

# Combating exclusion: gender issues in journalism education of Nepal

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## Abstract

This article examines gender issues in journalism education in Nepal by mainly focusing on the experiences of female faculty members. It critically explores the marginalization of female teachers in Nepali journalism academic institutions. While highlighting the barriers as experienced by female faculty, the study also shares some strategies employed by them to overcome these barriers. Drawing from critical feminist perspectives, the paper argues that though small in number, female faculty members are playing a crucial role in mainstreaming gender issues. It also investigates if issues of gender are taught in under-graduate and graduate journalism courses in Nepal. It examines curricula of journalism degrees of three major Nepali universities.

**Keywords:** Education, Faculty, Gender, Journalism, Nepal, Women

## Introduction

The influence of gender in journalism education has been the subject of global studies for many years. Like many other sectors, journalism has also been called upon to overcome barriers to gender equity by taking strategic action in several areas of concern including journalism education (Larrondo and Rivero, 2019).

Feminist scholars (Boateng, 2017; North, 2010; Geertsema-Sligh, 2014; Rush et al, 2005) are linking journalism education with female media workers and calling for 'gender mainstreaming in the curricula and academic institution to combat gender inequality.

This study mainly focuses on experiences of female faculty in journalism education in Nepal and examines 'gender mainstreaming' in curricula and within the institutional bodies/faculties. Furthermore, it explores how female faculty are coping with the issue of exclusion and marginalization. This study is an attempt to fill the gap in knowledge regarding the relationship between higher education, gender and journalism in Nepal. The increment in the number of female students in journalism courses in Nepal from last few years is a point of departure for this study. Various studies (North, 2010; Larrondo and Rivero, 2019) indicate feminization in most Western countries in journalism education.

Despite the increasing number of women in university journalism courses, the absence of substantive education about gender issues and newsroom culture is helping to maintain systemic gender inequality in the industry (North, 2010). From the last few years, female students continue to outnumber male students in journalism colleges/ department in Nepal as well. In spite of that, the media industry is largely dominated by male journalists. Besides, various studies (GMMP, 2015; Koirala, 2018) indicate that women's right to be seen and heard has not been reflected at the same rate in news media. While the number of women in public roles has significantly increased in last two decades, Nepali news media portrayal is confined to the traditional gender portrayal.

The number of female students in Nepal was estimated to less than 30 percent about a decade ago and now it is estimated to be more than 60 percent.<sup>1</sup> However, this 'gender-shift' has not been reflected in the newsrooms.<sup>2</sup> The numbers are even fewer when it comes to senior positions.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I contend that a gendered system at the universities has an influence for the above reason, thus assimilating the gender perspectives in journalism education might helpful. Gender perspectives in journalism are mostly confined within the topics regarding media content production and newsroom culture. While these issues are important to address the gender problem in journalism, a holistic approach to this issue needs to be backed up by journalism education, or more specially journalism training institutions. Margaret Gallagher (2010) in the Global Media Monitoring Project report also argues that gender-supportive in-house policy was alone not sufficient to ensure gender equality within the organizations. She points out a need for a systematic training program. Thus, it is important to explore the role of universities and to incorporate gender into teaching and examine their curricula and faculty from the perspectives of gender.

Both journalists, and those who train journalists, play an important role in cultural transmission. North (2010) argues that the lack of substantive gender education and attention to the gender dimension in newsroom culture in journalism education helps to maintain systemic gender inequality in the mass media industry. The literature review identifies that a small number of articles are published on gender and journalism education internationally. In Nepali context only one study (Adhikari and Pant, 2011) was found, which mainly reviews the curricula of selected universities of Nepal from the perspectives of gender.

This study will be guided by feminist perspectives, such as critical feminist approaches, which consider access to education and inclusivity in academia for women as critical tools in minimizing the masculine hegemonic control. Gender varies socially and culturally influencing every other social category. Drawing from Bourdieu's conception of education as a form of social capital, Djerf-Pierre (2007) argues that proper training/education empowers, enables and enhances women's competitiveness in a male-dominated field. Such cultural and social values revolve round education, prestige, titles etc. and 'the actors use different strategies to acquire positions and influence (Djerf-Pierre, 2007, p.82).

## Background and context of the study

'Nepal has experienced extraordinary political and social changes in the last 20 years, and since 2006 it has made some progress in promoting gender equality' (Koirala, 2018, p.30). Since the end of the Maoist insurgency in 2006 and the promulgation of 'new' constitution in 2015, progress has been achieved in increasing women's participation in politics and women's access to literacy, education, healthcare service. Nepal stands at 101st among 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap report of 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2020). 'While this indicates some progress, it also communicates another clear and crucial point: Nepal is 100 steps behind other countries when it comes to reducing inequalities' (Bastakoti, 2020). It might

<sup>1</sup> In the lack of official data, I manually collected the data of three major universities and their affiliated colleges. This data was also later verified with the participants of this study.  
<sup>2</sup> According to Federation of Nepali Journalists (2018), 18 percent of the total journalists registered are women.  
<sup>3</sup> The study report 'Professional Situation of Women Journalists in Nepal' by Sancharika Samuha (2015) shows that only 8.1 per cent of women journalists have reached high-ranking posts like editors and bureau chiefs among others.

be argued that despite the positive changes in gender landscape in the last decade, Nepali society is still dominated by patriarchy.

The history of Nepali press goes back to 1901 when the state-owned newspaper – Gorkhapatra – was launched. The participation of Nepali women in the media began in 1951, after the publication of the monthly magazine Mahila. The promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal 1990 marks the beginning of liberal democracy and press freedom. The constitution guaranteed freedom of expression, right to information and press/publication rights. The participation of women in the Nepali media was noticeable after 1984 when the newly established Nepal Television started hiring women as newsreaders and presenters.

The history of journalism education in Nepal dates back to 1976 when Ratna Raja Laxmi College (popularly known as RR College) was established. The college, affiliated with the Tribhuvan University, the nation's oldest and largest University. Most of the faculty members then were (mostly male) journalists with experience in print journalism, many of whom lacked academic qualification in journalism and mass communication (Pokharel, 2001). During the Panchayat period (1960-1990), a party-less political system established by then King Mahendra, independent journalism practices along with the expansion of journalism education were discouraged (Parajulee, 2000). Therefore, after almost 15 years of introduction of journalism education, only two colleges were offering journalism programs.

Journalism in Nepal underwent a remarkable transformation after 1990. Following the adoption of government's liberal provision, the new avenue of the private sector to invest in the media industry opened. In 1993, a new era in Nepali journalism began with the launch of two private sector broadsheet dailies, Kantipur (in Nepali) and the Kathmandu Post (in English) (Onta, 2001, p. 332). The media faced strict censorship when King Gyanendra took over power in February 2005. In the same year, Nepal alone was responsible for more than half of all cases of censorship worldwide (Reporters Without Border, 2006). Nepal reached a significant milestone for free press following the promulgation of the Right to Information Act 2007, the Working Journalist Act 2008 (Second Amendment) and the constitutional guarantee of freedom of press and expression in the interim constitution. The preamble of the current Constitution (promulgated in 2015) states complete press freedom and the freedom of opinion and expression is guaranteed in Article 17 (2) (a) under the Fundamental Rights and Duties in Part 3 of the Constitution.

While there is no official data to ascertain readership or media consumption in the context of Nepal, the increasing registration of news media outlets indicate that the news media industry is flourishing (Press Council Nepal, 2017). The growing literacy rate of the country (from 39.6 percent in 1991 to 65.9 percent in 2011) and increasing awareness is contributing to the growing number of newspaper readers and media consumption (CBS, 2014, in Koirala, 2018, p.5).

In order to meeting the growing demands of trained human resource, journalism education was introduced at the Master level in 1997 in Tribhuvan University (TU). Similarly, in 2001 Purbanchal University also started offering a Master level program in journalism. Following the demand for journalism education, newly established universities such as Kathmandu University, Mid-Western University, Far-Western University and Nepal Open University also offer journalism courses. Furthermore, 'several TU-affiliated colleges began to offer journalism courses at undergraduate level across the country, regardless of the availability of qualified human resources, and necessary infrastructure' (Parajulee et al, 2009, in Acharya, 2019, p. 3).

In an attempt to promote freedom of expression, gender mainstreaming and social diversity in the media, UNESCO developed and published a model curriculum on journalism in 2007. UNESCO also distributed copies of the model journalism curricula to help Nepali academicians standardize existing curricula of journalism education in the country and conducted an assessment on journalism curricula of three universities of Nepal. The study (Adhikari & Pant, 2014) was conducted in Nepal to analyse journalism courses of the universities of Nepal as compared to the sample courses with specific recommendations to guide the journalism education of Nepal. The assessment was also conducted from the perspectives of gender, which pointed out the fact that there is a situation of gender exclusion in journalism education in Nepal.

The latest data of National Education Board (2018) states that there are currently around 80 colleges offering journalism programs across the country. While research on journalism education in Nepal is limited, most of the focus has been on historical analysis (Panta 2010; Onta, 2001). Some other studies (Acharya, 2019) have also questioned the quality of education mainly stating that the curricula were not regularly updated to meet the pace of changing scenario of media industry. B. Acharya (2019) in a review of the growth of academic institutions offering degrees in journalism argues that quality of journalism education is inadequate to meet the international standards.

According to Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ, 2018), women journalists comprise 18 percent of the total journalists of the country. Despite their increased participation, women make up only a negligible por-

tion of airtime and column inches as news subjects in Nepal (GMMP, 2015). Besides, the relationship between journalism education and gender sensitive journalism has largely been neglected as a topic of analysis. While it is not within the scope of this study to directly examine this complex relationship, I believe that the findings might be useful to draw attention to this issue from media researchers and journalism educators.

## Methods

The study adopts feminist research as it mainly focuses on the experiences of women in academia. The aim is to address the existing challenges faced by them due to their gender while addressing other factors like curricula and their participation which might have added to their 'gendered experience'. As a female academic in Nepal, I am aware of journalism education and the existing gender discrimination within this profession. From my experience, journalism in Nepal is largely shaped by masculine norms and teaching journalism education seems even more like a man's world. While interviewing female faculty, I usually could relate to most of their experiences. My insider position was helpful to overcome cultural barriers. In order to minimize the possible harm in validity of the research because of my position, I have also focused on previous research and literature. I have tried my best to refrain from my assumptions while discussing the findings; the feminist approach has largely influenced my choice of questions and sample of the study, but it has not influenced on the process of analysis.

This article has used qualitative methods, mainly in-depth interviews. As the major focus of the study is experiences of female faculty, the study mainly focuses on in-depth interviews. To complement the finding and to set the background for discussion, I have also included document analysis. Here, I will mainly review the curricula of three selected universities, and the websites of the respective universities. The three universities are selected due to 80 percent of journalism colleges being affiliated to them.

During the process of analysis, I examine the presence of concepts like 'gender', 'masculinity', 'femininity', 'sexuality' and any other terminologies like 'minority', 'intersectionality' and 'inclusivity' that might indirectly refer to the issue of women or marginalised groups. With the aim to examine the working environment from the perspective of gender, five female faculty members, representing three different universities, were selected for interviews. Thematic analysis was used to present the findings of in-depth interviews. The themes of the studies were not pre-structured; they emerged during the course of analysis.

The interview questions were mainly targeted to understand their gendered experience if any. Semi-structured open-ended interview questions were developed and utilized to inform the data collection. The questions were developed after carefully reviewing the documents (curricula, websites). Five participants from five different institutions were asked to participate in video conferences for about an hour. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. For confidentiality purposes, the participants' names are changed and institution names not mentioned. Nepali language was used in most of the cases for the confidence of participants. The interviews were conducted between the period of 24th of August to 11th of September 2020. Two of the participants were contacted later (via telephone) for further clarification of their opinions on 13th of September. The findings of the interviews were later divided in different themes.

The limitations of this study are methodological in nature. As the data mainly depends on a sample of five female academics, it may not be enough to present a broader picture to understanding the issue of 'gender mainstreaming' of journalism education in Nepal. It is also important to highlight that due to the lack of experienced female faculty; the sample is limited to relatively young participants. The sample has only one ethnic minority participant. Similarly, the inclusion of male perspectives could have opened different perspectives.

The understanding of gender issues in journalism education is mainly drawn from the framework of UNESCO-UNITWIN (2018) gender mainstreaming principle in the media and journalism education field. Major dimensions of the framework are based on i) institutional normative framework– gender equality and gender mainstreaming principles implemented throughout the curricula (ii) promotion of gender parity for students and scholars, (iii) curricula development and course content, (iv) teaching /learning of feminist theories and methodologies, (v) learning materials – inclusion of texts, readings and pedagogical materials on gender equality, gender analysis, intersectionality vi) assessments – gender equality as a standard criteria in university assessment tools and (vii) research/publications on gender in media and communication. Drawing on methods from this framework, the study will mainly focus on experiences of female faculty, course content, teaching feminist theories/methodologies and gender parity among students and scholars.

Bamezai et al. (2020) have used this framework to explore the progress of gender mainstreaming in in

Indian Journalism schools and Universities. The findings based on a survey of 34 institutions indicated that ‘epistemological and ontological perspectives in teaching and research programmes fall short of a consistent gendered approach and are universally sporadic’ (ibid, p.5). Similarly, the South African NGO Genderlinks also used this model for an audit of gender equality in media and journalism education in two Namibian universities. Findings revealed absence of gender mainstreaming in the curricula and showed a dearth of gender specific courses.

## Exclusion of gender in the curriculum

Five different curriculums were analysed in this study: a four-year BA Curriculum and a two-year program of MA in Journalism and Mass Communication (JMC) of TU , four-year Bachelor and two year two-year Master in Mass Communication and Journalism (MCJ) of PU and a four-year Bachelor in Media Studies of KU.

Name of the University	Name of the course
Kathmandu University	Bachelors in Media Studies
Purbanchal University	Bachelors in Journalism and Mass Communication
Purbanchal University	Masters in Journalism and Mass Communication
Tribhuvan University	Bacelors in Mass Communication and Journalism
Tribhuvan University	Masters in Mass Communication and Journalism

**Table 1: Name of the courses included in curriculum review**

TU’s BA curriculum incorporates seven subjects on journalism out of which five are compulsory and one to be selected from three optional subjects. The only subject, Introduction to Mass Media and Communications mentions the issue of media diversity. Except for this, there are no other chapters/units addressing issues of gender or minority groups. A unit on Protecting and Promoting News sources and Ethical consideration while dealing with sources also seriously lack gender perspectives. Similarly, TU’s MA-JMC program does not have a gender perspective in their curriculum. Out of the ten subjects, only one subject titled Media Issues briefly mention gender, trans-gender and minorities in its sub-units. It is important to note that these topics were listed among other issues in one of the units of the course (which also included sub-units like sports and adventure, entertainment, religion and culture).

KU also offers a four-year Bachelor in Media Studies course. The course consists of 40 different subjects but not a single subject is on gender. Nevertheless, topics such as ‘Media, Culture and Society’, and Advertising principles contain a few sub-units with gender perspective, but lacks a proper understanding of the concept. PU’s four-year program of BA-JMC program contains a subject in gender and media. This subject includes units on feminist media theories, history of women movement and gender portrayal in various forms of media. The contents of the course are sufficient to familiarize students about the issues of gender in journalism and media research. A subject in Sociology also briefly addresses a few concepts grounded in gender perspectives, such as marriage, patriarchal family and social stratification. Despite the nature of the topics, there were no units to explain the concept of gender or gender relations. The unit on patriarchal family also narrows down the definition of patriarchy as it limits the topic to the context of lineage only. Although only two out of eight units incorporate gender perspectives, the course may be seen as including gender issues compared to the curriculum of TU and KU. It is important to note the four-year program offers course in fifty different subjects within the program.

PU’s two-year Master program has 22 compulsory subjects and two additional ones to be selected from eight alternatives. One of the optional subjects is on gender and media. The course as the title suggest is designed with feminist perspective and offers relevant local and international literature in the area of feminist media studies. However, its listing as an elective subject indicates that the University has not prioritized the subject.

My conclusion is thus that gender is not mainstreamed in the journalism curricula of Nepal. Some of the units dedicated to news reporting and media ethics also fail to incorporate the gender component in the subject matter. This indicates that feminist perspectives and gender issues are not considered as a significant

area that needs attention in journalism or in academic training for the profession.

The findings of curriculum review are not surprising considering the patriarchal nature of the Nepali society. It supports other international studies, including Sarikakis (2014) who argues that gender remains largely absent from the curricula in 25 institutions of 13 countries in the African continent. Globally, most studies on tertiary education and gender examined gender imbalance in courses and institutions, specifically in discussing the feminisation of journalism education. However, the mere inclusion of gender issues within journalism education might not result directly in a more gender-aware education (Larrondo and Rivero, 2019). The inclusion of gender-agenda throughout the teaching, work environment and research are equally important for the process of gender mainstreaming.

Teaching gender issues in journalism schools has to do with understanding the construction and impact of the gendered production of media content. It can also be linked to the status of women in newsrooms, professional career opportunities, equal payment, and eradication of gendered stereotypes. The above findings pose a serious question in terms of gender equality in journalism education, newsrooms and media contents and indirectly may be seen to justify poor representation of women as news sources in Nepali news media (Freedom Forum, 2020, Koirala, 2018, GMMP, 2015).

## Marginal participation of female journalism educators

Even though there is a little dispute on ‘numerical balance’ as an instrument for gender equality, the concept of gender balance is recognized in various international institutions including the United Nations. While gender is a matter of power construction and not only quantity, balancing number as a strategy for change may fall short in resisting inequality. De Bruin (2014) has also criticized quantitative surveys as ‘the body count’ approaches to examining and understanding a more complex problematic. Nevertheless, gender composition when combined with other qualitative approaches can be an important tool to examine the situation of gender mainstreaming. Therefore, the gender composition of the faculty as well as institutional bodies responsible for the development of the curriculum were closely observed for this study. Becker, Vlad, Huh and Mace (2003) found that journalism education in the United States has changed since 1989, with an increase in women as faculty members.

None of the three universities has a single female member in their Subject Committees<sup>4</sup>. This is not all. Even the state-owned Tribhuvan University, which need to abide by the clause to recruit a minimum of 33 percent women, is failing to do so. At present there is only one (of 12, part time and full time) female faculty at the Journalism Department there, and no women in a leadership position. The situation of Kathmandu University is not very different, with only one out of seven being female. Similarly, the female faculty at the three colleges affiliated with PU is at less than 10 percent.<sup>5</sup>

Name of the University	Female Faculty	Male Faculty
Tribhuvan University, Central Department of Journalism	1	11
Kathmandu University, Department of Media Studies	1	6
Purbanchan University (KCC, CJMC & Polygon College)	4	43

**Table 2 : Female and male faculty members of three universities**

Thus, despite the growing number of female students, journalism education in Nepal is largely a male domain. The ratio of female and male faculty is better in other subjects such as Sociology, Management, Business Studies, History, Education, Public Health, Environmental Science, and Medicine. The experiences of Western countries show that this was also the situation until few decades ago.

Michael Bromley states while journalism courses have been increasingly dominated by female participants, ‘being a journalism academic was seen as the prerogative of older men’ (Bromley, 2013). ‘This pattern of gradually increasing numbers of female journalism students occurred in the US where academic journalism training first emerged, but it was then replicated in many other countries, including the UK’ (Franks 2013, pg. 7) and then to African and Asian countries too.

<sup>4</sup> Subject committee is responsible to plan, revise the curriculum of the University.

<sup>5</sup> The information was taken from the website of respective colleges.

The scenario is slightly changing in recent years when it comes to female participation- particularly in the affiliated colleges of these universities. For example, Dhivabhumi Multiple College which offers an undergraduate program in TU is headed by a woman, and 60 percent of the faculty are women. Likewise, the College of Journalism and Mass Communication, one of the pioneer colleges to introduce journalism at the Master level is also headed by a woman.

In the earlier section, it is shown that the core journalism courses in the curricula have excluded gender perspective and gender issues. The politics of exclusion in the content is not an exception; rather, the universities have been practicing this institutionally. In other words, the domination of male and exclusion of female in the faculty partly reflects the patriarchal nature of the Nepali society.

## Experiences of female faculty

All five interviewees had between three years and ten years of teaching experience and were between 28 and 42 years old. Four worked full-time and one (Susma) part-time. One (Lali) of the participants was single the others married. Two of the participants were affiliated with the journalism colleges outside the capital and three were based in Kathmandu. Two started their career as a journalist and then became academics. All five had a Master's degree in journalism.

The findings have been presented in five major inter-related themes of i) Gendered work environment and behaviors ii) Professional-personal life balance iii) Imposter Syndrome iv) Isolation and tokenism and v) Lack of mentorship, networking and collaboration. These themes which emerged through the analysis, mainly explain the struggle and the barriers of these professionals.

## Gendered work environment and behaviour

Like the majority of female professionals in a male-dominated sector, the interviewees stated that they were also struggling with a gendered work environment. Except at one University, there were no toilets dedicated to female staff and in the case when they had one, it lacked basic sanitation. However, this is not limited to journalism departments. Some female faculty members have raised this issue in opinion articles and through social media post in recent years. The participants stated that although most of the institutions were running on small resources, they have experienced gender-insensitive behaviours even in the areas that require minimum to no additional budget.

Three participants stated that they have faced sexist comments, 'awkward stares' and 'gendered treatment' from students, too. Two even complained of feeling discriminated by other female colleagues and female students too. I argue that it might be partly because academia in Nepali context is largely understood as a masculine domain. Just like female journalists were historically frowned upon, arguing that women would lose their femininity (Chambers, Steiner & Felming, 2004), it may be argued that journalism universities/ colleges make female faculty feel unwelcomed.

Maya, who is a head of a department with more than six years of experience in journalism education feels that she is not taken seriously by her colleagues compared to male heads (of other departments).

*I often feel that I don't have that authority that I should have been entitled to in my position. In the beginning of the career, I've faced more sexist behaviour (...). One of the [students] proposed me on a date [in front of the classroom] in an attempt to harass me (...). I used to get 'awkward stares' from male students which often made me very uncomfortable. Now, I can react to this behaviour properly but in the beginning, I did not know what to do (...) I often felt unwelcomed and unwanted.*

While the academics in the public university did not have any experiences of unequal pay, those working with the private colleges felt discriminated as female. Part-time lecturer at a private college Lali states that her male colleagues at the same level and experience receive a higher salary. Susma states that even at the time when salary was equal, male faculty members were often invited to training programs or were given some assignments that would add towards their 'additional income'. 'In 10 years of experience in academia, I have not been given additional incentives,' she said.

The other participant Kusum shares that it took her almost eight years of experience to be promoted as senior lecturer.

*I think gender was taken into consideration and the assumption that I will not be performing better because of my family responsibilities was also always there.*

Based on traditional gender-roles and internalized assumption of masculine supremacy, concerns were raised about the lack of partner support in family care, exacerbating difficulties in work-life balance. While the academia is often presented as a career choice with flexible hours (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016), various studies incorporating experiences of female academics indicate (Okunna, 1992) time management struggle.

Except for Lali, who was living with her parents, the other four stated that one of their major challenges was to balance professional and personal life. They shared that they were struggling to manage regular teaching hours and were often unable to find time for research and publication. While research and publications are important parts of academic life, it is not often encouraged in Nepal, even less so for those temporary employed or working on a temporary basis.

Based on this traditional gender-roles and internalised assumptions of masculine supremacy, concerns were raised about the lack of spousal support in helping with family care which exacerbates work-life-balance difficulties and stress. The following two quotations represent the shared views.

*My work hours are normally 35-38 hours per week. But I end up working up to 70 hours per week. I'm sometimes working on Saturday and also on public holidays. (...) I find it challenging to bring the work home as I have a young child at home. [I live with my in-laws and] I am expected to cook and clean for the family of six which normally takes 3-4 hours every day (...) If I don't wake up at 4 am, there's no way I can be at the college to attend the lecture at 7:00 am. - Kusum*

*When I joined the academia in the beginning, I thought it was way relaxing than my previous job [news reporter] (...) However, my perception has completely changed in last few years. I think academic life is very demanding and with deadlines there's no such thing as "flexible hours". I'm just a part-time faculty but I think I work like any full-time faculty. The household responsibilities add up the burden. I've two children and I often feel guilty that I am not giving them enough time (...). My husband also involves himself in household chores but it is mostly I who look after kids and share the majority of household burden (...) One of the reasons I picked up to work as a part-time faculty was to be able to spend more time with family but now I find it challenging to balance my personal and professional life. - Susma*

## Imposter syndrome

In response to general questions on gendered experiences at their job, most of them stated that their gender was impacting their aspiration as they were 'overpreparing' for their lectures. Some felt being judged by their gender. One experienced participant, Kusum states:

*I think I overprepare for my lectures. I am giving more than the designated time to my work (...). I constantly have this pressure to be the best and (...) I want to be taken seriously.*

Susma shared that even after a decade of experience in teaching she feels she is not confident enough. 'I still have the nervousness that I had as a graduate student while submitting my manuscripts or while presenting my research ideas,' she further stated.

## Tokenism and isolation

Participants reported being isolated from formal and informal networks in the workplace. Three of the participants of this study were the only female faculty in journalism in a particular college/ University. Maya was the only participant whose institution has equal ratio of male and female co-workers. Shila has only two female faculty in the group of 12 faculty members.

The composition of gender in the institutions included in the study also indicates low participation of female faculty members. Various studies indicate that women working in non-traditional jobs often experience tokenism, and that this is not taken seriously (Zimmer, 1988, p. 67, Kanter, 1977). Shila, who has more than five years of work experience in three different colleges stated that she often felt isolated being in minority. She says:

*I've always been a single female faculty in three different colleges that I've worked with. While some of the male colleagues are really supportive and friendly, I often feel isolated. (...) I've realized that I'm not invited to various gatherings outside the colleges. (...) I'm often hesitant to discuss my issues specially when they are gender-specific in nature.*

The other participants also stated that being a single woman or two in the entire faculty was making them uncomfortable.

*Some of my male colleagues really make an effort and are helpful too. There have been few remarks/incidents in the department that indicated that I was in this job not because of my capacity but because of my gender. (...) to make sure there is at least one woman for the [numerical] gender-balance in the department. - Susma*

## Mentorship/network/collaboration

While this theme includes varied experiences, I have kept it under a single theme as the issues were closely related. As almost all the female faculty members are relatively younger and less experienced, they all pointed out the issue of mentorship. While most of them come with years of experience in journalism



and extra-ordinary academic performance, they are still struggling to make their mark. One of them being, lack of support and mentorship. While none of the institutions offer a special course to groom young faculty (including male faculty) in academic life, women who are already marginalized in this profession often feel neglected.

Similarly, all of them also expressed a desire to form a network to amplify their voices. Additionally, two women in the current study noted that they were uncomfortable with networking events as they were hardly given opportunity to speak.

*As we [female faculty] are in a small number, coming together might be one the mechanisms to fight against discriminations and the issue of marginalization. We could also help each other and encourage each other irrespective of different college and universities. - Susma*

Academia needs both collaboration and mentorship. However, women in journalism education in Nepal opine that they have often felt unwelcomed while approaching senior male colleagues for collaboration.

Maya shares that her requests to co-author a paper in four different instances with senior male colleagues were declined. 'I am aware that working with a senior in my field will help me to grow further', she says. The findings of the study indicate that most of the professors do not encourage collaboration with younger colleagues and it is even less likely to happen with women.

## Advocating gender equality and combating barriers

While faculty members irrespective of their gender can promote gender mainstreaming in teaching, this section focuses on the efforts of female faculty only. Despite challenges, the 'silver lining' of this study is that though small in number, female faculty leave their mark, particularly by mainstreaming gender issues. The findings indicate that while there is no strong institutional mechanism in any of the institutions to ensure gender-sensitive environment, they were trying their best. When asked if they were contributing to ensure gender-sensitive classrooms/ work environment from their individual level, most of them responded and shared some of their efforts. Most of these came as a response to their gendered experiences growing up in a patriarchal society. Three of them shared that they were considering forming a loose network of female journalism educators to share their problems and to support each other in their respective academic journeys.

Kusum said that there were only 4-5 female students in her department when she was studying at the University. In the classroom, she was never encouraged to speak or discuss.

*I somehow used to think that news reporting was for men and news presentation for women. We did not see many female journalists too while growing up. (...). I just want to make my students understand that this profession is for everyone irrespective of the gender (...). I bring female journalists as guest lecturers and often present the examples to combat gender stereotypes.*

Maya as a head of department has experienced that female lecturers often encourage students to pick up a gender perspective in their assignments and project works.

*In in our college at least 40 percent of the dissertation/ project's works are on women or on the issue of gender (...), participation of significant number of female faculty definitely have a role to play.*

Four of the participants stated that female students in their classrooms were more regular attendants and more sincere. They were in general more satisfied with the performances of female students in the classrooms.

Lali, the youngest participant of the group states that it was very encouraging to see more and more female students in the classrooms.

*While we don't have any course in relation to gender, I try to bring few examples that help male students to question their male privilege (...) and encourage female students to break the gender stereotypes. I constantly focus on how I can encourage these young female students into journalism and how can I motivate my students to pick of the gender lens (...) in production when they join a media organization.*

## Discussion

The study highlights that gender in journalism education in Nepal is largely missing in curriculum and faculty composition. Besides, female faculty also state that they felt discriminated in their profession because of their gender.

Scholarship from critical feminist theory indicates that gender oppression is very much engrained into

society including the academia, and the study indicates that female faculty face several challenges and barriers. As discussed before, female journalists bring 'new perspectives that are more favourable to women'. The findings of this study indicate that female faculty are also doing their part to create gender-sensitive classrooms and combat exclusion.

The concept of "tokenism" has been widely incorporated into studies of women who work in non-traditional jobs (Kanter, 1977). She saw the organizational structure of the workplace causing women's negative experiences at work. Some of these were results from tokenism, which she recognized in organizations where women comprise less than 15 per cent. Besides the negative experiences, women's inability to achieve equality have been attributed to their token status (Zimmer, 1998, p. 64). The previous studies (Kanter, 1977; Olson and Ashton-Jones, 1992) on groups/organization with skewed gender ratios (a high proportion of men and a small number of women) indicate that women were expected to act within pre-defined gender roles and experienced heightened visibility creating performance pressures. This was also one of the findings of the study, which was explained under the theme of 'imposter syndrome'. While explaining tokenism, Kanter (1977) further suggested that women's position in male-dominated organizations would improve if their proportion increases by new hiring and promotion policies and change in relationship and peer culture (ibid, p. 209).

Although the barriers/challenges faced by female faculty can be identified in individual, institutional and social level, the role of institution is crucial to address these issues. The first step is to create policies and practices in academia that will continue to foster an inclusive environment and addressing barriers against women professionals developing. Similarly, valuing the unique contribution women make, specifically in the area of care work has to be recognized.

Teaching gender issues in journalism colleges/ universities has an important role in understanding the construction and impact of gendered production of media content, status of women in the society and newsrooms, as well as issues of equal payment. However, lack of these issues in curricula means less safeguard against sexist comments and behaviours, both in academic institutions and newsrooms.

This study implies that women are not being able to explore their optimum potential in their career because of structural and societal barriers. The findings from the interviews suggest that while female faculty are experiencing gendered barriers, they are also battling gender-stereotypes. The challenges faced by female academics' work vs. life balance are grounded in patriarchal values, where only women are expected to do all the work at home and take care of their family.

As Skeggs (2008) and David (2016) highlight, feminist academics have broadened the scope of what constitutes valid knowledge and routes to understanding the world. The findings indicate that feminist academics are engaged in activism challenging the gendered working norms, which marginalise women within institutions. This study focused mainly on the perspective of female faculty. Further studies are needed to understand both the perception and experiences of male faculty members including those in decision-making bodies.

Gender audits and monitoring in the academic institutions are required to understand the broader picture to examine journalism education from the perspectives of gender equality.

## Conclusion

The study sheds the light on the current situation of Nepali journalism from a gender perspective. The findings indicate that journalism education in Nepal is largely shaped by masculine norms. Thus, female faculty often feel isolated and marginalized when it comes to professional and personal development. While marginalization; gendered behaviours, imposter syndrome, lack of network and collaboration indicate some patterns to understand the experiences of female faculty; it does not completely capture the overall gendered experience of the female journalism educators. Low participation of female academia in Nepali journalism education emphasizes the importance of hiring more female academic staff. Besides, journalism education needs gender-informed teaching faculty who understand how the issues of gender and power shapes our beliefs, including in newsroom culture and the media contents.

The findings provide a unique angle to understand the lived experience of selected female faculty members at various journalism institutions of Nepal. Although the research for this study is based on a small sample of opinion, it is a point of departure for studying whether the findings are representative of wider patterns across the country and other countries in similar socio-economic situations. Future research can include the

perspectives of senior academics and include the experience of male perspectives to have a larger understanding of the context.

Changing curriculum alone is not enough to achieve gender mainstreaming. However, dedicated units/courses on gender and journalism can potentially making some difference. The inclusion of titles on sexuality and gender equality may imply that educators care about these issues. A gender-friendly approach to curriculum on the part of lecturers, irrespective of gender, may also enhance more equal treatment of female and male students, by addressing gender stereotyping. Besides, various structural and programmatic actions could also be useful in this process. As the study stated that female faculty feel the need of specialized training and collaboration, that is also important area to address the gender gaps.

The study also shows how women faculty are fighting against exclusion and barriers. They also bring hope that the feminization of recruitment to journalism studies may be translated to newsrooms and faculty.

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