (Lohani et al 2010).

Moreover, Nepal is a small buffer state with a population of 26.6 million, with 12.9 million males and 13.6 million females (Central Bureau Statistics, 2012). In Nepal, around 40 percent population is illiterate. The current Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2012) report explains that male literacy rate is 75.1 percent and female literacy rate is 57.4 percent. The highest literacy rate is in Kathmandu district (83.3%) and the lowest in Rauthat district (41.7%).

Hindu belief views men and women as complementing halves that are equal in strength, but men throughout the centuries have dominated and designated themselves as the superior gender. Reinforced so frequently and in so many ways, this belief leads many women in Nepal to think of their husbands as their God, someone she worships. For these women today, following a man's orders without question is a form of servility that seems natural.

2.2 Socio- Cultural Context

Nepal is a multi- ethnic and multicultural country. The 2011 census recorded 126 caste and ethnic groups, 123 languages and 10 religious groups (CBS 2012,4). 81 percent of the population is Hindu. In terms of ethnic groups is no clear majority but numerous minorities (Thapa and Sijapati,2004:77). Nepal has a traditionally rigid caste system, which is a result of the ancient orthodox Indian caste system that continues to influence social stratification as a method of ordering an individual's role in the society (Burbank, 1994). Each caste has its own language and culture.

The caste categories are hereditary, which Hindus regard as the dominant and ruling philosophy of the religion that links power and social order. The inherent superiority of some castes and the inferiority of others is one of the Hinduism's central elements. Because the people perform caste- based work, higher caste people work on a high level, and lower caste people do the low-level work. They are humbled in relation to high caste people because of the work they do. Lower caste people are also less privileged with regard to education, and thus they have a lower level of literacy, which limits their opportunity to get employment.

The Hindu caste system is one of the fundamental aspects of Nepali society. The caste system plays an important role in determining an individual's socio-economic status, political power, behavior and obligations, and has an essential function in governing relationships both within and between the caste groups (Pandey, 2005). After the 1990s, constitutional changes, development programs by governmental and non-governmental organizations, the announcement that Nepal as secular state in 2006, and an increasing number of inter-caste marriages have contributed towards breaking down the restrictions of the caste system. At the same time, positive changes have also occurred benefitting rural communities, especially their Hindus and lower-caste women.

2.3 The Situation of women in Nepal

Although women comprise over 50% of the population, Nepalese society is patriarchal across all the different castes, cultures, and traditions in the country. Nepalese women are still very much under the rule of their husband and they expected to take care of the household, children, husband, community matters, and relatives, leaving their personal interests aside (Bhusal,2008). These matters are expected to be a women's personal interests.

The tradition of girls going away to their husband's house upon marriage has lessened their status even within their own family. To add to this plight, the custom of giving a dowry to daughter during the wedding has made them a huge financial burden and liability for the parents, further decreasing their prestige and status in the family. Even a highly-educated daughter has less decision-making power than a less educated son. The differences are even greater between husband and wife. This is often because girls get married at a very young age and are not given the opportunity or respect to voice their opinion in their family. The situation for women is characterized by a low level of access to education, healthcare, and social and political opportunities. Education can play vital role to make a capable population of women for family, society and country. Due to the lack of education, women cannot support themselves and need to depend on men for survival.

They are therefore too immature to decide and have no choice about the timing of marriage and their partner. According to Nepalese government sources, thousands of Nepali Girls leave school every year to get married, missing out on their education. For instance, the girls' dropout is high in the Terai region, where more than 50% of marriages involve girls under the age of 12. Many children do not attain school. Most of those excluded are girls, especially those who were married at a young age (IRIN, 2012). Tradition leads the girls to take on roles for which they are not psychologically or physically prepared, which contributes to a series of negative result, both for the girls and their society.

Moreover, marriage and childbearing persist among women in many south Asian countries including Nepal. The government and human rights groups are working together in these issues to reduce the traditional practices. As the women are sent to their husband's house through marriage, they are considered as part of the other family, which may occur when they reach a teen age, but it can take place any time. So, from these many perspectives, women are seriously disadvantaged than men in Nepalese Society, particularly in education and economic status. These conditions still exist, especially in the rural areas of Nepal.

The patriarchal authoritarian family structure has been common in Nepal, where men are considered superior to female dominating in every aspect of their personal, social and domestic life (Gyawali,2006). Thus, the Nepalese women socially, educationally and

economically depend on the authority of men. They are mostly assigned to perform the traditional roles, for instance: household chores, child bearing and caring for husband's family and husband.

The situation of many Nepalese women is made more difficult and problematic because some aspects of Hindu traditional culture seem to hinder women's access to education. Women's education freedom and equality have been facing various ups and downs that are manifested in the form religious beliefs and cultural practice in Nepalese society. Although, Women are important agents of change and can be powerful leader in family and society, their education becomes minimized because of men are better economic investment permeates in society. The constitution offers equal educational opportunities for men and women, but some religious and cultural factors hinders women's access to education in rural area in Nepal. Moreover, Women in Nepalese context comparatively low social status has hindered their education. Even though, female literacy rate has improved conspicuously over the years, in the early 1990s Nepalese female literacy rate fell far short of its male literacy rate, but the religious and cultural factors contributed to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates among the Nepalese women.

Moreover, Nepalese women's educational status is lower than men's education in rural areas. However lower educational status has many negative consequences in Nepalese women's lives. It is not limited women's skills and capacities, but also individual health, family health, legal and constitutional rights, their utilization and their actives participation in community maters. Bhushal (2008) says that Nepalese society still being run by a patriarchal feudal system and traditional cultural beliefs and practices in which women in comparison to men are considered to have lower status. The activities of discrimination, exploitation and domination still prevail. Superstition and other related problems have been deep- rooted in Nepalese society due to the lack of education and awareness among the people (ibid). To raise the status of women, education is critical to the process. In addition, for the overall development of the personality, society, and the nation women need to participate in education and public affairs.

Chapter 3: Methodological Considerations

Methodology is essential in the processes of producing and analyzing empirical data. The empirical data presented in this thesis is based on the interviews. I carried out in rural area in Nepal. In this chapter, I will introduce the methodological choices I made during the research process. First, I will present research design, which includes discussions of validity and reliability, the role of researcher, and qualitative and quantitative methods. Thereafter, I will focus on the methods used for producing data collection tools and techniques, mainly the selection of participations, ‘situating’ myself as a researcher, interviews, use of tape recorder, and transcriptions of interviews. I also present the overview of participants. I continue by describing choice of qualitative method and discuss why this method was the best for my research. The last section of the chapter, I describe the data analysis method and discuss ethical considerations that arose during the interviews.

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Validity and Reliability

In research, Validity and reliability are very important concepts for the evaluation of the research project’s objects and situation from qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The concepts of validity and reliability are mostly associated with quantitative research, but these principles should also be reflected upon in qualitative research (Silverman,2001). These concepts are essential to consider when carrying out qualitative research since they help to determine the objectivity of the findings. Validity and reliability illustrate the level of trustworthiness and credibility of research. Validity is in many ways the most important criterion. Validity can be defined as “whether you are observing, identifying or measuring what you say you are” (Bryman, 2008). Validity is concerned with integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research.

Reliability concerns whether the same observations would be identified if another type of method were applied or if the investigation were carried out at a different time or by another researcher (Kirk and Miller,1986). Moreover, (Bryman, 2008) explains that validity and reliability are separated into internal and external concepts. Internal reliability refers to whether there is more than one researcher within the study group so that observers can agree about to what see and hear. External reliability means to what extent a research can completed again with results comparable to the original study. It might be difficult to achieve high

external reliability since the scene and the setting is likely to change from the time of the original research to the time of a second one.

Kvale and Mason (1996; 2002) suggest that the researcher is the primary instrument while collecting and analyzing the data. The reliability and the validity of the study therefore depend upon the quality of the researcher's work. An important aspect in qualitative method is that the data must be produced through the relationship between the researcher and informants. Therefore, it is impossible to reproduce the interview with another researcher. That is why different researchers often get different experiences from the same informant. It is because there are different ways to present the same event and experiences.

Furthermore, by posing different types of questions about the same topic, various kind of information about the research topic can be revealed (Kirk and Miller,1986). Through the face to face interviews I had the opportunity to adjust questions and pose them in another way if I suspected that the informants did not understand the question in the way that I had intended. Even though the researcher may never fully understand the perceptions of informants and the cultural meaning inherent in information, fieldwork allows the researcher to constantly test his/her developed hypothesis in relation to different informants, at different times and in different settings (ibid).

In this study, I have designed a qualitative study to understand some cultural barriers women's access to education in rural area in Nepal. I strongly hope that my study has resulted in valid and reliable findings, because the research territory is my own context where I spent many years and got many experiences. I was very careful in constructing research instruments, for instance: interview guide, to be sure that the instrument measured what was supposed to measured when applying qualitative standardized open-ended in-depth interviews of women in rural area who could be authentic source of valid and reliable data for this study.

3.1.2 Role of Researcher

In research process, the researcher plays an important role in many ways, whether he/she uses the quantitative or qualitative method. Since researchers are the primary instruments in interpretive studies, the role of researcher is crucial for research design; data collection, data analysis and interpretation; and reporting processes to make outcome of the study trustworthy

(Borland,2001). The factors influencing the role of researcher include his/her background and personal qualities; degree of neutrality and involvement; and relationships with the informants.

Moreover, having background knowledge in the field of research is an additional benefit for a researcher. It helps him/her to find out the most suitable participants. Personal experience also means less time might be required or setting of the study. The researcher should have an open and enquiring mind, be a good listener, flexible and adaptive, and devoid of bias (Robson,2002). The researcher ought to be proficient in grasping the issues and interpreting them during the study so that any evidence, clues, etc. are not missed or misinterpreted later. A researcher must be open to contrary findings in order to avoid bias. The researcher must acquire good communication skills and thus present oneself as a reasonable, courteous and unthreatening human being by cordially interacting with the subjects and showing interest in what people do and say, while tolerating long periods of boredom (Randall, Harper&Rouncefield,2008).

Furthermore, the researcher can be classified as either an insider or an outsider depending upon his/her relationship with the subjects and study (Walsham,1995). The outsider “researchers remain at more physical and emotional distance from the subjects and thus the subjects feel free to express themselves as the trust builds up and there is less chance of going negative” (Randall, et., al,2008). This is the advantage of being an outsider since the researcher has no direct personal stake in various interpretations and outcomes of the study (Walsham,1995). Apart from this, the disadvantage of being outsider is that the researcher’s presence at each site or every occasion as well as access to information that is confidential or sensitive is not always possible and thus it is difficult to grasp and understand the direct sense of the field work from the inside in such cases(ibid).

The choice of role for the researcher should depend upon the advantages and limitations for his/her specific role in the study, but the best researcher is one who is an outsider with considerable inside experience (Forsythe,1999). This is because in the interpretive study the researcher must perform a difficult task of interpreting participants. And the outsider researcher having inside experience of the field can extract and interpret or evaluate the data

through systematic comparison between inside and outside views of events and processes (Forsythe,1999).

In this research, I positioned myself as an outsider. I always introduced myself as a student and maintained distance with the informants. I developed good relations with the women of the village. I became a neutral, neither Hindu nor Christian, emphasizing my position as a student doing research for academic purposes. This position had both positive and negative effects during my research period. I thought that it would take time for me to get accepted by people of the village. However, almost from the beginning, I was overwhelmed by the attention and interest of the inhabitants because they knew me very well. As a researcher, I had to be professional and maintain ethical considerations in every situation.

Moreover, I might have missed some confidential information in this case that insider could have collected easily, but the advantage I have experienced was that all informants expressed freely to questionnaires without any hesitation unlike responding to insider (Walsham,1995). There were ensured that their confidentiality will be mentioned. This helped me to develop trust relationship with my informants and interact more easily during the interviews.

During the interview, I never interrupted the informants; rather I listened to them in an interested fashion and let them talk. Thus, we started to behave like friends, I always remained unbiased regarding what they said. Most of the times, I maintained eye contact so that they remained positive towards my interest in the information provided by them. I was always punctual for the interview. However, apart from having appointment, I had to wait sometimes for the informants to be free from their household works and agriculture work in the fields. Moreover, to maintain equal status and get access to become familiar with the informants, I knew very well the situation of women and socio- cultural values in the rural village. I chose local Nepalese women to see some cultural barriers women's access to education. It has been very good for me to get information. I used the Nepali language to communicate with women in the village because they didn't speak English.

3.1.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

A research study can be designed in two ways with qualitative or with quantitative methods. Some studies use both basic kinds of methodology, (Robson,2002) which has been classified

as “flexible” and “fixed” designs respectively. The name “quantitative” method of course refers to quantity or number, and this research method is mostly suitable for determining the size, extent or duration of certain phenomena or find out the pre-specified effect of an intervention cause (Berg, 2003). This method is mostly done in the form of experiments and surveys with close-ended questionnaires and the data so collected are evaluated statistically (Robson, 2002). For conducting this type of research, a well- developed conceptual framework involving “what to look for”, “what you are going to do” and “how to do it” is required to find out the feasibility of the method.

Quantitative methods work with statistics and mathematical techniques and is most effective when yielding data on large sample. Quantitative research mostly begins with the selection of a hypothesis that can be proven true or false statistically, and is suitable for the measurement or analysis of causal relationships between variables. The aim of qualitative research methodology is to understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures. Researchers use qualitative research methods to explore the behavior, perspectives, feeling and experience of the research subjects. The basis of qualitative research methodology lies in the interpretive approach to social reality and in the description of the lived experience of human beings. Qualitative method procedure implies that the researcher collects data in the “natural setting” of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2009).

The data collection in qualitative methodology has much less pre-specification and the design evolves, develops and unfolds as the research proceeds and thus said to have a flexible design (Robson, 2002). The methods used to collect data in qualitative research include interviews, participant observation and the interpretation of texts/documents. Qualitative method is advantageous for producing data concerning the nature of a phenomenon with a focus of human experiences and meaning (ibid).

Considering qualitative and quantitative methodologies, I prefer to work with qualitative methods because the purpose of this research is to see the social world that is constructed through the interactions of individuals, and the social, cultural, economic and political realities of village life in Nepal. This method is also well suited to understanding some cultural barriers on women’s access to education in rural area in Nepal.

3.2 Data Collection Tools and Techniques

Various data collection tools and techniques were used to collect the primary and secondary data for the study. The choice of these tools and techniques was in accordance with those demanded by the research. I take a qualitative approach to this study. Documents are the primary source of data material, while the interviews I have conducted have served the purpose of informing my research at an early stage of the research process. This research has been conducted in rural village in Nepal, where the empirical data that forms the basis of this study was collected in November 2015 from local Nepalese women. In the following section, I discuss some methodological reflections around the selection and use of sources.

3.2.1 Selecting the Participants

Choosing appropriate participants is an important part of the research process. Therefore, during the fieldwork, I was careful with my selection. Since my research aimed at understanding some cultural barriers women's access to education in rural area, I chose illiterate participants who did not get the opportunity to go to school because of traditional cultural beliefs and practices in their society. In other words, the women's experiences ensured that the data gathered is rich and thoughtful. In addition, I selected participants who were very active and eloquent so they shared their thoughts and experiences without hesitation. Even though I chose illiterate participants in my research they were very open and friendly. My experience was that those interviewed to be very open and honest.

One day, I encountered participants at the public place to inform them about my work and find an appropriate time for interviews. In addition, I told them I was working on an education project concerning women in the village who did not get change to go to school because of existing cultural barriers influenced them in their own society. Although I encountered my participants at a public place, I conducted interviews individually in their own homes, on the way and in the agriculture fields. I did not have a group interview because the people were very busy harvesting rice, and therefore I could not manage to find an appropriate time. Fortunately, I could have finished my fieldwork at with them one at a time because my participants were very willing to share their thoughts and experiences with me, even though they were busy working in the agriculture fields. So, all our interviews arrangements were made quickly during my first contact with them. It came as a surprise to me that the response to my selection of participants was easier than I had expected.

3.2.2 'Situating', Myself as a Researcher

Access to people in rural village was not easy for me, especially in a situation where there were many illiterate people and local traditional cultural beliefs and practices. As Silverman (2006) said, every researcher faces some challenges during the fieldwork and no guidelines exist that can predict every possible event in the field. Most of the people were curious about me and what I was going to do. Upon my visit with women in the village, many assumed that I was working for women in village. At the initial stage of my research, while I was preparing the plan to select the interviewees and my stay in this village, I observed their situation, their interest in education and the cultural and religious obstacles they had encountered.

I prepared the plan to conduct interviews individually in their own homes, on the way and agricultural fields. It was very easy for me to get different views and experiences because of the previous discussion regarding the topic and purpose of my study. During the research, I lived at home with my family in the village. It was very hard time for me. I did initially plan to spend the whole time for fieldwork in the village. Unfortunately, I could stick to my plan because of my small baby and being busy with house-work. I was working hard at home as a housewife, and sometimes I was working out in the agriculture: harvesting rice, carrying Buffalo manure and digging fields. I was pursuing my research despite various obstacles at home. However, it was not easy to arrange an appropriate time for all informants and myself because all my interviewees were very busy harvesting rice and millet in the fields. That is why I interviewed four women in their own homes, two women on the way and three women in the agriculture fields. I spent 25 days in the village doing my research.

3.2.3 Interviews

In this research project, the data were performed by interviews. Interviews can be conducted via either structured, semi-structured or unstructured questionnaires (Robson,2002) depending upon the need and subject matter under study. I followed semi- structure interviews with open- end questionnaires. The respondents were allowed to talk freely and express their own views in order to obtain rich interpretation and maintain balance between excessive passivity and over direction (Walsham, 1995). The purpose of choosing semi- structure interviews with open-ended questionnaires as the data collection tool was to be flexible enough during the interviews and provide opportunities to discuss on other related topics. This interview method

also allows the informants to elaborate their views, experiences and interpret in their own way (Robson,2002).

The interviews were conducted in a rural village of Nepal during November of 2015. I conducted semi- structure interviews using open-ended questionnaires. The chosen research method for this study is semi- structured interviews and before the interviews were carried out an interview guide with some clear questions was prepared. So, that I would have an idea what kind of questions I should ask during the interviews. However, even though I had a pre-designed interview guide, I was not limited by it (Bryman, 2008), whenever the interviewees talked about something that I wanted to know more about or they started talking about issues I had not been considering in my interview guide. Due to the flexibility of the interviews and designing the questions in a more open way I could be happy that the interviewee's own views became apparent in the interviews (Bryman, 2008).

After all, I decided that interviews would be the most appropriate procedure for my study to discover information from the different respondents. This research method involves gathering of data through direct verbal conversation between individual. The nine participants included in this study were local Nepalese women from rural village of Nepal. The participants ranged in age from 30 to 55. All participants were illiterate, and they couldn't read and write. I conducted interviews with nine informants in their own homes, on the ways and some in the agriculture fields. As a Silverman (2006:20) argues "open- end" questions are the most effective methods to fulfill the aim of qualitative research and to gather an "authentic" understanding of people experiences. Being aware of this, I conducted semi- structured interviews using open- ended questions to encourage my informants to share their experiences and feeling with as little imposition as possible.

The interview would start according to the same pattern: First, I would say a traditional Nepalese greeting, introduce myself, tell my name, and where I am coming from, described what I study, what I am writing about, what I am interested in this field. Interviews were conducted in accordance with a plan. Thus, before data collection I prepared a detailed interview guide that included list of questions presented in logical sequence and in a certain order. For different informants, I created list of same questions and some different questions for my lower caste informants. All interviews were conducted individually and were different

duration, from 1 hour to 2.5 hours with local Nepalese women in Village. At the introduction stage, I explained to the respondents the purpose and objectives of the interviews. I assured respondents about the confidentiality of their answers, saying them, I would not mention their names or any other personal information. Moreover, With the permission of the participants and in order to not lose out on any information, I chose to use a recorder during all my interviews. I managed to record all the interviews with the help of tape recorder.

Even though recording brings about issues about how comfortable the interviewee is in the situation and how much the person wants to talk about personal issues when the recorder on, I decided to take that risk, because by recording the interviews, I was later able to re-listen to the interviews and observe what the interviewees talk about and how they talk about a certain topic (Bryman, 2008), which again is beneficial for the analysis when the data can be scrutinized repeatedly. Besides, I was making short notes about details in my diary. During interview, some participants were outspoken and some were of shy nature. Mostly, women were didn't hesitate to express their views and experiences. But some of the women did not speak more than necessary.

Moreover, during the interviews, I used camera as well. I asked my participants whether I could take a photo of them which they allowed me to do. I spent more than hour doing each interview and got the information I needed. Sometimes I talked to them several times, especially when some aspects of the conversation were very interesting. All interviews were performed in Nepali Language. They could not speak English language due to the lack of education. To have everything transcribed was very useful in the aftermath of the interviews. I was careful with the transcriptions and translations and used both English and Nepali dictionaries as I needed to be as accurate as possible. Those transcriptions were carefully read several times. I began the interviews by asking general questions. Initially, I started to ask them their name, age, occupation, family backgrounds, and their home situations.

Thereafter, I tried to ask my questions by phrasing them differently on different occasions, depending on the level of interesting and understanding shown by the respondents. With each answer, I attempted to probe more deeply and lead the women to tell me about the things that were most important for me. Interviews were carried out in various locations: homes, in the

agriculture fields or on the way to their work. During the interviews, I took pictures of my participants, some of which are included in the thesis.



Fig 1: This woman is cooking rice and meat.



Fig 2: This woman is carrying the paddy.



Fig 3: These women are harvesting millet in the field.



Fig 4: This woman is cutting grass.

3.2.4 Use of Tape Recorder

All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviews, because “compared to short notes, recording and transcripts can offer a highly reliable record to which researchers can return as they develop new hypotheses” (Silverman,2006). All my participants were agreed to record their sounds, it was good for coding and analyzing. The audiotape was used for recording data while carrying out the interviews, which was coupled with note- taking, in case audio-taping failed to record the information (Creswell,2013). I took short notes including date, time, and short background description of interview- participants.

All the interviews were tape- recorded and I coded all answers. I found great similarity in the answers. In this regard, I thought that all participants had the same problems in accessing education in rural areas. The participants were informed about the tape recording of the conversation. All participants verbalized their understanding of the tape- recorder and agreed to its use. Some participants were very interested in listening to their recorded voices. They were informed that interviews would be deleted from the recorder after the completion of the study, and it will not be shared with anyone. The recorded interviews were copied in my computer when I arrived in Norway.

3.2.5 Transcription of the Interviews

Wengraf (2001) described that transcribing is the first task in the analysis and interpretation of the interviews materials. He further argued that although transcribing can be boring and time consuming, it is “a crucial step in interviewing” All the interviews were tape- recorded and verbatim transcribed by me. It took me several days to transcribe interviews. Tape- recorded sound quality was not very good and I had to listen again and again. The recorded verbatim allowed me to listen to interviews repeatedly and help me to ensure that transcriptions were done currently (Patton, 2002).

While listening to the tape- recorder and typing whenever I found new and interesting that I needed more clarification. I asked to my husband to be more clarification. It was very difficult to asked again to my informants because they were very away. They did not use internet, and even they didn't have mobile phone. I did the transcription after a month when I get back to Norway. This helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the information and gave me the opportunity to reflect on my research work.

3.3 Overview of participants

In total, nine women took part in this study. As I already mentioned, the participants ranged in age from 30 to 55. All interviews were conducted in November 2015. All interviews were conducted individually and were of different duration, from 1 hour to 2.5 hours with local Nepalese women in a rural village. The following section provides background information on each of the participants, from oldest to youngest, high caste and low caste, education etc.

Interviewee A: She is 54 years old, illiterate high caste women. She did not get an education opportunity. Her father was very conservative regarding the education of his daughter. She cannot read and write. Her father forced her to get married at an early age. After getting married she tried to join a literacy program, but it was not possible due to her daily house work and the responsibility of children and family. She has three daughters. Her husband and others family members wanted her to have a son. She had one son after pressure by members of the family. She worked in the fields and in the home. She regretted the lack of education in her life due to her poor circumstances.

Interviewee B: She is 32 years old, lower caste woman (so called untouchable). She was suffering from poverty. Her father was working hard with high caste family. It was very difficult to afford basic needs for children. Father forced her to work with high caste people to support the family. Her parents did not have much land nor any income. When she was 15 years old her parents arranged her a marriage for her. After getting married, it was not possible to get any education. She is still working with high caste people to survive. Her husband was illiterate, and everyday drank a lot. She is facing many social problems at home and in society

Interviewee C: She is 50 years old, Brahmin woman (so called upper class). She got married at an early age because of the Hindu traditional cultural belief in priest family. Her father was willing to get marry her before first time menstruation. She did not want to go against her parent's wishes as they were both illiterate and innocent, but she was always against traditional cultural beliefs of high caste families. Fortunately, after getting married, she got chance to join the literacy program. Now she can write a little. She has four children, two sons and two daughters. Even though she did not have a formal education, she

encouraged her children to pursue education. That is why her children are living in the city so that they can get educated and, hopefully, good jobs. She is living in the village with her husband and works in the fields. I felt very happy to talk with her because she had good understanding about education and traditional culture.

Interviewee D: She is 43 years old, lower caste woman. Her parents were very poor. Even they didn't have enough food to eat morning and evening. They devoted their whole life working with high caste family. Her father didn't give her the opportunity to go to school. Since early age, parents forced her to stay at home and take care of siblings. She got married at the age of 14. She has four daughters. Her husband has another wife. She lives with her daughters in another house. Her husband lives with his young wife and one son. Every day she worked hard with high caste people in order to survive. She said that she had a very difficult family life because of her lack of education.

Interviewee E: She is 46 years old Chhetri woman of middle caste. She had little educational opportunity. She cannot read and write. Her parents had a very negative attitude towards education. The parents forced her to get married at a very early age. She has four children, three daughters and one son. Her husband is a secondary teacher in a state school. Even though her husband is a secondary teacher he never encouraged his wife to join the literacy program in the village. She works hard work at home and in the fields. She tends to a lot of cattle at home. Every morning she must go to the forest to cut grass for the cattle. She also takes care of her husband and four children and other relatives. She is quite worried and not satisfied with her life because of her lack of education.

Interviewee F: She is 35 years old, middle caste women (so called Chhetri)). She was born into a poor and traditional family. She had many brothers and sisters, her parents did not have money to invest in the children's education. Her parents decided to get married at an early age and she went to live in her husband's house. After getting married she did not get opportunity to go to school. Her husband worked in construction in the village. She is working on the farm, taking care children and doing the daily house work.

Interviewee G: She is 38 years old, high caste woman. She did not get a chance to go to school because of the early marriage. She was not happy with married life because her parents

always created problems in her life. She did not get enough food to eat. She spent her life as a servant. She has three children and lived with her family for more than twelve years. Now she lives in a separate house from her parents in-law. She faces many problems in her life because of the traditional culture and due to the lack of education

Interviewee H: She is a 49 years old high caste woman. Her father was very conservative towards his daughter's education. Since early age her father forced her to do household work instead of going to school. From an early age, she was working hard at home. She was the eldest daughter in her family and had many responsibilities in the home. She cared for her youngest siblings in the home. Her father forced her to get married at an early age because of the values of being a high caste family and cultural considerations. She has five children, works on the farm and in the home.

Interviewee I: She is 41 years old Tamang woman (from an ethnic group). She has also same problem as others, but is quite clever. Her traditional culture was different than other caste culture. Although she did not have any education she has taken responsibility for the household life. Her husband is a farmer. She was interested to join literacy program near the village but her husband did not give her that opportunity. She is taking care of the children and the daily house work. She is not happy with her life because of the hard housework and her lack of education.

3.4 Choice of Qualitative Research

For this dissertation used qualitative research methods as I believed would be more appropriate to the study and help me gather data that will be important to analyze the situation. My research was aimed at gathering qualitative information by focusing on local Nepalese women in the rural part of Nepal. It involved ethnographic methodology-interviewing.

According to the Denzin and Lincoln qualitative research is “born out of concern to understand the other” (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). It has suited me perfectly, as I went to the chosen place for in-depth study and understood the customs, habits, living situations, culture and society. I decided that interviews would be the most appropriate procedure for my study to get information from the different people. This research method “involves gathering data

through direct verbal conversation between individuals” (Manion L. & Morrison K. 2000). Qualitative method is powerful method because of its ability to explore the people’s real world directly in their own context. It studies the human behavior, attitudes and experiences times and describes how people organize their world and gives meaning to their lives. Through an interview, the interviewer can get closer to interviewee and collect the empirical data in detail.

In this paper, I wanted to explore “In what ways might cultural barriers influence Nepalese women’s access to education in rural areas?” To answer this question, I needed exactly the narrations with associated meaning, people’s behavior, attitudes, belief and values through direct conversation. That is why I have chosen a qualitative approach in my study. The approaches for data collection were one –one interview through women in a rural village. The interviews were conducted with open-ended questionnaires. This type of study is well suited to qualitative research design because it was the appropriate tool to collect the necessary information from women in the village.

3.5 Data Analysis Method

Data analysis method, as the core of a research gives an overview of the study, analysis and interpretation of findings. Thus, it is a process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data (Marshall and Rossman,1999), where it finds the meaning in data that gives an answer to the research questions in qualitative design (Merriam,2009). In other words, data analysis involves the process of organizing what have been directly seen, heard and read. That is why researcher can make sense of what had been learned. As mentioned, data analysis method in qualitative research is a search for patterns and relationship in data through constant comparing between individuals, stories, experiences and feeling attached to their experiences.

I used interviews as a main data collection method. These interviews were guided by the questionnaires. The data materials include primary and secondary literature books, articles, newspaper, internet, and so on. I conducted interviews beginning of November 2015 with nine women in a rural village of Nepal. During the interviews, I was given attention to each of the experiences that women expressed in our conversations and interactions. All interviews were recorded with the permission of participants and written in the short notes. Transcribing

the interviews while still in the field created the opportunity to understand more about the participants and their traditional culture.

It was not greatly complex for me to accumulate in the society since I was also one of the members of this society. Being part of the society and culture, I was recognizable with its members, culture, social tradition and practices. One challenge I have faced in the collection of data has been that all participants were not able to speak English. Since, I do not write my thesis in Nepali language, I spent long time to translate Nepali into English. During the research, I was putting them into codes after finishing each interview. With the interview technique, I developed some important points and some long paragraph during my interviews after reading many times, and analyzed myself about important aspects I had written. These interpretations are presented according to the themes and used in the analysis of findings and discussions based on the theory.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are an important part of the research process, and especially when it comes to the “lack of informed consent” (Bryman: 2008). Especially, in the qualitative research, the researcher should face the ethical challenges. The researcher must exemplify the following conditions during the data collection: respect for persons, maximization of possible benefits and minimization possible harms, and protection of justice regarding who benefits from the research (Hemming, 2009). As my research was understanding some cultural barriers to women’s access to education in rural area in Nepal, and since the interviews involved personal interaction, the ethical issues of informed consent and confidentiality had to be very carefully consider.

3.6.1 Informed consent

The ethical principle shows that the researcher’s respect for participants is asking for their permission before the research can be started. The participations are normally informed of the purpose of the research, its procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality and the right to withdraw (Burns, 2000: Johnson and Christensen,2008). After reaching the research field, the researcher interduce herself to the participants informing them about purpose of the study. As this study sought views and experiences from interviewees, the researcher informed the respondents that they were free to decide to participate or not. As women were my primary

research participants, I took consideration of their views, experiences and interest to include them in my study. As researcher, I listened to women as competent participants, which involves respecting their informed consent to participate as well as their right to decline involvement or withdraw from research.

I am very grateful that my informants were willing to share their thoughts and experiences with me because without their cooperation I could not have written this thesis. Although, they were busy harvesting rice and millet in the fields they managed make time for my research. When I was starting my interviews, I told my participants that all data about them would be confidential. I explained to them, what I was investigating and explained the purpose of my study. During the interview, I encouraged my participants to share their views and experiences confidently and without any hesitation. I asked their husbands at home if I was allowed to interview to their wives. I was never refused a conversation but always checked in advance as part of ethical considerations, especially because in our society women are not competent to make decisions by themselves (Silverman, 2005).

3.6.2 Confidentiality

Another important ethical issue is confidentiality, meaning that identity of the participants and the information they provide is no way disclosed unless the participants give their permission. This is significant because there are circumstances where data are publicized without participants' permission and this may cause them harm. On the other hand, the matter of confidentiality and maintaining privacy of all participants is high recommended to develop a mutual understanding through trust as well as to preserve the ethical standards in a flawless research (Baez,2002). The confidentiality and privacy of data generated after interviews were kept in my personal computer with a secure password. The access of data; tape-recorded was shared only to the individuals involved in research. I always asked permission to recorded the interviews. Moreover, I assured my participants that all recorded data were going to be deflected after submission of my thesis. Reflecting on the interviews, I feel confident that I was not abusing my informants by making them talk to me.

The short notes were only accessible to me. Anonymity was maintained on the transcripts of data. All data were kept without mentioning the name or any recognizable factors of the participants. It was highly essential to maintain privacy of collected because most of the

people in the rural village who know each other. Confidentiality is essential in research on sensitive topic because the potential of harm to participants who will refuse to cooperate if confidentiality is not clearly guaranteed (Cohen et al., 2007). Privacy is a human right that must be protected, and guaranteeing a participant's confidentiality avoids violating their privacy (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The study was about some cultural barriers influence women's access to education in rural area in Nepal, which is also being a sensitive topic, confidentiality was highly required. Interviews was conducted in a designated place where privacy was heightened.

The participants were also informed and request to maintain confidentiality of the matters. To ensure the participants' confidentiality, I did not tell anyone who was involved in my research. Their names were not mentioned. The findings were discussed and presented in such a way that their identities could not be deduced. Furthermore, the participants were informed about the anonymity of the data collected before initiating each interview. All the data generated during the study will be destructed after the completion of thesis.

During the interviews, I took some pictures with the permission of my interviewees. They agreed to allow their pictures to be used in my thesis. Some of them were so interested to see their picture in my thesis paper that I promised them that I will show them their pictures after submission of my thesis. In addition, I also encouraged my participants to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words, in-depth interviews reveal the interactions that form part of these women's education and their situation in the rural village. Reflecting on the interviews, I feel very happy with the way I conducted my interviews, winning in the process the confidence of the participants.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Considerations

This chapter presents theoretical concepts related to the research question and objectives of the study. First and foremost, I will start with the conceptual framework whilst focusing on traditional culture. Thereafter, I will discuss the Caste System, Household Works, Son Preference and Early Marriage. The last section of the chapter, I will present the empowerment theory focusing on women empowerment will be given.

4.1 The concept culture

Culture is a widely-discussed topic within social theory, and the concept is an important contributing when studying social behavior (.....). The Theorist, Raymond Williams (1976), described 'culture' as one of the most complex words in the English language. Raymond Williams also argues that culture is one of the most difficult concepts to define. He linked cultural activities and interests of the masses, particularly with the working- class to rural communities, and he declared that "Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purpose, its own meaning. Every society expresses these, in societies, and in arts and learning" (William, 1958:4). He described that Culture as meaning "a whole way of life- the common meaning", and the arts and learning the special process of discovery and creative effort (ibid:8).

Castro-Gomez,2001) address that in the nineteenth centuries, the concept of culture was defined in opposition to nature as a range of social, political, ethical, religious, philosophical and technical values. (...). The recent cultural theorist Hannerz (1990:237) says that the world of culture created through the increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures [.....] as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory. Moreover, Culture can be defined as a pattern of basic assumption- invented, discovered and developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration- that has worked well enough to be considered and, therefore, to be taught to new people as the proper way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems (Schien 1985).

On the other hand, the theorist Hofstede (1997) described Culture is the collective programming of mind which distinguished the members of one group or category of the people from another. This mental programming starts within the family, society and continues

within the neighborhood and workplace through their life time which contributes to the overall socialization process of the people (Hofstede, 1997).

Furthermore, Culture is the basic [...] assumptions and beliefs that are shared by the people in society. These assumptions and beliefs are learned response to groups of problem of survival on its external environment and problem of internal integration. Culture can be defined as a pattern of basic assumption- invented, discovered and developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration- that has worked well enough to be considered and, therefore, to be taught to new people as the proper way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problem (Schien 1985). Hofstede (1997) described Culture is the collective programming of mind which distinguished the members of one group or category of the people from another. This mental programming starts within the family, society, continue within the neighborhood and workplace thought their life time which contributes to the overall socialization process of the people.

Moreover, in the nineteenth centuries, the concept of culture was defined in opposition to nature as a range of social, political, ethical, religious, philosophical and technical values. The political thinkers and philosophers considered cultural forms that were close to nature is as superior to popular to culture. The Western, predominantly Christian culture is considered superior to those of tribal peoples who lived closer to nature and often practiced naturalistic rites. It was also believed that the nation state was the best carrier of the culture or national spirit of the people(Castro-Gomez,2001). The recent cultural theorist Hannerz (1990:237) says that: the word of culture created through the increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory. These are all becoming sub-cultures, as it were, within the wider whole.

Traditional culture is commonly used word to indicate our beliefs or customs that are derived from the ancient time. Traditional culture includes number of interrelated ideas such as traditional knowledge, traditional life style, and traditional business which are widely used in everyday life. It is a set of beliefs that is transmitted from one generation to the next during time in all family and society. Barfield (1997:140) says, the concept of tradition can be defined as “a category that individuals and societies ascribe expressions, beliefs and behaviors in the present to add value for the future”. Similarly, traditional cultural knowledge comes out

from the local people which encompasses values, beliefs, and cultures and is the result of the direct interface of nature (Agrawal, 1995).

In this research project, the concepts of culture and women's education within it as example of invented traditional culture. Furthermore, the roles of women within this traditional culture are house work, childbearing, care for husband and family instead to go school and outside works.

4.2 Caste System

“Caste is ranked endogamous divisions of society in which membership is permanent and hereditary” (Berremen, 1972:198). Caste system directs Hindu society in four different hierarchical categories: (I) (Brahman (Priests and Scholars) (ii) Kshatriya or Chhetri (rulers and warriors) (iii) Vaisya (merchants and traders) (iv) Sudra (untouchables) farmers, artisans and laborer (Indian Institute of Dalit Studies,2008). On the other hand, Beteille (1965) says Caste ‘as a small and named group of persons characterized by hereditary membership, and specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and usually associated with a distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system’ (Beteille, 1965). Similarly, Berreman (1967) argues that the caste system as a ‘system of birth-ascribed stratification, of socio-culture pluralism, and of hierarchical interaction’ (Berreman,1967). In addition, (Ghurye, 1964) adds that the fundamental concepts in the caste system are commonly associated with traditional occupations.

As argued by Upreti (B.C.2007), the caste system in Nepal was conceived and nurtured by religious and cultural values. The blending of cultural values and religious beliefs produced a class hierarchy, and in most cases a class system is blended with the caste hierarchy. Those that fall at the bottom of the hierarchy are scattered all over the country. The lowest caste is composed of the poor, illiterate people who performs menial jobs for a living. The people in the lowest caste also have marginal living conditions, and face social abuses (Upreti, B.C.2007). Upreti further argues that the lower caste people, particularly women are discriminated against in society. According to Upreti, in the Nepalese society the women fall into the lowest category in the lowest caste hierarchy and are treated in society as untouchables. They are not allowed to enter religious places and perform ‘puja’ (worship).

The women in the lowest caste perform menial jobs that are prohibited for the upper caste people. These women in the lowest caste live in the fringe areas of the urban localities with no facilities (Upreti, B.C.2007) that make life worth living. The caste system is closely associated with Hinduism in South Asia and is considered the oldest surviving social hierarchy in the world (Pyakurel,2007). However, it is mostly dominant in India and Nepal where, it is considered one of the rigid stratification systems without any possibility to change one's caste move between castes categories. Caste of person is determined by his/her birth into a particular social group. (ibid). Likewise, the caste system is an inseparable aspect of Hindu society and keeps close nexus with the Hindu philosophy, religious beliefs, custom and tradition connecting with marriage system, moral and manner, food, dress, habit, occupation, hobbies and professional skills etc. (Pyakurel,2007; Ghurye, 1964).

Nepalese caste- based hierarchy affects the people especially those in the lowest caste by constraining them to accept lower positions and conditions of work. The work that is left for the people in the lowest caste is riddled with oppression and exploitation. The high caste people do not hesitate to beat and scold the lower caste people in public places if they are found to break Hindu norms and values (Dalit Welfare Organization, 2010).

In addition, caste system gives more prestige, more privilege, and higher status to the higher caste people and lower status to the lower caste people in Nepalese society. Society is divided based on different occupations. Most of the artisan works and services are given to the lower caste people and priesthood and other ruling authority are taken by higher caste people. So, higher caste people, especially Brahman, are most powerful in the Nepalese society. It is because, all Asian cultures treated power as some form of ritual; that is, they develop early the idea that the correct performance of ritual produced the highest type of power (Pye,1985:39), and Brahman (priest caste) are responsible to perform social rituals in Nepalese society. As a result, lower people always dominated and depend on the blessing of the higher caste people since social and legal rules are made by the higher caste people. Lower caste people are pushed backward in every aspect.

In this study, caste based discrimination inequality cause for lower caste people in rural area. which does not consider women belonging to the lower caste competent to receive education. The people belonging to the high castes always neglect them in the public sectors and

discourage them from attempting to get job opportunities based on their qualifications. Moreover, thoroughly formed by their society, many lower-caste women do not want to access to education because they feel learning is not proper for their caste.

4.3 Household work

Women play an important role in every aspect of family life before and after getting married. Their first responsibilities are meeting the household works: child care, cooking, feeding, fetching water, washing clothes, cleaning the house, cutting grass for cattle, working at agriculture fields and collecting firewood from jungle (jungle (Barrett&Brown,1993; world Bank,1995; Waring 1996). Similarly, Yamanaka and Ashworth (2002) in their research found that girls are supposed to work two times more than boys in a day. According Yamanaka and Ashworth, girls are spent more time in domestic activities such as cooking, feeding cleaning the house, and yard, fetching water, washing the clothes, caring of younger siblings, cutting grass and collecting firewood.

According to Brannen (1995) in his research, Asian girls to do more non- routine based tasks and among girls the eldest bears more responsibility and workload. The eldest girl assumes more responsibilities because she has the duty of teaching her younger siblings. Brannen further argues that taking only those who had younger siblings in the family, it is believed to be the girl's duty to babysit. Chatterjee (1989) states that women are expected to take care of the old, sick and disabled family members. Likewise, women's involvement in household work is clearly visible in African countries as well. In this regard, Okojie (1996), reported that in Nigerian rural women spend 35 percent of their time on farm work and 40 percent on household activities. Sama (1994) also adds that women in rural Cameroon are occupied and devoted to household chores.

Compared to men, women spend more time on household works such as cleaning, dishes, children, husband, every day (The World Bank 2001). It can be argued that women in all societies constitute an underprivileged group even though their involvement in household activities is greater than men (Devkota at al.,1999). Likewise, they are heavily involved in multiple tasks throughout their lifetime as producers, reproducers and community workers (Mumtaz&Shaheed,1987; Acharya,1993; Bagchi,1993; Jacobson, 1993; Moser,1993). However, Waring (1996) argued that women's domestic roles and services are not always

recognized as productive work in many societies because the products of their labor are produced and consumed within the same household rather than being sold for cash. For instance, cleaning, decoration and maintenance of home, the servicing and repair of household goods, the preparation and serving of meals to household members, provision of training for, and supervision of their children, and the provision of hospitality to guests are some of the activities, performed by women in household, but not always considered productive (Bagchi 1993; Waring,1996).

Indeed, this uneven division of responsibilities in household- related activities may lead to women exploitation women. The women's responsibilities for childcare, and most of domestic work are typically unpaid. This can also mean that women's work is undervalued (Wimbush,1987). Thus, women's work is much more confined to household activities and unpaid in comparison to the activities of men (Stolen &Vaa,1991). Besides, household responsibilities impact on women's education and social events in rural areas (Bhattarai, 2006). Moreover, culture is a part of human life in the society. In this study, culture says that women are born for household work and taking caring the family members. They must to all the household activities such as: cooking, taking care children, and old, cleaning, fetching water and so on without expecting anything from the family.

Women may have more housework responsibilities than men affecting their education and performance with poor educational outcome (UNESCO,2023). As I have discussed in discussion chapter six, the household works of my research participants were engaged in household work since their early age. Based on the data from interviews, it is evident that women are found to engage more in domestic works: cooking, feeding, fetching water, washing clothes, cleaning the house, cutting grass for cattle and working in agriculture fields instead of schooling.

4.4 Son Preference

Son preference is a widespread cultural phenomenon particularly in developing countries in rural areas, and among more traditional couple of lower socioeconomic status. It has been seen in East Asia, South Asia, Middle East and North Africa (Arnold,1987; Cleland,1983; Williamson, 1976). In Nepalese culture son preference is still practiced. Parents in Nepal have the perception that a son to have successful life before and after death. Because the most

important role of a son is at the time of their parents' death when only sons are allowed to perform the funeral rites (Karki, 1988). Similarly, Hindu religion requires that sons burn parents after death. So, the son is one of the most important feature among the Hindu families (Mandelbaum, 1974).

Likewise, in Indian, sons are valued for their various life functions. Like: higher economic utility of the sons stems from his future income, his future support for his parents in old age and his future assistance in agricultural production (Arnold, Choe & Roy, 1998; Bardha, 1988; Basu 1989; Mamdani 1973; Miller, 19819). Higher social utility is awarded by the affinity system as status and strength is given to families with sons and dowry payment are expected for his future marriage (Caldwell, Reddy & Caldwell, 1989; Kapadia, 1966; Karye, 1965). Likewise, higher religious utility is given to sons as religious functions in Hindu culture require their participation in issues deemed important to the religion (Arnold, Choe & Roy, 1998). On the other hand, however, daughters are seen to be a liability because of dowry, costs of the wedding, search for marriage partner at an early age, careful supervision due to the importance of chastity and transference of her family membership to her husband's family after marriage (Arnold, Choe & Roy, 1998; Kishor, 1995).

Hennink & Simkhada (2000) argue that in Hindu societies, a son holds deeper socio, cultural and economic importance compared to a daughter. Filmer (2005) adds that the phenomena of favoring sons over daughters makes parents to invest more in sons. Investing in son can be considered as a form of insurance or social security where the benefits are reaped when the parents are old. On the other hand, (Karki, 1988) argues that that son preference in the Nepalese context is mainly due to socio-cultural reasons rather than economic reasons. He adds that son preference for economic reason is weakening in Nepal.

In Nepalese society, daughters are considered as a financial burden for the family (Gittlesohn et al., 1997). It is believed that the money investment on daughters' education becomes meaningless when they get married. Furthermore, financial burden is associated with marriage system of daughters where the provision of dowry is intensely entrenched provided a dowry (Clark, 2000). In this study, sons are supposed to protect the family property, the old age support for parents, the way to preserve the family name and the sole source of producing a

new generation of the family. Furthermore, sons are important because they perform all religious rituals, including the funeral rites to purify the dead bodies of parents.

In Nepalese society, parents place high value on the son than the daughter because the belief that the son will carry the family name unlike a daughter whose surname changes when she gets married. The son also carries prominence because he is the one who will take care of the parents once they become old. Other than taking care of the parents in their old age, the son takes the role of protecting the family's property, performs religious rituals and funeral rights. Compared to the son, daughters are viewed as liabilities due to the dowry paid when they get married. The daughter often does not provide any form of support to parents when they reach old age. Daughters are not even allowed to perform funeral rights.

In this research project, I have applied son preference theory in order to understand the high value of son in Nepalese society and it was influenced on women's access to education in rural area. I understand that the high value of paid to son is mainly deep rooted in socio-cultural, economic and religious practices (Miller,1981).

4.5 Early marriage

According to UNICEF early marriage is defined as “formal marriage or customary and statutory unions recognized as marriage before the age of 18” (UNICEF 2005). The UNFPA looks at marriages between involving a girl before the age of 18 as “forced” marriage (UNFPA,2012) which is a violation of human rights. Loaiza Sr& Wong,2012) argue that early marriage is a violation of human rights. It hinders the growth of an individual, regarding right to health education and right to choose a partner. Likewise, some scholars and activists argue that instead of looking for universal age which girls and boys should not marry, the focus should be put instead on eliminating the unwanted effects of early marriage (UNIFPA,2006).

Early marriages are common in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, but there are differences in prevalence among countries of the same region (Locoh 2000). This study, has found that religious and cultural beliefs plays a vital role in giving high value to early marriages in Nepal society. The central part of a marriage ceremony is “Kanyadan” which means “the gift of virgin”. This is considered as a medium to earn a credit of piety for parents (Maharjan et al, 2012). Thus, many parents prefer to marry off their daughters before the first menstruation

(ibid). On the other hand, poverty is another major factor encouraging early marriages in the Nepalese context. According to Mathur, et al. (2003) parents encourage their daughters to marry from an early age with the hope that once their daughters get married, poverty and economic problems will lessen in the family.

Parents are forced to marry their daughters before they reach the age of 18 to avoid heavy expenses in the marriage (Maharjan et., al. 2012) such as: the giving of gifts to the groom and his family by the bride's parents. It can be argued that the dowry system is deeply rooted in Nepalese society. If daughters can study they have a higher chance getting married to a well-educated boy. Though education of the girl child can be viewed as a bonus, the boy's family can demand more money and gift from the bride's family in form of dowry. This shows that lower dowry costs for girl's families is a common incentive for marrying girls early (UNICEF,2005) in Nepal.

On the other hand, marriage is bounded by social values and norms and is considered as necessary and inevitable in Nepalese society. Due to the high value placed on marriage in Nepal, many parents hold the responsibility of protecting the chastity of daughters till they get married. Parents also choose to marry off their daughters at an early age due to the fear of sexual violence and girl's decision to start sexual relations before marriage (Verma et al, 2013). Nepal is one of the countries with high prevalence of arranged marriage is high in Nepalese society. An arranged marriage is when family members help to select the partner and the bride girls are forced to marry the person whom they have never met and seen (Lamichhane et.al., 2011). Mahargan et al, 2012 however argues that Eloping away for "love marriage" is not acceptable in Nepalese society.

In this research project, many parents preferred to get married their daughters at an early age because of the various reasons in the society. It has found that religious and cultural beliefs play a vital role in giving high value to early marriages. On the other hand, Parents choose to marry their daughters from the fear of sexual violence and daughters' decision to starting sexual activity before marriage. Thus, parents became willing to get married their daughters at an early age.

4.6 Empowerment theory

Empowerment expresses [.....] something that individual or groups who are in a powerless situation should acquire strength and power to get out of powerlessness. Through this power mobilization they will be able to resist forces that hold them down and get more power and control over their lives. (...). Empowerment expresses therefore both an objective and means to achieve the goal (Asheim and Starrin,2007).

Kabeer (2001) define empowerment as “the expansion of people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them”. According to Kabeer (2005:19) consider that empowerment includes a sense of people making decisions on matters which are important in their lives. A crucial part of empowerment includes women being able to carry out the result of the decisions making in their family and society. While women’s own struggles for empowerment have tended to collective efforts, empowerment-orientated development interventions often focus more on the individual (ibid).

The term empowerment means to give somebody the power or authority to do something (Oxford Dictionary). Moreover, the World Bank (WB) defines empowerment as the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Mason, King 2001). Likewise, another scholar Rowland consider that the empowerment is “of central importance in the slow process of social, political, and economic change that is needed to turn the alternative vision they present in to reality” (Rowland, 1997).

Empowerment is a process, which leads to a state in which women are empowered. That is, empowerment involves an improvement in women’s ability to manage their own lives (Duflo,2005, Kabeer,2005). UNDP Human Development Report (2004) empowerment is defined as “women making choices to improve their wellbeing and that of their families and communities- a process, by which define, challenge and overcome barriers in their lives and ultimately, change the circumstances that relegate them to subordinates status” (UNDP Human Development Report 2004).

4.6.1 women's empowerment

Duflo (2011) states that empowerment is defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development-particularly health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation (Duflo, 2011). Low personal identity is a barrier to progress while improver women's education/self-esteem help them to raise their voice and participate in social activities. Strong culture pressures on women cause them to devalue themselves, to see themselves as having secondary status, to passive and dependent in their thinking and behavior..... secondary in ability (Sully, Green 2011). Considering this, if society is supportive to women for education rather than caretakers, of the household, women would be more independent.

The improvement of women's education/ knowledge is an important aspect of women empowerment. Education is an instrument which enables women to have access on decision maker, job opportunities, leadership positions at all level of society (Duflo, 2011). In addition, the improvement in education, the outcomes for their children, family and society would be change. Moreover, education has the potentiality to improve "women understanding of how to raise children and manage their family at home. (ibid).

Women empowerment in education is human right that lies at the heart of development of the nation. It is a critical tool for advancing development and reducing traditional beliefs and poverty. It has been argued that man and women produces similar improvements in their socio- economic status. Nevertheless, empowering women through the education produces any additional socio- economic gains that benefit the entire societies. This benefit includes; increased economic productivity, higher family incomes, delayed marriage, reduce the traditional beliefs and caste based discrimination, improve the health (UNFPA,2011).

Participation of women decision making, community meeting, social activities, and public discussion etc.is symbols of empowerment. Women access to education, and development when they are part of those who decide (Duflo, 2011). Women in leadership also call for favorable environments for women participation (ibid). This requires the identification and rectification of power imbalance (UNPA 2013). Women need education to change and improve their lives. Moreover, Hall (1992) states that the approach includes the personal establishment and enhancement of life chances and collective participation in efforts to

achieve equality of opportunity and equity between different gender, caste and social classes enhancing human potentiality at individual and social levels of expression (Hall, 1992).

Nevertheless, in this study, many women are remaining powerless to improve their lives from rural areas because they are burdened by household responsibilities, deprived education of education opportunity and public participation. According to the (Human Development Report, 2009), women gender inequality in Nepal stems from a traditional culture that defines the formal and informal roles for women's participation in relation to opportunities, access to education, resources and decision making. In the Nepalese context, women are marginalized from economic, and social opportunities due to the lack of education and conservative social views. "There is considerable evidence that access to education can bring abrupt changes in cognitive ability, which is essential to women's capacity to question, to reflect on, and to act on the conditions of their lives and to gain access to knowledge, information and new ideas that will help them to do so" (Kabeer 2005:16).

Chapter 5: Finding

This chapter includes the description of views and experiences derived from research participants, as well as the data obtained from semi-structured interviews. I have interviewed nine women from rural area. The quotations are used to present the views and experiences of participants in their own words without any alteration. The author translated all quotations from the Nepali language.

The participants are from different castes, ethnic groups and ages. To more precise and systematic, I tabulate information about the interview participant here:

Table:1

Number of participants	Caste groups		Gender	Age groups		Qualifications
9	High caste	4	Female	30-35	1	Illiterates
				35-40	2	
	Middle caste	2		40-45	2	
	Lower caste	2		45-50	2	
	Ethnic group	1		50-55	2	

5.1 Cultural barriers to women’s access to education

The finding of this study reveals that several cultural barriers influence women’s access to education in rural area. The views and experiences expressed by each participant are individualistic and unique, but their remarks all relate to a larger cultural context. For that reason, the findings chapter is divided into four sub-sections that investigate the most important factors affecting rural women’s educational opportunity: early marriage, household work, caste based gender discrimination, and the high value of a son.

5.1.1 Early marriage

In my analysis of this study, early marriage seems to be a problem for women's access to education in rural areas. During the interviews, many of my participants said early marriage influenced them to access to education. For example, Informant C, a 50-year-old Brahmin (high caste) woman said:

“My parents preferred to marry me before the first menstruation. They believed that marrying off a daughter before the first menstruation is crucial Dharma².... in Brahmin family tradition. In our culture, it was not good to refuse parents' decision. I got married when I was 12 years old. I did not get opportunity to study”. (Informant C).

When Informant C expressed her own feelings about early marriage in her life, it appeared that the cultural beliefs of families belonging particularly to the high caste laid the foundation for early marriage. These beliefs dictated that determined to see their daughter married before her first menstruation. In Nepalese society, parents drink water from their daughter's feet during the wedding ceremony. If they can do this before her first menstruation, they believe it is “Dharma”. Religiously speaking, it is a good deed will open the door to heaven for them after death. Thus, many parents in rural areas want to hold the marriage of their daughter before her first menstruation. The cultural belief in early marriage influences for women's access to education in rural areas.

As another Informant said,

“You know, at that time society was not like it is now. There was no system for study for daughters. If a family chose to let their daughters study, society viewed them negatively. My parents also thought that if they sent me to

² The term ‘Dharma’ means ‘good deed’

school, I might go to Poila³ and cut their nose⁴ off in society. They forced me to get married at an early age.” (Informant E)

In the view of Informant E, at that time, there were no women receiving education. Women’s education was impossible due to the socio- cultural attitudes of the society. In this study, the society seemed especially conservative with regard to a daughter’s education. Parents thought that if a daughter went to school, society might humiliate them. On the other hand, arranging her early marriage was acceptable for society. If daughter found a man and eloped from home without family support, however, society perceived them all negatively. Her parents seemed more concerned about their prestige because if she eloped, they damage their prestige from the society.

Informant A expressed nearly same views as an informant C, but in a slightly different manner in the following:

“My parents said that ‘giving away a daughter is the parents’ ultimate duty. Giving a daughter’s Kanyadan⁵ before her first mensuration, while she is still pure, will ensure that the parents go straight to heaven.’ I said to my mother, ‘I don’t want get married. I want to study.’ She said: ‘A daughter’s destiny is to leave her mother’s home.... go to her husband’s house. Once there, you have to work hard. So, learn house work properly. You can’t just dream of going to school. That’s over now. If you don’t do your duty well, they will blame your mother.....’ I did not have any options. I got married when I was 13 years old.” (Informant A)

As informant A understood what happened, her parents were more concerned to give their daughter away before her first menstruation in order to go to heaven than they were to give her an education. The mother emphasized her duty to learn housework properly instead of

³ The term ‘Poila’ means ‘to elope and run away’.

⁴ Cut their nose off means to lose their prestige

⁵ ‘Kanyadan’ is associated with the marriage system: ‘The gift of a virgin’

getting an education. Moreover, her mother seemed to worry about her own prestige in the future. In Nepalese society, if daughter could not carry out housework properly, the groom's parents would blame the bride's mother in rude language. Thus, socio-cultural beliefs played a vital role in forming parental attitudes regarding women's place and roles the society.

“My mother used to say a daughter is always the property of another. We shouldn't hold on for too long. If we marry her to a groom early, she respects her in-laws.....honours her elders...learns household work. What use is educating a daughter? It's futile for a daughter to study or try to for a job. Eventually, she has to get married..... and then it's back to housework.” (Informant G).

Informant H expressed her experience in following way:

“I haven't been able to study. We had a tradition of marrying at an early age. My parents didn't even introduce the man to me; nor did they check with me. They believed that a daughter is not supposed to refuse the first proposal; otherwise good fortune goes away..... I got married to the first boy who came with proposal.” (Informant H)

As an understanding of the participant's point-of- view, being ready to get married with the first man who proposes is according to traditional beliefs in Nepalese society. Popular beliefs dictate that the first marriage proposal decides the fate of girl. Indeed, the traditional beliefs are deeply embedded in the society, and parents do not understand that their daughter's fortune would be better with education than with early marriage.

“Why didn't I get opportunity to study. If you listen to my story from childhood, you may cry here. My parents were very poor. We did not have enough land..... or any source of income. We always had financial problems. I had brothers and sisters. It was very hard for my parents to manage basic needs. They didn't have the where-with-all for..... for my

study. They forced me to get married. I also thought myself that if I got married, it would be a little easier for my parents to afford basic needs. There would be little more food and other necessities... for them. I got married when I was 15 years old.” (Informant B)

Another reason for early marriage in rural villages was poverty. As explained by participant B, she decided to get married in early because her parents did not have the economic resources for afford basic needs and other necessities for study.

Informant D said:

“(....) because of my parents’ fear of social opposition, I could not study. You know, people used to say educating girls is like hammering nails into your own head. They stopped listening to our parents. Then you might wonder how my parents sent me to school. Imagine how conservative society was at that time!” (Informant D).

You know, in Nepalese culture we must obey whatever is said by the senior person in the family. At my home, my grandmother was the family matriarch. She was too old. My father said, “let’s wait until our daughter’s a bit older. Currently, why should we rush into marriage?” But my grandmother said, “If I can see her married, my soul will rest in peace.” We must keep our traditions. I got married when I was 14 years old.” (Informant F)

In understanding of this participant’s views and experience, early marriage is still one of the major problems for women’s access to education in rural area of Nepal. Further, due to the lack of social awareness many parents are forced to arrange daughters’ marriage at early age. On the other hand, to preserve their traditions many older people in the family are willing to get granddaughters married early. Thus, many women in rural area are deprived of education. I will elaborate and more develop this topic with quotations from different informants in the discussion chapter and argument based on the literature.

5.1.2 Household work

A central finding of this study is that the housework was great problem for women's access to education in rural area. Many of my participants verbalized how responsibility for all of housework made it difficult for them to gain access to education. Informant E, a 46-year-old Chhetri (Middle caste) woman, said:

“.... My parents had' always expected me to do good housework. I was very interested to study but my parents did not allow me to go to school. I went to school for four days with my brother without permission from my parents. My mother beat me with sticks and firewood. She did not give me food for 4 days. I cried and cried inside the room. Since childhood, I was engaged to catch goats' tails, cut grass for cows, and dig in the fields. They believed that if I knew and could do all this and housework nicely, then I would have a good future.” (Informant E)

“I was the eldest daughter in my family. My brothers and sisters were small. My parents asked me to look after the household chores and take care of my little brothers and sisters. They used to work in the fields and collect firewood from the jungle. I was always busy with housework - cooking, cleaning house, taking care of my little brothers and sisters..... After getting married I was also busy doing housework. Being a daughter in-law, I have to perform all the housework. I didn't get an opportunity to study.” (Informant I).

The participants expressed how their parents' expectation that daughters would do the housework created a problem for access to education. In my understanding, many parents seemed more positive towards housework than to education in rural area. They did not think education was good future for daughters. Many parents wished to see their daughters become excellent household workers in future. Moreover, in understanding of the participant's views, they could not arrange time to go to school while they were busy with housework and caring for cattle. The daughters often needed to work in the fields and at home for parents.

Moreover, they did not get positive support from parents regarding education. Informant E was even beaten by her mother when she went to school with brother. It should be clear that rural women suffered from having responsibility for the housework in rural area.

“My father was a farmer. He didn’t have a job. We had a lot of animals at home - Cows, buffalos, goats, oxen. Every morning I used to go to the jungle with my mother to cut grass. It took many hours to walk home from the jungle with a heavy load. Every day I had the same routine. During the harvesting season, in addition I had to go to work in the neighbour’s field. It was easy to share each other’s work. My parents didn’t think about my education. Also, I didn’t force them because nobody used to go to school among the neighbours of my same age.” (Informant F)

“In our society, there was no system of study for daughters. Even I didn’t even know much about education. Nobody used to go to school. I usually looked after the cattle, goats and cows in the jungle. I also engaged in other housework, such as collecting firewood and grass, cleaning, cooking and bringing water to the house.” (Informant A).

“I think you may heard that in our earlier traditional culture, all responsibilities for housework have to be taken by daughters before their marriage. Since an early age, my mother forced me to wake up early in the morning with her. I used to clean the house and prepared breakfast for all family. After finishing all the morning work, I had to go to the jungle with my mother to cut grass. One day, I asked to my parents send me to school, but they said me ‘you are a daughter. You don’t need education.... you must be perfect in carrying out housework.... that would be best when you get married. In our culture, daughter can’t be a doctor, teacher engineer and so on. Why do you need education? You stay at home and learn to do housework properly.” (Informant C)

The participant's experiences manifest that the housework is thought to belong to women in Nepalese society. Only the women put great effort into housework in the family. Therefore, they engage with housework - cleaning, feeding, farming, cutting grass, collecting firewood etc. Moreover, many parents encourage them to learn housework properly instead of studying. So, the participants have to master all household responsibilities in order to be a good wife and good daughter-in law in the future. This socio-cultural practice with its prevailing, deep-rooted values and beliefs deprives women of access to education in rural area of Nepal.

“My parents were totally dependent on agriculture. We had more Bari⁶ than Khet⁷. We used to grow millet and maize in the Bari. The cultivation of millet and maize requires hard work. It was very difficult to find people to work in our agricultural fields..... If we weren't able to do the work ourselves, we might lack food. We didn't have enough money to buy food from the market. My father ploughed the land and my mother and I did other tasks on same land. My parents frequently asked me, 'if you go to school, who works in the fields.....? You don't need education when you go to husband's house. If you learn housework well, then your husband and parents-in-law will be happy.' I had a serious responsibility with housework.” (Informant G).

This participant believes the problem for access to education is burdensome housework and lack of money. Moreover, her parents have been more concerned about housework than education.

Another participant expresses her experience as follows:

“You know, it was too hard being married at an early age and being responsible for the housework. In our culture, there was too much pressure on daughters-in law..... Nobody helped me with the household. Sometimes if my husband was ready to help, my parents-in law didn't allow him to help. I had to do everything myself, from cooking to cleaning to

⁶ The Nepali word “Bari” means land where Nepalese people grow millet and maize.

⁷ The word “Khet” indicates land where the people grow rice, wheat and mustard.

baking cakes for my husband's family to collecting firewood and cutting grass. How could I manage time to study even if they gave me the opportunity?" (Informant H)

As the participant explains, she felt that the responsibility for all the housework was very difficult to manage by herself in her husband's house. She felt that Nepalese culture especially, with its different expectations of daughters-in law, is responsible for her situation. She was not allowed to argue with her husband although he did not help her with housework. In this study, the caring for the household seems to present common problems for many women regarding access to education in rural area. To more precise, I will analyse quotations from interviews and arguments made by scholars in literature about this research topic in the discussion chapter of this study.

5.1.3 Caste based gender discrimination

The findings of this study revealed that the socio- cultural beliefs of caste-based discrimination created problems for women's access to education in rural area. In the Nepalese context, the caste system divides the population into different groups - the high caste, middle caste and lower caste. In this study, the lower caste people are considered impure and called Dalit or untouchables. During the interviews, some participants said that because they were in the untouchable caste in Nepalese society, they faced problems with access to education. Informant D, 43 a year-old-lower caste woman said:

“You know, in my time, education was not available for Dalit. The teachers did not accept Dalit students. Dalit students could not gain permission to sit beside the high-caste students. Their social superiors did not want to eat and drink together with Dalit students. We could not walk together with high-caste students. If we touched their food inside the lunch bags, they threw that food at us. They humiliated and discriminated against us everywhere in both public and private places. They used to say, ‘education is only for high-caste people, not for Dalit.....’ We lived in a society that high-caste people dominated in a very extreme fashion. We couldn't survive without

working for them, for high-caste families. My parents forced me to go to work for a high-caste family when I was 9 years old.” (Informant D)

According to this participant, Nepalese society does not consider women belonging to the lower caste competent to enter education. The people belonging to the high castes always neglected them in the public sectors and discouraged them from attempting to get job opportunities based on their qualifications. However, thoroughly formed by her society, this woman did not want to access to education because she felt it was not proper for someone of her caste.

I asked her again, what is the situation like now? Did they change? Did you send your daughters to school? She replied,

“The situation is not like it was before. Now education is available for all people. Teachers also seem to accept change in school. But they still don’t drink and eat together with Dalit students. My economic condition was extremely poor. My husband and I work hard for high-caste people. We have had great difficulty meeting the basic needs of our children. I forced to my daughters to do work for high-caste people too. We didn’t have enough food to eat.....I didn’t have the resources to buy the necessary things for study, how could I send them to school? Could you imagine....?”
(Informant D)

The caste system often excludes Dalit women from education in Nepalese society. Informant B, 32 years old-lower caste woman expressed her experience as follows:

“The high caste-people used to dominate and excluded us from society. My parents suffered from poverty. They had to work for high-caste people every day. If they sometimes came to work late, the high-caste people rebuked to my mother as a Dangrini⁸ and my father as a Dangro⁹. My parents didn’t

⁸ The Nepali word Dangrini – a demeaning name for a Dalit woman

have land and other another occupation..... I was the eldest daughter in the family. I had small brothers and sisters. My parents used to work all the time for a high-caste family. I used to take care my small brothers and sisters at home. If my parents didn't work for the high-caste family, we had to sleep without food. Between food and books - which one are children expected to choose? How could they send me to school? After all their efforts, they could barely manage to earn enough to feed their children. They forced me to stay at home and take care brothers and sisters. I got married to someone from a family on the same socioeconomic level. My husband doesn't have land and a well-paid occupation. He ploughs the field every day for high-caste people. All the time, I must go to jungle to collect firewood and grass." (Informant B).

This study's findings reveal that lower-caste people, dominated by high-caste families, cannot be independent. In rural areas, their socioeconomic superiors keep them socially and physically suppressed. Landless and completely dependent on the high caste to survive, most Dalits in rural areas are unable to send their children to school because of financial constraints. The participant's experience above offers an example of parents who always worked hard for high-caste people but earned so little that they barely managed to feed their children. They forced their daughter to stay at home because without working for the high caste, they did not have enough to eat. Investing in education was impossible for them.

5.1.4 The high value of a son

Nearly all the participants in this study (all women) felt that the tradition of preference for a son preference tradition has created problems for them with regard to access to education in rural areas. In the understanding of many parents in Nepalese culture, having a son makes a successful life both before and after death. Moreover, the findings of the study reveal that a son is responsible for taking care of his parents and performing the last rites and funeral rituals. On the other hand, by deeply ingrained tradition, a daughter moves into her husband's household after her marriage.

⁹a similar name for a Dalit man

Informant E said:

“I think you should know about our culture. Many parents still expect a son rather than a daughter in our society. My mother gave birth to 10 children. She expected sons, but she continuously gave birth to daughters. After nine daughters, she was finally able to give birth to one son. Unfortunately, he died when he was six months old. My parents were very sad. They always thought about their future without a son. They used to say that daughters are the property of the in-laws’ family after they get married. Therefore, it was very difficult for my parents to invest money for a daughter’s education.” (Informant E).

She also explained the circumstances regarding her daughters’ education

“I have four children. My husband is a secondary school teacher. When I had given birth to three daughters, I asked him to prevent any more births. He didn’t agree with me. I gave birth to one son after three daughters. My husband got to marry off our three daughters without any education. Our son has completed higher education in the city. Now he has a good job..... but my all daughters are engaged with housework in their husbands’ households.” (Informant E)

In my understanding of this participant’s experience, her parents wanted to have a son in order to have a successful life before and after death. While waiting for a son, they had a large family which created a growing financial burden in the family and difficulties for giving equal education and opportunities to all their children. I think many parents in Nepalese society hope for and await a son in order to keep the family heritage alive and take care them in old age. That is why they invest money in their son’s education.

“My parents had a conservative mindset. They thought that son is the preserver of their ancestors and the existence of their life even after their death. They considered a daughter as a future member of another family.

They used to send my brother do school, but, they asked me to go to the jungle to collect grass and firewood.....” (Informant A).

As the situation is explained by informant A, she was not able to study because of the cultural beliefs regarding sons and the conservative attitudes of her parents. Her parents were more concerned to ensure their son’s education.

“You know, many people think that in our society without a son, parents cannot go to heaven after death. Many parents want to continue having children until they have a son. I had three sisters. I was the eldest daughter. I didn’t have brother. My parents were very upset for a few years due to the lack of a son. People in local society used to call them Aputtra¹⁰. Many people hesitated to talk to my parents and didn’t want to buy our land..... Being the eldest daughter in my family, I had a huge responsibility for my parents and sisters. My parents didn’t want to education for daughters.” (Informant G).

Concerning the above, the passage makes clear how a son holds a deeper socio-cultural and religious importance for the family in Nepalese society than does a daughter. If a family has no son, the local community regards them negatively and gives them a pejorative, demeaning name. Being an eldest daughter, Informant G took all responsibility for the family before she married. However, her parents didn’t seem interested in having their daughter study.

“In our culture, son performs all religious rituals. Many parents prayed to God and sacrificed goats in the Hindu temple for the birth of a son. If they didn’t have a son, society ignore them in cultural activities until they did. After six daughters, my parents gave birth to three sons. I had many sisters and brothers. My parents choose to send their sons to school. Because of the financial burden in the family, my parents preferred that only their sons studied. All we daughters were forced to stay at home and be engaged with domestic work..... ..” (Informant F).

¹⁰ The Nepali word “Aputtra” means “sonless parents”.

“My brother was two years younger than me. My parents forced him to go to school, but they forced me to help my mother in the kitchen and go to the jungle to look after goats and oxen. They frequently said to my brother ‘our son is our property, our future, care taker, and heritage.....’ They told me that education was unnecessary for a daughter, who would marry into her husband’s household”. (Informant I)

According to the participant’s views above, the family’s daughters received no education because the parents valued sons rather than daughters. They believed that a son has the responsibility for the economic support of parents and families, for preserving the family name and performing religious funeral rites. On the other hand, daughters are ultimately the property of another family, so that education is not necessary to them. For these reasons, many parents in rural areas choose school for sons and domestic works for daughters.

Informant C said:

“My parents frequently said, daughters are ‘grass trees’ and sons are ‘orange trees’. They wanted to send my brother to school but they asked me to work at home and collect grass from the jungle” (Informant C)

The son is very important in Nepalese culture. Many parents in rural areas don’t use birth control until they give birth to a son. As informant C recalled, her parents called daughters grass trees and sons orange trees. In her parents’ view, the grass tree can grow fast without good care, and it does not bear any fruit. However, people don’t use grass much, except to feed the cattle. But the orange tree needs more care and takes time to grow. It bears sweet fruits. Everybody loves to eat such fruit. They thought that daughters grow up fast and soon are ready to go to other people’s households. Thus, the parents cannot get help from their daughters. Sons need more care than daughters and take time to grow up but sons preserve the family name, perform all religious rituals and take care of parents at old age. Thus, the participant’s parents preferred to send their son to school so that he could earn more for their care. They forced their daughter to work at home.

Informant H said,

“If a woman doesn’t bear a son, her husband marries another wife. We keep on trying, no matter how many daughters we have gotten. Three daughters are enough for us, but we still need a son to appease society. Society demands a son.” (Informant H).

I asked her again why society needs a son. She replied,

“If we don’t have a son, someone else’s son will inherit our property.” (Informant H).

summing up

The overall finding of this study is that various cultural barriers seem to be problems for women’s access to education in rural area. The patterns and themes that emerge from the data provided by nine women from rural areas. The findings fall into five categories that become the sub-chapters of early marriage, household work, caste-based discrimination, son preference tradition, and gender discrimination.

In working for an understanding, the women’s lifestyle in rural area, we must remember that most of the women were engaged in daily domestic work and farming in the fields. Early marriage in the countryside in particular limits women’s access to education. Due to their lack of education, women were valuable only for giving birth to children and taking care of home and family. Moreover, many parents seemed more conscious of the importance of a son’s education. In contrast, in Nepalese society parents view a daughter’s education as wasted investment. Likewise, caste discrimination presents problems for women’s access to education. The lower-caste people in rural area live under the high-caste domination and suffer from poverty. Thus, poor families cannot allow their daughters to study because they need to look after their siblings at home and help their parents with the domestic work.

In addition, the findings of this study reveal that despite being trapped inside the wider cultural barriers in rural area, most of my participants seemed to be interested to join the literacy program in the village. In the next chapter, I will discuss these findings more precisely.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter presents the main findings from the interviews I conducted with nine informants, discuss these in relation to the theories presented in chapter four, and on this basis, attempt to answer my research question. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I will not able to discuss all the findings from the interviews, but focus largely on those problems that can help to understand cultural barriers to women's access to education in rural area.

6.1 Some cultural barriers to women's access to education

6.1.1 Early marriage

Early marriage is commonly practiced, in poor, rural parts of developing countries (UNICEF,2005) where there is lack of access to education among the local people (UNICEF,2012). Similarly, the findings of this study indicated that overwhelming majority of people in the rural area experience poor living conditions within a strict traditional cultural environment. Moreover, this cultural environment forces girls to marry at early age, which in turn, further limits their education. Likewise, from the findings of this study, it became clear that such poor, uneducated people find it impossible to stop harmful traditional practices from continuing to harm the communities' women.

On the other hand, Mathur, et al., 2003 state that parents encourage marring their daughters while they are still children in the hope that the marriage will benefit the family socially, while relieving financial burdens. The findings of this study, moreover, suggest that poor families with limited resources believed they could not afford education for daughters. Although education from the government school was free, it was very hard to afford other necessary materials goods necessary for study. Instead, parents preferred to get their daughters married at an early age to reduce financial burdens in the family. A similar result was demonstrated in India by Singh and Samara in 1996, where the higher the level of poverty and lack of access to education opportunities, the more likely women are to marry before they reach the age of 20 years.

The findings of this study demonstrate that poverty was a major reason for girls to get married at an early age. In the location of the interviews conducted, many poor parents were

willing to see their daughters married before the age of 15 years old. In this regard, according to participant B, it was clear that “due to the lack of enough food and other necessary things for the family, it was decided that she should marry, when she was 15 years old.” Another negative traditional practice of early marriage in India is the issues of dowry. In Indian tradition, girls’ families are responsible for paying dowry and the marriage celebration of their daughters. Daughters in Indian families are therefore considered economic burdens. Culturally, more educated daughters who are older than 15 usually require a high dowry (UNEFPA,2012).

Rural Indian marriage traditions are comparable with traditional practices of early marriage in Nepal, regarding the issue of dowry. Although widely practiced all over Nepal, the requirement of dowry is constant in the high-lying Terai region in the southern part of the country. “There this cultural practice, among parents having more daughters, leads to economic collapse, severely affecting the families’ economy because since they have to pay a huge amount of money as dowry.” However, if parents do not pay the dowry demanded by the grooms’ families, daughters are often tortured, including having acid thrown in their faces or being burned alive (Central for Social Research,2005).

From the above, it was clear that the more educated daughters are, the more expensive the dowries to be paid to find the educated grooms. Therefore, parents prefer to get their daughters at early age to avoid heavy expenses in their marriage (Maharjan et al., 2012).

However, in this study, dowry was not a serious issue with regard to early marriage. I did my research in Hills region in the eastern part of Nepal. In this area, the findings showed it was traditional to give household items and ornaments in the marriage, if brides belonged to rich families. This was demanded by grooms’ families. On the other hand, Gittelsohn et al., 1997 reported that, in patriarchal Nepalese society, girls are considered financial burden for the family. As seen in the findings, many parents believed that all the resources and investment on daughters’ education became meaningless because they leave their parents’ house once they get married. Furthermore, Klark (2000) argues that daughters might represent a substantial economic burden in places where their parents provided dowry. The findings of this study, however, suggest that the early marriage practices in rural areas still occurs at high rates. Many people live in rural area with their own communities and traditions. In these rural

traditions, women have house care responsibilities, as well as duties in agriculture and animal husbandry. As a result, parents are not paying attention to their daughters' education. Yet, the findings showed that religious and cultural practices still favor the marriage of daughters at a very early age, often before their first menstruation.

In this regard, (Acharya et al 2007). state that the practice of early marriage prevails mostly in high caste families, because it is a matter of honor for them. Interestingly, in comparison with the other castes in this study, high caste families seemed to be more positive towards early marriage. For example, during the wedding ceremony, parents must drink water from the bride's feet. So, if parents can do this before the first menstruation of their daughters, they feel socially fortunate. On the other hand, there is the concept expressed in the word Kanyadan,¹¹ "the gift of a virgin" which signified the giving away of daughters.

Early marriage hinders the development of the individual's right to health, education and choice of a life partner (Loaiza Sr & Wong, 2012). Likewise, in this study, many women in rural area have limited rights and opportunities for education and personal development. Instead of education, parents held to traditional beliefs that they ought to see their daughters married at very early ages. They often worried that if they arranged their daughters' marriage according to social expectations, they would not be able to see them married at all. This is why many parents valued early marriage of their daughters instead of education in rural area.

Furthermore, when girls are married as children, they are denied an education and opportunities to develop their potential at a pivotal life stage (Baysenge, 1998). The findings from this study signify that many parents perceived that daughters' education would only benefit their husbands' household, not their parents'. Additionally, some parents believed that girls do not need education for their roles as wives and mothers, and that education undermines cultural practices. Likewise, Bista (2004) described how many parents' attitude was that daughters' education as a bad investment, since daughters typically live at their husbands' houses. "Why invest money for daughters' education that will soon be someone else's?"

¹¹ Kanyadan is associated with the marriage system. 'The gift of a virgin'

On the other hand, Mohammed (2000) stated that when a favorable marriage proposal arises, parents readily marry their daughters whether the girls in question are mature or not. If daughters are going to school, parents might withdraw them from school. However, early marriage is a socio-cultural factor that hampers the girls from going to school. Similarly, during an interview participant H, who addressed this experience, when the question was asked, “Why did you get married at an early age instead of going to school?” said that her parents believed that if a daughter refused the first proposal of marriage, she might never receive another. The problem is that it did not matter what age a daughter had reached, in Nepalese culture it was assumed that she should get married to the first man who proposed. “For participant H, it was clear that she was held back by traditional beliefs that her parents saw as an essential aspect of their Nepalese culture.”

Likewise, the findings from the interviews showed parents thought that matured daughters were great burden in the sense that when they grow older, it becomes more difficult to find a suitable groom for them. So, parents wished to get married their daughter in early age, even though early marriage had been observed as one important contributing cultural barrier that deprived girls of in rural area. Moreover, as has been noted in the previous research, it was clear that in Nepalese culture, where men are considered as the main leaders at home, girls are generally married earlier.

As seen in the findings, in Hindu Nepalese culture, where complex characteristics of eloping to escape was not acceptable. Parents did not wish to see the elopement of daughters without permission from their families. If daughters eloped without parental permission, their communities perceive them negatively. However, parents did not wait until their daughter being mature age. On the other hand, it was clear that eloping away can cause damage to family’s prestige in Nepalese Hindu culture. So, parents considered for marriage when daughter get 10-12 years old.

Likewise, another major tradition was seen in the findings: the issue of chastity and virginity of the daughters is considered as an important matter for family honor in Nepalese culture. In regards, Verma et al. (2013) describe how early marriage is part of the responsibility of parents to protect the chastity of daughters until they get married. Therefore, parents choose to

marry their daughters from the fear of sexual violence and daughters' decision to start sexual activities before marriage.

6.1.2 Household work

Another cultural barrier to women's' access to education in this study was household work. While interviewing illiterate women in rural areas, it was observed that parents were conscious about sons' education and forced daughters to learn and carry out all household work. This research finding supports Barrett and Brown (1993); the World Bank (1995) and Waring (1996) who argue that since an early age, helping in the kitchen, collecting grass for cattle and firewood, fetching water, tending young siblings, cleaning house, and washing dishes and clothes are daily tasks for girls. Likewise, based on my data, all my participants were involved in household duties since early age. They also did farm work during the planting and harvesting seasons. They said that their brothers, on the other hand, were often excused from these tasks and allowed to attend school. Such traditional culture is still very common in many rural communities in Nepal. By considering the reality of women's household work and the lack of opportunities they have for education, we can better understand the difficulty of their life situation

Based on the available data from the interviews, all my participants engaged with domestic work to replace their mothers in the family. Since an early age, they were involved in cooking, cleaning utensils, cleaning house, sweeping the yard, feeding the cattle and so on. In this connection, my research findings support Cheno and Narain (2003) who argue that daughters of all ages and abilities routinely care for younger siblings and perform household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and feeding etc. On the other hand, it was clear that from the findings of this study that the low value assigned to girls' education has been culturally and socially constructed in rural Nepalese society. They were trained to bear the responsibilities of a mature women since a very early stage of their life. Nepalese parents focus their learning to perform household work nicely from early childhood.

Using the data from Bangladesh, Baden et al. (1994; Baden, 1994) reported that traditional conservative attitudes towards women were one of the most important factors that slowed down their daughters' participation in education and events outside the home. Parents of school-going children consider girls' education as a waste of funds because most parents have

the stereotyped idea that daughters are only valuable for household tasks within family boundaries. I agree with Baden et al. (1994) and Baden, (1994); in this study, similar traditional conservative attitudes of parents towards daughters' education were evident. Further, the results showed that parents' conservative attitudes and cultural practices played a significant role to make the decision of household duties for daughters instead of schooling. On the other hand, some parents believed that daughters did not need an education for their roles as housewives after getting married. Therefore, the important lesson for daughters is to learn household work well and in this way, get ready for marriage. Likewise, Glick and Sahn (2000) argue that parents' attitudes are the most important factor that determines the decision for limiting daughters' education.

In west African countries, Glick and Sahn (2000) determined that within the parental education and maternal education there are different influence over the children's education in which improvements in fathers' education raises the schooling of both sons and daughters. On the other hand, mothers' education has significant impact only daughters' education. Previous research shows that the mother's education has more influence on the well-being of children than does the father's education. In Nepalese culture, mother tends to be the main provider of care within the household. Likewise, the findings of this study revealed that many of the female participants asked their mothers to send them to school after they had finished all the morning housework. But, they did not ask their father because in Nepalese culture, daughters share everything with their mother rather than their father. Nevertheless, they did not get the opportunity for education because their mother always forced them to work at home.

Furthermore, historically, mothers assigned women "the value of hard work, chastity and proper behavior, and focused more on women's roles as daughters, daughters in-law, mothers and wives" (Schuler et al., 2006). Similarly, the findings of this study showed that in rural Nepalese communities, girls are not responsibilities for economic activities. Instead they are viewed as potential wives, daughters-in-laws and mothers and considered the perfect people to take care of family members. They are also child bearers and housekeepers. On the other hand, during the interviews, it was observed that poor families had more children. It was not possible to study all children with limited financial resources, but the commonly observed rule was that parents choose their sons to send school and focused on assigning to daughters to work at home, such as collecting firewood, cutting grasses and working in the fields.

Similarly, Drez and Kingdon (2001) argue that not all children have equal access to education in poor families. The effect is very serious for daughters because such parents prefer to send only male children to school. Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that daughters were culturally bound to support their devotion to household related works and the support of family members in Nepalese society.

In this regard, I would argue that household works to be performed by girls has been impact on access to education. On the other hand, it was clear that they did not have time to go to school. Parents focused them to engage on household work from their early age as the preparation for their married life. So, since morning to evening, they were engaging with at home and agriculture. Despite of very interest to access to education, the parents didn't give that opportunity for daughters. Interestingly, "for participant E, because of her attending school one day with brother, she got a physical violence for 4 days by her mother" However, the voice of daughter was not heard by parents, and a daughter was imposed with the interest of the parents rather than her own interest.

On the other hand, Chatterjee (1989) indicated that women are expected to take off from school to supervise, old, sick and disabled family members. During the interviews, about three-fourths of participants said that they did all the housework, took care of old parents- in-law and worked in the fields. From the participants' voices, it was clear that due to the lack of education, they had spent their lives in household work, the care of children, old, and agricultural work in the fields. In comparison with the Nepalese context, women's involvement in the household is similar to the African context. In Cameroon, Sama (1994) suggests that the whole day of rural women in Cameroon is occupied and devoted to household chores. Likewise, according to Okojie (1996), Nigerian rural women spend about 35 percent of their time working in agriculture fields and 40 percent on household work.

Furthermore, Bhattaria (2006) argues that their huge household responsibilities make women less available for education and social events in rural areas. The findings of this study showed that since an early age, all participants were engaged with household work; cooking, cleaning, collecting firewood from jungle, cutting grasses for cattle and caring for siblings. Moreover, parents did not give them an opportunity to educate themselves. In this regard, a similar argument is made by Pandey (2006), who indicates that parents did not want to see value in

education for their daughters in the future. During the interviews, some of my participants claimed that due to the lack of a school near their homes, it was very difficult to go to school after they had finished all house work in the morning. On the other hand, parents did not give them permission to go far away from home. The findings by Shtrii Shaleti, (1995 and Subedi (1997) also argue that many daughters in rural areas are confined to household work and agricultural activities instead of education.

By taking all the household responsibilities and accepting the culturally dictated order of family life, many women in rural area are deprived of education. During the interviews, all my participants shared the experience of, at an early age, waking their parents early in the morning. First, they used to finish all the morning household work. Thereafter, they had to be ready to go to fields during the harvesting season. Otherwise, parents used to ask them to go to the jungle to cut grasses. In spite of these chores, they were willing to go to school, even though household responsibilities gave them less of an opportunity. On the other hand, parents believed that in Nepalese culture, daughters could not be doctors, engineers and teacher and so on. Consequently, they asked their daughters to be perfect in household work instead of education.

6.1.3 The high value of a son

According to the data from the interviews, it was believed that without having a son, parents could not go to heaven after death in Nepalese society. Similarly, Karki (1988) says that in Nepalese society, the most important role of sons is at the time of their parent's death when only sons are expected to perform the funeral rites. From a religious point of view, some think that sons are the means by which they can reach heaven after death (Karki, 1988). The findings of this study suggest that the widespread traditional belief is that the door of heaven will be opened for people when they die if they have a son. Such a religious belief and value always puts a son in a higher value than daughters in Nepalese society. In this regard, Karki (1988) has concluded that the high value of son is mainly due to socio – cultural reasons rather than economic.

In this regard, during the interviews, one of my participant told her life story. “I got married to a 60-years-old man. At the time, I was 20 years old. The man had nine daughters from his previous wife, but he was expecting son from me. There was no sign that his previous wife

could bear him a son, so, he got married with me to father a son. After some years, I gave birth to two sons. My man felt very happy and believed he would go to heaven after death". This example appropriate here because it clarifies how high a value religious belief in Nepalese society puts on having a son.

According to the world fertility document, the preference for sons in Nepal was demonstrated for the first time in the 1980s. Sons are highly preferred by parents because they continue the family name for the next generation; perform funeral rites and provide security for the old (Haughton and Haughton, 1995; Leone et al., 2003; Nanda et al., 2012). On the other hand, from this study's findings, it is clear that many people prefer sons to daughter's due to cultural beliefs and the practice that daughters will get married and become part of other lineages and households. It is believed that parents are supported by sons in their old age whereas daughters go away to their husband's house when they get married.

Likewise, in Indian culture, sons are valued because of their various life functions. For example, the higher economic value of sons stems from their future income and support for their parents in old age (Arnold, Choe & Roy, 1998; Bardhan, 1988; Basu, 1989). In addition, the highest religious value is given to sons because religious functions in Hindu culture require their participation for issues deemed important to religion (Arnold, Choe & Roy, 1998). Daughters, on the other hand, are seen as a liability because of the requirement of a dowry, the costs of the wedding, the parental search for marriage partner for a daughter when she is at an early age, the careful supervision that is necessary due to the importance of chastity, and the transference of her family membership to her husband's family after marriage (Arnold, Choe & Roy, 1998; Kishor, 1995).

When comparing the Indian traditional cultural practice, the finding of this study showed that similar traditions exist in Nepalese society as well. Sons were believed to be the old age support for parents, the protection and expansion of the family property, and the source of the continuation of the family's generations. Moreover, it was found that after death, according to the Hindu religious convention, sons were important as the performers of the funeral rites to purify the souls of the dead. On the other hand, daughters would become part of other lineages and households after marriage, and were the source of family expenditure mainly in

the marriage ceremony and due to dowry system. In this context, parents believed that education for daughters was a wasteful investment after their marriage.

The above finding finds support from Hennink & Simkhada (2004), who argue that sons hold deeper socio- cultural, and economic importance for families, whereas daughters receive less value from these all perspectives. According to traditional belief, only a son who can give deliverance to the ancestors and perform funeral rites. This belief has led many families to abandon their daughters, which stigmatizes the daughters and disempowers them in all perspectives of their life (Hennink & Simkhada ,2004). Likewise, according to a similar argument by Filmer (2005), parents invest more in sons as way of increasing their resources in old age. They believe that all investment in a son's education will be returned when parents get old. This means that when parents become old, only a son who will take care them, buy their medicine, pay doctor's fee for treatment, and supply other basic needs. Moreover, parents believe that if they invest money for son's education, that investment will be returned in the size of the dowry from the bride's home in marriage.

In addition, in patriarchal Nepalese society, the birth of a girl is considered to be followed by misfortune and occasionally, might result in abandoning a wife who does not bear sons. The men become proud of themselves if they have sons in their family as fathering a son is believed to be an indicator of their masculinity (Nanda et al., 2012). The findings from this study signify the same. The men expected sons rather than daughters during the birthing of a child. If their wife bears a son, her husband and the families become happy, and they sacrifice a male goat to feed the mother. But if she gives birth to a daughter, they do not show pleasure or take care nicely of the mother. This finding receives support from CREHPA (2007) and Karki (1988), who argue that families are not given nutritious food to eat after birth of a daughter. Such women are also compelled to go to work rapidly after delivery, whereas those women who give birth to a son receive more care. For example, they are not allowed to go to work earlier. This indicates that mothers of sons have high status in the family and society.

Furthermore, (Nanda et al., 2012) reported that most families do not celebrate the birth of daughter. If a daughter is born in the family, they let it be known to their neighbors only after some months. On the other hand, they immediately celebrate the birth of a son and spread the news to all relatives and neighbors. Moreover, the findings of this study show that there are

various superstitions and misbeliefs entrenched in Hindu traditional society regarding a woman without a son. These women have faced a lot of psychosocial “torture” from their own families first and society second. People from the society at large give them a lot of pejorative nicknames and believe them to be a sign or source of misfortune or bad luck. For example; rural traditional society believes that meeting a sonless woman early in the morning can bring bad luck for the whole day. They also hesitate to talk to sonless woman. It is even very difficult to buy and sale the property for sonless parents.

Because of these various religious and cultural attitudes in their society, many women in the Nepalese countryside want, however possible, to have a son rather than a daughter during birth. In this regard, Milar (1981) states that the high value accorded to a son is deeply rooted in socio- cultural, economic and religious practices. The findings from this study signify that traditional culture and some religious beliefs create problems for sonless women in rural Nepalese society. On the other hand, in these places sons are the inheritors of parental property and the representatives of traditional Hindu culture. In Nepalese society, by cultural practice and law, property rights and family formation inheritance go from the parents to the sons. However, despite being equal inheritors at birth, a daughter’s right to ancestral property is revoked once her marital status changes. Nepalese law property rights (2003) indicate that daughters can acquire parental property, but only up to their marriage. Once married, they lose all ancestral property rights.

Further, the finding of this study reveal that sonless parents have no value. Local society ignores them in cultural activities. If a family does not have a son, all its property inherited someone else’s son. A daughter does not hold her parents’ property instead of someone else’s son. Although the findings of this study showed the value of son is high in Nepalese society, daughters are valued for their help with housework, taking care of younger children and companionship with the mother.

In summary, from the findings of this study it is clear that the main reasons for wanting sons are that they are supposed to look after parents at their old age and the funeral ceremonies. Likewise, the findings show, another important reason to put a high value on sons is that the traditional belief that the door of heaven will be opened for parents after death if they have a son. On the other hand, it is clear that parents who are waiting for sons while having having

more and more daughters, might produce a large family without an heir. Of course, having a large family creates difficulties for giving equal opportunities to all the children. As the value is given to son, parents choose to invest in their sons' education and force their daughters to stay at home and do the housework.

Bajracharya (1994) and Subedi (1997), concur that in Nepalese culture allows sons to perform all religious rituals, and excludes daughters. Sons hold deeper socio-cultural, religious and economic importance for families, whereas daughters are viewed only as a part of another family. Therefore, sons have a very high status in Nepalese society and parents are willing to send only their son to school, whereas they see daughters' education as a wasted investment.

6.1.4 Caste based gender discrimination

Another point that I realized through this study raises cultural barriers to women's education is caste based gender discrimination. In this regard, DFID (2006) reports that caste based discrimination was officially banned in 1963. However, the findings of this study show that caste based discrimination still exists in Nepalese society. That sort of discrimination affects lower caste women to access to education. Likewise, Bhattachan et.al (2009) state that lower caste communities remain far behind in social, economic, educational, political and religious spheres due to caste based discrimination and untouchability. They further argue that lower caste people, particularly women, face various types of discrimination in the society. They fall into the lowest category in the caste hierarchy and are treated as untouchables (ibid).

The findings demonstrate that women belonging to lower castes do not get educational opportunity. They are therefore, always dependent on higher caste people in society. Likewise, the International Dalit Solidarity Network, (2016) reported that Dalit women face multiple forms of discrimination, as women, poor people and as members of the lower caste. The findings of this study reveal that Dalit women are forced to live in most vulnerable conditions. They constituted the major workforce occupied with hard manual labor and every day engaged in agricultural operations with high caste families. Similarly, they suffered from a vicious cycle of poverty over many generations and inhumane behavior from high caste people. All Dalit women participants had similar views of the reason of situation of the Dalit community, which existed in the context of caste based discriminatory practices, especially bias in the education sector and the unequal distribution of human and material resources.

Bishwakarma (2011) supports this study's finding, stating that Dalit children face caste based discrimination in educational institutions. According to my data from the interviews, it was true that Dalit children faced the discrimination by teachers and high caste children. They were not allowed to sit beside the non-Dalit students, not allowed to touch water, food, and even not allowed to walk together with non- Dalit. Moreover, Upreti, B.C. (2007) states that the lower caste people, scattered all over the country, are generally illiterate, poor, perform menial jobs, have marginal living conditions, and face social abuses. It was clear that from my own findings that there was no doubt that lower caste people lived in extreme poverty and faced social problems in rural area.

Due to the lack of enough land and other sources of income, Dalit parents always devote their whole life working with high caste people. The problem is that they have more children than other castes. They have difficulty providing for all basic needs for their children. This means that from morning to evening, they must be engaging in work with caste families. They are not able to send their daughters to school because from an early age. daughters have all the responsibilities at home involved with taking care of siblings and doing housework. Moreover, as the findings show, Dalit parents in rural areas were unable to send their daughters to school because of the financial problem.

Likewise, Shrestha (2002) argues that lower caste daughters are forced to work as servants for their landlord without much of a wage. Furthermore, the Hindu scripture *Manusmriti*, describes how the caste system is based on the differentiation of people in terms of their occupation or profession (Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2008). This study, on the other hand, shows that landlessness and poverty are the main reasons for caste based discrimination in Nepalese society. Of course, lower caste people work in low-level occupations. They made iron equipment, sewed high caste people's clothes, did cleaning work, handled dead animals, and worked with polluting, processes, such as tanning leather. In addition, for some reason, perhaps because of the lower level of work, its dirtiness, or because of religious beliefs, Dalit are considered as the worst people to see at the time of departure for high caste. People believed that the look of the Dalit always bring evil to their work. Similarly, (Ghurye, 1964) states that the fundamentally concepts castes are very commonly associated with traditional occupations.

During the interviews, Dalit women mentioned that they lived in a society of extreme high caste domination. The high caste people did not encourage their parents send them to school. From an early age, parents therefore forced their daughters to work with high caste families. In addition, firewood was very important for them to cook food in the morning and evening. Due to the lack of land, they did not have their own jungle, so parents forced their daughters go to the open jungle and collect firewood. In this regard, one participant said, “I used to travel for hours to reach the jungle. I used to spend the whole day in the jungle to collecting firewood with neighbors.”

Moreover, lower caste people are not allowed to enter religious places. They are to perform menial jobs that are prohibited for the high caste people and allowed to live in the fringe areas of the urban localities with no facilities (Upreti, B.C.2007). Likewise, findings suggest that because of the various reasons as mentioned above by (Upreti, B.C.2007), Dalit people get mentally affected by the society. They did not send their sons to school. They think that Dalit people cannot do anything except work in menial jobs for the high caste population. It was true that in Nepalese society, high caste people did not want to give them opportunities, whether they were educated or not. On the other hand, findings showed that due to the lack of money, Dalit parents do not send their daughters to school. It was very hard to afford the necessary equipment for study, such as books, a uniform, paper and pens. Their income was too low even to buy enough food and clothes for their children.

Summing up

In this chapter, I have attempted to discuss some cultural barriers for rural women’s access to education in Nepal. In rural areas, the cultural barriers to their education are early marriage, household work, the high value of a son and caste based gender discrimination. Early marriage is a common practice among the Nepalese people. None my participant got the opportunity to go to school. The socio-cultural belief in early marriage frustrated their desire for access to education. The household work of the daughters played against their interest in education. It was clear from the interviews, that from an early age, parents forced their daughters stay at home and learn household tasks instead of sending them school. Due to the lack of education, the role of my participants was limited to household chores and the rearing

of children. While they contributed to their family's occupations, farming or trading, their work was considered unproductive.

Moreover, the caste based gender discrimination was a problem for women's access to education. From the interviews, it was clear that the high caste people did not allow Dalit women to enter any religious, public or private place. They were not allowed to touch water or food or to sit together with high caste people. Lower caste people lived in extremely poor conditions. They devoted their whole life to working with high caste families. Some participants felt that the caste system was still practiced in many rural parts of Nepal. Also, the high value accorded to sons was problem for women's access to education. The widespread religious traditional belief in Nepalese society is that the door of heaven will be opened for the people after death if they have a son. So, parents give educational opportunity to a son rather than daughter. Some of my participants have understood the importunate of education for a daughter. They will probably give their daughters better opportunities.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In understanding of this study, readers should remember that Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world. The majority of its people live in rural areas. Due to the lack of education among most people there, traditional cultural beliefs and practices remain extremely deep-rooted in rural Nepalese society. Although men and women are both important agents and should participate equally for the development of society and country, it is not yet practically possible in Nepalese rural context. In the rural area, many women are still illiterate. This is because women are more vulnerable, and do not get educational opportunities. Cultural beliefs and practices present the main problems for women's access to education in rural area. In this study, I wanted to see how these local cultural barriers exert limiting influences women's education on a daily basis. The focus of one research question therefore was as follows: "In what ways might cultural barriers influence Nepalese women's access to education in the rural area?"

During study, my aim was to see the problems for women's access to education and parents' unequal treatment of sons and daughters' education. The study's findings are that several cultural barriers restrict rural women's education. Parents' attitudes do not favor daughters' education because of the cultural beliefs and practices in the society. With reference to the main objective of this study as the impact of cultural barriers on women's access to education in a rural area, the finding is that daughters suffered discrimination with regard to education. Parents were willing to send their sons to school and forced their daughters to stay home and limit their development to leaning how to do household tasks properly.

My research finding supports Bista (2004) who asserts that many parents' attitude is that daughters' education is a bad investment, since daughters typically live at their husbands' houses after they marry. "Why invest money for daughters' education that will soon be someone else's?", as one informant baldly put it. Based on this study's findings, it can be concluded that the cultural barriers influenced women's access to education in the rural area are mainly 'early marriage, household work, caste-based gender discrimination and the high value placed on having a son'.

The socio-cultural reasons I found during the interviews that reinforced the preference for sons were that they are believed to be 1) the old age support for parents, 2) the way to

preserve the family name, 3) the means of protecting and expanding the family property, and 4) the sole source of producing a new generation of the family. Moreover, the informants explained that sons are important because they perform all religious rituals, including the funeral rites to purify the dead bodies of parents. In contrast, daughters become part of other lineages and households when they get married. Sons are believed to be equally important for the family's economic benefit through their employment, whereas daughters are the source of expenditure mainly through marriage ceremony and the dowry system. Thus, the participants' parents preferred to send their sons, rather than their daughters to school.

Another problem for women's access to education in rural area was found during the interviews, the household is thought to belong to women in Nepalese society. Therefore, they engage with housework - cleaning, feeding, farming, cutting grass, collecting firewood etc. This research finding supports Barrett and Brown (1993); who argue that since an early age, helping in the kitchen, collecting grass for cattle and firewood, fetching water, tending young siblings, cleaning house, and washing dishes and clothes are daily tasks for girls. Based on the data from interviews, many parents in rural area, encourage their daughters to learn housework properly instead of studying. So, the women have to master all household responsibilities in order to be a good wife and good daughter-in law in the future. Furthermore, many parents wished to see their daughters become excellent household workers in future. My research finding suggests that this socio-cultural practice with its prevailing, deep-rooted values and beliefs deprives women of access to education in rural area of Nepal.

Based on the findings of this study, parents' conservative attitudes and cultural practices played a significant role to make the decision of household duties for daughters instead of education in rural area. This finding supports Glick and Shan (2000) who argue that parents' attitudes are the most important issues that determine daughter's schooling and the decision for the daughter schooling instead of household work. On the other hand, the findings of this study revealed that some parents believed that daughters did not need an education for their roles as housewives after getting married. However, in this study, many women are remaining powerless to improve their lives from rural area because they are burdened by household responsibilities and deprived of educational opportunities.

Moreover, based on the available data from the interviews, parents were more concerned to give their daughters away before first menstruation in order to go to heaven than they were to give them an education. This finding supports Maharjan et al. (2012) who argues that the cultural beliefs of families belonging particularly to the high caste daughters' foundation for early marriage. These beliefs dictated that determined to see their daughters married before first menstruation. Based on the data from interviews, during the wedding ceremony, parents must drink water from the bride's feet. So, if parents can do this before the first menstruation of their daughters, they feel socially fortunate.

This research finding suggests that the cultural beliefs of early marriage influences for women's access to education in rural area. On the other hand, it was found during the interviews, arranging early marriage was acceptable for society. If daughters found man and eloped from home without family support, however, society perceived them all negatively. So, many parents in rural area seemed more concerned about their prestige because if daughters eloped, they damage their prestige from the society. Moreover, poverty also seemed to be problem for early marriage in rural area. Poor parents did not have the economic resources for afford basic needs and other necessities for daughter's study. So, they preferred their daughter married at an early age instead of schooling.

On the basis of the data from interviews, poverty is another reason for persistence of early marriage in Nepalese society. The economic situation of my lower caste participants' parents was extremely poor due to the land and income sources. This finding supports Maharjan et al. (2012) who asserts that poor families couldn't afford necessary things for Daughters' education. Instead, they prefer them to get married at an early age in order to reduce the financial burden of the family. My research finding suggest that cultural beliefs and practices are main reason for early marriage rather than of poverty in high caste families. On the other hand, it was clear that from available data poverty was problem only lower caste family for persistence of early marriage. Thus, parents prefer their daughters to get married at an early age.

Moreover, another tradition was of early marriage in Nepalese society, the issue of chastity and virginity of the daughters. My research finding supports Verma et al. (2013) who argue that in Nepalese society, the responsibility of the parents to protect the chastity daughters

unless they get married. They choose to marry their daughters from the fear of sexual violence and daughters' decision to starting sexual activity before marriage. Thus, parents became willing to get married their daughters in small age.

Based on the data from interviews, caste-based discrimination causes social inequality for lower caste people in Nepalese society, which does not consider women belonging to the lower caste competent to receive education. The people belonging to the high castes always neglect them in the public sectors and discourage them from attempting to get job opportunities based on their qualifications. Moreover, thoroughly formed by their society, many lower-caste women do not want to access to education because they feel learning is not proper for their caste. Of course, landless and completely dependent on the high-caste people to survive, most lower-caste people in rural areas are unable to send their children to school even if they want to because of their poverty.

Parents of the low-caste women informants, who are called Dalit or the untouchable, work hard for high-caste people, but earn so little that they barely manage to feed their children. Their daughters have all the responsibilities at home involved with taking care of siblings and doing housework. Parents also force their daughters to stay at home because unless mothers and fathers are away from home working for high-caste families, they do not earn enough to feed their families. Investing in education is impossible for them. Public education, in any case, is nearly impossible for Dalit children because they are not allowed to sit beside high-caste students, touch their betters' water and food, or walk together with non- Dalit.

The study throws light on another problem: The Dalit have more children than other castes do because of their lack of education and awareness about the society. That is why it is very difficult for Dalit parents to provide for all the basic needs of their children. Therefore, they must be work very hard from morning to night with high caste families in order to afford the food for children. They cannot afford to send all their children to school, and prioritize sons because of the socio-cultural values connected to them in family life. Thus, lower-caste people are unable to send their daughters to school because of their financial situation and traditional style of family life.

The findings of this research suggest that daughters are perceived to be a financial burden for the family. The daughters leave their parents' home and move to their husband's home after getting married. Investing in their education is perceived to have no economic and social benefit to the family in rural areas. On the other hand, sons are generally considered as a source of old-age security for their parents. These biased preferences and cultural beliefs and practices are reflected in the lifelong neglect of women in rural Nepal. Given their low status, they are restricted in access to education and employment opportunities. This is one of the reasons to preoccupy daughters with household work instead of schooling.

On the other hand, it was clear that from the interviews that poverty also plays a central role in severely limiting women's access to education in rural areas. As I already discussed above, the economic condition of the lower-caste participants in the study was very poor due to the lack of land and income resources. Therefore, this study concludes that poverty is a major contributing factor in keeping women deprived of a right to education, forcing them to engage in an unbroken cycle of household work to make the family happy.

As mentioned above, from my research findings there are various problems for women's access to education. It is the case not only in Nepalese society, but in many parts of the world, especially in developing countries due to the cultural beliefs and practices, economic situation and perception of family. For example, women's situation and problems to gain access to education are similar in the rural area of Nepal and India (Madhura, 2011).

My research findings help to understand the local cultural barriers are the main problems for women's access to education. Moreover, it is also helped to understand without education how is the lives of Nepalese women in rural area. My analysis concludes that the problems for women's access to education is due to the several local cultural barriers in rural area. The research also uncovers how cultural beliefs and practices as well as parents' attitudes exercise strong influences on women's access to education. These practices are rooted in patriarchal societal forms in which where women are seen as hindrances in terms of their education opportunities.

This paper has pointed to the problems for women's access to education in rural area. Based on the findings, local cultural barriers are main problems for women's access to education. In

the light of these findings in Nepalese context, women assume responsibility for the domestic work to replace their mother in the family, and so are forced to engage on household works from an early age. Second, the strict traditional cultural environment forced daughter to marry at early age which in turn, further limits their education. Third, the religious belief and value and cultural practices always puts a son in a higher value than daughters in Nepalese society. Parents were willing to send only their sons to school, whereas they see daughters' education as a wasted investment. Fourth, the caste based discrimination in Nepalese society which does not consider women belonging to the lower caste competent to receive education. Thus, they did not get an opportunity to go to school.

This research project suggests that, although the society is growing more aware of rural women's situation due to national and international agencies working for women's education, the government offer of equal education opportunities for women remains unfulfilled because of the continuing strength of traditional cultural beliefs and practices. Moreover, the larger picture is that in rural area of Nepal most women remain excluded socially, economically educationally and politically.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

These questions translated Nepali into English

1.1 Personal Background of the Women

- Name
- Age
- Caste
- Education
- Work
- Number of children and their education and job
- Husband's education and occupation
- Number of family members at home

1.2 Questions

- Why didn't you go to school at early age?
- Why didn't you get an opportunity to go to school?
- Did you want to go to school at that time?
- What were the difficulties to go to school?
- What kind of works did you do at home?
- Did you ever ask your parents that you are interested to go to school with your brother?
- What did your parents think about daughter's education?
- Why did your parents want to send school only for son not for daughter?
- Why did a son is important in Nepalese culture?
- Why society needs a son?
- Could you please share your childhood experiences?
- Why did nobody want to send school their daughters in the communities?
- Why did you get married at early age?
- When did you get married? please tell me your age?
- Did you ever encourage people in the communities who didn't want to send school to their daughters? Please describe what did you say them?
- why did your parents need a son?

- Did you send your daughter to school?
- What is the main reason that women didn't get educational opportunity?
- Do you think cultural beliefs and practices is the main reasons to influence daughter's education in Nepalese society?
- What do you think about education? Did you fell any difficulties life without education? Please describe your situation or challenges before and after getting married?
- What did you do if you got an education opportunity?
- Are you still interested to join the literacy program?

Only for lower caste women

- Why didn't lower caste people allow to go to school?
- Why did high caste people dominate to lower caste?
- What did high caste people say? If lower caste people enter their home?
- Was your father worked for high caste families in his whole life?
- Was your father forced you to work for high caste families?
- Did your parents send to school to your brothers?
- Why did high caste people humiliate to lower caste?
- Did your parents have enough land and income sources?
- Did high people change in the communities?
- What do you think about daughter's education?
- Are there some changes in the situation with education of the lower caste women?

Appendix :2 Map of Nepal, showing the research district. Ramechhap



Source: - <http://naturekhabar.com/en/archives/3175>