

# Being in Academia

## A Narrative Inquiry of Nepali Female Academics

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# **Being in Academia: A Narrative Inquiry of Nepali Female Academics**

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# Abstract

With the increase in participation in higher education and the engagement in the academic professions in the modern era, the Nepali women form a group of professional academics. Among all the professions females are engaged in, academia is the most popular and highly respected profession in the Nepali society. This study aims to explore the perception of the academics identity of the Nepali female academics in the Nepali socio-cultural context. It follows a research question: How do Nepali female academics perceive their academic identity? It argues that the women's academic identity is a form of the social identity in the Nepali context; therefore it uses the concepts from the Social Identity Theory for the discussion of their perception of their identity. In addition, since the study is on the female academics, their academic identity in their socio-cultural setting, and their steps against stereotypical socio-cultural practices; language, and subjectivity interpret their academic identity from the post-structural feminist lens.

It is a qualitative study. It follows narrative inquiry as the method for the research. The narratives from four Nepali female academics were collected through qualitative interviews. Although the female academics narrated the academic facets of their life, their experiences, understanding, opinion, beliefs, and practices of being women in general in the Nepali society have also been embedded in their narratives which no longer confine them within the academic slot merely. The analysis of the narrative revealed that the Nepali female academics are noble, independent, and the change agents of their societies who can deconstruct the masculine perspective in the society and academia in Nepal. It was also revealed the female academics get the opportunities of mentorship and some support from the university as the academics to bolster their academic identity. In the meantime, it was also found that Nepali female academics have the challenges of male domination, less collaboration, and cooperation at work, less validity of their academic abilities, and a heavy workload. In such challenging situations, the female academics try to minimize the effects of the obstacles on their own through communication and negotiation. Sometimes, they choose to ignore the hinderances since they cannot change anything.

Keywords: *academic identity, female academics, patriarchy, social context, social category, social comparison*

# **Dedication**

To the struggling Nepali female academics in Nepal.

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I am also grateful to my parents for making it possible for me to study abroad.

# Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ARNEC	All-Round National Education Committee
BPKIHS	B. P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
FWU	Far-Western University
INGO	International Non-governmental Organizations
KU	Kathmandu University
NA	Not Available
NAMS	National Academy of Medical Sciences
NFA	Nepali Female Academics
NNEPC	Nepal National Education Planning Commission
NSU	Nepal Sanskrit University
PAHS	Patan Academy of Health Sciences
PokU	Pokhara University
PU	Purbanchal University
SIT	Social Identity Theory
TU	Tribhuvan University
UGC	University Grant Commission
WEPAN	Women in Engineering Programmes and Advocates Network

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the situation of the Nepali women and their professional and academic engagement in general. It also portrays a broader picture of the socio-cultural beliefs and practices in the Nepali society. Likewise, there is a discussion on the research issue and its rationale followed by a presentation of the research purpose and the research question.

## 1.1 The background of the study

It is visible in the Nepali society that it has gone through the changes of the modern times in terms of education and employment. However, it is still not a privilege for the most of the women to be a professional in the Nepali context. The existing literature on the Nepali women and their professional lives point out several reasons behind the situation, some of which are rare/ no opportunity for higher education, the prevalence of harsh socio-cultural beliefs and practices, male-dominated leadership in the institutions, industries and organizations, and a double load of domestic and professional duties on women. Most of the literature on the socio-cultural status of the Nepali women point to patriarchy and patriarchal tradition as the most influential hindrances of women empowerment and development. It refers that patriarchy has driven women so miserable that they have no control over their own “body, labor, income, mobility, sexuality, ideology and identity” (Poudel, 2011, p. 30). For instance, in one of the studies, Bista (2006) found that the Nepali female teachers have taught in schools as an additional job to their household chores since their engagement in the profession outside their home is not an excuse for the reduced domestic duties. The list of such reasons may be longer, nonetheless, these are some the most influencing reasons behind the scene. Interestingly, such obstacles are not common among all the women in Nepal, i.e. “the ecological and socio-cultural diversity, intersectionalities affect the constraints and opportunities of women in term of ecology, class, caste/ethnicity, religion, locale of residence and the development region” (Bhadra & Thapa Shah, 2007, p. 10). Moreover, according to Bista (ibid.), the highest number of women in the academic profession belong to Bramhin<sup>1</sup>, an ethnic group in Nepal. I, being a female who belongs to the so-called uppermost ethnic group (Bramhin), residing in the outskirts of the capital city, personally, might have enjoyed

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<sup>1</sup>Bramhin is the highest caste in Hinduism

more opportunities than the women who live in the rural settings and belong to the so-called lower classes.

The point that drew my attention towards this area of study is not the difficulties prevalent in the Nepali society but the experience of some women who, despite obstacles have taken some positions in the reputed universities. According to Mahat (2003), the total share of the Nepali female in the professional occupations and administrative jobs is only one-fifth and the rest belongs to men! Likewise, according to Acharya (2003) the total female proportion of Nepali women in the labor force by occupation is 43.2 (as cited in Bhadra & Thapa Shah, *ibid.*), however, 'academics or teaching' have not been explicitly shown in the record. Perhaps, they come under the 'Not stated/Others' category. The statistics also signifies that 'Education/Academics' is not recognized as a separate profession for women in Nepal. Despite the situation, there are women who are struggling in creating their space as academics in the universities. I believe that it is important to bring their experiences in light so that other women may get encouraged in academia. Moreover, their experiences may help other female academics to cope up with the difficult situations. Therefore, this research is an attempt to study the perception of the academic identity of the Nepali female academics (NFA) in their society and family through their narratives.

This study explored the understanding, experiences, opinion, beliefs and practices of the NFA to interpret their perception of who they see themselves as and how they made themselves the persons they are now. It not only illuminates the stories of success or struggle during the challenging situations but also sheds light on the opportunities for the female academics in the male-dominated socio-cultural country context. The perception of the NFA, hence, may help the university administrators and policymakers to revisit their policies for their female academics and make necessary amendments in the provisions for the female academics in order to improve their professional status (Canrinus, 2011). In addition, it may also encourage other researchers to carry out additional studies on female issues.

### **1.1.1 Women's role in Hinduism**

Religion and culture are the two sides of a coin that cannot be separated from one another since culture defines and verifies religion and religion, in turn, has impacts on culture (Beyers, 2017). It refers to the idea that there is the influence of religion in society, human life, and the mode of human life. In this regard, Oppong (2013) states that the literature in

social sciences shows that religion and the religious beliefs and practices may have a direct and positive correlation with an individual's identity since it is instrumental in enriching the understanding of identity formation of the individuals of the particular group! In addition, there is also the literature which conveys that women have been a special target in the most of the religions and they have been defined as submissive to men (Basharat, 2009). This understanding leads towards the thought that the academic identity of the NFA might have been influenced by the religion their society follows. In this section, Hinduism is discussed as an influential factor on shaping and defining the academic identity of the NFA in the Nepali socio-cultural context.

Although Nepal is called a multi-religious country, according to Thapa (n.d.), Hinduism is the dominant religion among Nepali people. The Central Beauru of Statistics [CBC] (2014) recorded in the population census 2011 that 81.34% of the total population of Nepal follows Hinduism. The same report demonstrates that Hinduism has remained the dominant religion since 1952 which shared 88.87% then. Hinduism, since the ancient time, has not only remained a mere religion but also the system of governance in Nepal (Thapa, *ibid.*). The faith in Hinduism and its principles and the changes that the religious practices might have gone through with the change in time might have also influenced the women, their roles and their identity both from their own perspective and also from the perspective of their family and society.

There are conflicting opinions and arguments on the Hindu women's roles and identity among the scholars. Some of them view women as pious and as significant as men and some others present them as worthless creatures. Swami Abhedanada (n.d.) states, according to Manu<sup>2</sup> authentic texts in Hinduism women are recognized as the powerful members of the society hence; they are endowed with legal powers. Likewise, a woman can take the hold of the social, the religious and the civic responsibilities like a man does. However, there exists some contrasting literature as well that does not concur these ideas. Allen (1982) quotes that a Hindu family treats their female family members nothing like human beings, instead, they take women as the animals that cannot speak and express (as cited in, Basharat, 2009)! Such revelations of the religious beliefs discourage women in searching for and constructing their own identity. Moreover, such thoughts might be misused in dominating women in the name of the religion.

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<sup>2</sup> Manu is the author of the Manusmriti (200 BCE- 100CE) which is considered as the Hindu law

Regarding the issue of female identity, if the literature is narrowed down to the examples and explanations, they present Sita<sup>3</sup> and Draupadi<sup>4</sup> as the role models for the entire Hindu women. Sharada (n.d.) argues that Sita and Draupadi are the ideal women in Hinduism since they showed enormous commitment and faithfulness to their husbands. She further affirms that all the women are taught and expected to behave like Sita and Draupadi and do just what men want them to do. However, they fail to note that these two women were not blindly following men but they had stood for themselves when they were in crisis and that their identity and existence were taken for granted by men! Sharada (ibid.) exemplifies that Sita refused to sit on burning fire just to prove that she was pure and untouched the second time (for the first time she actually did so)! Likewise, Draupadi also refused to serve as a maid for her step-brother-in-law because her husband lost her in the gambling where he had used her as a possession!

Although Nepali civilization has come a long way since the period of Sita and Draupadi and there are changes in the lives of women in the Nepali society, according to (Basharat, 2009), the female members are still dominated in the name of the such hostile beliefs and they are forced to remain dependent on their fathers before marriage, to their husbands after marriage, and to their sons in their old age. This practice leads their life to rightlessness which in turn, forces them to live according to men's terms and conditions. It may also refer to the idea that patriarchy in Nepali societies might have been originated in the religious prejudice of Hinduism.

However, the educated feminists have started to reinterpret the scriptures of Hinduism and raised their voice against the unjust practices that are particularly targeted to women. Their protests seek for education and opportunities for women like it is available for men along with respect and dignity (Anantananda Rambachan, n.d.). Shukla-Bhatt (2008) states that the Hindu women with educational opportunities have economic liberty since they are employed in the labor market.

Since the Nepali Hindu society runs with the religious codes of Hinduism (Dangol, 2010), it considers/ forces to consider the social roles, patterns and organization meaningful for everyone living in the society (Whyte & Marshall, 1970) which might not be true to all the people. This overview of Hinduism depicts the similar conflict. It shows that the Hindu

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<sup>3</sup> Sita is queen of Hindu God Ram (Mukherjee, 1893)

<sup>4</sup> Draupadi is the common wife of five brothers (Mukherjee, 1983) in the epic of Mahabharata

women are still struggling between the religious beliefs and the transformations of those beliefs for the betterment of their lives in Nepal. In such situation, it might be significant in understanding the perception of the NFA of their own academic identity in the Nepali socio-cultural context.

### **1.1.2 Patriarchy**

Although the practice of men domination over women has a long history the conceptualization of the term ‘patriarchy’ appeared later in the literature. The research for the initial meaning of patriarchy led me towards the definition of ‘patriarchalism’ that Weber (1947) puts forward which referred to a traditional practice of the rule of a man in their societies and the rule was over both men who do not hold the same positions and women (as cited in Walby, 1990). Weber (ibid.) further interrogates if the ruler always has to be a man (as cited in Adams, n.d.)! The literature on patriarchy afterward centered their definition on male domination over female. In this regard, Walby (ibid) defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (p. 20). Likewise, Millett (1969) stated a general meaning of patriarchy, that it is all about the oppression of women by men and the power with which men dominate women (as cited in Beechey, 1979). Furthermore, Beechey (ibid) gave more definitions to patriarchy from different points of view; politically, patriarchy is the interpretation of operation and subordination and that of aspirations of the changes in political practices and; theoretically, patriarchy is about finding out the real base for oppression and subordination of female. Though the interpretations of patriarchy read quite different on the surface, the essence in the interpretations is common; oppression of women. Duncan (1994) elaborates the concept of patriarchy in the line of the feminists where it is argued that women are subordinate to men. The feminists also criticize patriarchy for sustaining gender inequality (Jutting and Morrisson, 2005). There are three categories that originated patriarchy; “male control over female labor, male aggression, and violence towards women, and women’s role in childbearing, motherhood, and sexuality” ( Duncan, ibid, p. 1177-1178).

Apart from the general understanding of patriarchy in the modern world, the focus of this section is the practice of patriarchy in Nepal and its bases. The study of the ancient religious and traditional scripts that Nepali culture and practices are based on do not depict that patriarchal practices existed explicitly in the societies. The women are read to be given a

higher status in Vedic period <sup>5</sup> (Pokheral 2030; Gorkhapatra 2018; as cited in Tamang, 2000; Dhungana, 2014). The various Hindu texts of different times and types described the shape and the functions of ideal women (Dhungana, *ibid*) which ultimately gave them the higher status. Nevertheless, the description of the ideal women and the examples stated in such religious texts made the women's life “a monotonous saga of misery, narrow domesticity and submissiveness” (Mukherjee, 1983, p. 380). Furthermore, the women of those time were suggested to have the knowledge and wisdom from the Vedas so that they would be liked by a learned man for marriage (Mukherjee, *ibid.*). On the contrary, the same texts also include the bitter facts that the wise and learned women who can debate with men are hated by the society. Therefore, the use of learning outside the households and wifhood, and the learned personality of women have been condemned by the Nepali Hindu society since the ancient times. Although implicitly, women have been dominated by men even in the times they were said to have higher status. The modern literature on patriarchal practices in Nepal presents the irony that the status of women has been deteriorated with the reformation in the country (Nepal Country Paper, 1977, as cited in Tamang, *ibid*). The elites and the rulers of different periods manipulated the position and the functions of women as described in the religious texts on their favor, hence, deteriorated their status.

Walby (1990) claims, “patriarchy is composed of six structures; the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions” (p. 20). Male domination relies on these structures and influences women’s lives. Walby (*ibid*) further explains that men exploit women’s labor in households for free. Even if women are capable of paid labor they are not given a better position that pays them better benefits. It is not only men in particular that dominate women but the state also reinforces the patriarchal policies and actions hence, marginalize women. Likewise, the justice for women against male violence is so vague that men take women violence for granted, and that the state does not have enough provisions to safeguard women from all sorts of violence. Similarly, it is obligatory for women to be heterosexual. Finally, it is the men who decide in what ways women are represented in the cultural institutions.

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<sup>5</sup> The tentative period of 1500-500 BCE (Upanisads, as cited in Jamison & Witzel, 1992)

## 1.2 Issue statement

The most current statistics on the female academics is not accessible, however, according to the University Grant Commission Nepal [UGC] (2010) the female academics covers only 16.6% of the total academics in nine universities in Nepal. The statistics challenge the policy provision for female in education in Nepal. In the policy level, since the beginning of education planning in Nepal, women have always been prioritized in the teaching profession. For example, the first two education plans, Nepal National Education Planning Commission 1956 (NNEPC) and All-Round National Education Committee 1961 (ARNEC) mention that qualified female members would be recruited in the teaching profession. Since then, female recruitment in education as professionals is being stated as a fascinating line in the education plans. However, as Bista (2006) states, these lines seem to be limited within the planning level because a clear lack of efforts in the implementation of the plans is visible. Although the policy refers to the enrolment of women in the profession of teaching, the number of women in the profession is incomparably less than men.

The truth is that the Nepali women suffer from discrimination in their family on almost every aspect like food, health, education, opportunities, etc. In this regard, Dangol (2010) states that such unjust practices on the female members begin right after their birth and continues life long influencing their bringing up, education, employment and decision making. In such situations, it is difficult for a female member to get into a respectable profession since they may not be qualified for the position. The Human Capital theorists also assert that women do not equate men in terms of human capital since they do not have the same positions in the family (Walby, 1990). Such beliefs and literature undermine the ability of women. This way, the story does not end at less and weak enrolment of a female in academia but it continues in every step of their career.

Bista (2006) explains that there are limited or no opportunities for a female to get promoted. Similarly, the male-dominated administration discourages women to get into the profession. It is surprising that the UGC Annual Report 2012 also does not mention anything about women or gender in its report (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). The evidence shows that the issues on the NFA in the universities have been neglected. The prevalence of fewer numbers of female academics in the universities maybe another reason to be included in the list that I mentioned elsewhere in this chapter. Irrespective of the reason(s) behind, the issue of the academic identity of the NFA in the university context is an area that needs to be studied.

When it is mentioned ‘the NFA’, it refers to professors, assistant and associate professors, and lecturers. I chose to study how these NFA of the universities perceive their own academic identity. The study interprets if they recognize themselves as different women from other women and the male academics in their family, society and the university. The demarcation of their identity is not only a difference marker among female-female and female-male, but it is the understanding of the contribution that the women may be making in their profession and the discipline. The recognition of their ‘Self’ not only reflects what the female academics have done/ have been doing but also in what ways they can contribute more to academia. It is necessary for the female academics in the university to understand and reflect who they have been, who they actually are, how they came to the position, how they have changed/ have been changing, and how they may go along. I, as an academic female and a researcher, hold the belief that recognizing self-implies making a position for self among others in the discipline. Moreover, despite the research being carried out by a female, born and brought up in a typical Nepali Hindu society, and aware of the social norms and values, beliefs and practices, her personal biases during the presentation of the narratives and their analysis and discussion of the findings are kept as minimum as possible.

### **1.3 Rationale of the study**

Understanding the ‘Self’ is the milestone for personal development. The same implies in professions as well. When a person in a profession knows who s/he is as a professional in the given context, the person can take further steps for his/her professional development in order to construct professional identity. The scholars and educators also agree with the idea that knowing who the person is as a ‘Self’ is a proactive step. While discussing identity and teacher identity Oslen (2012) states that identity is “an individualized self-image any person possesses” (p. 1122) and teacher identity is “analytical frame that draws attention to personalized, dynamic, social nature of any teacher’s professional development” (p. 1123). As teaching is a part of academic work (Maxwell, Gyamtso, Seden, Choeden, Lhamo, Tshomo, Tshechu, Wangmo and Lhamo, 2015) the statement may also signify that academics have a dynamic professional identity. Since professional identity is a dynamic construct, it is influenced by the social context that the academics are in. Clarke, Hyde, and Drenan (2013) argue professional identity is a complex individualized process which is affected by the society in many ways.

Bringing out the stories of the academic identity of the NFA explicates not only their personal understanding, experience, opinion, beliefs and practices but it also embeds the answers to the “disciplinary inquiries and examines how a person develops inside various social context” (Oslen, 2012, p. 1122). I took the reference from different literature to locate pertinence of the issue for the study. Morley and Crossouard (2015) mention that gender wise studies in higher education is an emerging issue. They further state the reality of the prevalence of less research in the area. The need for such studies has been recognized by the scholars for a long time. Regarding the rationale of such studies Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) assert that researches on professional identity are necessary. Likewise, Clarke, Hyde, and Drenan (2013) also encourage research on disciplinary identity in the profession.

## **1.4 Aim of the study**

The aim of this study is to exhibit the perception of the academic identity of the NFA. It explains their experience, opinion, and understanding of being in academia in Nepal.

## **1.5 Research question**

The research question of the study is;

How do Nepali female academics perceive their academic identity?

## **1.6 Delimitation of the study**

This is a qualitative study carried out on four female academics in Nepal. It explores the female academics’ perception of their own academic identity through their narratives under the lenses of the social identity theory and post-structural feminism. It is grounded on the individual identity of the female academics with reference to their socio-cultural grounds along with the influence of their gender on their professional engagements. The researcher discusses the influences of the socio-cultural orientations of their family, society, and the university on their academic identity as women. The study does not present the female academics and their academic activities on their gender basis merely (Bem, 1981) as a gender theorist does; rather they are interpreted as the professionals irrespective of their gender of being a female. Inversely, in the discussion, it includes the influence of their gender on their

professional engagements and in making them the professional academics. Hence, this is not a gender study but a social study on which gender has been influential.

## **1.7 The structure of the study**

There are seven chapters in this study. The first chapter introduces the topic. It briefly sets up the background of the study. Then, it discusses the issues this study centers at and the rationale of this study. After that, it mentions the purpose of carrying out this study and the research questions. Finally, it briefly delimits the study methodologically, theoretically, and thematically.

The second chapter presents the literature review. It provides a brief overview of higher education in Nepal. Likewise, it also attempts to conceptualize women's marginalization in academia. The review is constructed on the facts and figures relevant to Nepali society. After that, it presents a brief review of the empirical studies carried out in the other parts of the world around the same theme.

The third chapter discusses the theoretical base for the study. There is a review of the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and post-structural feminism. The review of the SIT explains social context, social categorization and social comparison as the concepts for this study. Likewise, there is also a review of the concept of language and subjectivity of post-structural feminism. Then, it discusses the rationale of the concepts of the theories used throughout the study.

The fourth chapter discusses the methodology of the study. It explains the philosophical orientations for the study. Then it elaborates the research design in detail. It also explains narrative analysis as the method followed during the study. After that, it presents a discussion on the quality standards of the study. At last, it presents a discussion on the ethical issues addressed for the study.

The fifth chapter presents the stories of the academic identity of the female academics in the Nepali context. The narratives of the female academics are based on the shared experiences and information in the interviews. The narratives are followed by the findings drawn from the analysis of the narratives. The findings include the perception of the NFA, the opportunities they got, the challenges they encountered in their professional journey, and the ways they cope with the challenges.

The sixth chapter presents a discussion of the findings of the study. The discussion is based on the ways the language, social context, social categorization, and social comparison influence the construction of the academic identity of the NFA in the Nepali society.

The seventh chapter presents the conclusion of the study. After that, it presents the limitations of the study and the recommendations for further research in the area of academic identity in the Nepali context.

## **1.8 Chapter summary**

To get engaged in a profession and get recognized as a professional of the field for the Nepali women is not yet their right but a subject to criticism and struggle. Although, the situation has changed to some extent in terms of opportunities for education and employment, for instance, an increase in the number of educated women led them towards professional engagements; the women do not enjoy the equal professional freedom or professional opportunities to men. The everlasting rule of patriarchy and patriarchal interpretations of the religious scriptures have jeopardized women and their identity in terms of their values, and terms and conditions. Instead, women are expected to be identified in terms of their belongingness to the male characters in their family, i.e. their father, their husband, or their son! In spite of their professional engagements, the women still take the complete responsibilities of the homemakers too. The socio-cultural practices of the typical Nepali society are still patriarchal; hence Nepali women are still the subject to men domination in almost all spheres of their life including their personal decision making. However, some women have taken the bold steps and brought changes in their lives as academics. This study attempts to bring to light the professional and academic experiences of some of the selected Nepali women and their perception of their own academic identity. Having introduced the topic for the research in this chapter, the next chapter will present an overview of the research carried out on female and their academic experiences in Nepal and abroad.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a brief overview of higher education and the situation of female academics in the universities in Nepal. It also presents a review of some empirical studies briefly. The review of the empirical studies is built on the discussion of the purpose and the findings of the research carried out in academic identity theme. These empirical studies contribute to the interpretation of the findings from the narratives of the NFA in chapter five and six.

### 2.1 Higher education in Nepal

Nepal does not have a very long history of formal higher education. The establishment of Tribhuvan University in 1959 (<http://tribhuvan-university.edu.np/about-us>) marks the formal inception of higher education in Nepal. However, according to the recommendations of the first education commission, the steps had to be taken with the literacy of young Nepali children and adults (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2015). It may refer to the fact that the history of higher education to the common people is even shorter than that of the institutions. According to the UGC (2017), there are nine universities and four medical institutes in Nepal. Likewise, there exist 1,407 higher education campuses, 98 constituent campuses, and 777 private campuses, and 532 community campuses in Nepal by 2015/16 (UGC, *ibid.*). Despite the prevalence of the community colleges affiliated to these universities, the less number of the universities and the government's support to improve the quality of education and access to education is still inadequate to the increasing number of students in the tertiary level (Mathema, 2007). More specifically, Nepali higher education still lacks infrastructures, resources, and concrete policies (Gaulee, 2014).

### 2.2 Female: The neglected gender in Nepali academia

The less number of women's enrolment in academia may convey that it is a male-dominated profession in Nepal. The currently available data from the UGC (2017) mentions that the total number of academic staffs in the universities and the medical academies is 9,142. Although there is an increase in female enrolment in the tertiary education and graduate percentage, it is surprising to see that there are no female academics in some universities at

all (ADB, 2015)! Despite their discouraging presence in academia, the NFA attempts to make it a professional platform through their “education and action” (Dhungana, 2014, p. 39) for their identity and independence.

In spite of the women’s lack of approach to higher education, the statistics shows that there is an improvement in the enrolment of Nepali women in the occupations which were visibly dominated by men in the past. However, if women employment is concentrated at the profession of teaching only, it shows a decreasing percentage with the increasing level of education (Acharya, 2015). It is also significant to note the proportion of female from a different ethnic and socio-cultural background in the profession since there exists different ethnic groups in Nepal. The livelihood of the different ethnicities may also be different. Regarding ethnicity-wise engagement in teaching, Bista (2006) states that the number of women from Bramhin and Chhetri<sup>6</sup> ethnicity is higher than the number of women from other indigenous groups and minorities in the profession of teaching. Likewise, the female teachers are less likely to change their profession than male teachers in the Nepali context (Bista, *ibid.*).

According to the UGC (2012), the total number of female faculties in the universities in Nepal is 1,322 (i.e. 7.9%) whereas there are 15,365 (i.e. 92.1%) male faculties. It explicitly demonstrates that there is a huge gender gap in the distribution of faculties in the universities. Moreover, among the 1,322 female academics, there are only 48 female professors in the whole country belonging to Tribhuvan University only! It would be more significant to mention additional facts and figures on female academics in this section of the review; however, the UGC report does not give the gender details of the academics (Morley & Crossouard, 2015).

According to the UGC (2017) following table shows the general share of the academics in the universities in Nepal (p. 28).

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<sup>6</sup> Bramhin and Chhetri are the so called higher classes in Nepal

Table 1: Number of different levels of teachers in different universities

University	Prof.	Assoc. Prof.	Assist. Prof.	Lecturer	Teaching assistant	Instructor	Total
Pokhara University (PokU)	9	11	56	26	6	NA	108
Patan Academy of Health Science (PAHS)	12	23	21	83	NA	NA	139
Kathmandu University (KU)	17	26	78	63	11	NA	195
Far-Western University (FWU)	9	11	54	Na	26	NA	100
BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences (BPKIHS)	68	54	86	NA	NA	NA	208
National Academy of Medical Sciences (NAMS)	43	68	70	24	NA	NA	205
Lumbini Buddha University (LBU)	8	4	NA	53	NA	NA	65
Mid Western University (MWU)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	156
Tribhuvan University (TU)	566	2206	3060	4	1669	461	7966
Total	732	2403	3425	253	1712	461	9142

Adopted from the University Grant Commission (2017), p. 28.

Note: In the table, 'NA' refers to 'Not Available Data'.

The table from the UGC (2012) provides the faculty information in the universities and academies in Nepal. The following table from the UGC (2012) shows the gender-wise distribution of the faculties in the universities in number in Nepal.

Table 2: Number of faculty members in universities by rank and gender

School	Prof.		Reader or Associate Professor		Lecturer		Assist. Lecturer		Others		Total	
	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	T
B.P.Koirala Institute of Health Sciences		52		26	0	66				39		183
Kathmandu University		33		0	0	171				137		341
National Academy of Medical Science		43		35	0	42				22		142
Nepal Sanskrit University		65	3	130	39	520	0	15	0	40	40	770
Patan Academy of Health Sciences		7		1		7						5
Pokhara University						4		1				16
Porbanchal University						1				4		9
Tribhuvan University	8	89	05	082	23	242	2	326	92	240	280	3679
Total	8	04	08	302	62	183	2	376	92	700	322	5365

Adopted from the University Grant Commission (2012), as cited in ADB (2015), p. 29.

Note: 'F' refers to 'Female' and 'T' refers to 'Total' in the table, Likewise, the researcher had access to this piece of information only during the research period.

## 2.3 Empirical review

This section presents a short review of the studies that have been carried out around the theme of academic or professional identity in Nepal and abroad. Each study presented here is discussed in terms of its aims, research methodology, and findings.

Nagatomo (2012) carried out a narrative study entitled 'The impact of gender on the professional identity of seven female teachers of English in Japanese higher education'. The study aimed at exploring the impact of gender on the professional identity of the female

teachers in Japanese higher education context. From the study, it was found that gender is one of the significant barriers for Japanese female teachers that hindered them from enjoying the same privileges that their male counterparts enjoy. The female teachers feel that they were peripheral to their male counterparts in their institution. However, it was also found that female teachers acknowledge that their competence in the English language provided them with the opportunity of being the professional teachers. Likewise, it was found that the part-time female teachers also had the feeling of being the professional teachers. The researcher found that there was a complex relationship between gender and power, which eventually influenced the teachers' professional identity.

Sapkota (2016) carried out a narrative inquiry entitled 'Constructing EFL Teacher's Identity in Nepal: A Narrative Inquiry'. The study aimed at exploring the socio-cultural identity of the English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' in Nepal through the lenses of their practices and perception. The researcher found that the EFL teachers of Nepal still feel their correspondence to the god as it is stated in Hinduism. Likewise, the society still has faith in them as the role models of their society. However, the changing social and political context of the country and teachers' involvement in the activities other than teaching merely, has been influencing their professional identity in a negative manner. The researcher mentions in the study that there is not much difference in the identification and characterizations between the EFL the teachers on a gender basis. However, there is a contradictory idea which is also the point of departure for additional studies on women that it has been difficult for the female teachers and the female counterparts to enjoy the similar professional environment that the male teachers do. In this regard, one of the questions that may arise is, if there exists no difference in a professional environment on a gender basis, why would the female teachers find it difficult to adjust in the professional settings?

Fraser (2011) conducted a study titled 'Exploring the nature and process of professional identity of the teachers of English in Japanese Higher Education'. This explorative study aimed at examining how the teachers of English at one of the largest private universities in Japan negotiate and manage their professional identities. From the study, the researcher found that not all the teachers of English chose to be teachers because their academics belonged to Education, but the feeling of helping others made them teachers. However, they also found that not all the teachers readily accepted to describe themselves as professional teachers since others do not perceive the teachers of English positively in Japan. Likewise, there is not any

professional framework for teachers as it exists in other professions. Similarly, the teachers were also found feeling that their qualifications were inadequate or inappropriate for their current roles as teachers. There is another interesting finding, which in the research is a generalized finding for all teachers of English, however, that may be linked with this study, i.e., both the teachers and the administration assumed that the teachers have enough learning for their profession so, the teachers have less engagement in professional development activities.

Bista (2006) carried out a study entitled 'Status of female teachers in Nepal'. This survey research aimed at describing and analyzing the present status of female teachers in Nepal. The researcher found that female teachers had to bear the double load of responsibilities; the domestic and the professional. Hence their profession was negatively influenced than that of the male teachers. Similarly, the negative attitude of the male teachers towards the female teachers also made them keep themselves confined to teaching only without having the opportunity to develop themselves professionally. Likewise, the presence of gender biases and the cases of sexual harassment make the female teachers insecure at their workplace. In the same way, the male-dominated administration also has affected female teachers' professional promotions.

Canrinus (2011) carried out a study entitled 'Teachers' sense of their professional identity'. This survey study aimed at exploring the extent to which teachers' professional identity profiles are related to the teachers' educational beliefs and teaching behaviors. The researcher used teachers' job satisfaction, self-efficacy, occupational commitment, and change in motivation as the indicators for the teachers' sense of professional identity. Among the three profiles categorized; unsatisfied and de-motivated, motivated and affectively committed, and a competence doubting identity profile which consists of the teachers with more diverse score, the researcher did not find any difference between the profiles in teachers' amount of experience, perceived professional development opportunities, their perceived level of autonomy, or their reasons for becoming a teacher. It was also found that the permanent teachers were motivated and committed to their profession in comparison to the other two categories of teachers. Similarly, the researcher also found that the students found differences in the teachers in terms of their classroom management and clarity in the instructions.

Pillen, Beijjard, and Brok (2013) carried out a study entitled 'Tensions in the beginning teachers' professional identity development, accompanying feelings and coping up

strategies'. This mix-method study aimed at understanding the tensions experienced by beginning teachers in their professional identity development, including the accompanying feelings and ways of coping. From the study the researchers found that there were three major tensions in the beginning teachers; wanting to care the students versus being expected to be tough, wanting to invest in a private life versus feeling pressured to invest time and energy on work, and experiencing conflicts between one's own and other's orientations regarding learning to teach. The teachers were found to have negative feelings like insecurity, awareness of the shortcomings, helplessness, and anger. However, the researchers also found that the teachers preferred problem-focused coping strategies rather than their emotion-focused strategies for such tensions. Another interesting finding of the study was that the female teachers found themselves in more tensions than their male teachers.

Maxwell, et.al. (2015) carried out an exploratory study entitled 'Experiences of becoming and being academic women in Bhutan'. In the study, they found that there are positive changes in female education and employment but the socio-cultural understanding of the teachings of Buddhism, which is followed by the majority of the Bhutanese, has a negative impact on building their professional being. The popular Bhutanese linguistic proverbs also demoralize the capacity of the women of the country. Despite the socio-cultural barriers, most of the Bhutanese female academics are encouraged by their family to take the profession and construct their identity in the profession. Although the teaching load seems equal to both male and female academics, there exists implicit discriminations in the opportunities in service and research-oriented roles. The male academics get more such opportunities than the female academics. Likewise, the burden of the multiple roles at home and the profession, tight schedule issues and weak networking among the other staffs, especially male academics, are found to be highly influential challenges for the female academics in Bhutan.

## **2.4 Chapter summary**

Nepal does not have a very long history of higher education. The history of the enrolment of the women in higher education is even shorter. Education remained luxury than a basic need for the Nepali women for a long time. A handful of women who got access to education and later have professional engagements are also struggling to make their professional space and identity. Moreover, the institutions that recruit women as professionals may not recognize

them as professionals as they do with their male employees. Despite the same positions and abilities, the NFA experiences inferiority in the universities they are enrolled. The studies carried out on female academics hint the partiality among men and women and crisis of identity in women implicitly and explicitly. The sense of the gap and the crisis of identity laid the foundation for this study. Having reviewed the literature in this chapter, the next chapter presents a detail discussion on the conceptual framework used for the study.

# 3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents a discussion on the conceptual framework for the study. The Social Identity Theory is discussed as the theoretical base for the study. Then, there is a detailed discussion on social context, social categorization, and social comparison as the three professed of social identity. Moreover, there is also a discussion on post-structural feminism as another conceptual base for the study. The researcher discusses the concepts of language and subjectivity in detail which are used in the study for the interpretation of the narratives.

## 3.1 Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) was introduced by Henri Tejfel and John Turner in 1979. According to Tejfel and Turner (1978; 1979), the individuals define their identity according to the group they belong to; furthermore, their relatedness to the group not only gives them the belongingness but also supports them to construct and develop their same identity. Moreover, the affinity to a group keeps people positive towards the group and the group behaviors, and strengthens their identification as the group members (as cited in Islam, 2013). The way people behave reflects their individual identity and the behavior of the group they belong to. In other words, the people in a group have some common behaviors of the group although they are different on their individual basis.

Referring to the human beings as individuals and as the members of a social group(s), Tejfel and Turner (1986) further discuss that s/he may choose to keep them connected to others only in terms of who they are individually rather than which group they belong to. In the meantime, it is also possible that her/his contact with the others is guided by their group orientations, i.e. keeping their group morals and recognition higher than who they are as individuals. Sherif (1967) exemplifies that the interconnectedness among the people and their recognition is temporary since it can be heightened or weakened by changing their groups (as cited in Tejfel & Turner, *ibid.*). Likewise, the group members may behave more competitively if they perceive threats from the out-group members (Tejfel & Turner, *ibid.*). Here the in-group refers to the group that an individual belongs to and the out-group refers to the groups that the individual does not belong to. The sense of competition with the out-group(s) keeps the in-group members attached to one another in their group and behave more influentially.

In the SIT, Tejfel and Turner (1986) discuss social context, social categorization, and social identity and social comparison as the three processes which help an individual to create social identity in his/her group and distinguish himself/herself from other groups.

### **3.1.1 Social context**

The social context provides the individuals with two different social behaviors; “interpersonal and inter-group” (Tejfel & Turner, 1986, p. 277). First, the people have the opportunity to keep their individual traits at the center while interacting with another member of the society. Second, there are also the possibilities for the individuals to interact as members of a certain group rather than as an individual merely. In the former interaction, there are individuals interacting with each other, however, in the latter interaction, the individuals represent their groups keeping their personal features less significant. They further affirm that the group values, attitude, and beliefs influence its member’s in-group and out-group behaviors. The knowledge of the in-group and the out-group behaviors provides individuals with the chances of social mobility and social change in the same social context. According to Tejfel and Turner (ibid), social mobility provides the group members with the possibilities to change their group if they are not satisfied with their group and the group behaviors; i.e. it is an individual member based activity. However, social change covers a wider area. It concentrates on changing the status-quo of their group irrespective of the position they hold in the group rather than changing the individual’s affiliations or the activities (Tejfel & Turner, ibid).

### **3.1.2 Social categorization**

The identical behaviors of the people belonging to a certain group create the social category particular to them. In this regard, Tejfel and Turner (1986) elaborate that identity is influenced by the behaviors of their social category since they tend to be inclining towards their in-group behaviors and remain aloof from the out-group behaviors. They further discuss that the in-group members evaluate out-groups according to their in-group culture and norms, and yet, favor the in-group rather than the out-group(s). The conflicting group interests result in competitions; however, it is not only the reason for competitions between the in-group and out-group(s). The awareness of the existence of an out-group in the in-group members may also encourage intergroup competitions. Having been aware of such competitions, group bias

and belongingness may create a social category. The social category is the cognitive process which may organize the social environment or divide it or categorize it, and make the people act differently in the social settings. Thus, the social category may give individuals the reference of who they are. “The trivial and ad hoc intergroup categorization leads to in-group favoritism and discrimination against the out-group” (Tajfel & Turner, *ibid.*, p. 282). However, when the groups are cognitive which they call “minimal”, there exists no conflict or enmity.

### **3.1.3 Social comparison**

The common meaning of a group for Tajfel and Turner (1986) is the collection of people who understand themselves as the members of a same social category, share the emotional morale of the social category and establish a common understanding for the assessment of the group and their affiliation to the group. The people belonging to a social group identify themselves as the group members when they meet these social standards. Furthermore, the individuals keep comparing themselves while they are also identifying themselves. Tajfel and Turner (*ibid.*) claim, “they define the individual as similar to or different from, as “better” or “worse” than, members of other groups” (p. 283). They argue that social identity arises from such considerations.

From the discussion of the social context, social categorization, and social identity and social comparison, Tajfel and Turner (1986) give the following theoretical principles,

“Individuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity.

Positive social identity is based to a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-groups and some relevant out-groups: the in-groups must be perceived as a positively differentiated or distinct group from the relevant out-groups.

When social identity is unsatisfactory, the individual will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or make their existing group more positively distinct” (p.284).

## **3.2 Social Identity Theory for the academic identity of the NFA**

The concepts of social context, social categorization and social comparison from the SIT introduced by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979 have been used as the conceptual base for this study. According to Tejfel (1972), social identity is “the individual’s knowledge that s/he belongs to a certain social group together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership” (as cited in Hogg, 2001, p. 186). In other words, it is the self-understanding and the conscious self- positioning into a group for some reasons. The SIT is the theory of social psychology. However, education is an applied field and the emphasis of this discipline is in enhancement of the professional practices (Beacher, 1987, as cited in Beacher, 1994). Since the study concentrates on the perception of the academic identity of the female academics through the narratives of their own academic experiences, understanding, opinion, beliefs, and practices, the narratives are studied through the lenses of the SIT.

According to Tejfel and Turner (1986), people identify themselves as someone in particular in accordance with the group they belong to. This study is oriented by the same concept. With this conceptual stand, the study attempts to reflect the female academics' academic image of themselves in the mirror of the Nepali university context. In other words, the female academics' narratives uncovered their sense of belongingness to the group of university academic professionals in Nepal.

Tejfel and Turner (1986) proposed three processes in the SIT that bring the realization in individuals of who they are in the social context they live in; social categorization, and social identification and social comparison. While discussing the female academics' discernment of their academic identity during the study, the processes of social context, social categorization, and social comparison have been used. Their idea that people recognize themselves as a member of a certain social category is the basic take away from the theory into this study.

### **3.2.1 Social context**

It has been discussed in the previous section that the social context helps the individuals to understand their behavior as that of an individual and also as that of a member of a group. Tejfel and Turner (1986), named the former social behavior as interpersonal and the latter as intergroup. The interpersonal behaviors are not influenced by their affiliation to a social

group but the intergroup behavior is highly influenced by their affiliation to a social group. In this study, the concept of the intergroup behavior may be explained more prominently. 'Academics' is the social group that the female academics belong to. Therefore, the narratives of the NFA are expected to explain their academic experiences, understanding, opinion, beliefs, and practices as their group behaviors. Nonetheless, their individual perception of being women in the Nepali socio-cultural context is not undermined. It is because their gender not only influences their professional behaviors but also shapes their professional beliefs (McGinn & Oh, 2017).

While discussing the process of social context for social identity, Tejfel and Turner (1986) discuss social mobility and social change. Social mobility and social change are the "individual's belief systems about the nature and the structure of the relations between social groups" (Tejfel and Turner, 1986, p. 278). Social mobility allows the individuals to shift into another group if they are dissatisfied with their current group (Tejfel and Turner, *ibid*). In the study 'social mobility' has been used to explain the NFA's experience, practices, and understanding.

### **3.2.2 Social categorization**

The people categorized into the certain group exhibit some common attributes of the same group, which, in turn, becomes an identifying determinant of the people (Tejfel, 1979, as cited in Trepte, 2006). Trepte (*ibid.*) exemplifies the statement with, punk, which refers to the group of people with similar clothing and habits. However, the important point here is, they not only have such typical characteristics but also have similar hopes and expectations from the group. The identity that a person has at a time may not remain the same forever. Clegg (2008) argues that identity is a multiple and shifting concept (as cited in Jawitz, 2009) which conveys that identity may keep changing. In the study, 'university' is used as the concept for society and the 'academics' is used as the concept for a social category. When the female academics get into the university context as the professionals their identity may change from a female to the female academics. Such shifts impart new responsibilities and contribute to develop a different perception (Gillespie, Howarth, and Cornish, 2012). This way, the enrolment of female academics as professionals in the university is the basis for their academic identity construction (Wenger, 1998, as cited in Jawitz, *ibid*). The women as academic professionals in the universities are referred to the concept of social categorization

which, in this study, is the answer to a broader question, ‘what makes the female academicians feel that they belong to the group of academics in the universities in Nepal’. The researcher intendeds to explore and interpret the “salient” (Trepte, *ibid.*, p. 258) features of being female academics in the context of Nepali universities as expressed in the narratives of the female academics through the study.

### **3.2.3 Social comparison**

When people are certain that they belong to a certain group, they tend to shape themselves according to the attributes of the same group. The change in their attributes arises not only because the female academics get the position of a university academic professional, but also because the female professionals work as academics. For instance, according to (Jawitz, 2009), the teachers’ identity changes since they identify themselves belonging to the community of teachers and change their behaviors. Likewise, individual female academics shifts their agency of participation in a particular social context, which is the university context (Billett, 2004, as cited in Jawitz, *ibid.*) while constructing their identity. Tejfel (1978) notes that the idea of the Self that originates from one’s affiliation to a social group, in a social context, emerges along with the values and emotional significance of the group (as cited in Trepte, *ibid.*). In the study, the same concept of the social identity has been used to interpret the Self of the NFA since the researcher reflected that the values they have found built/ built in themselves as academics/academic professionals in the universities.

## **3.3 Post-structural Feminism**

The recent studies in education include varieties of female issues. The literature also indicates that post-structural feminism provides a relevant theoretical framework for such female studies of the present times. Likewise, there have been changes in the practices of women in the contemporary societies which are influencing their living experiences (Alcoff, 1988). The changes seek for the explanation from the post-structural feminist perspectives. The post-structural discussion of the female issues in education has been found meaningful (St. Pierre, 2000). Moreover, post-structural philosophical concepts can meaningfully articulate the contemporary experiences of women in education (St. Pierre, *ibid.*). Although these concepts are transferred from humanism to post-structural feminism, their interpretations are relevant and clear in terms of the female issues. Language, discourse, rationality, power, resistance

and freedom, knowledge and truth, and the subject are the key concepts of post-structural feminism (St. Pierre, *ibid*). Gannon and Davies (2005) discuss that feminists have made meaningful use of the discursive nature of the post-structural theory to fit into their perspective; hence they have been able to construct and strengthen the strategies to deconstruct the gendered binaries. The deconstruction illuminates the struggle of/for the identity of the female academics in this study.

According to Gannon and Davies (2005), the structure of language, the social structure, and cognition are indispensable for discussion from the post-structural feminist point of view. Hence, two key philosophical concepts of the theory; language and the subject are discussed in the next. Language and subjectivity have been used to discuss the narratives of the NFA in the study. Both language and subjects are the social constructs that complement social identity through discussion, comparison, and evaluation of the socio-cultural beliefs and practices of the society. Moreover, the change in socio-cultural beliefs and practices can be comprehended from the language and the position of the members of the society.

### **3.3.1 Language**

The linguistics literature conveys that language is a means for communication. More specifically, according to Wells (1947), “the words, word groups, and sentences are all sign-signifiants linked with signifieds” (p. 8). Human beings use such signs to convey their opinion and make meanings. However, St. Pierre (2000) argues that there are not enough such signs to address all the individual entities so that each of them could be identified on their own; instead, several entities that might look similar but are different, in fact, are kept into a single category. She further illustrates her argument with an example of the term ‘women’ which includes all women irrespective of the differences they may carry in terms of age, ethnicity, race, class, profession and so on. Despite the generalization, language provides identity. It is further discussed that it is necessary to address the differences since they influence the personality of women, hence all women might not refer to the same qualities and identity. They carry differences in their identities.

The function that language has been used according to Foucault (1966/1970) is to create binaries, hierarchies, and categories (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000). The feminists view this function of the language as manipulative for women since women are given the wrong slots in the binaries and the lower position in the hierarchies. Regarding the post-structural

feminist view towards language and its connectedness with identity, St. Pierre (ibid) further elaborates that generalizing and fixing the differences into a single category of women is the attempt to oppress women.

It is common among the feminists and post-structural researchers to excavate how language operates to make a so-called real structure (St. Pierre, 2000). Pierre (ibid) continues that language cannot reflect all the realities of the world since there is no one-to-one meaning between the entities and the words. In fact, the meaning which is attributed to the entities is continuously changing and temporary. For instance, although women in the Nepali context are understood as the homemakers, they are not limited in homemaking; rather they have gone through the changes of the modern times in terms of education and employment, hence, they have constructed a different identity. Thus, it is contextual to discuss language as a tool for identity construction of female academics in the Nepali context.

### **3.3.2 The subjects**

When it comes to a concrete definition of who the subject is, there is no concrete single definition. For the humanists, the subject is a stable rational being who can generate truths; however, for the Marxists, a subject is a social product that changes along with the change in social relations; likewise, the psychoanalysts believe that the subject is simply unavailable (St. Pierre, 2000). Pierre (ibid) further discusses Althusser's idea of the subjects who states that the subjects are the constructs of the leading ideology. In other words, the ideology describes and delimits who the subject is and who can be the subjects. Moreover, the skills and qualities of the subjects are parallel to the ideology that they are in. With these contrasting opinions of the different theorists, here, I establish the idea that the subject is viewed and interpreted differently from different points of view.

According to the post-structural theorists, the subject is all about an individual's understanding of herself or himself that the person constructs on the basis of their own conducts and their relation with the world (Weedon, 1987, as cited in St. Pierre, ibid.). It refers to the idea that the community people live in, the activities they do, the personal understanding of the Selves and that of the others and, the interactions among people keep constructing the subjects. Moreover, it also opens the space for the individuals to make sense of who they are in relation to who others are in the world they live in. St. Pierre (ibid) also discusses that the cultural practices of the society, the language, and the available discourse

play a vital role in constructing and reconstructing the subjects. This post-structuralist view allows an individual to move freely to construct and reconstruct their subjectivity rather than being confined with a single stable identity. This study attempts to uncover the ways the NFA perceives themselves as the professional academic subjects at the university. It also discusses the influences of the Nepali socio-cultural practices on female academics' construction of their academic identity. Since the concept of the subjects also touches upon the other indicators like culture, language and the value of self and self-understanding, it makes the meaning of the discussion clearer.

### 3.4 The conceptual framework

The following figure provides an overview of the conceptual framework of the study. It shows the concepts and their interconnectedness with other concepts used in the study in order to generate the meanings of the narratives shared by the NFA.

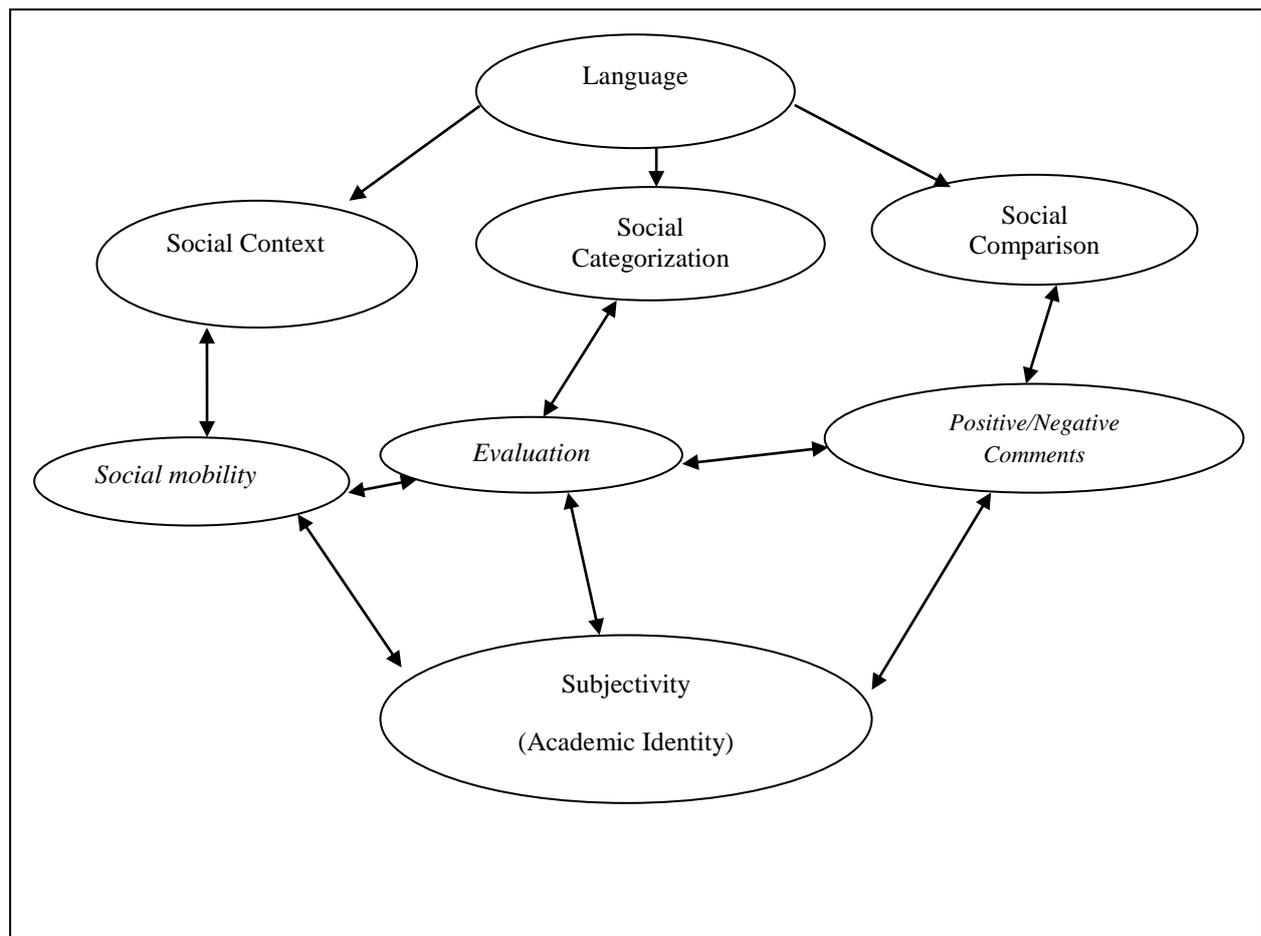


Figure 1: The conceptual framework

The conceptual framework demonstrates that language functions as an overarching concept influencing all the three processes of social identity, i.e. social context, social categorization, and social comparison. The awareness of the social context and the in-group and out-group(s) conflict leads the female academics towards their social mobility. Likewise, the positive and negative comments passed by the institutions and the society guide them with the continuous comparison of the identity of female academics. Similarly, the belongingness to a social category supports the female academics in evaluating their activities and identity. The remarks passed to the female academics also function as a factor for evaluation of their activities. In all these processes language is used as a medium for interaction and communication. The NFA communicates or interacts and gets communicated and interacted about their identity in terms of language; may it be verbally or symbolically or through the social practices. It is through the language they evaluate their activities and themselves and get aware of the state of satisfaction in living in a particular way or in receiving and interpreting positive or negative comments on being an individual and a professional in the academia. The evaluation of their own activities and the comments they receive may also influence their stability in a social category with a particular identity. Therefore, the NFA keeps interacting with themselves and the society they live in to keep constructing and reconstructing their own identity.

### **3.5 Chapter summary**

With its three processes for identity construction; social context, social categorization, and social comparison, the SIT provides the theoretical base for this study. Having acknowledged the assumption that individuals belonging to a certain group behave like the other members of the same group, the three processes of the SIT function as the infrastructures for academic identity construction of the NFA. The NFA continuously evaluate their social category and keep comparing their identity according to the comments they receive. The process of evaluation and comparison leads them to the reinterpretation of their place and identity in the given social setting. Hence, they function as feedback to decide if they fit into the context or they need social mobility. These three processes are accompanied by the post-structural concepts of language and subjectivity. Language influences all these processes since it is the means to communicate the academic identity of the NFA and reinterpret the identity with the changing context. Having discussed the conceptual framework in this chapter, the next chapter presents a detail discussion of the methodology for the study.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

This chapter explains the research methodology for the study in detail. It begins with my philosophical orientations for the study as a researcher where I discuss my beliefs and knowledge bases. Then there is a discussion of narrative inquiry as the research method for the study. It is followed by the explanation of the research site and the participants included in the study. Next, it elaborates interview as the data collection tool and narrative analysis as the data analysis method. After that it presents an explanation of trustworthiness, authenticity, and verisimilitude as the quality standards for the study, which is followed by the ethical issues addressed throughout the study.

### **4.1 Philosophical foundations**

This section of the chapter is an explanation of the philosophical bases of the researcher for the study. It explains what the reality of being female academics mean in the Nepali socio-cultural context and how the reality was approached during the study.

#### **4.1.1 Ontology**

During the study, the researcher took the position of a constructionist. The meaning-making of the perception of the academic identity of the NFA was not a single concrete word about who they are, rather it was a continuous process. It was constructed with their experiences, opinion, knowledge, and understanding that were built in the Nepali socio-cultural context. Thus, it is the “socially constructed” (Bryman, 2012, p. 33) attribute in the NFA. The position of a constructionist in the qualitative research might have guided me towards the belief that identity is dynamic, it has multiple meanings, and it is in the continuous process of construction. In other words, there is not a single word or a sentence that defines and delineates what being a female academics refers to. There are a couple of reasons behind the belief of the multiple meanings of the academic identity. First, the background (family, social, cultural, geographical, ethnic, and educational) that the female academics have since their student life might have guided them towards the profession they have now. It has already been mentioned in chapter one that background influences the position of women in their family and society and the benefits they get. Second, the context they are working as a professional at present might have attributed multiple meanings to their identity. These

realities equipped the female academics with the experiences both as the ordinary women and as the academics since the women need to play different roles in different contexts in Nepal. Such roles are unavoidable for women. The roles they play, in turn, keep forming their identity. In addition, their ethnicity, religion, and the geographical region of their origin and residence in Nepal also influence “who they are, how they have become the person they are now and why they are the person they are now” a lot. Such variations have been narrated in their narratives. Hence, all the experiences and understanding they shared during the interview have been included in the study as the significant elements of their academic identity.

### **4.1.2 Epistemology**

“Thick description” (Bryman, 2012) is not only the quality standard of a qualitative research but also the way to get closer to the truth embedded in the given description. A qualitative researcher of Social Sciences is required to uncover as much information as possible during the study so that the findings of the study are closer to the social reality. It was a narrative study hence, it required listening to the stories of the female academics. The narrative stories were the basic episteme for the study. Therefore, for the study, there was closer with the female academics. The closure for withdrawing the interactive stories was the basis for shedding light on the perception of the female academics so that the readers at distance can also comprehend the meanings shared (Clandinin, 2007).

The stories were not merely the narration of the events, but they were also the means through which, as the narrators, the female academics shared their experiences of hegemony, their confusions, the opportunities and also the challenges they experience (McNiff, 2007). Such experience, opinion, understanding, and the beliefs and practices are the components that form their academic identity in the academic settings. All these components narrated during the interview were valued as the sources of knowledge for making the meaning of the academic identity of the NFA in the study.

## **4.2 Research design**

According to Bryman (2012), “a research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data” (p. 46). It is a stage-wise plan that a researcher follows for a study. It includes the discussion on the research method for the study, the research participants for the

study, the site of the research, the data collection techniques used for the study, and the framework for data analysis. This is a qualitative study which followed the inductive strategy of researching. As Bryman (ibid) summarizes, when a researcher follows the inductive strategy, the researcher observes the phenomenon, which concludes with the development of a theory. This study strived towards illuminating the issues with the lived experiences of the female academics which may be useful for the domain of the study. Likewise, it strived towards getting closer to the “empirical world” (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015, p. 7) of the female academics’ perception of their own academic identity.

During this study, the narratives of the NFA were read and analyzed irrespective of the post they hold in the university as the experience, understanding and opinion of every one were worthy for the study. Therefore, “hierarchy of credibility” (Becker, 1967, as cited in Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015, p. 10) remained insignificant during the study. As the qualitative researchers focus their attention to comprehending the sense that participants relate to the particular aspect of the social phenomenon being studied (Snape & Spencer, 2003), these experiences were analyzed as their perception of themselves as the university academics in Nepal. Regarding the purpose of the qualitative research Bryman (2012) further states that a qualitative researcher attempts to make the meaning(s) of a social phenomenon from the research participant’s point of view. The same idea was the primary base for this study. It explored the perception of the academic identity of the NFA in the Nepali socio-cultural context. It indicated that the outcomes of the research were the NFA’s experience, understanding, opinion, and beliefs of their own existence as the academics. In this regard, Creswell (2009), states that qualitative research design functions as a means for comprehension of what a particular concept means to an individual or a group (p. 4), which, in this study is the meaning of the academic identity of the Selves of the NFA. The purpose of explicating the perception of the academic identity of the female academics through their narratives required a qualitative research since Bryman (2012) also asserts that studying qualitatively is about seeing the world from the participant’s point of view.

The qualitative research design and the interpretive mode of the study were appropriate for this research because it elucidates the shared perception of the female academics. This study explored and explained the experience, understanding, opinion, and beliefs and practices shared in the stories of the female academics, therefore it included all those meanings and experience of the academic identity of the female academics which may mean very little or nothing to others outside the study.

### **4.2.1 Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative Inquiry was used as the research method for the study. Clandinin (2016) suggests that narrative inquiry is a way to study human lives and experiences embedded in them as a tribute to those who lived the life and as a source of knowledge and understanding for others who study them. The female academics narrated their perception of the construction of their identity through the stories. The stories have been a powerful means of expressing, describing and investigating one's experiences since the history of human civilization (Barrett & Stauffer, 2012). During the study, as a narrative inquirer, the researcher elicited the meanings of construction of the academic identity of the NFA in the way they lived and have been living through the stories they narrated. As Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark and Morales (2007) argue, a narrative inquirer studies one or two characters in which the stories they share, is the data; then retells the stories told by the characters in a chronological order in order to make the meanings of academic identity as a university academics in the Nepali context. It is believed that the narrative inquiry enables to engender various aspects of their perception of their academic identity which may or may not be in the line of general meaning. Hence, it may lead towards a contradictory meaning since the personal experience of the female academics is base of the meaning the researcher made through the study but not what someone else may think or say about it.

### **4.2.2 Empirical context and participants**

The female academics in the universities in Nepal were the participants for this study. The female academics for the study belonged to two different universities; Kathmandu University and Tribhuvan University. There was an informal conversation with them before the interview for the study in order to find out if they were willing to be one of the participants for the study. However, the participants did not hold the same position in the universities. For instance, there were female professors in only one university out of nine universities in Nepal (UGC, 2012). To overcome such constraints the study was kept open to the participants with different positions in the universities. The study included the NFA participants who held the position of the professors, the associate/the assistant professors, or the lecturers in the two universities in Nepal.

The following table provides an overview of the participant NFA for the study.

Table 3: Participant's overview

Participant's name	Experience in years	Faculty
Aasha	13	Social Sciences
Anita	17	Social Sciences
Madhu	12	Social Sciences
Rubi	30	Social Sciences

### 4.2.3 Data collection: Interview

During the study, the narratives were collected from the female academics, through the qualitative interview sessions; therefore, the qualitative interview was only the data collection technique for the study. The participants were interviewed using the interview guidelines prepared before the researcher went to the field. The 'Appendix 1' has the interview guidelines used for the interviews. The interview questions prepared beforehand sought the experience, understanding, opinion, and beliefs and practices of the NFA in their context since the qualitative interviews aim at illuminating a phenomenon from the participant's point of view (Bryman, 2012). However, the questions prepared before going to the field did not address everything in detail that the NFA had to share. Therefore, some additional questions were asked along with the questions in the guidelines when the researcher felt the need during the interviews. These interviews were audio recorded so that their stories were saved the way they were narrated. The researcher listened to the stories more than once whenever it was necessary during the data analysis process. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) assert, the participants were interviewed more than once unless they shared sufficient information for the study. Then the interviews were transcribed. The researcher used the transcriptions of the narratives throughout the research process. The researcher followed the guidelines of Bryman (2012) regarding the qualitative interview and the number of interviews with participants, who suggests that qualitative researchers may need to have repeated interviews with the participants to excavate their views and experiences of their own academic identity. It was one of the reasons behind the repeated conversations since the researcher did not get a rich description of their perception in a single interview session.

The female academics were approached through their university administration. The researcher asked about female academics in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Then the researcher asked for their contacts. The university administration provided their contact details after the filled-out field visit form from the University of Oslo was shown. The potential participants were made telephone calls to get introduced and to clarify the purpose of the meeting. They were requested for an informal meeting so that they could be clarified the purpose of approaching them in detail. The researcher went to meet the NFA at their place. However, all the time the meetings did not turn out to be successful. The researcher had to come back empty handed since they could not find time to meet at the time they had fixed earlier. In such cases, the meetings were fixed for other days of their convenience. Some of them invited the researcher to their home for the interview. Some others called the researcher at their offices. There was also a participant who told that she would be comfortable to talk outside in a cafe.

In the meeting, they were explained about the study being carried out in detail. Since the participants were the female academics, they showed excitement in the study. Followed by the informal conversations, they were requested for an interview in the beginning. When they agreed, the date and time for the interview were fixed and the interview took place according to the plan.

The participants were explained the purpose of the interview and asked if they allowed recording their interviews before the interview took place. They were asked about the language they preferred for the interview; either Nepali or English. Interestingly, all of them wanted the interview in Nepali and the reason they gave was that they could express their feeling more openly and clearly. The interviews started with the interview guidelines devised beforehand. However, as the conversation proceeded, the questions were added according to need and their narration. The interview sessions were quite intensive since they started with the talk about how they came to the position from the beginning. They had stories to tell about the difficulties that they faced while coming through the way long. At some points, during the interview, they asked to stop the recording so that they could speak about the difficulties at home and in their work openly. The information shared at those moments were written as the short notes during the interview. As per the participant's request, the written notes have been incorporated indirectly in the findings and discussion wherever necessary.

There were some instances, where they ran out of words to express what bitter experiences they had to face as the female academics!

#### **4.2.4 Data analysis**

The data analysis in this study is all about making the meaning of the narratives collected from the NFA through the repeated interview sessions. To generate the meaning, at first, the stories shared by the academics were transcribed. Then, the researcher read and re-read the transcriptions to explore their perception of academic identity as the female academics. The shared perception was categorized while reading and re-reading the narratives of the female academics. Then, the themes were generated. It is because “the themes and subthemes are the products of thorough reading and re-reading of the transcripts or the field notes that make up the data” (Bryman, 2012, p. 579). In addition, the researcher looked for the “repetition and similarities and differences” (Ryan and Bernad, 2003, as cited in Bryman, *ibid.*) in the shared stories to create categories of the narrative data. Based on the categories of the stories of the NFA, the themes were generated so that their meaning could be organized and explained throughout the study.

The researcher blended two different methods of data analysis to make the sense of the narratives as suggested by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007); first, by the issue of the academic identity of the female academics and second, by the research questions on the academic identity of the female academics. The researcher blended these two approaches to generate the meaning, to blend interaction and action together, and then to construct the meanings (Webster & Mertova, 2007) of the narratives of the NFA. While blending the approaches, at first, the researcher studied the narratives carefully and from different angles like social, cultural, patriarchal, and religious as mentioned in chapter one. Then the researcher studied the issues that the research questions raised. Likewise, the researcher also studied the participant’s narratives through the lens of interview guides that were prepared before the interviews to address the issues raised by the research question. Generating the meaning of the narratives by issue got more meaningful when the researcher compared and contrasted the experiences of the academic identity of the female academics (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, *ibid.*). This way the narrative study illuminated the meaning of being the female academics in the Nepali context.

## **4.3 Quality standards**

The quality standards of the research being carried out are the ways the researcher takes her/his position. It also includes the place and the way the researcher positions the NFA and the ways s/he presents the narratives in order to meet the aim and make the study believable. Bryman (2012) states that the quality standards are the criteria for the evaluation of the research. This study attempts to address the criteria of trustworthiness, authenticity, and verisimilitude to assess the quality of the research.

### **4.3.1 Trustworthiness and authenticity**

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), trustworthiness and authenticity are different criteria, but they are parallel to validity, reliability, and objectivity of a positivist research. The quality standards of the study were trustworthiness and authenticity since it was carried out as an interpretive research. According to Taylor and Medina (2011) also, the quality standards of an interpretive research include the quality standards; trustworthiness and authenticity.

#### **Trustworthiness**

During the study, a long time was spent for the prolonged immersion with the NFA. The informal conversation with them during the phone calls and the meetings established a trustworthy relationship with them. Likewise, the repeated interview sessions provided the grounds for the prolonged stay with the research participants. It also encouraged them to tell and retell their experiences more confidently on being a female academics. The prolonged immersion in the field helped to make the study credible. The repeated interactions with the participants and their narrations through the conversation and the qualitative interviews, helped to draw a rich description of their perception of their academic identity. The researcher believes that the conversation/interviews with the NFA might have led towards the emergence of new knowledge from the study on the academic identity of the Nepali female academics.

#### **Authenticity**

In order to make the study authentic, the narratives narrated by the female academics were presented fairly. The researcher attempted to incorporate the diverse experience, understanding, beliefs and practices, and opinion shared by the NFA during the interview

without any personal bias for the fair representation. The narratives were presented according to the perspectives, context, and experience that the female academics shared rather than what the researcher thought would sound right or better. Likewise, the researcher explained the place and setting of the conversation which was the added descriptions of the narratives. Moreover, the added description of the context supported to keep the analysis of the narratives fair and clear.

### **4.3.2 Verisimilitude**

When the narratives were re-written, they were written close to the narratives that the female academics shared during the interviews. It was “an active process of photographing” (Bach, 2007) of the lived experience of the female academics including their understanding, knowledge, opinion, and beliefs. The closer and deeper the researcher got into the narratives, the clearer picture was made on the female academic’s perception their own academic identity. Therefore, during the study, the researcher made close readings of the narratives and the notes made during the interviews of the NFA. The readings of the study, therefore, were a “retrace” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 557) of the academic identity of the NFA rather than a research report merely.

## **4.4 Ethical considerations**

The researcher addressed the ethical issues using the model that Tracy (2010) presents. According to Tracy (2010), a qualitative researcher needs to consider procedural ethics, situational ethics, and relational ethics while carrying out a study.

### **4.4.1 Procedural ethics**

This qualitative study implies that the researcher, as a narrative researcher, uncovers the perception of the academic identity of the NFA. However, in bringing out the perception of the NFA in their social and the professional context, the researcher did not explicitly mention their identification. The pseudo-identification of the female academics has been presented throughout the study. Similarly, the researcher informed the female academics in advance so that they knew what the researcher was doing with their social and professional experiences, opinion, understanding, beliefs, and practices (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, informing the academics also helped them to decide if they wanted to be a part of the study or not (Bryman,

2012). The researcher gave them a detailed information and consent letter before the interviews which they studied and signed in order to make sure that they wanted to be participants of the study. The information and consent letter is attached as the 'Appendix 2'. However, as Tracy (2010) argues the researcher did not present anything false or overlooked any of their experiences.

#### **4.4.2 Situational ethics**

As discussed in the previous sections of the study and also throughout the conceptual framework for the research, identity is not an isolated concept. It is relational, and it is constructed in context. This study uncovered the perception of the academic identity of the NFA in the Nepali social, cultural, personal and professional contexts. During the study, the researcher did not force the NFA to share their personal experiences unless those experiences influenced their academic experience (Bryman, 2012) or explained their professional experiences. As Tracy (2010) asserts, the researcher focused on their professional/academic experience, understanding, and knowledge while drawing the narratives from the NFA. Moreover, the personal and professional narratives shared by the NFA has been used in this study only.

#### **4.4.3 Relational ethics**

It is explained repeatedly elsewhere in the study that it is the narrative analysis of the narratives of the NFA. It is also mentioned that the researcher interviewed the NFA more than once to get a thick description of their perception. In order to get the rich narratives, the researcher had to establish a good rapport with the NFA. However, when the researcher established a relationship with the NFA the relationship was not established to draw a "great story" (Tracy, 2010, p. 848) rather it was established to unwrap their narratives true to their life perception so that they were not misread and misunderstood.

### **4.5 Chapter summary**

As a female and an academic practitioner, born and brought up in a typical Nepali family and society, the researcher is introduced to a typical Nepali woman's livelihood. However, it is also true that the education and the exposure to the world outside the native place have implanted a personal perspective towards women's' life and identity in the researcher. The

personal perspective might be different from the established social norms and values. The same learning has also enriched the understanding that it is not necessary for women to remain women at home and get recognized as someone else's possession as it has been since the ancient time in Nepal. Instead, it is possible for Nepali women to be known for who they are. This research has come into existence in search of those different women and their academic identity within the Nepali women. This empirical study is a narrative inquiry of four female academics in two universities in Nepal. Based on rich interviews details, it is a trustworthy and an authentic study. As ethically bound research, it does not reveal the identifying details of the female academics. Moreover, the narratives, experience, and information shared by the academics have been used for the research purpose merely. Having the methodology set in this chapter, the researcher, in the next chapter, presents the findings of the research that followed the methodology.

## **5 FINDINGS**

The first section of this chapter presents the brief narratives of the participant female academics. The narratives are composed of the knowledge, experience, understanding, opinion, beliefs, and practices of the NFA that they shared during the interviews. I knitted everything that the academics shared as their responses to the interview questions during the interviews. Then, the second section presents the thematic discussion of the findings drawn from the analysis of the narratives in detail.

### **5.1 Narratives of the NFA**

The narratives of the female academics are presented in the following sections. Each female academics is given a pseudonym and their identifying details are not present explicitly in order to keep the identity confidential.

#### **5.1.1 Aasha**

An employee of an institution in Kathmandu, Aasha, started to teach the university students about 13 years ago. Teaching was one of the other official responsibilities she had in the institution. As the time passed, her interest in teaching got more intense. Likewise, the feedback she got from the clients, the students and the administration overwhelmed her interest in academia. In the meantime, she was also involved in the research activities. The research she carried out as a consultant also opened the realities of research in general and research in Nepal. Her work experience made her feel the need for systematic research and research education for promotion and documentation of the local knowledge in Nepal. It paved her path towards working as academics.

As a female professional in academia, she feels that she is different from other common women. The common women in this study refer to the homemakers. On the one hand, she surprises other women with her strong adherence to certain stereotypical social norms and values and on the other hand, she shocks them with her radical thoughts and practices. It does not mean that she is completely different from others though. She believes that she cannot go completely against the society. So, she behaves like other women and carries out the stereotypical roles in many ways to be accepted and legitimized in the society.

Her being of academics professionally influences her practices of being a female. She thinks her personal dispositions matter a lot to her womanly behaviors. There are certain things she prefers not to do as a woman that other women do readily in the society. The social status she holds influences her practices as a female in the Nepali society. Moreover, there have also been the changes in the social roles she holds as a member of the society. She feels that there are higher expectations of the society from the academics and the practitioners from Social Sciences.

However, she experiences a continuous struggle in deciphering her academic identity. In the Nepali society she lives, she feels the need of proving her abilities and professional capabilities time and again to be legitimized as a professional. Although challenging, she feels that the opportunities she has got are the strongest contributing factors to her academic professional self. Likewise, her interest in academia and academic activities supported her to a great extent. The mentors she got also guided her towards academia.

### **5.1.2 Rubi**

Rubi has come a long way in academia. She has been working as academics since 1988. She started with teaching the university students and she is still teaching. In the meantime, she also worked as an editor, a translator and a report writer in the university. Her passion for teaching brought and sustained her in academia for such a long period of time.

Having believed herself a guide to the students professionally, she feels that there are differences in being an academic professional from being a common woman. In fact, she even feels that she is different from the other academics in the university! She has observed that there is lack of commitment and dedication in others. However, she feels that she has both of the traits which actually brought her to the stage she is in now. Next, she has also been balancing her households and academics parallel despite the difficulties. Similarly, the sense of dedication and determination towards professional roles and respect towards the other female duties as a Nepali woman according to the need are the other important points she notes as professional academics.

Although marginalized, she comes from the community where women hold more power than men. Her belongingness to the community made her feel that she is never less than a man. The equal share that she enjoyed in the family with her brothers nourished her thoughts and

led her towards equal input and competition in the professional arena. At times, she feels that she is being treated differently because she is a female, however, she is informed about speaking against the unjust behaviors and practices, therefore, she has been able to maintain her status and the position of an academics.

As the academics, there are the occasions that her professional being influences her general practices as a female. She thinks that the way she behaves as a common woman is influenced by who she is as a professional. The social expectations also compel her to behave in the particular manner. Likewise, she feels that she is respected. In the Nepali society, it is often seen that people undermine female, however, as the academics, usually, they do not behave in the same way to her. She says that there is no money in the academic profession but there is respect for the academics.

The discipline she belongs to professionally also influences her being of a female. When people know that she belongs to the particular discipline, they have a different point of view towards her. Her long practice in Social Sciences has made her a more humanitarian and civilized person. Moreover, she feels that she has more feeling of generosity and compassion that the profession endowed to her.

There had been many hurdles in her ways towards becoming the academics however, she kept overcoming them. Her desire has been the greatest contributing factor to her identity today. She followed her dreams and worked hard to achieve them that actually made her who she is. In addition, the support from her parents and the family supported her to make the space in academia.

### **5.1.3 Anita**

Anita came into academia as a faculty in the hard pure discipline. Later, she changed the discipline and got settled in Social Sciences. It has been more than 17 years that she has worked as academics. Her professors and the mentors guided her towards the profession, however, her professional and social experiences sustained her in the academic profession. She feels that she has a lot of social prestige because of her engagements in academia. Next, she also feels that she has been able to balance the professional and the domestic duties. A female in the Nepali society has a tremendous role to keep her family in a better condition.

Moreover, the sense of safety in the profession that her family felt since the beginning of her career made her way easy to some extent in the profession.

Her professional engagement in academia makes her feel that she is a different woman from other common women in the society. She has the realization that she is contributing to her society whereas the common women are limited within their households only. The learning she has from her academic and professional engagements has a place to be practiced in the society. She thinks that living the life of the common women only in the Nepali society does not provide enough space for the women to use their learning and experience influentially. For example, she believes that she is actively participating in the social transformation of the Nepali society through teaching and research. However, she also has the feeling that there are certain ways in which she is like the common women in the society. When it comes to the capability to work, she has experienced that, as a professional, she is able to handle the multiple responsibilities and she can think in multiple ways. On top of it, she has the feeling that she can prioritize the roles and responsibilities without hampering the others. It is because of her ability to handle the multiple roles, her family life is happy, otherwise, she exemplifies the situation where women had to end their marital and family relations for the sake of their profession and professional identity.

However, her being of a woman has, of course, influenced her academic identity. She belongs to the ethnicity where women are usually limited within the households. The other female siblings she has also have limited themselves within the domestic walls. In such a situation, she had to convince the family that despite her female gender, she could still get engaged in the profession outside the house. Likewise, due to the female household duties and the joint family structure, it was difficult for her to make time for her professional growth. Moreover, pregnancy, delivery, and motherhood also affected her professional life. She had to take a break from her profession for some years because of the role of being a mother.

Inversely, she also perceives that her professional identity of being the academics also influences her general practices of being a female. She explicitly shares that after coming into the Social Sciences academia; she learned how to behave in better ways as a female in her family and the society in a peaceful manner. Human beings, family, society, mutual understanding among them, the teacher- students' relations and research enriched her understanding of living in a more meaningful manner both as an academics and a common woman in the society.

The involvement in academia made her a worthy member in her family and the society since she could meet their expectations. She feels that because of her professional being of academics she is expected to put forward her thoughts and opinion which is not a common phenomenon in the Nepali society, where women are considered secondary to men and where women's opinion is considered insignificant.

The academic identity has been a continuous struggle for her. However, with the challenges, there were also the supporting factors. She mentions that the professors that she met at different turns of her academic careers were the greatest support for her. They motivated her in all the situations. Most importantly, the voice from the inner core of her heart of making herself a different woman than the ones in her community and family sustained in the profession in all the situations.

#### **5.1.4 Madhu**

Madhu has been working as professional academics for more than 12 years. Although a medical person by her profession in the early years of her professional life, she changed her profession and she is settled as academics in the university. The gender roles in the family obliged her to quit the medical profession. The family structure and the family roles made her take the profession in the past. The more she worked in academia, the more she enjoyed it. Both, the life and the professional experiences kept motivating her in the profession. With the changing time and context, she has now shaped herself as academics, and, she is happy with her profession! She happily expresses that she has time for both the family and the profession.

As an academic female professional she perceives herself more empowered than other common women in her society. The family and the society have expectations from her. She says she has a position in her family and the society, hence, she is not dominated by others; neither men nor women. She is an independent woman, hence, she does not experience insults in the family. It is quite commonly seen in the Nepali society that women are not respected in their family. They are misbehaved socially, emotionally, and even physically by the family members (both male or female)! Despite having lived in such a society she feels that she is able to negotiate and refuse whenever necessary. She thinks that her being of the academics endowed her with the position where she can take the decisions for herself, family and the society.

She thinks that the female academics still have to take the double load of the responsibilities; the domestic and the professional. Even though the men and the women in a family have the same profession, the men have more time for his professional growth than the women. The men do not need to spend so much of time in the domestic chores but the women need to do everything for the family including the care for children and the elderly people in the Nepali context. Despite the uneven domestic roles in the family, the female academics need to compete with the male counterparts who are so much privileged.

She finds it interesting that, in spite of the complex socio-cultural structure and the domestic roles, the society and the family have high expectations from the female academics. The family and the society seek such women to give their opinion and also involve them in decision making. They respect the professional academics and respond positively to them. She believes that her professional being of academics has benefitted her to take the decisive position in her community for its development.

When asked about the challenges she had to go through to become the academics, she smiled and said that the greatest challenge for her was to be a female. She says that pregnancy, delivery, and childcare are the inseparable responsibilities from a female. Besides, the family's expectations of sacrifice from the women than that of the men for smooth family conduct create difficulties for women in her professional growth and identity construction. What should she choose to be; a professional or a female in the family, is always a difficult crossroad that women come across in the male-dominated social structure.

## **5.2 Findings**

The study of the narratives of the four NFA has revealed several findings. The findings from the narratives have been categorized into different themes. The following sections present the findings of the study on a thematic basis.

### **5.2.1 The identity of the NFA**

The narratives study demonstrated the following findings regarding the female academic's perception of their own academic identity in the Nepali socio-cultural context.

## Entry in the profession

In the narratives, all the interviewed NFA shared that their enrollment in the profession was guided by their own interest. Besides, their experience in academia also strengthened their passion for the profession. Regarding her entry in the profession, Aasha narrated,

*“I came into the profession strategically. While working as a consultant, I learned about the fact that systematic research is still in the embryonic stage in Nepal. I also got feedback from the clients that I would work better if I work as a researcher. So, strategically, I took a PhD degree and started working as a researcher at the university”.*

Likewise, Rubi also said,

*“I had always been very interested in teaching. I had worked as an editor and translator as well, but I discontinued those positions. I also did not enjoy working in INGO. My passion for teaching at the university led me towards the profession and sustained me here”.*

According to Maxwell et. al, (2015), the family impacts women’s entry in the academic profession. Likewise, Kyriakon, Hultgren and Stephen (1999) also argue that female and their family choose academia as the profession because it is socially respected and important (as cited in Erten, 2014). The narratives of the NFA also concur the family impact on their academic engagements as the professionals. In addition, the NFA discerns that their stability in the profession is determined by their family. Having spent a long time as the academics, Anita narrated,

*“...my family suggested to me that it is better for me to work in university than taking other jobs. Since I was also a wife and mother and I had been struggling to manage time for my family and profession, I found their suggestion appropriate in my context.”*

In this regard, Rubi reiterated,

*“My family also supported me to continue working at the university even after marriage. Now it is more than 25 years that I have been working at the university”.*

Tejfel and Turner (1986) in the SIT argue that individual interest is less significant than the group interest. Since the family is the group that Nepali women may prefer more than their personal interest, the family values and expectations guide them on what they need to do rather than what they want to do. The studies on the Nepali women's' livelihood show that they are preferred to work for the family staying within their households rather than getting participated in the jobs outside their home (Acharya, 2015). Therefore, the women who

decide to take a profession outside rather than being the home-makers look for the professions which allow them to spend time in the households as well (Tašner, Žveglič & Čeplak, 2017). When they work as the academics they have time for their family. Moreover, their family allows them to do only the jobs which makes them feel more prestigious in their society (Acharya, *ibid.*). The NFA and their family may get a respectable status in their society because of their profession; therefore, it might be an honor for the women to be academics. As Tejfel and Turner (*ibid.*) discuss there is the influence of the social context and interactions in the construction of identity. Such influence may make it difficult for the women to decide the profession they want to take by themselves in Nepal. Nepali women rarely enjoy the freedom of selecting the job they want to do on their own (Luitel, 2001). Therefore, the NFA might have decided who they want to be according to their family.

The narratives also revealed that some NFA has influential mentors. Working with the mentors in the universities in the initial days motivated them to get enrolled in academia and sustained them in the profession. In this regard, Anita said,

*“One of the reasons behind me being in the profession is my professors. My professors provided me with the opportunities to work at the university”.*

Tejfel and Turner (1986) state that the activities and the behaviors are different for the in-group and the out-group members; the in-group is more favored than the out-group. Since the mentors and the female academics share the same professional backgrounds, they belong to the same group. Their belongingness to the same group is likely to promote communication and acceptance of one another's ideas and activities. At the same time, it is also true that the NFA is largely motivated by their interest and effort rather than by other external forces merely.

### **Attributes built in the NFA**

The narratives revealed that the profession developed several attributes in the NFA which not only built their identity but also made them different from the other common women in their family and society. In other words, these are the defining attributes of the NFA. The NFA recognizes themselves in terms of these features which are built in them by their professional engagements; therefore, their understanding of their academic identity is narrated and explained in terms of these specific characteristics (Sancha & Barbará-i-Moliner, 2016). These attributes include independence, ability to hold multiple roles, ability to change some

social practices particular to women, the feeling of Self-existence as a member of their family and society, the recognition of the female Self within them, and a de-structor of patriarchal practices in education. Each of the attributes is discussed as the findings of the narrative study in detail in the following sections.

## **Independence**

It was found that being academics for all of the interviewed NFA meant to be an independent woman in the family and society where, according to Acharya (2015), despite education and the status majority of the Nepali women live a subordinate life to men. Moreover, according to Hinduism, women cannot be equated with men since they are weak, hence, they cannot lead an independent life (Swami Abhedananda, n.d.)! However, in the interviews, the NFA reported that they live as an independent person rather than someone's wife or daughter merely. Regarding independence, Madhu exclaimed,

*“I am an academics in the university and I am independent. I feel I am independent because I do not depend on my family or my husband to take personal decisions. If not all, I can take the majority of decisions myself. I have my own earning, so I do not need to wait for others to pay for me. To be an independent is a wonderful feeling. I wonder how the women who live as housewives actually live”!*

The NFA also revealed that the profession made them proud and feel complete in themselves. They realize their independence in terms of their earning, empowerment and decision making for themselves and their family. They see the common women's life miserable since the women as the individuals and their works are not valued by their family and society. The NFA feels that they are heard in the society because of their profession and their identity academics. Likewise, the narratives also show that the NFA is confident and motivated towards the innovations in their profession. In this regard, Aasha narrated her confidence as,

*“I am an inspired and enthusiastic person. I want to use my learning from overseas here in the country. Although it is difficult to work in the same way that I would have done in the foreign because of the contextual difference, I try to use them here. They seem to be different from the ongoing practices, but I think we need a change. Hence, I think to be academics is also to be an independent academic culture developer. After all, someone needs to begin the change”.*

The narratives also uncover that the NFA has come along a long way to become academics from a common woman. Anita narrated her pride in being academics as,

*“It is very difficult to be a professional in academia for women in Nepal. However, the females who are in academia are independent. They have a different charm in living the life of academics in Nepal. Being a professional in the university makes me an independent and empowered woman.”*

Likewise, the NFA has a feeling of existence because of their profession. They struggled and interacted with the social norms and values to break the tradition of living the life of a homemaker merely just because they are female. Instead, they struggled to be a part of academia. This process of the change in their life according to Tejfel and Turner (1986) shows that they have reached the dimension of social mobility; social mobility allows the group members to change their groups if they want to change. As the female academics met the qualifications for working as the academics they found the reasons and the meanings for changing their way of life rather than living a life of a house-wife. Hence, they moved on to become academics.

### **Multiple roles holders**

The narratives demonstrated that the profession made the NFA able to hold multiple roles in their family, society, and profession. In the Nepali socio-cultural context, it might be important for the NFA to be able to hold multiple roles if they want to live a prestigious and successful life. In this regard, Anita narrated,

*“An identity that I see in myself is my ability to perform multiple roles and make priorities among the roles. I am a wife, mother, sister-in-law, and academics and I carry out all the duties accordingly every day. If I fail to play the role of a female the society will not accept me as a prestigious female no matter how successful I am in my profession. I am happy that I have been able to carry all of my roles”.*

If not a professional in any profession outside their home, as Luitel (2001) explains, a common Nepali woman may hold different positions at different circumstances, for instance, a sister-in-law, daughter-in-law, wife and a mother, hence, she is supposed to perform the role as per her position in relation to the other members of the family. It implies that she has multiple tasks to do even as a common woman. The lack of the ability to hold such multiple roles may make her a failure at work or in the family. Regarding the issue, Rubi narrated,

*“Some of my colleagues complain about the different things they need to do in the family. It is not particular to them. Perhaps, every female in Nepal needs to do many things. I never complained about the things I had to do as a female in the family. Even in the days when I had to take the classes early morning, I used to cook lunch before I leave for the work. My mother-in-law was always happy”.*

This finding is in line with the idea of Tejfel and Turner (1986) about social change where they discuss that it is very challenging for the group members to change the group individually. In relation to the finding of the ability to hold the multiple roles by the female academics, it might be obligatory for them to take the multiple responsibilities. Traditionally, women have been working for the family without any engagement in another profession(s) in Nepal. So, if they leave their domestic responsibilities completely and focus on their profession only, they may have to face negative consequences in terms of their family and married life. Hence, as Tejfel and Turner (ibid.) suggest, they do not 'betray' their group, i.e. the family and themselves by changing their group from a typical Nepali woman to a professional woman completely.

### **Social change agent**

The narration of the experiences directly and indirectly also revealed that the NFA has more inclusive roles in their families and societies than that of other common women. They are also the pioneers of the new practices which were/are stereotypical to male in the Nepali socio-cultural context. For example, the NFA has been able to change the gender role of earning for the family which is still supposed to be done by the men in the Nepali society (Olah, Richter & Kotoswska, 2014). They have been able to break the outdated practices and establish some female-friendly practices. In this regard, Aasha narrated her bold steps as,

*“There are certain stereotypical things that I do as a woman in Nepali society. It is because they are socially accepted and legitimized and I need to behave in a certain manner to be legitimized in society. However, at times I also take certain positions that other women usually do not do. It surprises other women. They find me quite radical in such matters, for instance, I live in my own apartment alone. Likewise, I do not perform all the family responsibilities that a female is supposed to do in Nepalese families”.*

It was also found that the NFA recognizes themselves as the agent for changes in their society. The female academics have been able to make a position in their society which in turn has made them able to change the stereotypical practices that kept the women away from the mainstream of the society. Anita shared,

*“I do not mean that house-wives do not have anything important to do, rather, what I think is, everything that I have learned during my higher studies, might not be useful for my family and home merely. I have been learning about human beings and societies, and how society functions hence I believe that my learning can contribute to change our society. If I am to change the societies, I need to be in the university*

*where I can disseminate my learning to the students from several other communities. I am happy and proud that I have that ability and position as academics”.*

The findings on the transformation of the society are in the line of the social categorization of Tejfel and Turner (1986). They elaborate that individuals take different ‘social actions’ according to their perception of the social category they belong to. The awareness of the female academics of their subordinate position to the male members despite the equal capacity to work led them to take the positions in the universities where, traditionally, men work. Likewise, their engagement in academia might have also come from their comparison with the female academics from other country settings. As Tejfel and Turner (ibid.) discuss, they consider both ‘the better’ and ‘the worse’ situations of their existence as an educated female. Having conceptualized the identity of the female professionals in a better way and realized the difficult situation of the common women in Nepal, they might have dared to take the initiatives of being a professional in academia.

## **Existence**

It was found that being academics made the NFA realize that their opinion and presence is valued in their family and society. Although the social values and the societal practices are changing, the patriarchal mindset has made the women live for the family rather than for themselves. Likewise, often, Nepali women do not entertain their rights of decision making in their family (Acharya, 2015) in the Nepali context. Despite such common practices, Madhu narrated,

*“Because I belong to the university, I feel that my opinions are valued in family and society. I can take decisions in family affairs. I also worked as chairperson for the women welfare group in our community. I was also asked for participation in community welfare issues, which I did. Usually, other women are not seen in such works. When I work with others for the community, they listen to me and value my opinion. I feel respected than other non- professional women in the community. I am included because of the profession I hold”.*

Rubi echoed,

*“Since I am an academics I feel that I am respected. In the social gatherings, I have seen that unprofessional woman and the women from another profession, I do not want to take the names of the profession, are disrespected and humiliated by the males. But when it comes to me or other academics, they do not behave that way or even give sarcastic remarks or misbehave. I have also experience that they take my opinion and ideas during the discussion”.*

In this regard, Acharya (2015) also found out that teaching and the jobs related to teaching is one of the most preferred and respected jobs for the women by their family and society in Nepal. He further pointed out from the study that even the women choose to get enrolled in these professions although there is also an increasing number of the woman interested in medicines and civil services.

Regarding her existence as a social figure and the significance of being the academics of Social Science, Aasha narrated,

*“Usually I am called in the discussions and talks that are related to female. Sometimes I question there if I am called only because I am also a woman! However, it is true that the professionals from social science background are highly in demand for social issues. Even if you check you will see limited medical personnel or other professionals in the media. But having said that I think I am expected in such a social setting not only because I come from social sciences background but also because I am a female in myself”.*

It shows that professional women are expected to discuss the female issues. It may be also of the empathetic value since a woman can contextualize and discuss the female issues more influentially than a man since she comes with her experiences of being a female in a particular context. Moreover, it may also refer to the social acceptance of the woman as a member of the academic group. In this regard, Tejfel and Turner (1986) argue that when any group is recognized as greater than another, the members of the groups are interpreted as the group but not as an individual merely; i.e. the female academics may no longer remain a common woman, but the member of an intellectual group.

Nevertheless, it might not wise to conclude that all the academic women have the same socially inclusive status. Luitel (2001) mentions that the inclusiveness of women is determined by other factors like caste/ethnicity, ecology and so on than the women belong to. Although she did not mention the details, Anita said,

*“I come from a marginalized ethnicity and the female in my ethnicity are even more marginalized by patriarchy. I am only the female who holds a profession among my siblings and in-laws. It might be the reason that I feel respected in my society and family because I am an academics”.*

However, some existing literature on the social status of Nepali women shows the contradiction that education has been subtly strengthening patriarchy rather than being a bolster to female identity and development (Luitel, 2001).

## The female self

The narratives revealed that the satisfaction of their engagement in the profession as academics might have built their Female Self. Moreover, their engagement helped them in the preservation and growth of their Female Self. In this study, the 'Female Self' refers to the existence of the female academics as an absolute and complete female in herself. In this regard, Madhu said,

*"I can see around in my locality that women are living a difficult life. They are not respected in their family. Most importantly they have to give up their personal interest because their family does not like it or support it. It is not the same with me. I can personally fulfill my personal interest. I feel I have a better life than other women because I can live my interest as a woman".*

The brief narration of the NFA on living own interest and the satisfaction it gives in living may be beyond any measure. It is because the majority of the married Nepali women still may not think about their personal life and interest in the Nepali community since they are considered subordinate to the male. This practice has been endowed and transmitted from a generation to generations as a formula to keep the good conducts in the family and society according to Hinduism (Luitel, 2001). Therefore, it may be the heavenly feeling to be able to live as they want for the women.

Their engagement in the academia and the discussion on catering their personal interest also revealed that the female academics might have been able to make the space for their say both at their work and the family. As Sundaram, Sekar and Subburaj (2014) found out in the Indian context that education and employment bring empowerment in the female which also implies that they can speak for themselves and against the wrong practices in the societies. The female academics also narrated some similar experiences of being themselves. Quite different but about saving her 'self', Aasha said,

*"When I look for my identity as academics most of the time I see myself as the rebel of certain practices and the perception I receive in the university and the society".*

Having held the position in the university and supported their family financially, the NFA might have been able to speak against the perception and practices that the women cannot be a professional or an academics in Nepal. Luitel (2001) furthermore argues that the women who earn or help to earn for their family through their involvement in agriculture merely also can rebel or protect their say more than the women who do not support earning for the family or who do not need to support the earning for their family.

## **A de-constructor**

The narratives also revealed that the NFA is the trend-setter of the concept that ‘Female can’ if they overcome the difficulties and fight against the discrimination rationally with their knowledge and abilities. As Derrida (1967; 1974) asserts that the meanings need not remain the same over time but can be changed with changing circumstances (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000), the traditional meaning of Nepali women of that of the homemakers (Acharya, 2015), can be changed through education and empowerment. Narrating the deconstruction of the masculine perspective on education Aasha said,

*“At times, people do not even think that I belong to the university staffs. They ask me if I am a PhD fellow in the university at my face. I do not like the perception of the people that a female cannot hold the full-time faculty in the university. It is dissatisfying”.*

Yet, there are examples in the other parts of the world that women are making the significant participation in the so-called male-dominated fields (Sussman & Yssaad, 2005). However, some exceptional practices were found to be in existence during the conversation. The male dominance in the households and the gender based discriminations are not parallel in all cultures and ethnicities (Luitel, 2001). The women from some ethnicities did not have to fight for the opportunity for education. Regarding her entry in the profession, Rubi narrated,

*“Actually teaching was my passion so I took the profession as soon as I completed my degree. Interestingly, as other females share in discussion, I have not faced difficulties from my family to keep working. It may be because I belong to the ethnicity where females have more power than male. In my family and community, usually, mothers are more powerful than father. The male members earn, and mothers decide where and how to use the money themselves”.*

However, it may not imply that these women do not face male domination at the work. Jensen and Mandozai (2013) argue that the so-called upper caste exploits the so-called lower caste people in one way or the other on a daily basis in Nepal. In this regard, the marginalized ethnic female professional is the victim of double domination. First, they are dominated because of their caste and then they are dominated because of their female gender. Regarding the situation, Rubi further narrated,

*“... but it may be because I do not belong to the ethnicity that most of my colleagues belong to I feel masculine hegemony. Having said that it does not mean that the female of their cultural background and ethnicity do not have to face the same situation, they also face the same. Male colleagues want to dominate decision making.*

*I think no female in my place is given the position of chairperson yet. In such situations, I rebel on behalf of other female academics as well”.*

Despite the reservations and the changes in female participation, deconstructing the traditional practices of marginalizing female from the mainstream of development and decision making brought by the latest political changes (Acharya, 2018), the women need to rebel to make their position and shout that they also exist in Nepal!

## **5.2.2 Opportunities and challenges of the NFA**

Although the study aimed at exploring the perceived professional identity of the NFA in the beginning, the narratives also revealed the opportunities they got, the challenges they faced, and the way they cope with the challenges.

### **Opportunities for the NFA**

The study revealed that the NFA gets a handful of opportunities in their academic setting. Although the opportunities are not abundant for the NFA they play a significant role in shaping their academic identity and expanding the scope. The NFA revealed that the mentors in the institutions they worked, their own interest in learning, and the support from the university have been influential opportunities for them in their academic shaping. These opportunities are discussed in the following sections.

### **Mentoring**

It was found from the narratives that the NFA had some mentors at their work who supported them to become professionals in academia. The NFA shared mixed experiences of getting mentored during the interviews. The narratives also revealed that there are differences in the type of mentoring and the extent to which they got mentored. Sharing the most important opportunity she got from the beginning in the profession Anita said,

*“I felt that it is others who observed my level of knowledge and ability. It might be the reason that I have always been supported and motivated by my professors and tutors as my mentors since the very beginning. I have met different mentors at different points of time. The process is still going on. My PhD supervisor is also my mentor”.*

The literature and studies on the significance of mentoring suggest that mentoring helps in shaping the profession and the professional identity of mentees and the lack of mentoring

obstructs the development (Chandler, 1996). Sharing the impact of mentoring in her academic engagements, Aasha also echoed,

*“Something that mattered a lot is mentoring I received. I had good mentors around me who helped me”.*

However, in Nepal, to have a male mentor for the female academics may be difficult because of conservative social norms and values. In this regard, Kram (1985), Burke, et al, (1994), Rahins and McFarlin (1990), Ragins and Cotton (1991) and Okurame (2006) assert that the likelihood of the misinterpretation of the mentor-mentee relationship as sexual, traditional gender cliché, and gender- social distance may hinder mentoring when the mentor and mentee are man and woman (as cited in Okurame, 2008). This fear may result in rare mentoring opportunities for the female academics at work. Likewise, even if the NFA asks for mentoring, it is not as effective as it is for the men. Misra, Smith-Doerr, Dasgupta, Weaver, and Normanly (2017) had a similar finding that female academics have troubles in getting regular mentors, but male academics do not usually face the same situations. Describing mentoring in the Nepali context Aasha added,

*“Here I see certain professors are mentoring certain professionals, I mean like a right hand. ... I think women get such opportunities very very less. It is not happening enough. Even if it happens, people make implicit sexual connotations. So, it is risky”.*

The narrative conveys that mentoring for the female academics in Nepal seem to be influenced by the social norms and values. The male-female collaboration might not be allowed and accepted by the traditional Nepali society. Sapkota (2016) also found out that women do not get the same professional environment at the institutions despite the same position and the roles. In this regard, Tejfel and Turner (1986) discuss that the group member’s activities are guided by the norms and values of their groups and they follow the group values more than the individual values. The narratives also revealed that some of the NFA also did not get any mentoring at work. Madhu narrated a similar experience,

*“I do not get any help at work. I need to prepare myself for all the situations”.*

The narrative conveys that mentoring might not have been accessible for everyone and that the formal nature of mentoring in the universities may not exist (Carmel & Paul, 2015) in Nepali academia. Furthermore, it might not be comfortable for the male colleagues and the mentors to work with the female colleagues/ mentees. In one of the studies, de Vries, Webb and Eveline (2006) found out that the male academics in the universities are not yet aware of

the issues of the female academics of their work-place. The same situation might have been influential with the NFA as well. Likewise, the social norms and values also may not consider it a moral act when a man and a woman work together in the Nepali context.

### **Interest and opportunities**

The narratives notified that the NFA is highly supported by their own interest in academia. Their interest in academia kept them aware of the potential opportunities and the opportunities, in turn, kept reinforcing them with the feedbacks and the comments for their better performance at work. In this regard, Aasha narrated,

*“I was definitely supported by the opportunities and my personal interest. I credit myself for who I am since I am a self-made person. The person I became is because of my interest, motivation and a lot of my hard work.”*

Regarding the opportunities for academic engagements, Donaldson and Emes (2000) assert that the increasing enrolment of the women in academia is the global phenomenon and it is the outcome of the increased participation of the women in higher education and their graduate percentage. Madhu had a similar experience. She shared,

*“When I was sure that I can no longer continue working as a nurse, I looked for something else to do. Although social science is different from nursing, I started for the profession pursuing the degree. Fortunately, I got the position after the completion of the degree. So, I think my interest directed me towards my Self today”.*

This way the opportunities the NFA got kept supporting them in shaping their identity after their enrolment in academia. It may also create more opportunities for their betterment in the profession. However, this finding contradicts with one of the findings of Fraser (2011) where it was found that the academics had the feeling of accomplishment in the profession, hence the academics did not pay much attention to the additional opportunities. In this regard, Rubi said,

*“In my case, I think it is my personality that directed me in the profession. My personality created the interest to work in academia. My interest, in turn, created opportunities. I think there should be a good combination of interest and academic knowledge to get opportunities and promotion”.*

It was also disclosed in the narratives that the opportunities for the NFA are less and biased. However, this is not a country-specific issue on the professional gender gap. Brooks (1997); Brooks and Mackinnon (2001); Monroe et al. (2008) and Nakhaie (2007) argue that male

academics can pay full time to their profession resulting in less professional obstacles hence, they have more opportunities to carry out research and get published, therefore, they have more opportunities for promotion and senior positions at the promotion (as cited in Baker, 2012). Regarding such biased and fewer opportunities, Madhu shared,

*“I do not get other opportunities except the duties that I am assigned. Most of such opportunities are given to male colleagues”.*

In the same context, Anita shared,

*“I cannot say I do not get opportunities but the opportunities for female are very less”.*

Despite the discouraging situation, the NFA takes even the smallest of the opportunities available in their profession. They keep themselves aware of the situations and try to create the opportunities for themselves. Such opportunities might be in terms of getting mentored or collaboration with the other colleagues. In this regard, Aasha said,

*“I am always looking for opportunities to learn from others. So, if I find somebody from whom I may learn something, I look for the opportunities to learn from the person in whatever way it is possible”.*

Similarly, it was revealed in the narratives that some female academics are supported by the university to build their knowledge and abilities in their profession so that they are recognized as better professionals through scholarships and guidance. These findings refer to the idea of resource distribution in the groups of Tejfel and Turner (1986) that when the female academics are positively accepted, or identified as the faculty as other male academics, they may get the resources more readily. Reynolds, Turner, and Haslam (2000) argue that social identification may strengthen the positive in-group regards rather than heightening the negative feelings towards the out-groups (as cited in Islam, 2013). Therefore, the opportunities and the resources given to the female academics by their institutions for the professional reasons may convey that the NFA has been accepted in the groups of the academics in Nepal. Nonetheless, it cannot be generalized to all the NFA in all the institutions and departments.

## University support

The NFA manifested mixed experiences on the support from the university in their professional shaping and growth through the narratives. Some of them claimed that they have been given the opportunities, whereas some others reported that they have not been given any opportunity. On the one hand, reporting the support from university Anita said,

*“I have been greatly supported by the university in my profession. The university has been participating me in the training and conferences. I am also guided by the seniors whenever required. Most importantly, I have been provided the opportunity to complete my doctorate study”.*

On the other hand, Madhu said,

*“There has been no support from the university at all. They do not stop me if I take any personal initiative for my professional growth, but they do not help as well”.*

Similarly, Rubi echoed,

*“They give some extra responsibilities but there has been nothing like support as such for constructing my academic identity”.*

Since the university is the place where the female academics professionally belong to, it influences the academics in shaping who they are. Although the university hires academics according to their expertise, it is expected that the academics experience growth and development at the institution through the work. According to the ADB (2015), the universities in Nepal are supported by the government to create and provide opportunities to the faculties for their professional capacity building and development.

Despite the reality that the opportunities from the university are indispensable for creating and promoting academics in the female academics as it is for the male academics, the female academics reported the inadequate or no such opportunities for them. The literature on women in higher education mentions that there have been attempts to train the women with administrative functions of the universities, though the same literature reinforces the need of such coaching for male more than female (Parker, Hewitt, Witheriff & Cooper, 2018). The women are still found lagging behind both the administrative and the academic roles. The fewer opportunities they get in the universities, the less expertise they may get. The expertise issue, in turn, may lead to fewer opportunities for the female academics.

### 5.2.3 Challenges for the NFA

During the interviews, the NFA also unfolded the challenges that they have been facing in their profession. The challenges that the female academics had to face and are facing might have been influenced by socio-cultural factors and their gender of being female rather than being into a particular profession and the place merely. While narrating the challenges, the female academics, sometimes, requested to stop the recording process. They also requested not to include those narratives explicitly in the study. The challenges narrated in the interviews are presented in the following sections.

#### **The balance between the professional and the domestic duties**

It was revealed in the narratives that it is a challenge for the NFA to balance their domestic and professional roles since they have demanding roles both at work and in the family. It is an obvious challenge not only particular to the NFA but also to the women in all other professions since their roles have been reconstructed, i.e. the women who were homemakers are now also the source of income for their family (Duncan, 1994). Bista (2006) also found out that the domestic workload has a negative influence on women's profession. Regarding the issue, Anita said,

*“The main problem is time and the number of things we have to do as a female and a professional at the particular period of time. I work at a university but when I go home at night I have a separate duty left. I need to cook and feed the family. There are other things like washing and cleaning. Females are expected to do everything for the family. We need to save time from such works to work as a professional”.*

On the same issue, Madhu echoed,

*“The burden of household works along with the professional work is the problem for female as I have experienced. It was even more difficult in the past. We had a big family. Looking after the big family was not easy. It was very difficult for me to do the household works, the festivals and celebrations and professional works at the same time but I managed”.*

Aasha also shared a similar experience,

*“Sometimes when we have discussions, I tell the male colleagues that there is no one else to cook for me or keep the things ready. Of course, there is someone ready to serve your food when you get back home at night..... no matter who I am as a professional, I have to do the typical works at home. The burden of such works makes it difficult to balance domestic and professional duties”.*

In the traditional Nepali society, women are expected to practice the soft skills in their households only (Dangol, 2010). Apart from such socially created gender roles, it was found that the NFA lags behind because of the unavoidable ‘responsibility of motherhood’ as well. Since the processes may not be checked, the female academics have a problem in balancing their works. Likewise, the literature on the challenges of the female academics also acknowledges the fact that the women with children face explicit challenges to balance their work and the family along with maintaining parity and representation in their profession (Ward, 2014) . In this regard, Madhu narrated,

*“The natural role for female to get pregnant and deliver baby also makes it very difficult for us. We cannot leave the baby and go to work as males do. I didn’t do anything until my son started to go to school. No matter how much they say that they help it is not enough in our context. Female have to bear more than male”.*

Anita also shared,

*“I had to leave the work for sometimes after I had a baby. The family does not like if you just leave the baby and go to work. I cannot go to work leaving my family behind. I am not valued in society if I do not have a family”.*

The problem of the double roles load on the female professionals has been discussed as one of the most influential challenges of the female professional regardless of the discipline they work in. Fogarty, Allen, and Walters (1981) suggest that the adjustment problems the female professionals face in the so-called male-dominated profession, are due to the difficult integration of family and the profession (as cited in Witz, 1992). On the one hand, there is limited support from the family, and on the other hand, the institutions may not have adequate provisions to minimize the effects on them (Güneavdt, Göktürk & Bozoğlu, 2017). It has not only challenged the female professionals at their work but also limited the opportunities for their enrolment in the labor market (Witz, *ibid*).

### **Lack of collaboration**

Academics collaborate with one another in order to widen their knowledge and strengthen their capacities by providing feedback and working on the weaknesses; the collaboration may produce significant knowledge which might not be effective when the academics work on their own (Kochan & Mullen, 200; Mullen & Kochan, 2001, as cited in Kochan & Mullen, 2003). However, it was revealed in the narratives that the collaboration with the NFA at their work is not adequate. Regarding collaboration in the university, Aasha said,

*“I feel there is very less collaboration in the university. I see the male colleagues collaborating with each other. They have groups and they work in a group, but I find that I am excluded. It does not mean that they tell me not to talk to them, but I feel that they are not comfortable to work with females. I don't know if it is the culture here. ...er..r .. we had a piece of institutional work. I had thought that the other colleagues will collaborate with me, but they didn't. In fact, that work needed collaboration. In the end, I did everything alone. There are many such instances. Sometimes I feel, why do I even come to the university if I am to work alone! I can work at home, can't I?”*

The NFA are not verbally told to stay away but they may be excluded from almost all sorts of collaboration at work. According to the structured and theory-based literature on female collaboration, one of the prominent reasons behind the exclusion is the lack of formal collaboration mechanism for the women as it exists for the men (Steffen- Fluhr, 2006). Likewise, Sultana (2012) argues the patriarchal organizational and social relations which assume women inferior in capabilities and status may be the other influential reason behind the exclusion. It is not only male-female collaboration difficult but also female-female collaboration an issue. Acker (1990) finds it embarrassing when there is failure in collaboration between women in the institutional settings . The female-female cooperation may develop power in them and help in building their own status and structure in the institutions (Acker, *ibid*). Regarding male-female and female-female collaboration, Anita said,

*“There is very less collaboration in the university. The male colleagues collaborate to some extent, but it is not adequate. Even female hesitate to collaborate in academic tasks. There is a very bad feeling of unhealthy competition among female as well. I feel that they as afraid if the next female gets a better opportunity because she knows better!”*

According to Bennett (2005) the institutional behaviors, which also includes the behaviors of the people in the institutions, are determined by the society and its social norms. The institutions follow the framework of the social context. Since the Nepali society may not find it morally acceptable when the women collaborate with the men outside her family relations, they get excluded in their profession as well. In addition, as Tejfel and Turner (1986) propose in their theory, the female academics accept to work with the male academics as the same group members but male academics might not have been able to accept the changed context readily; the women assigned to be the homemakers in the patriarchal society are now at academia as the professionals which were perceived to the men's place (Acharya, 2015)! Moreover, the male academics might have perceived the female academics as the out-groups.

Hence, the realization of the existence of the female academics as out-groups may have created the discriminatory behaviors.

### **The validity of the NFA's ability**

Although the female academics have the position and the professional roles because of their ability, it was found in the narratives that their capacity and knowledge may not be considered valid by their family, society, and the university. In this regard, Aasha said,

*“I think the legitimacy of our ability is a strong challenge for female academics in Nepal. It is because males do not need to prove their ability, they are trusted and given the roles but female need to prove that they are good enough like males, then only they are given the job”.*

Madhu also shared similar experience regarding the assumptions regarding female's ability,

*“I have felt that society doesn't believe women and their abilities. It is the same in the university as well. Although there are experienced and able female academics, they are not given important roles. They are given those roles where they remain subordinate to the male. For example, I don't understand why only females need to keep the minute of the meeting, and why can't female make a decision”.*

According to Castro, Garcia, Cavazos, and Castro (2011), the PhD attainment rate of the women is less than that of the men. It might be one of the reasons that the NFA's marginalization in the professional setting (Gibson, 2006) since it may convey that women are less qualified. Similarly, the lack may require them to work more than that of the men. However, it may be important to note that all the positions in the universities may not require a PhD.

Although the authentic Hindu texts and beliefs provide a respectable position to women for their wisdom and ability, and empower them with decisive power (Swami Abhedananda, n.d.), the prevalence of the patriarchal ideology has reinforced the male ability in all the significant positions and works whereas, it has underestimated the abilities of the female. In this regard, Luitel (2001) stresses that patriarchy has been jeopardizing the women from the opportunities despite the same qualifications to the men. Even though women excel men in education they face discrimination in professions and they may be given the jobs that may not require any specific skills (Miriam, 2015)! Luitel (ibid) further reveals that the blind faith on the men that they are always right and they can handle the responsibilities more efficiently and do the justice to the position they hold might have been a strong barrier for the women to

make a reliable position at their profession. Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002) discuss the phenomena as a threat of the social context to the social reality, i.e. the social context of Nepal requires the women to be obedient to the men rather than using their wits and abilities (Luitel, 2001).

### **Male domination**

The challenge of male domination is one of the common findings of the studies carried out in the past in Nepal and abroad. For instance, Bista (2006) found out that male colleagues not only pass negative comments but also attempt to harass the female colleagues. In the narratives of the NFA, it was reported that the NFA experience male domination at work. At times, they took the names of some of such dominating male colleagues and requested not to use the real names and the university they belong to. Perhaps, male domination is the overarching challenge of most of the challenges the NFA encounters in the professional settings. Having its root on patriarchy, male domination, not only is a challenge for the women at work but in almost all spares of their life, since its effects are society-wide (Witz, 1992) and human beings cannot stay aloof of their society. On the contrary, there is no less literature on the gender roles and the gender ideologies which try to endorse that male domination is in a remarkably decreasing trend (Ogbogu, 2011). Speaking against the prevalent literary facts, Madhu said,

*“They say there is no male domination in our place, but I feel that there is domination. They want women to work in the way they want and at their time”.*

It was also narrated that male domination exists both in terms of decision making and the professional roles. Regarding the issue, Rubi also echoed,

*“We face the problems because of our male-dominated societies because males try to dominate female at work as well. I wonder why they boast a lot! I experience this often during the meetings that if female try to lead the discussion on some issues, they feel they are humiliated. In such situations, they keep speaking so loudly that the female has to stop speaking”.*

Male domination on the female in the Nepali context has been practiced as a culture (Luitel, 2001). It is discouraging that women do not get the same place. The imbalance in the opportunities available for the male and the female academics as Nagatomo (2012) found out, could be a consequence of male domination at work. Such practices may not only demotivate the female academics but also outnumber them from certain departments since it is

difficult for them to cope up with the situation in the professional setting (Banchevsky & Park, 2018). It was very sad to hear Aasha when she said,

*“I cannot leave my gender when I come to work, I enter the university as a woman! This has sometimes been the greatest disadvantage. I am actually thinking about changing the institution lately”.*

The repetition of the same practices in the profession might have come from the traditional gender roles where the men take decisive positions and the women follow the decisions made by the men in the Nepali social context (Witenstein & Palmer, 2013). Moreover, the men are still fighting over the roles of the educated female professionals as the homemakers over better homemakers (Parker, 2015) rather than supporting their professional abilities. It refers to the conflicting situation where the women might have already gone through the process of social mobility from the position of the homemakers to the professional academics (Tejfel and Turner, 1986), whereas, the men still expect them to take the hold of the domestic responsibilities rather than the professional ones.

#### **5.2.4 Overcoming approaches to the challenges**

The narratives show that there are some overcoming strategies that the female academics implement as the professional academics. However, there are also instances where they just ignore the situations rather than fighting against them.

#### **Communication and negotiation**

The NFA disclosed in the narratives that they tried to overcome the obstacles through communication and negotiation in the professional settings. They try to communicate personally so that they get a way out. In this regard, Aasha shared,

*“I keep my personal effort according to the situation. I usually write emails describing the problems. Er...r I am known in the university for writing long mails! What I believe is there ought to be clear communication, I have to speak up to be heard”.*

On the same issue, Madhu also said,

*“When I see a challenge, I try to negotiate about the challenge with the colleagues and the department. Most of the time we find a solution through negotiation and communication”.*

In addition, if they have problems in their profession because of their family as well, they try to negotiate so that there is no or very little effect. As far as possible, the female academics attempt to convince the family communicating and negotiating their professional roles.

Regarding communicating in the family, Anita said,

*“I think my priority is my family. The professional challenges that arise from the family need to be solved from the family itself. Therefore, I communicate with my family. Sometimes they tend to be indifferent, but I keep my effort. I tell them the truth. It lessens the problems even if it does not solve completely”.*

It was also found that female academics try to solve the problems themselves since they get minimum help during the challenging situations. Here, I add a legal initiative from history while discussing this piece of the finding from the study. Even though the study of the history shows that there were legal provisions for the women from the government since the launch of Muluki Ain<sup>7</sup> in 1963 regarding the opportunities so that they could also develop parallel to the women from the developed countries (Nepali, 1980, as cited in Tamang 2000), the practice side has been proved to be feeble. It is because of the same reason that the women are still fighting for their identity and profession at present as well. Regarding the fight for the identity and acceptance in the group, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002) argue that when the group members are highly committed to their group, they have the fear of exclusion from the group rather than being categorized in a different manner. Therefore, they attempt to remain in the group. The NFA shows the similar characteristics. They may be committed to their profession so they do not want to quit the profession because of the prevalent challenges; rather they keep effort to find the solutions so that they are not excluded from the group of academics.

## **Self-management**

It was found in the narratives that the NFA tries to adapt in the challenging situations making their own efforts. They seek to solve the problem through their own initiatives. Narrating her coping approaches, Anita said,

*“I try to complete all of my tasks on time. I have felt that female academics are blamed for not finishing the given works on time. If I feel that I cannot finish my work on time, I stay at the university until late or come early at work. I also cut my time from celebrations. I aim to finish everything before the deadline”.*

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<sup>7</sup>Muluki Ain is the Nepal's New Code launched in 1963 by Late King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev

The narrative depicts the hard work of the female academics for handling their roles effectively. The assumption that female academics may not be influential at work also troubles the NFA psychologically. Moreover, the implicit institutional culture of supporting patriarchy keeps pointing problems to the female professional showing how less they are involved in research and publications (Güneavdt, Göktürk & Bozoğlu, 2017). In such a situation as well, the NFA needs to keep proving that they are worthy for the position. Hult, Callister, and Sullivan recommend that it is necessary for females to maintain their professional roles on the priority basis (as cited in Samble, 2008).

### **Ignoring certain situations**

The NFA narrated that, at times, ignoring is an approach to encounter a challenging situation. The female academics revealed that they ignore the challenges in a way or the other to minimize their influences at their profession and the professional roles. In this regard, Madhu said,

*“Oh yes, there are things that we cannot change on our own, so we need to ignore them. I especially ignore eve-teasing in the class. It used to happen very frequently in the past. Even the colleagues sometimes teased me. Maybe I am getting older now. But I used to ignore those situations. I wonder too how many people I could deal with!”*

In this regard, Humm (1996) states that female academics need to face “sharp attacks” like isolation and misapplication and mismanagement of their effort which makes them face the so-called equity and domination (as cited in Güneavdt, Göktürk & Bozoğlu, 2017).

Therefore, the female academics may ignore the challenges like male domination and less or no collaborative situation since it is very difficult for them to rebel against the practices that have been practiced as a culture for a very long time. Referring to a different context Aasha said,

*“The university administration sometimes does not take our problems and issues seriously. I tried to draw their attention many times when I had an issue that the university was supposed to fix. However, nothing happened from them. Then I ignored. Since then, I feel that there are certain practices in the university practiced as a culture, for example, less collaboration with female academics, which I cannot change overnight. So, I ignore and work on my own”.*

Moreover, the female academics exhibited the difference in their identity comparing it with other women in the Nepali context. Their identity, according to their narratives, was

incomparable to men and their existence! According to Tejfel and Turner (1986), the social comparison with the subordinate groups creates less conflicting situation than the comparison between dominant and subordinate groups. Since the men hold the position of the dominants and the women hold the subordinate position in the Nepali context, the conflict between women and men is more serious than the conflict between women and women. Having realized a better self-identity by the NFA in comparison to the common women in their society, they might be ignoring certain situations rather than fighting against them.

### **5.3 Chapter summary**

The NFA recognized themselves as the academics in terms of the attributes developed in them after they got enrolled in the universities. The academic engagements in the universities made them independent and feel their own existence. Likewise, they believe that they are able to change some social values that have remained influential in their family and society for so long. They perceive these attributes through continuous evaluation of their own behaviors. They also compare themselves with other men, women, and themselves when they did not have the status of the academics. However, they also have obstacles like male domination, the heavy workload at home and the institution, less collaboration, and the heavy pressure for proving their capacities and abilities time and again. Yet, the NFA keeps effort to minimize the effects of such problems through negotiation and communication. At times, they ignore the challenges rather than fighting against it. Having presented the findings thematically in this chapter, the next chapter presents the theoretical discussion of these findings.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the findings presented in chapter five are discussed. The findings in the previous chapter were drawn from the narratives that the NFA shared during the interviews. It presents a discussion of the facts and the narratives presented in the previous chapter with the theoretical concepts and other relevant literature. By doing so, it answers the research question mentioned in chapter one which is ‘How do Nepali female academics perceive their academic identity’. While attempting to answer the research question the researcher discusses the ways social context, social category, and social comparison along with language and subjectivity lead to the construction of the academic identity in the NFA. Likewise, the researcher also discusses the other themes that emerged in the narratives and as the findings of the study.

### **6.1 NFA’s perception of their academic identity**

Tejfel (1972) had a general impression that identity of an individual is her/his understanding of the affiliation to a group which not only provides the individual with the group’s attributes but also the affective attachments (as cited in, Hogg, Abrams, Otten & Hinkle, 2004). In the SIT, Tejfel and Turner (1986) elaborate that the individuals construct their social identity through three social processes; social context, social categorization, and social comparison. Whether a person behaves as an individual or as a member of a group is investigated under social context. Likewise, if the individual has a category in the social setting s/he is in, is the area of social categorization. Finally, the comparison that an individual makes with the out-group(s) in defining her/his own identity of that of the group comes under social comparison. The narratives and the findings presented in the previous chapter are discussed in relation to these three social processes in the following sections. The behaviors of the NFA and their subjective identity of that of the academics in the Nepali socio-cultural context have been realized directly or indirectly through these social processes. However, it is also noteworthy that these three contexts are influenced by other socio-cultural aspects like religion, ethnicity, and social structure and social practices.

### **6.1.1 Social context in identity construction**

A common theme of the literature on the SIT is that an individual is likely to behave either personally without showing any attachment to any external group(s) or as a representative of a group irrespective of who the person is as an individual. The experience, understanding, opinion, and beliefs of the interviewed NFA convey that they are more than a common Nepali woman; they are the academics. Although Tejfel and Turner (1986) argue that the behavior of an individual either as an individual or as a group member is determined by the “intergroup conflict” ( p. 277), the NFA’s understanding and interpretation of their behavior as academics is less based on the explicit conflict with other women in their society who are homemakers or are in other professions. In fact, there is also less conflict between their own unprofessional womanhood and academic womanhood. The real conflict may be rooted in the structure of the society which considered “women were invisible” (Mirkin, 1984, p. 39). Therefore, their experience and understanding of the academics at work, in their family, and society convey that the tension lies between the added identity of the academics of the NFA and patriarchy, patriarchal beliefs, and practices of other men and women in the society. On the one hand, the patriarchal structure of the society tends to force the NFA towards the same stereotypical female roles and consider them “worthless in front of all” (Basharat, 2009, p. 243). On the other hand, the re-interpretation of the orthodox practices particular to women that have been marginalizing them from opportunities, empowerment, and individual existence, is trying to maintain gender-based social justice so that they can live with the similar identity of that of the men (Shukla-Bhatt, 2008).

The understanding of the social structure as the origin of the inter-group conflict raises an additional question of the possible means for the conflict. St. Pierre (2000) affirms that language has been used as a tool to draw the lines of limitations for women. She further elaborates that the inability of language to give all possible meanings to the possible roles the women play and the identity they carry, as it is given to men, has made their identity shaky. Despite the mobility of the NFA from a mere traditional homemaker to the professional academics (Tejfel & Turner, 1986), the over generalized identity referenced to them by language has continued the open social conflict. The conflict the NFA goes through results in obstacles in the construction of their academic identity. Less collaboration among the colleagues in the university, the double workload of the family and the profession, the domination of the male colleagues, and underestimation of their ability to work independently as an academics may have been originated from the patriarchal social structure

of the society. In this regard, Acker (1990) says that the feminist literature acknowledges that institutions are run by men and they oppress women in the institutions. Moreover, it is also an implicit understanding that the head of an institution may be female by biology but she needs to disguise herself as a social man (Sorenson, 1984, as cited in, Acker, *ibid.*, p. 139). The women who have been able to make their place outside the four walls of their houses too are in the eddy of the social conflict because of the widespread patriarchal ideology and the lack of the explicit and legitimated linguistic reference to their reconstructed identity. Despite the proven ability, the NFA struggles from the second slot of the binary that language created; and it indicates women as powerlessness and lack of rationality and consciousness (St. Pierre, *ibid.*). However, their struggle in academia may significantly indicate that “identity is more than repetition of sameness” (Britzman, 1993, as cited in St. Pirre, 2000, p. 503). Henceforth, the educated and qualified women may not choose to recreate the femininity as per the patriarchal ideology rather they attempt to change their identity.

### **6.1.2 Social category in identity construction**

Having lived in society and followed the models of the society for their livelihood in a meaningful manner (Whyte & Marshall, 1970), human beings define themselves as a social animal. However, this may be a generalized statement on human behaviors. A more specific understanding of human beings and their social behaviors demonstrates that the individuals in any society may belong to the distinct group(s). According to Gillespie, Howarth, and Cornish (2012), such groups have distinct behaviors and it is commonly known as their culture. Hence, the individuals belonging to the distinct groups with such distinct practices may form a social category in their society. Their social categorical practices develop certain attributes in them which may function as the signs for their recognition. Tejfel and Turner (1986) argue that the individuals belonging to the different social categories not only keep evaluating their group behaviors and attributes but also supporting their own groups over any other out-group(s). It is noteworthy that such in-group prejudice may lead to conflicting situations (Tejfel & Turner, *ibid.*).

Social categorization provides an analytical base for the recognition and classification of one's group or category (Tejfel and Turner, 1986). The NFA perceives that they have built some specific qualities in themselves like transforming social values that are oppressive to women, reconstructing masculine perspectives and practices in education, celebrating their

womanhood, taking the hold of multiple responsibilities, and leading an independent life. As St. Pierre (2000) asserts that certain capacities in women may be developed from certain positions only, the NFA believes that these qualities are the consequences of their academic engagements. These accomplishments of the NFA are not only limited to their personal benefits but they have a wider influence in the society. The sense of social balance and gender equality politically and educationally in women (Miriam, 2015), might function as a milestone for the social transformation through education. According to Jutting and Morrisson (2005), women's initiation in the transformation of the social and cultural practices is not the disrespect of the social norms and values but it is an attempt to make space for them to make their own decisions that give them the sense of their existence. The NFA is proud that they hold a name and a position of the category of the academics in the society that still considers a woman a mistress or a housekeeper despite her full-time engagement in her family (Luitel, 2001).

The NFA expresses the understanding that these traits are developed after getting engaged in academia with other Nepali academics. They also believe that these traits are the indicators of their academic engagements. Their evaluation and analysis of their own academic characteristics not only classify themselves as the unique women among "institutionally dominated and nonindividual women" (Mirkin, 1984, p. 39) in their society but also motivate them to take additional steps to continue their affiliation in the category of the academics. For instance, the NFA's search for mentors, collaboration at work, and the additional academic opportunities for their capacity building may refer to their academic actions to keep them active in the category. The search for such possibilities continuously regenerates and redefines the identity (St. Pierre, 2000) of the NFA.

The NFA perceives that their categorical shift from the common women to the academics is the reconstruction of their identity. In this regard, St. Pierre (2000) asserts that society sets the initial 'dos' and 'don'ts' for women through language and the language continued the same reference, however, if language can create the category and identity of women, it can also reconstruct it. The NFA accepts that it may be more beneficial for the women to come out of the four walls of their houses, change their category, and accept the challenges; like Walby (1990) suggests less skilled jobs, or less paid jobs, or even deskilled jobs. Even though challenging, it frees them from the linguistic attack of remaining "weak, irrational, powerless, etc" (St. Pierre, *ibid.*). Such engagements and creation of own social category may not match

the so-called social standards of the goodness of women or the equal status to the men in their society but they give them an individual “social reference and create an individual’s place” (Tejfel & Turner, 1986, p. 283). Moreover, the broken stereotypical gender values by the NFA for their academic engagements may be their “attempt to reframe the problematic knowledge” (St. Pierre, *ibid*, p. 499). The narratives of the NFA reframe the general perspective of the traditional Nepali society that the women are confined within the households, rather they stress their dynamic subjectivity in the family and society. The NFA’s contribution to the changing positions may have given them the identity of the academics.

### **6.1.3 Social comparison for identity construction**

The realization of the belongingness to a social group also takes place when the individuals interact with others and compare themselves with them, and the comparison may be with the individuals of the in-group or with the individuals of out-group(s) (Tejfel & Turner, 1986). The in-group considers such comparisons with the out-group(s) more relevant if their group traits are closer to each other (Hinkel & Brown 1990, as cited in Trepte & Loy, 2017). For instance, it is explicit in the narratives that the NFA chooses to compare themselves with the Nepali common women and the academics rather than with the foreign women and the academics; or, the NFA compares with the Nepali female university academics rather than the Nepali female school teachers. Regarding the NFA and their interactions for comparison, as (Tejfel and Turner, *ibid*.) further explain, the recurrence of the interactions of the NFA and its depth, the reasons for such interactions and the position of the NFA during such interactions are less influential than their own acceptance and that of others including their family, university and the society as the academics in the Nepali socio-cultural context.

The NFA’s consideration of their unique identity of the academics often aroused from their comparison with the common women and the women from other professions in their society. The NFA’s comparison with the common women made them realize that they have shifted from, as put forward by Dangol (2010), the dependent status of Nepali women on men in monetary matters to the independent status. The comparison also revealed that they have acquired the decision making power whereas, according to Bhadra and Thapa Shah (2007) women have been excluded from decision making in Nepali society. Likewise, their comparison with the women in other professions might have made them realize that they are

respected and known in the good terms in their family and society because of their engagement in academia (Acharya, 2015). On the contrary, their own engagement in other professions before they were in academia had been an issue to a lot of criticism and risk to their professional being. Therefore, in a way, the shift to academia has been a constructive step for professionalism for the NFA in the Nepali socio-cultural context.

St. Pierre (2000) argues that it is necessary for a post-structural female to adapt in the given situation to construct the meaning of the situation. She further accentuates that the analysis of their own engagement and its reformation is more significant than to accuse others for their misery. Having understood the fact, perhaps, the NFA has been taking their own initiatives to minimize the effects of the obstacles they have been encountering in the academic settings. Moreover, it might have also been the consequence of their comparison of the situations when they did not take any step on their own with the situation when they tried to solve the problems. As Butler (1990) argues that individuals may prefer to transform their actions rather than repeating (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000), the practice of the continuous comparison and reinterpretation of own roles the NFA might have changed their identity from 'a woman' to 'the academics'. They perceive that the change in the identity and the position in their society, in turn, enlightened them with the knowledge and enabled them to transform the discriminatory social practices that were imposed on women, as Mahat (2003) states, just because she was not born a boy! Likewise, St. Pierre (ibid.) claims, the NFA believes that it would not be possible for them to change the practices if they had been living the life of the common women.

## **6.2 Chapter summary**

The search for the identity outside their households for women is a struggle in the Nepali socio-cultural settings. The social norms and values, the language, the religious practices and interpretations of the scripture, and patriarchy together give an identity of a dependent person to the women then oppress them and oblige them to remain the homemakers who keep serving the family without seeking for anything in return and without an identity of an individual. However, the NFA who broke such stereotypes and came into academia have the perception of some different identity than that of being a woman at home. Although they encounter obstacles, they see themselves as individuals in themselves who are recognized for who they are but not in relation to someone else. The feeling of independence, change, and

existence developed in them through the evaluation of their own activities and position. Likewise, the comparison with other women and men in their society including themselves when they were not living an academics' life helped them to perceive their own identity. Moreover, the changes in their practices they have brought about with their own hard work made them perceive that they hold the identity of the academics.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The NFA accepts that the Nepali society has gone through some of the socio-cultural transformations of the modern times, however, they also agree that the society still operates with the old social and traditional values. Despite some of such changes, the society still names the men as ‘the bread-winners for the family’ and the women as ‘the homemakers’. The religious beliefs like ‘the works outside home spoil women’, still prevail in the society. Having lived within such a society, the NFA has seen and experienced the life of, both, the common woman and the academics. They evaluate and compare their own existence as a common woman and as a professional. They also evaluate and compare their life with the common women in their surroundings. The evaluation and comparison might have made them perceive that living the academics’ life is more meaningful. They also perceive that their engagements in academia brought pride to them and their family. In fact, having born and brought up in a typical educated Nepali family, they were suggested to join academia. The NFA believes that their family is aware that having academics at home; a daughter or a daughter-in-law or a mother, is an indicator of prestigious social status in the society. Yet, the Nepali women go through several challenges when they try to establish themselves as a professional. Despite education, qualification for a profession, and also the professional opportunities, the women are still expected to be the caretakers of their family. Having believed the men can only earn for their family, the Nepali society considers it disrespectful when the women get out of the four walls and work as a professional and an income generator for their family. In the name of religion, tradition, culture and social values, the society compels women to remain the common women, creates boundaries, and also warns that they do not cross them!

Nevertheless, the revelations of the NFA in their narratives insinuate that they broke the lines of limitations and they are leading the life of the academics. They believe that they bear the similar qualities of a professional academics. The NFA perceives that the experience of their existence, the ability to lead an independent life, the confidence in playing multiple roles of a homemaker and a professional, and the attempts to contribute to the transforming the society are the attributes they developed after they came to academia. They believe that these qualities made them the academics.

In the meantime, the NFA also perceives that their journey in academia has remained thorny since the beginning of their career. They experience that the obstacles throughout their stay in academia not only challenge their academic being but also reoccur frequently raising questions against their identity. They fight against patriarchy in their family and at their work, since the university administration also seems to reinforce the patriarchal ideologies leaving the female academics behind despite their ability. The NFA does not get a collaborative environment or adequate mentorship to strengthen their professional abilities. The institutions they are engaged in seem to be guided by a conservative social value typical to the Nepali society that the men and the women cannot maintain a professional relationship merely. However, the NFA tries to minimize the effects of such challenges through communication and negotiation. They attempt to negotiate with their fellow colleagues and the family members so that they remain in the profession as effective as other colleagues. However, there are no less instances, where the NFA shuts their voices since they cannot change the situation.

Although the religion, culture and tradition, social norms and values, and language are used as instruments to promote patriarchy and discourage female from leading an independent professional life in the Nepali society, the NFA has been able to break some of such stereotypical practices and establish themselves as the academics professionally. Nonetheless, their efforts were not accepted overnight. The NFA believes that the profession of academics has been helpful in changing the conservative beliefs and practices against women and their academic identity to some extent if not the most.

## **7.1 Limitations of the study**

This qualitative narrative inquiry was carried out on four NFA who belonged to two universities. They are the full-time academics in the universities. Likewise, all of them are the in-service academics who have spent a considerable period of time in the profession. They represent different ethnic groups and in Nepal. Although they came from different parts of Nepal, all of them have been working in Kathmandu, the capital city. Some of them held a permanent position at the university and some of them were working as temporary academics. Likewise, the tenure of their service in universities is also not uniform which might have influenced their experiences. In the same way, all of them work within the Social Sciences departments in the universities.

During the study, the narratives of the NFA have been analyzed using the selected concepts of the social identity theory and post-structural feminism. Likewise, the study interprets the narratives of the NFA only. It does not include anything that the university administration, the male academics, the students, or the family of the academics may have to say on the academic identity of the NFA. In addition, the study included only the female academics who belong to the universities but it did not include the female academics from the affiliated campuses.

## **7.2 Recommendations for further research**

It was a small scale qualitative research with few participants. The researcher included the female academics from two universities only for the study because of limited time and access to other universities and their academics. Therefore, it may be possible to incorporate more research participants from the rest of the universities as well and carry out quantitative studies so that the findings may be generalized extensively. The researcher included the participants who belong to different ethnicities in the study. Since ethnicity and the livelihood of people belonging to different ethnicities are influenced by the socio-cultural norms, values, and belief of the people of the ethnic groups, additional studies may be carried out with the female academics belonging to a single ethnic group or following a particular religion. Moreover, the position of women is different in different ethnicities and religion which could be the other issues for research. Although both the permanent and the temporary academics were included in the study, the differences in their experiences have not been marked on the basis of their permanent or temporary positions. Likewise, the researcher based this study within the academics of Social Sciences only. Hence, comparative studies may be carried out comparing the academic experiences of the female academics from different disciplines which may show a different picture of being academics of different disciplines in the Nepali society.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: The interview guidelines

### Part I

- When did you join the university as a teacher?
- Could you please narrate how you entered in the university as a teacher?
- Why did you choose to be a teacher in the university despite the availability of other professions? Was there anyone to inspire you to be university teacher in particular?
- What does being a university teacher mean to you?
- Or how do you define yourself as a university teacher? Do you have any socio-cultural or religious reference to yourself as a teacher? (for instance, Saraswati, the goddess of learning in Hinduism)
- As a university teacher by profession, what makes you feel different from other females in your family, society and other profession? Do you have any experience of such incident/s to share with me?
- Do you think your gender (of being a woman) influence your professional identity (a teacher of social science/ a teacher of medical science)? How does it influence your identity? Do you have any incident to share at this moment?
- Does your professional identity (of being a university) influence your practices (as a woman) in general?
- Do you feel the change in your social roles because of your profession?

### Part II

- What difference do you feel in being a university teacher (of social science/ of medical science, or....., ) from being a common woman science you have experienced both states?
- Could you come to the stage you are in today easily? Could you please narrate your journey?
- What helped you to make yourself a university teacher? Could you please narrate in what ways they helped you?

- What kind of challenges did you have to face to make yourself the person you are today?
- How does the university administration respond to you and your activities as a female teacher?
- Does the university administration respond to you and your activities as a female teacher?
- Does the university administration support you in your professional growth? If yes, how does it support? If no, what are your experiences?
- How do the university students behave with you a female teacher? Do you feel/notice any difference in their behaviours when they are with male teachers?
- Do you have any other roles in the university besides teaching that helps you to promote your identity?

### **Part III**

- During the difficult times at the university, do you seek help from the university administration? Can you share any incident when the university administration supported you?
- Besides university administration, do you also seek help from other colleagues? Do they support you? Do you have any incident to narrate when your colleagues supported you? Can you please share the incident now?
- Do you sometimes ignore the problem? What kind of problems do you ignore? Why do you ignore them?
- Would you like to say something that I missed to ask you now? Please feel free.

Thank you very much for your time and response!

## **Appendix 2: Information and Consent Letter**

### **Information and consent letter**

Thank you for showing interest in the interview for the research. This research project is my master thesis. I am a student at University of Oslo. I am doing masters in Higher Education. This study attempts to explore your perception of your own academic identity.

This is a qualitative study. I use interview as the tool for data collection. The experiences and understanding you share about your own academic identity make the narratives. The narratives are the source of the data for the study.

The data is used for the thesis purpose only. Likewise the data is handled according to the Personal Data Act. Your name is not mentioned in any part of the study. The name of the university is used but it is not used to show your affiliation to the university. A pseudo name is given to you when your information is mentioned in the thesis.

You are not forced to participate in the project. You can withdraw from the project whenever you want.

### **Consent for the participation**

I have received and understood information about the project and i am willing to participate.

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(Signed by participant, date)