Everyday Lives of LGBTI in Kathmandu Valley:
A Narrative Inquiry

Megh Vilas Bhatta

Faculty, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Budhanilkantha School, Kathmandu, Nepal
Email for correspondence: mv.bhatta@yahoo.com or mvbnature03@gmail.com

Abstract

There is an increasing recognition of political and socio-economic right and identification of the LGBTI throughout the world. Hereby, I soaked into lived experiences of LGBTI people and interpreted those experiences for better understanding of their daily life activities, the gap between their individual identities and social identities, prevailing exclusionary provisions and need of their social inclusion in term of gender identities and social development. The study also relates to the multiple realities of the world view of LGBTI investigated through interpretive paradigms and narrative inquiry as methodology which focuses on critical life events depicted through participants' stories, exploring their holistic views and holds valuable potential for researchers in a broad range of socio-cultural and economic structures. The research questions; how do LGBTI perform everyday life activities, how have they been appraising their identity and why social exclusionary practices have been affecting the lives of LGBTI in the development process of Nepal have been instrumental to materialize them.

Key words: LGBTI, gender, sex, everyday life, identity, exclusion and inclusion.

Introduction

LGBTI is commonly used acronym which is an umbrella term encompassing a heterogeneous group of lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender and intersex persons (Bista, 2013) with homogeneous concern of sexuality and identity. More specifically, **Lesbians** are women whose primary sexual and emotional attraction is towards other women. It also has a self-identification or group-identity connotation. **Gays** are male persons with physically and emotionally attracted to some one of the same sex. The word "**bisexual**" is used to refer to a person who is attracted physically and emotionally to both males and females. Thus, bisexual identity establishes attraction to both genders. **Trans-genders** are persons whose gender identity, outward appearance, expression and/or anatomy do not fit into conventional expectations of male or female. The term transgender is often used to represent a wide range of non-conforming gender identities and behaviour. Thus, they are new challenges to politics, government, and law, and new opportunities to broaden the horizons of everyone who has a trans-person as their neighbor, co-worker, friend, partner, parent, or child (Stryker & Whittle, 2006). These people generally have treatments to alter the sex of their body and they are cross-dressers (Gilbert, 2014). **Inter-sex** persons are those who have both male and female sexual organs which creates confusion towards cultural and societal expectations of a distinctly male or female (Chase, 2006, p. 300). The medical science has identified them as hermaphrodites. Thereby, the collective union of the people of these categories is commonly known as LGBTI community. These days the LGBTI movement is gaining the momentum.

The Rationale

The development of any progressive countries remains halted if it fails to recognize the role of the people in nation building. When the people become reluctant and refrain from

contributing to the mainstream activities, development of the country is left behind. In the process of socialization among various groups of people, they feel differently that they are being excluded from the mainstream social activities and consider themselves of bearing injustice. "The LGBTIs are excluded and believed to have no capacity to contribute to society" (Pant as cited in BDS Annual Report, 2009). Therefore, an attempt has been made to cover such an issue with LGBTI people in Nepal in terms of their exclusion in Nepalese society. The study also shows its concern towards their empowering and bringing them to the inclusion in the process of formulating so called new Nepal.

Research Questions

- How do LGBTI perform everyday life activities?
- How have they been appraising their identity?
- How do LGBTI experience different forms of exclusion? In what ways do they affect their lives?

Research Design

My intention was to understand the complex world of lived experience of my participants and also understand how they perceive such experiences individually under the descriptive and analytical qualitative frame work which is social justice oriented approach that attempts to promote moral discourses for stimulating critical conversation about caste, gender, class, and society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this attempt, critical reflective and narrative as a resource for talk-in-interactions practices have been shaped and maintained order of the lived experiences of research participants within a socio-cultural action and interaction (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2008). For studying the lived experiences of LGBTI on social inclusion, I applied narrative inquiry methodology that is set in human stories of experience. The principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social; in relevant and meaningful ways (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10). It provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). It also reveals a sense of human agency and intention (Shulman, 1992 as cited in Dawson, 2007) and focuses on critical life events, exploring holistic views and holds valuable potential for researchers in a broad range of socio-cultural and economic structures (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

The etymology of narrative (Latin derivation, meaning 'to know') purports to represent knowledge or 'truth'. It is an expression of our lived experience that concerned; not with facts, but with plausibility turn is related to 'to know' (Dawson, 2007, p. 82). As stated above, the study has focused on the knowledge about the present status of the LGBTI members in terms of inclusion and/or exclusion embracing an open ended research design process that allows emergent research questions, emergent modes of inquiry and emergent reporting structure (Taylor, Settlemaier & Luitel, 2009).

While paraphrasing the French philosopher and an existentialist Jean- Paul Sartre from his book Words (1964): *People are always tellers of tales. They live surrounded by their stories and the stories of others; they see everything that happens to them through those stories and they try to live their lives as if they were recounting them*. While doing so, I heard both big and small stories of the participants to know how and how much of the narrative environment can be seen

from inside the narratives. I collected both primary and secondary nature of information. Primary information was collected through in-depth interview and observations and secondary information from different published articles, documentary films, document review and different books, journals and sites as well as unpublished materials like case studies, dissertations and other resources. As I knew, in terms of information generation, qualitative researcher participating in the field for day-to-day lives of the people for an extended period of time can also observe what is happening; listening to what is said and/or asking questions through informal interviews, collecting documents and artifacts as for collecting narrative information (Atkinson & Hamersley, 2007, p. 3).

I employed purposive criterion sampling method for selecting seven research participants (see in table 1) belonging to all categories of the LGBTI community. More specifically, parallel sampling design was applied as for making sample cases more public during selection of LGBTI characters (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Table 1. *Selection of the Participants*

S. N.	Categories	Kathmandu	Bhaktapur	Lalitpur	Participants
1	Lesbian	1	1	-	2
2	Gay	-	1	-	1
3	Bisexual	-	1	-	1
4	Trans	1	-	1	2
5	Inter-sex	1	-	-	1
Total		**3**	**3**	**1**	**7**

The above table shows that, out of my seven participants, two are lesbians, one is a gay, one is a bisexual, two are trans-persons and one is an inter-sex person. Besides their different categories in the LGBTI community, they also represent different status like ordinarily literate to highly educated, a layman to highly politically motivated ones. Considering the ethical aspect, I have kept their real identities confidential and used the pseudonyms where Niharika and Anita are lesbians, Harish is a gay person, Ojesh is a bisexual, Sony is a trans-person (i.e. man to woman), Binod is another trans-person (i.e. woman to man) and Vijay is an intersex person.

An Appraisal: Daily Life and Livelihood of LGBTI

The LGBTI's way of life is uniquely different than that of other straight gendered people. During my study, I was amazed by seeing their optimistic living despite the struggle out of frustration, depression and transition. They, as categorized differently, have different experience of their daily activities. However they have one thing common to them: they all have suffocative living as they are required to hide their real identity from the contemporary Nepalese societies. Before the society, their fate strikes a cruel blow. Whether they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex, they cannot reveal their identity before the straight gendered friendly Nepali societies.

As soon as their identity being known to the public, they are kicked out of their home and thrown to the street. In the reference of social identity theory their identity has been categorized by the socio-cultural structures rather than through their self-identification. Thereby such categorization process also has been establishing indifferent relationships among individuals in the society (Jenkins, 2008, p. 7).While looking their daily life from everyday life perspective, I affirm that because of minimal educational and job opportunities and maximal socio-cultural

stigmatization still they are compelled to perform comparatively less organized everyday life activities than normal people in Kathmandu Valley.

There is wide spread intolerance for LGBTI community in Nepalese society on the basis that they do not conform to set notions for male or female gender identity (BDS Annual Bulletin, 2014). They are suffering from a considerable socio-cultural stigmatization and discrimination. They encounter extensive prejudice, discrimination, and violence because of their sexual orientation. They may either confirm or challenge the prevailing order of nature and thus earn sympathy or scorn from contemporaries (Nye, 1999, p. 224). The social prejudice and discrimination to LGBTI excessively take place in rural areas of the country. This does not mean that they are not facing any discrimination in urban areas. They are struggling against their fate and are facing wide discrimination during employment and housing even in urban centers. People are not yet ready to offer job and house on rent to the people of this community. Although sexual orientation and gender identity have no relationship to workplace performance, the LGBTI people are not accepted easily in the open economic market. Their ability is not considered as of a great value. Our patriarchal societies are piggybacking the straight culture of gender overlooking the any other types of deviated ones. Firstly, as mentioned in the previous part, it is almost impossible for them to find the working place to offer job for them with revealing their real gender identity. Secondly, even if they get by hook or by crook, they have to face various types of social stigmas and harassment. Regarding the problems faced in renting room in Kathmandu, my participant shared her experience:

We cannot give our home on rent to hijara like you. We don't know about your issue. But for us you are neither male nor female. Then you are both. A misfortune occurs with our home due to your arrival. We have our grown sons and daughters; you may spoil them (Vijaya, 5th November, 2015 [FN]).

Emotional and Global Identity of LGBTI

In recent years, the identity of an individual has become remarkable and the scholars have taken an intense interest in questions concerning identity (Fearon, 1999). In socio-political life, we find the concept of "identity" at the center of lively debates in every major subfield. In political theory, questions of "identity" mark numerous arguments on gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in relation to liberalism and its alternatives (Young 1990; Taylor 1989 as cited in Fearon, 1999). The concept of "identity" in its present incarnation has a double sense. It refers to social categories and to the sources of an individual's self-respect or dignity at the same time (Fearon, 1999, p. 2). Above all, "identity" in its rationale concept reflects and evokes the idea that social categories are bound up with the bases of an individual's self-respect. I was interacting with my lesbian participant in the role of a trans-man and discussing her identity. While discussing, she expressed that:

When I think that my identity is "who I am," we mean "who I really am," in some sort of essential or fundamental way. Assessment begins with my question "How critically you are realizing your life?" Answer is that: I am neither a male nor a female. I am a third gender (Anita, 17th October, 2015 [INT]).

People, by their sexual and gender role are either male or female. But sometimes, nature does a terrible mistake that a child is neither male nor female but both or sometimes female soul

develops in the male's body or male's soul develops in the female's body. It leads them to undergo with the state of gender confusion. There is no perfect matching of their role and their soul. When they try to perform the role according to their soul, the society does not accept. They, though in the initial study of their status, become confused and they don't reveal it to anybody; remain hidden. When they become fully convinced about their gender role with their identity what they are or who they are, and they accept their identity. However, they live in suffocations that they cannot express it to their society, not even to their own family. Regarding this one of my interviewees says:

First of all, I am not exposed to many people with my real identity. Not even to my family members. That's why they take me as a girl only and I am a girl only. The only thing is I like girl only, not boy. I can't stay happy with boys. Some like me but they want to make relation with me only for sex but not for life which I don't want (Niharika, 20th October, 2015 [INT]).

In this process, though they feel the difference with their identity, they keep it confidential within themselves with the fear of the conservative society that society does not accept such role easily. Though western literature also says that homosexual/transsexual dimensions of human life, like all forms of universal diversities" (Hunt et al., 2012 as cited in Wikipedia). The age at which this awareness develops is not always clear, but it is likely to be well established by adolescence. Although having a negative social identity may threaten both collective and personal self-esteem, it does not lead inevitably to having low personal or collective self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989). However, in Nepali context they become compelled to live their life under pressure and suppression.

The life of LGBTI people is viewed unequal to that of straight gendered people, their identities are also grounded. The straight gendered dominating society does not let the identity of LGBTI people to germinate and grow up. The society cripples the real social identity of them. Despite the unconscious internalization and acceptance of the LGBTI identities, inequities in education and employment and limited access to educational opportunities prevent the expression of their behaviors (Harris, 1995, p. 279). They have to have a kind of struggle for establishing their perceived identity and they start seeking for institutional support which can offer them friendly environment where they can become open up and can start their comfortable and happy living.

Bridging the gap between self and others: Unlike others, LGBTI people still do not want to come forward in the society with their open identity. It is because of the social stigma and the fear of being bullied by others. Our Nepalese societies so far are not tolerant and friendly towards the LGBTI people. Therefore, they are always feeling inferior to other people and shameful with their identity. So, they hesitate to come to the social forefront and remain aloof and isolated. My participant said:

I can't tell about my identity to anybody other than the BDS people. I want to stay aloof. I can't socialize with others. I want to go to the cinema alone. I have been involving only in BDS for a long time. I rarely involve in other sectors. I don't participate in social functions (Anita, 17th October, 2015 [INT]).

Her tinny voice implies that they don't enjoy the company of the straight gendered people. They rarely interact with other people and even to work they cannot become adjusted in the public working places. While appraising texts from everyday life perspective, I understood before leaving her home she must have felt hopeless, lonely and frustrated. However even in the capital city, she could not socialize with other normal people. This symbolic context helps us to

understand everyday life activities of LGBTI in their origin areas where they have been rendering their daily activities without paying much attention.

It is not because they do not behave with others properly but because others do not respect them and their feelings and they do not try to understand them. Almost all the participants accepted that they do not participate in any political activities either as cadres or as leaders. They even do not participate in any socio-cultural functions except the fair and function of their own community. They understood very well that society is not accepting them till this moment. Therefore, for me without reforming existing socio-cultural structures they cannot participate in any social functions. They are struggling for establishing social identity for social acceptance. In the reference of social identity theory, identity cover 0-1 probability because social category is defined along stereotypical as held in culture (Stets & Bruke, 2000, p. 229) but the mentioned proposition might false hope to the members of LGBTI community.

BDS is only the comfortable place for them to be in which have been providing them an atmosphere they are seeking for and enhancing their living standard through enabling and empowering them in career development. It has been running the advocacy campaign for the rights of LGBTI people, struggling for the establishment of their identity in the society, creating pressure upon the government and other authorities concerned for the inclusion of their population in all the areas of state mechanism. If we appraise their effort from structure and agency theoretical view point, we can found they are developing agency relationship to perform some service on their behalf which involves delegating some decision making authority to the agent (Jensen, 1976). Consequently, some achievements have been made in the side of the LGBTI. Media support for their movement, youths ability for their self-exposure to the society, familial and social acceptance through gradual process, distribution of citizenship and other public rights through the indication of gender other than male or female.

By the legal order of the Supreme Court of Nepal, their inclusion provision incorporated in the state mechanism as gender and sexual minority population, counting in national census as other than male and female etc. are some recent achievements as results of the LGBTI movement. Hence, LGBTI people are trying to bridge the gap between their self and society through the participation in BDS.

Social structuration and the LGBTI destiny: Since human beings are born into some society, social structures do exist for individuals prior to them; but they do not exist independently of what we do; they are produced in that they are reproduced by our actions: they continue to exist only because they are incarnated in our activities. The capacity to exercise control over one's own thought processes, motivation, and action is a distinctively human characteristic because judgments and actions are partly self-determined and people can affect change in themselves and their situations through their own efforts (Bandura, 1989). Agency in general concept is the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices. One's agency is associated with one's independent capability or ability to act on one's will. This ability is affected by the cognitive belief structure which one has formed through one's interactions and the perceptions held by the society and the individual, of the structures and circumstances of the environment one is in and the position they are born into. People do not operate as autonomous agents, nor is their behavior wholly determined by situational influences. Rather, human functioning is a product of a reciprocal interplay of intrapersonal, behavioral, and environmental

determinants (Bandura, 1986). The newborn arrives without any sense of selfhood and personal agency. The self must be socially constructed through transactional experiences with the environment (Bandura, 2006).

Human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents which reproduces the structure. This means that there are a social structure-traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things; but it also means that these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently (Giddens, 2001). Similarly, Sidanius (1993) posits that all social institutions and cultures involve some form of hierarchy. Parents who succeed in education tend to have children who meet and even surpass their parents' accomplishments (Stephen, 2007). These folk phrases presented narratively summed up family characterizations-some complimentary, others definitely not. They all infer that parents are to blame for how kids turn out-for better or worse.

There are several notions based on orthodoxy prevailing in Nepali societies. Prevalent religions in Nepalese societies generally are negative towards the orientations of the LGBTI people. There are many different types of actions they may take: this can range from quietly discouraging homosexual activity, explicitly forbidding same-sex sexual practices among adherents and actively opposing social acceptance of homosexuality, to execution which the LGBTI people are primarily adopting as their occupation. Religious fundamentalism has been found to correlate positively with heterosexuality. Many argue that homosexual actions which the LGBTI prefer to perform are sinful, rather than the state of being homosexual itself. To this end, some discourage labeling individuals according to sexual orientation:

It is our obligation to go to the street for sex activities. We do not get job anywhere else neither we are respected in the society. Various superstitious notions are imposed upon us and we are ill-treated (Simran, 15th October, 2015 [FN]).

It is heart touching that they are victimized by the prevailing social and religious orthodoxy against the sexual orientation of LGBTI people. Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions (APA, 2008). Therefore, they have formed the community of their own popularly known as LGBTI according to the principle of unionism and they have been carrying out the collective campaign against the orthodoxy and for the social change. Theoretically it can be said that their consciousness is transforming from practical to the discursive level thereby they are struggling for living with identity and dignity (Kaspersen, 2000)

Common Voice for Social Inclusion

The third research question "Why have social exclusion practices been affecting the lives of LGBTI? And how are they playing agency role for the betterment of their living?" focuses more on condition of the access on both mobile as well as immobile property, their access on formal, informal or skill development educational activities, development of their community sentiments backed up by the acculturation and international law.

Property Rights: No! No!! No!!! One of my participants ferociously commented that: *No, I don't have any personal property. The salary I get here is not sufficient. Sending some home, managing the necessities here, just enough.* This remark was made by an official in the informal

communication who was employed in the office of the Federation of Gender and Sexual Minorities, an umbrella institution of the various organizations established for the welfare of the gender and sexual minorities (LGBTIs). Regarding the property keeping condition of the LGBTIs, it is beyond imagination till for the time being. The exhibition of their real identity as LGBTI is almost taboo in the Nepalese societies. The gender confusion and their deviated sexual orientation bring them in conflict with the family members and the members of their societies as well.

They are thus, compelled to abandon their home and go away where they are not known by the people who they are. It is often very hard for them to find the job in the economic labour market due to their identity. Even if they get the employment, it is not easy for them to sustain in their working place as they have to undergo with several types of disgraceful circumstances. They are harassed, tortured and even expelled out of work upon the identification of their gender. Therefore, they see no hope of life and undergo with frustration and eventually some even commit suicide. There is no point of getting the property (inheritance) with them. Their narrow possibility of getting a dignified job with high pay rate bars them from accumulating enough capital to purchase the immobile properties and use them. Their income is hardly sufficient to manage the basic needs of their own.

Their Education: Man Purposes, God Disposes: One of my participants emotionally expressed that: I was disliked in school and at home as well so, I could not study well. If anybody helps me, I wish to study (Anita, 17th October, 2015 [FN]). Hearing from most of my participants, it is understood that they had to suffer a lot in school while getting formal education. They would not find the environment of their school gender friendly. They have the pain of dislike at their own home on the one hand, on the other hand they are bullied by their friends, even by their own teachers who are supposed to provide them with love and care equally like the other children admitted to the school. But their failure to do so pushed them to be out of school. Here, it seems that the LGBTI children do not get the social protection; their own family members and their own teachers at school both the responsible one to protect their children and ensure them with the fundamental rights as guaranteed by the constitution. Thus, such a discriminatory situation has been stimulating their personal identity of LGBTI community members made them self-reflexive and classifying self (Stets & Bruke, 2000, p. 225). They are thus thoughtfully realizing the violation of their educational right as well as fundamental rights mentioned in the constitution.

They want to study but they don't have support. Some others have studied up to higher degree despite the social difficulties that they had to struggle quite a lot. Hearing to them, even if they studied with much difficulty, their certificates cannot help them find the job and social respect as their documents do not match the gender role they are with. From the notion of my participant:

When I chose to study, I found an unsuitable environment and I was expelled from school and colleges, so where is equality and right? I was always suspected in the exam center. I was commented as a fake student taking an exam and the superintendent used to come with camera in his hand and take photo also considering me as a boy appearing in exam in the name of a girl (Vijaya, 15th November, 2015 [INT]).

This is a painful story of my participant who was born as an intersex child. He was considered a daughter by the family and given the name of a girl accordingly. He got the admission in the school with the name of a girl only but later his growth took place as a boy; boy's indicatives developed in the body which put him into difficulty in receiving formal education.

Since the formal education becomes quite terrible thing to achieve, they are more dependent upon informal process of acquiring life skills. However some of those who have reached the contact of the institutions like BDS, they have undergone with some skill development trainings as well so that this may make them skilful and capable and motivating those people for applying diversified livelihood strategies and earning for day to day life (Kaspersen, 2000, p. 34).

United We Stand Divided We Fall: The community of my participants firmly believes in the unity as the strength. So, they have been organized in institutional way and formed the union ship. Due to social stigmatization and discrimination, third genders are having difficulty in building their capabilities as they have always been subjected to pain and cruelty. Due to ongoing social humiliation, they are compelled to remain suppressed and inferior. Consequently, they are lagging behind in terms of their own development and thus the societies are also failure to be benefitted from their potential human capabilities. However, my participants are quite optimistic and have progressive thought putting the bright future as target in the days to come. They have been raising their voice and blowing the trumpet for their inclusion through the change in existing state policy favoring the straight genders. In the reference of identity theory, members of LGBTI community understood that social identity is a cognitive and motivational process which can be establish through collective action, group cohesiveness (Turner et al., 1987 as cited in Stets & Bruke, 2000). The continuous failure of our conservative Nepalese societies to understand and experience what they have things like injustice, stigma, discrimination, and torture continued. These people expand their social network. They became bonded together under the umbrella of Blue Diamond Society (BDS) since 2001. By this, they became able to share their sorrows and problems. By belonging to BDS, they have been able to build up their knowledge, skills and capacities. So, they have become empowered and have expanded their strong networking in forty major cities of Nepal. They have been getting united to fight against anything they have negative impacts upon them and their community.

Conclusion

The term LGBTI is a common term used to indicate the people of the community having multiple orientations other than that of male and female. Since they fail to fulfill the general expectation of the society, they are considered to be the deviant and abnormal. Consequently, their existence is often taken for granted. Because of the different orientation they are not easily accepted by the family and are compelled to have an adverse familial relationship, where their feeling and emotions are often ridiculed. Similarly, they even had limited life enhancing opportunities i.e. many members of the community have been sacked out from their jobs, they don't have conducive environment to acquire formal education and they are also not getting identity cards based on their orientation. They were abandoned by the families. Therefore, many of them go through personal distress, frustration and the suicidal thought.

Usually, majority of the members of the community feel like leaving their home and local society after the revelation of their identity because they are aware of the fact that their problems will not be understood by the family nor by the society. So, they would remain deprived of their parental property and the social positioning. Existing societal norms and values remain barrier for their inclusion. They are not particularly recognized in the social roles with dignity. Since their orientation is different from others maintaining dual status, they are facing many problems both

mentally/physically and socially. For their different kinds of gestures they have, they are often teased by using obscene words like Hijaras or Chhakkas. They are never encouraged to take a lead naturally in the social activities but are rather humiliated. On the other hand, the government does not seem to be protective about these people rather the authority appears violent upon them. Country's laws and policies are not in favor of them. They are not treated like the citizens of the country. They remain totally exclusionary despite some inclusionary provisions being adopted by the state.

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