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Original Research

Schooling Experiences of Tamang Girls in Nepal

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Abstract

School education is the foundation for continuing education and attainment of basic skills and knowledge. Despite the international promises such as Education for All, Universal Primary Education, and national provision of school education as free and compulsory in Nepal, most of the marginalised people could not complete their school education. Among them, girls from the Tamang community are still confronting insurmountable challenges in accessing and undergoing schooling experience in Nepal. This paper argues that the schooling process of the Tamang girls is influenced by the embedded characteristics of cultural setting and their subjectivities through their stories. Using narrative inquiry as a research method for the study, this paper explored that schooling is shaped by the complex and dynamic role of embedded identities, power, and historicity of the community and people. I present how the Tamang girls experience their school education and how it has been the foundation for their higher education journey as well as identities formation. The paper concludes that identities of Tamang girls in school are multiple, intersubjective, and contextual, which are less recognised in modern schooling.

Keywords: *Tamang girls, School, Intersectionality, Narrative Inquiry*

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Introduction

Education is considered a key pointer of learning and progress in human life. Universally, education has been emphasised in universal primary education and education for all. In the context of Nepal, institutional access to school among common people started after the 1950s with the introduction of the first education plan in 1954. The Ranas got overthrown in 1951, the Ranas and their adversaries recognised education as a force for social change (Sharma, 1990). However, for the people of many indigenous communities, access to education was a distant dream. The general public got access to education, but within that those who were from the good socio-economic background, higher caste, and male counterparts would get the opportunity. Parajuli et al. (2008) argued that the disparities in access to education are caused by geographical region, gender, social groups, and economic level. Even in the drastic progress in the educational policies influenced by rights-based perspectives in Nepal, a large number of students could not get access to school because of the different intersectional positions of themselves in society. The schooling of the girls from the Tamang community, for instance, was fundamentally shaped by their communal and individual identities.

I also belong to the Tamang community and faced several forms of exclusions to complete my school education. As I reflect on my access to school, there seemed a slim chance of finishing school education. My family setting, class, and geography had played a vital role to restrict access to school and education. My family's priority was to fulfil everyday survival needs rather than to send me to school for education. I was born as an elder among three siblings, so had the role of looking after my siblings, household chores rather than going to school. I used to go to school near my home in Taruka, Makwanpur, but it was just for the sake of going, as everybody used to send their kids to school. The language we used at home was Tamang, so I could not grasp much of the teaching which took place in Nepali and English.

Due to *poor* social and economic condition of my family, I almost dropped out of school. I got an opportunity to continue my education in Kathmandu with the help of an organisation. They brought me to Kathmandu to start my school education from Grade I in an institutional school. It was a turning point to get access to school education. It was not convenient for me to continue school education in an urban setting, new

environment, and new language. I somehow got through it but felt erratic; I did not see anything that exemplified my people and me in the textbooks and everyday life of schooling.

The list of my difficulties to get equitable access to school education would extend longer. With the massive transition of political systems from the monarchy to democracy to a federal democracy, the educational provisions have been reformed, which increased the access of students to school. In such a context, the purpose of the study was to narrate the experiences of the Tamang girls in school. The research question for this paper is ‘How do the Tamang women narrate their stories of early experience in school education?’ In this paper, I present the experiences of the Tamang girls who faced prejudice, stereotype, and marginalisation of being a Tamang in school. Thus, I argue that Tamang girls faced social structural discrimination in access and participation in school and raised a critical question on the equitable access and participation of Tamang girls in school.

Along the following sections, I present the positionality of the Tamang people, interrelation of education, ethnicity and inequality, methodology, stories of my participant, its interpretation, analysis and discussion, followed by the conclusion of the study.

Positions of Tamang people in Nepali Society

Tamang people live in such a community where they have their own cultural, traditions, arts, language, songs, community governance, and living a life in harmony with nature. The word ‘Tamang’ refers to both language and the ethnic people. According to Tamang (1992), Tamang people have their language, unique lifestyle, and religious belief. Tamang people consist of 5.8% of the population of the country (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). It is the fifth-largest ethnic groups having a mother tongue (Thokar, 2008). Tamang people are rich in indigenous knowledge and cosmology. They follow the clan system and do not have hierarchies; the clan system is an integral part of the ethnic identity – used for marriage patterns, which is exogenous and patrilineal. Buddhism, Animism, and Hinduism are included as daily religion. For the Tamang religious rituals and practices, *Bombo*, *Lhabon*, or *Lhabtaba*, and *Lama* are the three foremost ritual specialists.

The positionality of Tamang, in terms of state, has played a vital role to exclude and oppress them in the form of the caste system. Sharma (1978) mentioned Nepal as the only Hindu Kingdom with a rigid caste system. The “casteless populations” as Tamangs and Sherpas got included in the system (von Furer-Haimendorf, 1957). Before 1932, Tamang people lacked official recognition (Levine, 1987); however, they used to be known as Murmi, Bhote.

Gellner (2007) noted that the autocratic Rana regime (1846-1951) ruled the orthodox Hindu Nation. More so, the *Muluki Ain* of 1854, promulgated by Janga Bahadur Rana, tried to bring all people into ‘Hill Hindu.’ Based on caste, there was punishment in differed nature and severity as per the *Muluki Ain* legal procedure for social and economic offences (Sharma, 1978). Due to which many ethnic groups are systematically marginalised and excluded from the various spheres of the economic, political, and social dimensions. The dominant groups spread throughout the country as landowners, priests, administrators, soldiers, and police officers, and they were all from Bahun (Brahman) and Chhetri (Kshatriya) castes (Gellner, 2007). The non-Hindu groups, such as Tamang people, were kept in middle-ranking position in the Nepali hierarchy. The Tamang people got categorised as “Pani Chalney” which is the lowest caste among hill ethnics (Zemach-Bersin, 2005). Tamang was considered people who could be used as a slave. The domination and marginalisation of the Tamang people have a subsequent consequence in their social, economic, political, and education access and experience.

The Tamang people are categorised as ‘marginalised indigenous’ people as recognised by the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) (Bhattachan et al., 2018) as of now. However, they face many stereotypes as the eater of dead cows (March, 1983), eating beef co-signs as a lower order of humanity (Campbell, 1998) and the term “Bhote” (Zemach-Bersin, 2005). The economic mobility limitation as to ‘Pipa’ during the Rana regime, no access to military and need to serve as bonded labours – as menial labourers for the rulers. The Tamang women were associated and used as entertainers and concubines.

Education, Ethnicity, and Inequality in Nepal

Stash and Hannum (2001) mentioned how the emergence of the formal education system shifted towards a credential-oriented status attainment society in Nepal.

Education is considered as a base for better status and wellbeing, which would help to move upward in better class, opportunity, and livelihood. The Tamang people who lack behind in every aspect of education could be way as well as uplifting self and family in terms of social and economic class. As the saying goes, educating a girl means educating the whole family. So, going to school is of importance for the Tamang girls. In the context of Nepal, there is a significant improvement in terms of the number of students attending school in comparison to earlier times.

However, the educational progress in terms of quantitative data seemed increased as the net enrolment rates by level of schooling (Subba et al., 2014); there is an enormous gap for the Tamang children. At the primary level (1-5), the enrolment rate is 95 percent, for boys 95.6 percent, for girls 94.5 percent. In the case of Tamang students, it is 80.7 percent in total, and 81.5 percent for boys and 80.2 percent girls. At the Lower Secondary level (6-8), the total enrolment rate is 70.0 percent, 70.5 percent for boys and 69.5 percent for girls. In the case of Tamang students, it is 46.8 percent overall, whereas 43.2 percent for boys and 50.4 percent for girls. Likewise, at the Secondary level (9-10), the total enrolment rate is 52.1 percent, of which boys accounted for 52.7 percent whereas girls 51.4 percent. In the case of Tamang students, the total enrolment rate is 26.1 percent, of which boys accounted for 26.3 percent and girls 26 percent. The number shows an alarming and distinct lower number of Tamang students in school. Still many Tamang children have remained missed-out from school education.

The Tamang girls also face discriminatory behaviour in schools and community, although the Tamang community puts emphasis on both genders. However, due to the influence of the caste system dominated by Hinduism where female is considered secondary to males has also taken a toll in the Tamang girls. Tamang girls being from an ethnic community face the double marginalisation from the society and within the community. I earlier presented how the Tamang women/girls are exploited by the Ranas as well as the trend of selling the Tamang girls to Mumbai, which later within the community started to continue the trend. Till date, the Tamang girls and women suffered from this reality as well as stereotyped because of the exploitation. The social structure, along with economic and political structures, adversely impact the girl's access to education.

As a result, inequality has been perpetuating in school education due to gender, class, caste/ethnicity, language, geography as a historical phenomenon. The egalitarian characteristics of the Tamang community as March (2018) pointed out equality among both genders in their social structure, no longer maintained because of the massive influence of patriarchal society under the Hindu culture (Rana, 2012). Moreover, Rai (2011) raised his argument from an economic perspective where the Tamang were historically discriminated people compared to other indigenous groups. She also added that they never got held an office above the village development committee at the financial and management level. The Tamang people were historically placed in a fragile economic class, which hindered their economic accessibility.

The modern school system has further institutionalised stereotypes about Tamang people in Nepal with its language. The doctrine *ek desh, ek bhasa, ek dharma* (one nation, one language, one religion) adopted by the country had an impact on the indigenous language as other languages got banned in classroom and playground (Phyak, 2011). According to Phyak, it was one of the darkest age Panchayat enforced in terms of language policy perspectives. Additionally, Awasthi (2004) remarked that Nepal's educational language policy marginalised the indigenous community from the education/school system. So the unfavourable environment in the schooling system reflects the influence of high class over the minority in a power relationship, domination, and favouritism to a particular community.

Due to geographic reason, many Tamang children have to suffer from lack of access to primary education and face barriers to their access to and participation in education. An example mentioned by Rai (2011) who shared in Sindhupalchowk where the population of Tamang is high. In 1962, a Sati Devi School was established until grade six; however, after that, I had to walk two hours or rent a room nearby the school. Despite the need and students' availability, the school was not upgraded, which shows how geography barriers create a further continuation of education.

I adopted the multilevel model theory of intersectionality to distinguish different levels of analysis of the Tamang girls regarding social categories or particular relations, areas of investigation (organisational, representational, intersubjective, and experiential) and historicity (process and outcomes) (Anthias, 2013). The organisation includes categories within the institutional framework as our school, family, networks,

educational system, political and legal system. Intersubjectivity is about patterns of practices of identity self and otherness. The experiential domain is about the Tamang girls' lived experiences in school. The historicity looks at the power play overtime and specific place. Anthias (2013) mentioned the intersection of different identities which denote the process where people in a particular place and time within the arena of an organisation, representation, and intersubjectivity, experience inequality. The hidden power structure is revealed through intersectionality (Keskitalo-Foley & Naskali, 2018), which helps to understand how the Tamang girls experience their lived experience in school.

Methodology

I have used narrative inquiry for my study. "Narrative inquiry is always with and within stories- the stories of participants, the stories of inquirers, the social, cultural, institutional, familial, linguistic narratives within which all stories are lived, told and inquired into" (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 18). The stories of the participants are not limited to self but their social life and everyday life. This article engages with how the Tamang girls experience the process of schooling, drawing on qualitative data from my MPhil dissertation.

I have selected four participants purposefully who pursuing higher education until the Master's Degree. The method of purposive sampling was adopted for this study because my research aim was to know the experience of Tamang women in higher education. In doing so, these articles cover their stories of early schooling only. I chose the Tamang women because of three reasons: a) I belong to the same community and observed and experienced various obstacles of the Tamang girls as insiders, b) the Tamang girls have still less representation in education and c) as a Tamang girl, they have the unique experience of education and schooling I faced difficulty finding the Tamang women as my participants who had completed their school education and struggling to complete higher education. Their early schooling stories reflected the kind of intersectionality they faced, which makes their experiences different and challenging to overcome. Tamang women's lived stories are the data source in my study (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). My participants are Dechen, Diki, Dolma, and Sonam. Here, I present their experiences of early schooling.

I found that the relationship is at the heart of thinking narratively; it is the key to what narrative inquirers do (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I maintain my research ethics throughout the study. The stories of the participants were collected with their consent and recorded, transcribed and presented as they shared. During the research, no harm was done to the participants. All the names and place presented in the study are pseudonyms of the participants, so confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

Tamang Girls: Our Struggle in School

My participants, including myself, are the first generation to get an opportunity to go to school. Our social positionality shapes the type of school and school experience. In the following section, I share the stories of my participants Dechen, Diki, Dolma and Sonam.

Dechen: Can Tamang Kids Study?

Dechen's father source of income was a small shop that he owned in Kathmandu. He was running his business while the family was in the village. The family migrated to Kathmandu when Dechen was three or four years old. They migrated to the city for education and better opportunity. Despite being uneducated, her parents encouraged her to study. She started schooling from the "*Shishu Class*" [similar to kindergarten], at Balkumari, which was the preparation for grade one. In grade one, she joined Sita Kanya School, Bajra Bazaar, in 1997.

It was the year 1998, and she went to live in her village with her sister after attending Grade I in a school located in the city. She joined Saraswati School, one of the local schools in the community, in Grade II. The majority of people were from the Tamang community. However, only three students got admitted, amongst which two were boys. There was no Tamang teacher. The number of educated Tamang was meagre, so the presence of Tamang teacher was minimum. In the Tamang community, it is important to have a Tamang teacher as the community has its language which is used at home and the surrounding environment. However, other non-Tamang teachers cannot understand or communicate properly with the students. They could not communicate with their teachers because they did not speak the Nepali language, rather speak their mother tongue, the Tamang language. The teachers were from other castes, mainly Bahun/Chhetri or the Madeshi community. In the entire district, there was

hardly any Tamang as a teacher. She felt uncomfortable due to the behaviours of her teachers. She narrated:

I was good at school, but I never held the first position because I belonged to the Tamang community, and teachers perceived that Tamang girls could never score good marks and be the first position holder in the class. Usually, one of my classmates, who was the daughter of a teacher, scored the first position. I had to remain satisfied with the second position as I could not dare to question the second position in the class despite all the efforts that I had put in my studies. Then my brother-in-law went to the school, met the headteacher in his office where all the other teachers were sitting. He greeted the teachers and asked him to re-calculate my score

Brother-in-law: Can I see the score of my sister?

Headteacher: What is the problem?

Brother-in-law: Not a problem, but I would like to know about my sister's grade sheet.

Head Teacher: But why? The result was already out. It is the final result which cannot be changed.

Brother-in-law: Can we re-calculate the total the marks? We are not satisfied with the result. She is good at her study.

After much pressure, the score was re-calculated and found that her score was higher than that of the first girl. However, she was not considered the first. She got told by her principal, “*Can the Tamang kids study? It might not be so.*” Although Dechen was a good student, her teachers were not ready to accept the fact that a Tamang girl scored higher marks than other children. The teacher had a stereotypical mindset towards Tamang’s children. The school was in the Tamang community, but only a few Tamang children attended the school. Upadhyay (2013) mentioned that teachers belonging to higher caste have a stereotype or pass disapproving remarks or proverbs toward the Tamang children. There are stereotypes as the Tamang children cannot study, are slow learners, and cannot have excellent educational attainment. For Dechen, being a Tamang girl, she had to face the stereotypical attitude of the teacher and their negative comments. The Tamang people stereotype by others due to the historical position as salvable and labourer for the Rana’s. The economic condition being deplorable has

generated a stereotype among the Tamang people and additionally the history of Tamang girls being dragged into sex-workers.

Dechen felt sad about the situation. In a shallow tone, she said with a sarcastic smile, *“That’s how they treated me.”* She further shared, *“I was disappointed and did not want to go to school anymore. I argued and cried with my sister to take me back to Kathmandu”*. Later on, she was not treated well by the teachers’ in-class tests, competitions, and programmes. During that time in the village, such discrimination and negative remarks were often made to Tamang’s daughters by the teachers and people from the community. The unkind comments of the headteacher *“Why aren’t you cutting grass with your mother, and why are you studying here? Why aren’t you helping your sister at home?”* shocked her. She was the only girl in her class from the Tamang community attending school in the village. She shared with an expression of sadness as well as surprised as to how Tamang girl is treated.

Dechen’s stories reflect the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity that played a vital role in her experience. Banerjee and Ghosh (2018) mentioned that the intersectionality of social characteristic produces a specific experience of marginalisation in an individual life. The comment as to why you are studying and not acknowledging her competency in the study reflects how the Tamang people, particularly the Tamang girls, have to face discriminatory behaviour from the teacher. Teacher and peer in the school play a significant role in making learning space better for individuals.

Diki: I Got Bullied

Diki’s parents were from Kavre; however, she was born in Patan, Lalitpur district. She has an elder brother and two younger siblings. Her father worked in the carpet industry, and her mother was a housewife. After the carpet industry went down, her father shifted to driving. In 2001, her family shifted to Pokhara. They own a piece of land and built a house there and started to live in a new place. She joined in grade four at the new place. She got enrolled at Shiva Adarsha English Boarding School.

In grade four, she felt as being a new student in a new school and a new environment a different experience. Diki says, *“At that school, I got bullied. So, it was hard times”*. I also felt so due to intentional harassment that occurred by bullying and peer victimisation (Neupane, 2014). Regarding this, Diki further shared:

I was from Kathmandu with typical Tamang bodily texture. There were other Tamang students in the class also, but I got remarkably noticed at school due to my mushroom cut. The people with short hair were considered “Nakali”, i.e. having artificial hair. There existed some groupings of the students. The grouping was new versus old. The boys had their group, and so did the girls. We were three newly enrolled students who got excluded from the group. We faced such harassment in four to five months. They called our names or linked our names with the boys. So everyone tried to ignore us. Nobody would share the bench with us.

She told her friends about bullying, teasing, calling names or obscure gestures or facial expressions (Neupane, 2014), exclusion from the group, and spreading rumours among the friends. Diki’s experience in school reflects how the haircut which made her the centre of attention and got bullied too. The Tamang people have a specific facial structure that distinguishes them from others. The small ‘chinky’ eye and flat nose. A new school, urban and rural contexts also made a difference as girls are expected to keep their long hair. She was bullied due to the distinct look of her face and hair. Among friends, there is biasedness; however, being from the Tamang community, she faces the discrimination that got played in group interactions.

In a new school, Diki struggled to be part of it; she had a distinct look (being a Tamang) and a different hair cut (where girls usually have long hair), which made her look different. Because of that, she experienced a tough time in a new school. The behaviours of friends made her question her identity and social life. It was a difficult time for her to adjust and focus on her education. It was a kind of frustrating moment for her

Sonam: There was a Feeling of Frustration

Sonam has thirteen siblings altogether, including children of her other two stepmothers. Her father was a “*Pradhan Panch*” (village chief), so other people would respect him. While educating sons and daughters, he sent sons to an institutional school and daughters to a community school. She felt it was a practice which she found unfair for the daughters. The discrimination was visible, which shocked her.

Sonam had to walk for three hours to reach her school when she was in grade three to five. She, along with her friends, would hide on the way many times. She, however,

would never miss the school on Wednesdays as there used to be a Haat Bazar near the school. She later got shifted to a nearby school where their shop was situated in the village. It became much more comfortable after that. According to Weinstein and Palmer (2013), the minimal number of students that qualify is also impacted by geography as most of the schools are unevenly distributed. The distance is a significant barrier for many Tamang children in the village school as well as for further education.

At school, Sonam narrated how difficult it was for her there, although by distant viable. A new school, English as the medium of instruction of teaching-learning, made her struggle. She shared: *“When I shifted to a new school in grade six, many Chhetri/Brahmin children, and few were from the Tamang community. The school was located in a mixed community place. My old school had many Tamangs as the school was nearby a large Tamang village. The medium of instruction in the new school was English, so it was quite challenging to engage in teaching-learning activities. I studied among the Tamang students earlier. At home, also we communicated in the Tamang. In the old school, too, we used to communicate in our mother tongue. You know, when we speak Nepali or English, we have Tamang accents. Also, we tend to make a lot of grammatical errors in Nepali as we do not have a practice of it. We do not speak as Khanchhe, Baschhe type of Brahmin/Chhetri language, rather would say Ta [You] to all. We do not talk like others as Khanchhin, Bolchin- but after joining the school, we also started to speak like them. In that school, we got forced to talk like them. The teachers and the students teased the way we spoke. The Tamang people who were living in the area were also influenced by the culture/tradition of Brahmin/Chhetri. The new school had a limited number of students. It was one of the best schools in the village”*. The Tamang language and Nepali ways of speaking are different. However, the inferiority and superiority of language are prevalent—the way Tamang accent is made fun of shows how Tamang language and people are perceived. The Tamang do not use the same syntax and grammar, which makes it odd for many Tamang to speak Nepali. The teachers, rather than motivating student, seemed to make fun and demotivate students.

The school focused on English medium as teaching. Her friends were eloquent in speaking, but for her, it was a great challenge. She would have to keep her eyes down, avoid direct eye contact with the teacher and other students as she would feel mocked

at. They teased her and her sister whenever they spoke, and their every word of mockery would step by step bring their confidence down.

Sonam's story was like that of many Tamang children who got hindered due to mother tongue- spoken since birth. Sonam was told to speak the English language in the class to have a better English accent. Sherpa (2012) mentioned that the students were not allowed to speak the Tamang language; rather, they were compelled to speak the Nepali language. She shared a case of Tamang community in Rasuwa:

Due to the Tamang language not being used to teach, students did not understand what got taught, and the result was poor, so they had to repeat the class but could not pass the exam. So later, they were not interested in going to school, and they gave up their study forever (p. 65).

They have a mindset that the way Tamangs speak depicts inferiority and their language is without any value.

About attending classes, Sonam shared, *“There was a feeling of frustration after being teased regularly. Once, it was a regular class like every day. I was sitting with my sister on our back corner seat. In the Nepali class, the teacher was collecting the homework exercise books. One of our friends said to the teacher, “Laa.” Then the teacher said, “Are you giving this copy to a goat?” He teasingly started to use Tamang’s accent and said Khancha, bhanchha to a friend. He then shared how Tamang says, “Aye bhau Bhat khana aau, aaeza Bhancha re ghai ra Ghoru lai chahe aaunus, Tapai bhanncha re” [Father is called with disrespect, but for animals, one calls with more respect] Then they used to tease us.* The Tamang people have a peculiar accent while they speak, so for others, the Tamang people do not have proper pronunciation in Nepali. Likewise, the teacher tries to show how the Tamang children behave with people be it the teacher or their family members. The teacher is trying to show that Tamang children do not have discipline and manner. They show respect to animals but not to human. In this way, he humiliates the student and teases to make her feel bad.

She and her sister got teased about their way of speaking; sometimes, it was infuriating. So she mentioned, *“It even occurred to me that I did not feel like going to school early after being teased so often who wants to go to school. Also, we used to sit*

on a separate bench, the bench where we sat nobody used to sit with us". In the new school, not only language but students would not share a thing or sit with them. According to Ghimire (2008), the school had discriminatory behaviour towards Damai, Kami, and Tamang students while he was studying. It reflected Sonam's experience at school. The indifference attitude of the teacher might not be so because of Sonam being Tamang, but according to Bhattachan (2013), education has fallen short of prejudice and discrimination towards indigenous people. Such education has a significant impact on how the students perceive themselves and build identities.

Sonam, even being the daughter of Village chairman, the experiences in school stand out because of the language as a Tamang girl. She said that in her old school mostly they were talking in the Tamang language and also at home. So, language became a significant barrier and fun for others to make. Phyak (2011) mentioned how language in school, which was Nepali made 'the privilege' and 'the high caste' exercise their ideology and power. In contrast, students like Sonam (from indigenous community Tamang) lost their language, culture, and identities (p. 271). Sonam shared later how they also started talking like others in Nepali, speaking, or having Tamang accent made them feel inferior.

Here, the intersectionality of gender, language and geography made her experience in school. Her father's discriminatory act reflects the underlying lack of value for what it means to be female (Cole, 2009). Even being in good socio-economic class, Sonam got to study in a community school due to her gender. The geography also determines which school she would go to her village. Her father's shop was located on the road high way due to which she had to change school. The old school was a three-hour walk. In the old school, many classmates were Tamang; however, the new school had a different environment where she had frustration. Language medium in the class was another challenge she had to face. Gender, language and geography depicted her identities, experiences and struggle in her educational attainment. The ongoing changes in school made her experience painful and hard.

Dolma: My Father Changed His Caste 'Tamang' Into 'Gurung'

Dolma and I met at the mall for our meeting. She had recently completed her Master's degree. Then she told me that she was a Tamang, but in official documents,

she writes Dolma Maya Gurung. I was quite surprised and asked her why? She told me that her father changed his caste to Gurung from Tamang. He was not allowed to get recruited in the Indian army without changing his caste. Tamang and Gurung are ethnic communities; however, the Mulkin Ain, under caste system put the hierarchies among the ethnic group. The Gurung was considered higher than the Tamang. The Tamang people were not recruited in armies. So, during the time due to discrimination on Tamang people, many people changed their ethnic identity or caste.

So later, we also got the same caste as Gurung. It was a great deal to be recruited in the army for her father. She narrated:

In July 1967, my father joined the Indian Army at Dehradun, thinking that the Indian army could only earn more money and provide more facilities for the family. Moreover, he got retired in August 1995 from Shilong. People who were army got prestige in our Tamang society. Education was provided to only boys, and the girls were not allowed to go to school. They were forced to do household works. My father changed his caste 'Tamang' into 'Gurung' because Tamangs were not recruited in the Indian army. My father later tried to change but could not do so. I also want to change, but it is not possible. My father said to me, "Write whatever you want to write, and I needed to be an army. So, I did it. Now, because of army life opportunities, we have what is required for us. It is like this. Whatever the caste you write, you are all my children. I am your father that is all". She told me that it is odd to say 'I am Gurung' when I know 'I am Tamang'. In her community, some families have changed their surname. She likes herself to be called a Tamang, but in official paperwork, he used the surname Gurung. They even tried to change it, but could not do so. For her father, joining the army was a prestigious thing, which would also place them in a good economic position. Her family was well off due to her father's job in the armed forces.

She further said that Dhading was populated by the Tamang people, but in the institutional school, only a few of them were from the Tamang community. In her class where she studied, only around four or six of them were from the Tamang community. It bewildered her why the same faces she had seen in the community not seen inside the school premises. She said that *"Almost all teachers were from out of Dhading or belonging to other castes; there was only one Tamang teacher. Till the time of our SLC (School Leaving Certificate), he taught us environment science. In the whole school, he*

was only the Tamang teacher. After I passed my SLC, the Tamang teacher left the job". She found that having teachers from their community was inspiring and motivating for education. Many times people questioned her about being Gurung her false surname as a reply she would say that she was Rai, or called "Bhoteni." The Tamang people got called with derogatory ethnical term "Bhote," dirty beef-eating Buddhists (Zemach-Bersin, 2005; O'Neill, 2004). These unkind remarks deeply depressed her. Nepal is dominant in Hinduism in comparison to Buddhism. The Tamang people and many ethnic communities consume cow meat whereas in Hinduism cow is worshipped. So, due to this very reason, the Tamang people are stereotyped as cow eating people and get discriminatory behaviour due to it. Also, calling people 'Bhote' and 'Bhoteni' is said in derogatory type rather than addressing the person with respect.

Dolma's experience was different and showed the privilege based on caste/ethnicity. It reflects how Tamang, as a caste/ethnicity, had linked in your class and job opportunities. Dolma's family members being Tamang, have changed their caste/ethnicity to Gurung. Social class is essential due to multiple social hierarchies (Collins, 1998). Dolma's social class played a vital role in her experience being a privilege in comparison to other Tamang girls in her community. It lets people know your economic power and which influences the identities and experiences of the individual

Constructing Identities in the School

The stories shared by Dechen, Diki, Dolma and Sonam about their school experience shows that they faced language-based discrimination, stereotyping of caste and gender, which were historically situated to influence their schooling and education.

Language-Based Discrimination

The country's about 87% of the population speaks five major languages like Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu and Tamang. Tamang is one of the largest population that has been continuing speaking its language. Language is not just an identity but essential because of cultural, ecological and linguistic value. However, in the context of education in Nepal, Nepali and English have been occupying dominating roles (Ghimire, 2012). The children from the ethnic communities like Tamang suffer due to the medium of the instruction in the class. The minority of people's languages never got similar acknowledgement as Nepali and English.

Ghale (2016) mentioned that many do not measure the price the Tamang children have to pay for doing well in school where no one speaks the language, no textbook reflects their history or culture, and no teacher looks or sounds like them. Sonam shared how she got frustration due to the medium of teaching. In school, she had to learn English and Nepali, whereas the language used at home was Tamang. Sonam felt inferior because of the language, teachers, friends, and comments and remarks made by her friends. There was a widespread notion that Tamang people could not read and write. Stash and Hannum (2001) said that educational studies had mentioned a strong caste effect on school participation. Tamang tone and way of interacting differed from others; however, the way Tamang children communicated was made fun of and inferior. Likewise, Dechen shared her experience with a teacher who did not acknowledge her as a good student instead and tried to demotivate her. Mostly, what I myself experienced was that we were made fun of our pronunciation since as we spoke Nepali, our Tamang tone would get inserted. So, belonging to the Tamang community, having a mother-tongue accent was an embarrassment, and we had to pay a hefty price for it.

Stereotyping of Caste and Gender

The representation of the Tamang people was stereotypical. They are perceived as low-level labourers by the elites and a caste having symbolic dominance on the Tamang people (Holmberg, 2000). The oppressed Tamang people had no institutional access, which impacted their access to resources. So, despite being illiterate except Dolma's father, they provided education to their daughters and became the first generation in the family who got an opportunity to study. Dechen shared how her teachers had a perception of Tamangs. Dechen being girl was questioned by her teacher "Why not help in cutting the grass? Why do you have to study?" This reflects the kind of perception people have towards a Tamang girl.

In the context that most Tamangs are peasant agriculturalists (Thokar, 2008), they get involved in non-agriculture activities like labourers, thangka artists, drivers, and carpet weaver and so on migrating to the Kathmandu valley. It has a direct linkage to the way the Tamang people were positioned historically. Dechen's father worked as an event carter as his own business. Her family depended on his earning, so there was a struggle to sustain the family. Likewise, Diki's father was working in a carpet factory,

until the carpet industry got down. The Tamang people were of large portion in carpet weaving (O'Neill, 2004). He left the carpet industry and started driving the vehicle, by doing which he earned comparatively better income. He was determined to educate his children when they shifted to Pokhara, so he enrolled them at an institutional school. At that time, the Tamang people were not allowed to join the army as Gurkha troops or others (O'Neill, 2004), which would enhance their economic condition. Dolma's father changed his ethnic identity to Gurung, which made it possible for him to get access to the army. It opened the door to economic furtherance and better educational opportunity for his children.

The intersubjectivity of the research participants in school experience concerned teachers, friends, and school systems. Dechen felt discriminated in a village school by the teachers. The school, as an organisation, was not ready to accept the outcome. The teachers were from outside of the community who did not understand the community or their value. Holmberg (2017) mentioned how high caste teachers attempt to have bodily purity and do not live with the local people and alienate from them. It reflects a difference it would make to have a teacher from within a community and how inspiring it would be. Diki felt bullied by her peers. However, for Dolma being a Gurung daughter of the army meant access to an institutional school. Sonam felt prejudiced and stereotypical attitudes always existed (Seo & Hinto, 2009) among them. The caste system in Nepal is based on some being superior or inferior to another person. However, an ethnic group where the clan system plays a vital role rather than hierarchy got influenced by the Hindu system, which made the ethnic community inferior to them yet upper than the Dalit.

Conclusion

Based on the stories of the experiences of my participants, identities of Tamang girls in school are multiple, contextual, and situational, which are less recognised in modern schooling. Their experience of schooling is associated with gender, caste/ethnicity, class, geography, language, experiential, intersubjective, organisational and representational, and historicity. Their stories reflect how Tamang girls faced oppression historically, which could not be reduced in one fundamental type of schooling process and thus produced social injustice. They constructed multiple identities in all aspects, especially in educational space. Their experience reflects that

there is more to do to have access and the space of the classroom, so as a Tamang girl, one can be proud of their identity and self. Institutionalised social structures in school hardly recognise the multidimensional aspects of their identity.

The experiences are painful and excruciating, as they get ill-treated in the classroom and discrimination with family between sons and daughters. The historical discrimination, oppression and suppression on Tamang people impact on the parent's economy and class, which influences their schooling as well as experience in life. The research is limited to the four participants to give insights into the Tamang girls' schooling, which may give a sense of making and unmaking inclusive education in Nepal.

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