



Construction of Gender Stereotypes and Its Implications in Development Practices

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Abstract

Gender, as both a theoretical construct and a lived reality, remains a contested and evolving concept. Following a review method along with scientific readings, this paper articulates that feminist theorists have critically engaged with the term, challenging its binary understanding and emphasizing its fluidity. Gender is not merely a social identity but intersects with law, politics, and culture, shaping societal structures and individual experiences. The origins of rigid gender roles can be traced back to the Victorian era, which reinforced the division of public and private spheres—assigning men to public engagement and women to domestic responsibilities. In deeply patriarchal societies like Nepal, gender discrimination persists, perpetuated by ingrained stereotypes and biases that begin in early childhood and extend to professional and leadership domains. Notably, women's internalization of societal norms further reinforces gender inequality. Despite progress, global statistics indicate that only about 25 percent of leadership positions are occupied by women, reflecting continued disparities in compensation and executive opportunities. Given the deeply embedded nature of gender discrimination, education emerges as a fundamental tool in dismantling stereotypes and fostering gender equality.

Keywords: Gender, stereotype, patriarchal, discrimination, feminism, development



Introduction

Gender infers about the power relations of society in terms of gender roles. It refers to the socially constructed roles, behavior, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys and men and gender diverse people (Lindqvist et al., 2021). It influences how to perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact and the distribution of power and resources in society. Gender refers to the socially constructed attributes associated with women and men, including norms, roles, and relationships between them. It is not fixed but varies across societies and can evolve over time. The concept of gender encompasses social, economic and political constructions (Sapkota & Dahal, 2022). It cannot be separated from the idea and practice of gender role. Gender equality refers to the social attributes and opportunities linked to being female or male, as well as the relationships between women and men, and girls and boys. These attributes are socially constructed and acquired through the process of socialization. They are context-specific, time-bound, and subject to change. Gender shapes societal expectations, permissible actions, and the value assigned to individuals based on their gender within a given context.

Gender roles are structural and contextual. They are historically conditioned in society favoring male supremacy and power (D'Acunto et al., 2021). The term gender role was first coined by John Mooney in 1955 in the course of his study of intersex individuals to describe manners in which individuals express their status as male and female. Gender roles are changeable, it is learned, negotiated or contested subjects. Andocentric is male-focused and gynocentric is female-focused. All the things we face in today's world are Andocentric. The society is patrifocal along with the androcentric and male worldview structurally rooted in patriarchal norms.

Gender stereotype refers to the socially constructed roles ascribed to women and men as opposed to socio-economic, political and cultural contexts and are affected by other factors including age, class and ethnicity. Besides differences in roles between women and men, roles among men and women differ as well, while women and men may also combine different roles individually over time or even simultaneously (Priyashantha et al., 2023). Although women are seen as victims in general in conflict situations. They are often mothers, breadwinners, combatants or peace activists. Gender equality relates to the equal rights, relationships, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys regarded as a human rights issue and considered a pre-condition for an indication of sustainable, people-centered development. In this context present paper aims to assess the relationship and its impact between gender stereotypes and development practices.

Methodology

The research method was purely qualitative. It is mainly based on the secondary data. The articles from Government surveys includes national demographic and health surveys, population censuses and labor surveys that provide data on gender disparities in education,



health, employment and decision making. The data from many NGOs and INGOs were surveyed such as Worec, Blue Diamond society, UNV, UNW, UN and World Bank. The sites are cited and proven in the references. It has discussed the feminist theory and woman-based approach, principles and indicators which will help in the development. This paper is based on the descriptive and analytical methods of collecting secondary data of information. It is based on the quality of research using already published resources and journal articles, case study, books, and national newspapers as a secondary data basis. The findings are drawn from the discussions and analyses that have been linked to development practices and discourses and does not capture the lived experiences of those directly affected by gender disparity. Without the voices of women and marginalized groups the data may miss important dimensions of gender inequality. Some secondary data may not provide gender specific breakdowns or fail to capture nuanced aspects of gender roles and stereotype such as masculinity and feminine in Nepali culture. There might be cultural and selection bias where reports only focus on women empowerment and economic participation while less attention is paid to how men might be stereotypes or gender roles affect transgender, non binary or sexuality minority individuals in Nepal.

Results and Discussion

Feminist Perspective of Stereotypes

From a feminist perspective, gender stereotypes are viewed as socially constructed narratives that perpetuate power imbalances by prescribing rigid roles for men and women. These stereotypes often confine women to domestic, caregiving, and passive roles while positioning men as active, decision-making figures in public and economic spheres. Feminist scholars argue that such stereotypes not only limit individual agency but also institutionalize gender inequality, shaping societal expectations and behaviours in ways that disadvantage women (Butler, 1990). The perpetuation of these stereotypes within various sectors, including politics, education, and the workforce, undermines the goal of gender equality, reinforcing structures that marginalize women and other gender minorities. Feminism advocates for deconstructing these stereotypical narratives to create a more equitable and inclusive society, where individuals can express their identities and pursue opportunities free from the constraints of gendered expectations.

Indeed, feminism has been a popular word in politics more than gender. After feminism took the ground in the world there came different types of feminism such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, black/white feminism, and transgender rights post feminism that have been making a large difference in today's world (Lawford-Smith, 2022). The history of gender stereotyping is Marxism which is the cornerstone of many post-modern philosophies. Marx, in his theory, saw all humans as equal without regard for gender or class. Nationalism embraced new gender roles these phenomena came together and gradually toppled the Victorian gender stereotyping era. For example, Lady Liberty came to represent partly the proposed new freedom for women. Gender stereotyping is still prevalent across modern society, as Victorian gender roles haven't fully disappeared. In a study conducted by



Nepalese Women's Development Forum (NWDF) 70% of rural women reported that their primary responsibility at home was household chores, whereas 65% of men claimed to have no involvement in these tasks. This reinforces the notion that women's roles are confined to the private spheres.

Gender Stereotypes and intersectionality of caste, ethnicity and sex

Gender in Nepal as in many other societies do not exist in isolation. It intersects with various social categories such as caste, ethnicity and sexuality creating layered forms of discrimination and privilege. Understanding how gender intersects with these social categories is important when addressing inequality. Caste remains a deeply entrenched social structure in Nepal particularly among Hindu communities. The caste system is a hierarchical system that categorizes people into distinct social groups, historically defined by their work and the social status ascribed to them. A recent study by the Nepal Dalit Association (NDWA) found that 68% of Dalit women reported experiencing caste based violence including sexual violence in addition to gender based violence. Moreover these women also face exclusion from higher education and well-paying jobs reinforcing marginalized status in society even though policies are made for the Dalits it is not fully practiced and articulated. Many ethnic women may face cultural expectations that limit their autonomy and opportunities for instance in many ethnic communities' women are expected to marry and bear children and also face barriers to accessing healthcare, education and employment opportunities further limiting their ability to challenge gender norms. A recent report by the International Labor Organization (ILO) on ethnic minorities in Nepal highlighted the significant barriers faced by ethnic women in accessing employment. Women from marginalized ethnic groups often face discrimination in both urban and rural labor markets limiting their financial decisions. LGBTQ++ individuals in Nepal, especially those who identify as transgender face unique challenges too. Despite the legal battles discrimination and defamation based on the sexuality remain prevalent. Even though Nepal was one of the first countries to legalize the third gender in 2007, transgender people still face systematic barriers in terms of healthcare, legal recognition and social inclusion. A study by the Blue Diamond Society (BDS), an LGBTQ++ advocacy organization in Nepal found that transgender individuals and sexual minorities faced severe challenges in accessing healthcare, particularly gender affirming treatments. The same study found more than 40% of sexual minorities experienced verbal and physical abuse from family members and many reported being forced into heterosexual marriages due to societal pressures. By understanding how these social categories interact policy makers and activists can develop more inclusive and effective strategies to combat inequality. Nepal's progress toward gender equality must take into account the unique challenges faced by individuals who experience multiple forms of marginalization. In particular, concerted efforts are required to address the compound disadvantage faced by Dalit women, ethnic minorities and sexual minorities.



Gender Stereotypes in Societal Norms and Cultural Practices

Gender stereotypes are deeply ingrained in societal norms and cultural practices, shaping the roles and expectations of men and women. These stereotypes are often reinforced through traditional customs, language, and rituals that define the perceived roles of individuals based on gender. For instance, women are frequently expected to fulfil caregiving roles, while men are associated with leadership and decision-making. In many communities, cultural practices such as dowry systems, preference for male children, and restrictions on women's mobility reinforce gender biases. These norms not only limit women's agency but also create structural barriers to their participation in social and economic development. As a result, gender stereotypes continue to shape individual identities and influence perceptions of capability and worth (Steward et al., 2021).

This internalization of gender norms operates through both subtle and overt social mechanisms, shaping individuals' perceptions of themselves and others from an early age. Social institutions such as family, education, and media reinforce these expectations, making them appear natural rather than constructed. As a result, individuals often police their own behaviours to align with societal standards, fearing judgment or exclusion (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2022). Women who assert themselves in male-dominated fields may be labelled as aggressive or unfeminine, discouraging them from pursuing leadership roles. Similarly, men who engage in caregiving or emotional expression may be ridiculed for failing to adhere to traditional masculinity. This self-regulation sustains deeply embedded power structures, making it difficult to challenge and dismantle gender hierarchies, ultimately impeding broader efforts toward gender equity in social, economic, and political spheres.

A study by Un Women examined the experiences of women migrants in Nepal highlighting how migration challenges traditional gender roles while migration offers women financial independence and increased decision making power it also leads to social stigma and altered family dynamics. The system underscores the tension between traditional gender expectation and the evolving roles of women in Nepalese society. Domestic violence remains a pervasive issue in Nepal with the traditional and cultural taboos. with women often facing violence due to traditional beliefs about male dominance and female submission. A survey by the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) found 53% of women in Nepal experienced some kind of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Many women do not report the abuse due to fear of social stigma or retaliation, reflecting the gender stereotypes that women should endure these conditions silently. In many communities menstruating women are subjected to the practise of Chaupadi, where they are sent to live in isolation in small huts made out of mud during their menstrual cycles due to this belief that they are impure. Though illegal these practices still persist in western Nepal. A report from Human Rights Watch (HRW) in 2019 highlighted that more that 15000 women in western Nepal still undergo Chaupadi every year, despite a legal ban on the practices. This illustrates how culture and religion has blinded the people.



Gender Stereotypes in Education and Skill Development

The education system plays a crucial role in shaping gender perceptions from an early age. Textbooks, curricula, and classroom interactions often reflect and reinforce gender biases. For instance, male figures are more frequently portrayed in leadership positions, while female characters are depicted in caregiving or passive roles. These subtle reinforcements contribute to the formation of gendered aspirations among students. Moreover, access to education and skill development opportunities remains unequal for men and women. Girls in rural areas often face barriers to education due to societal expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities over schooling. Similarly, gender norms influence the selection of academic disciplines, with women being underrepresented in STEM fields and men in caregiving professions (Master, 2021).

Educational institutions and skill development programs must actively work to dismantle gender biases by promoting inclusive curricula, encouraging diverse role models, and creating environments that support gender equity (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Integrating gender-sensitive pedagogy and critically examining existing materials can help challenge stereotypical representations and foster a more balanced understanding of gender roles. Furthermore, mentorship programs and leadership initiatives for underrepresented groups can empower individuals to break free from societal constraints. Without such efforts, traditional stereotypes will continue to limit individuals' potential and hinder broader social progress, reinforcing existing inequalities in professional and personal spheres. A project by the NGO skill share utilized football to empower girls and challenge gender stereotypes in Nepal. The initiative held coaching, workshops enabling girls to assert their rights and raise awareness about gender-based violence. Participants reported increased confidence and a better understanding of gender equality demonstrating how sports can serve as a platform for challenging traditional gender norms. According to the Nepal Demographic and health survey (NDHS) 2021, the literacy rate for women in rural areas is 59.4% compared to 77.3% for men. The gender disparity in higher education is also notable with women making up only 43% of total University graduates.

Gender Stereotypes in Labor Market Participation

Gendered expectations significantly shape labour market participation by reinforcing occupational segregation and wage disparities. Women are disproportionately concentrated in lower-paying, informal, or part-time employment sectors, while men dominate higher-paying and leadership roles (Farré et al., 2023). These disparities stem from deeply ingrained societal norms that dictate appropriate roles for men and women rather than purely individual career choices. The perception that women are primary caregivers has resulted in workplace structures that fail to accommodate their labour force participation adequately. The lack of maternity leave, flexible work arrangements, and childcare support often forces women to navigate career interruptions or opt for roles with reduced job security and benefits.

Conversely, men encounter barriers when seeking more active caregiving roles, as rigid gender norms discourage them from taking paternity leave or prioritizing family



responsibilities. Workplace cultures and policies frequently reinforce the expectation that men should be the primary breadwinners, limiting their ability to engage in domestic roles without professional or social repercussions (D'Acunto et al., 2021). These entrenched gender norms create a cycle that perpetuates disparities in earnings, job opportunities, and career advancement for both men and women. Addressing these structural inequalities requires policies that promote gender-inclusive labour practices, such as equitable parental leave, workplace flexibility, and the dismantling of occupational stereotypes that constrain economic opportunities based on gender. Following the 2015 earthquake, Anima Dhakal a Civil Engineer exemplified the breaking of gender stereotypes in Nepal. Despite societal expectation that engineering is male dominated field, Dhakal contributed significantly to the reconstruction efforts in Sindhupalchowk. Her involvement challenged traditional perceptions of women's roles in engineering and disaster management. In a landmark decision, Nepal's Supreme Court recognized Rukshana Kapali, a transgender woman, as legally female. This ruling allowed transgender individual to self-declare their gender without the need of the medical verification. A Druk Amitabha Monastery in Nepal has trained nuns in Kungfu a practise solely for men. This initiative empowers women by providing them with physical strength and confidence enabling them to challenge the expectations raised to them by the society. According to the international Labor Organization (ILO) the gender pay gap in Nepal stands at 32% with women in urban areas earning significantly less than their male counterparts. Women hold only 14% of parliamentary seats, highlighting the lack of gender diversity in leadership. Nepali media, television shows, films and advertisements often reinforce traditional gender roles where women are depicted as nurturing mothers or devoted wives while men are shown as strong independent figures. A study by the National Media Council found that in Nepali television dramas 72% of female characters were depicted as mothers, wives, or daughters while only 15% of female characters had professional careers, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes.

Gender Stereotypes in Political Representation and Decision-Making

Despite progress in women's political representation, gender stereotypes continue to influence perceptions of leadership. Women in politics often face higher scrutiny, gendered criticism, and cultural biases that question their capabilities. Political participation is frequently hindered by societal beliefs that leadership is inherently masculine, creating obstacles for women seeking positions of influence (Sweet-Cushman, 2022). These biases manifest in media portrayals, voter preferences, and institutional barriers that undermine women's credibility and electability. As a result, female leaders often have to work harder to gain legitimacy, facing expectations to balance assertiveness with traditional notions of femininity. Overcoming these challenges requires systemic changes, including gender-sensitive policies, mentorship programs, and efforts to challenge deeply embedded cultural perceptions of leadership.

Furthermore, gender quotas and affirmative action policies, while instrumental in increasing women's representation, sometimes reinforce the notion that female leaders are exceptions



rather than equals (Sapkota, 2024). This perpetuates the idea that women in politics must work harder to prove their competence, whereas men are assumed to be naturally suited for leadership roles. Achieving gender parity in political representation requires dismantling stereotypes that equate leadership with masculinity. Encouraging women's participation at all levels of governance, challenging media portrayals that reinforce biases, and fostering mentorship programs for aspiring female leaders are essential steps toward a more inclusive political landscape.

Implications of Gender Stereotypes on Development Practices

Gender stereotypes significantly shape development practices, influencing how policies are formulated, programs are executed, and resources are allocated. A failure to address gender dynamics within development frameworks can inadvertently sustain or exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities. For example, economic empowerment initiatives that overlook women's unpaid labour and caregiving roles may unintentionally burden women further, rather than empowering them (Lahiri-Dutt, 2023). Inadequate attention to these gendered realities often results in skewed program designs that fail to address the multifaceted challenges women face in economic spheres. This oversight underscores the importance of integrating gender considerations into the core of development projects to avoid reinforcing stereotypes.

Infrastructure development initiatives are another area where gender stereotypes often manifest, especially in sectors traditionally dominated by men, such as transportation, energy, and industry. By focusing primarily on these male-centred sectors including budget and infrastructures, development agendas neglect critical areas that directly benefit women, such as healthcare, education, and childcare services (Khalifa & Scarparo, 2021). This skewed prioritization perpetuates a gendered division of resources, limiting women's access to essential services that enhance their well-being and contribute to broader development goals. When the infrastructure that supports women's roles in society is neglected, gender inequalities in both economic and social spheres are deepened.

To move toward more inclusive and sustainable development, it is essential to adopt a gender-responsive approach that challenges stereotypes and seeks equitable access to opportunities. Incorporating gender analysis into policy formulation, ensuring the active participation of women in decision-making processes, and addressing institutional barriers that perpetuate gender inequality are crucial steps in achieving this goal (Kabeer, 2019). Such an approach not only fosters equality but also ensures that development practices align with the lived experiences of all individuals, irrespective of gender.

Strategies for Challenging Gender Stereotypes in Development

Addressing gender stereotypes requires a multi-faceted approach that includes education, policy reform, and community engagement (Steward et al., 2021). Raising awareness through media campaigns, school curricula, and workplace training programs can help challenge deeply ingrained biases and promote alternative narratives of gender roles. Additionally, policy interventions that promote gender-sensitive development practices are essential.



Governments and development agencies must implement policies that address structural inequalities, such as equal pay laws, gender-responsive budgeting, and targeted support for women entrepreneurs.

Community engagement plays a vital role in transforming gender norms at the grassroots level by fostering inclusive mindsets and dismantling societal barriers. Local initiatives that actively involve both men and women in discussions about gender equality can challenge deep-rooted biases and promote collective responsibility for social change (Bullough et al., 2022). Educational programs, awareness campaigns, and participatory decision-making processes help shift perceptions about traditional gender roles, encouraging more equitable distribution of responsibilities in households, workplaces, and leadership spaces. Moreover, engaging community leaders, educators, and youth in gender-sensitive dialogues creates a ripple effect, influencing broader societal attitudes over time. Sustainable change requires not only policy reforms but also grassroots efforts that empower individuals to recognize and challenge gender-based discrimination in their daily lives.

Synthesis

Feminism has long critiqued the pervasive role of gender stereotypes in shaping societal structures, particularly in the realm of development. It argues that traditional gender roles confine individuals, especially women, to predefined positions of subordination, which hampers their ability to fully participate in economic, political, and social spheres. Gender stereotypes portray women as inherently suited for caregiving and domestic duties, while men are seen as natural leaders and breadwinners. These stereotypical portrayals not only limit women's opportunities but also legitimize systems of oppression by reinforcing unequal power dynamics (Lorber, 1994). Feminist scholars argue that challenging these stereotypes is crucial for dismantling patriarchal structures and ensuring that development strategies do not perpetuate gender inequalities.

In development practice, gender stereotypes often lead to skewed policies and programs that fail to address the needs and rights of women. For example, economic development projects may prioritize male-dominated sectors such as infrastructure and industry, overlooking the critical contributions of women in unpaid labour and caregiving (Moser, 2018). Development initiatives that fail to recognize the gendered division of labour not only perpetuate economic disparities but also marginalize women's voices in decision-making processes. Feminist perspectives advocate for integrating gender analysis into the design of development policies to ensure that women's experiences and needs are adequately addressed. Without this shift, development efforts risk reinforcing the very inequalities they aim to resolve.

Moreover, a key aspect of feminist theory is the emphasis on women's empowerment and autonomy, which can only be realized when gender stereotypes are confronted and dismantled. Women-friendly and gender-responsive perspectives advocate for policies that recognize the intersectionality of gender with other social factors, such as class, race, and geography, and aim to create inclusive development outcomes (Chant, 2016). By ensuring that women's voices are included in decision-making processes and by addressing systemic



barriers to equality, these perspectives seek to redistribute power in a way that fosters real social and economic transformation. This approach is integral to achieving sustainable development that benefits all members of society, not just those who conform to traditional gender norms.

A gender-responsive approach in development goes beyond simply addressing women's needs; it aims to reshape the power relations that perpetuate gender-based inequalities. This approach involves promoting policies and interventions that enable women to access resources, education, and employment opportunities on an equal footing with men (Kabeer, 2019). Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of creating an environment where both women and men can break free from restrictive gender roles. By shifting development practices towards gender-responsive policies, societies can ensure that women are not only beneficiaries of development but also active agents in shaping their futures.

Ultimately, to address the complex issues of gender inequality, a holistic and transformative feminist approach is necessary. This approach must not only challenge gender stereotypes but also actively promote women-friendly, gender-responsive policies that foster an environment of equality and empowerment. As development continues to be shaped by the voices of various actors, including international organizations, governments, and local communities, it is critical that these efforts challenge entrenched gender norms and work toward inclusive development that is equitable for all.

Conclusion

This study finds that in the world of digital era, women and men have equally been aware of the rights. Gender stereotype seems like a normal issue but women fight little wars every day. Big movements definitely has made an impact on gender equality but these restrictions, degradation and violence is embedded in our society and they appear natural but they are not natural. Social movements and campaigns like #BringBackOurGirls, #EverydaySexism, #FeministFriday, #MeToo, #TimesUp, #womenShould, #HeForShe, #The Dalit Lives Matter, #Ending caste Discrimination, #TransNepal, #NepalPride, #GaiJatraPride, #OutandProud and so on have been held for the rights of the women, LGBTQI++ and Dalit. Gender stereotype has affected females throughout their lives and is still existent. It is a deeply rooted cause that has engraved the patriarchal society the power and encouragement to rule. The children are brainwashed from the very beginning of their existence. The sad part is many people don't realize that they are practicing the wrong practices over their lives. Until and unless these types of taboos eradicate completely from the society the gender stereotype will prevail. The provision of good education where teachers receive trainings in gender sensitive pedagogy, equal raise in corporate, media, education and health sectors, promote gender sensitive media and communication like fund campaigns that highlight the contributions of women and men across all fields (STEM, Politics, etc). Government should conduct audits to monitor the implementation of Gender Responsive Budget and ensure swift and fair and legal action. Early childhood is when many gender norms are first internalized schools should partner with offering trainings on avoiding gender bias in play materials, toys, and classroom



activities. inspiration and opportunities starting from their parents can help build gender neutral attitude towards the society. Only implementing the policies for gender equality will not do justice awareness and practice should be prevalent. The development only takes place when such social problems are eradicated.

Gender stereotypes remain a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and sustainable development. Their influence extends across various sectors, shaping individual opportunities, labour market participation, political representation, and access to resources. Addressing these deeply embedded biases requires proactive efforts through education, policy reforms, and community-driven initiatives. By challenging traditional gender norms and adopting gender-sensitive development strategies, societies can create more inclusive environments that enable individuals to realize their full potential regardless of gender. Recognizing and dismantling these stereotypes is not just a matter of social justice but a critical step toward sustainable and equitable development.

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