

The Badi: Changing Social Norms and Empowerment

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This article is based on the study conducted in Narayan municipality of Dailekh district. Main argument of the article is socially constructed and changing in social norms makes change in relationship. It is perceived that Badi community represents woman -friendly community. They wish to have a daughter rather than son. However, now Badi community has changed its norms. Now, Badi community prefer son to a daughter. In the past, Badi women used to dance, sing and run their family. However, now, due to availability of different types of musical system and instruments, Badi women's profession has replaced by modern entertainment system. With their profession lost, Badi male took lead of the family care. One of the oldest respondents of Badi community has mentioned "pahile hami khanekura jamma garna gauma jantheu hamra badda mantha hamro bato kurera basthe, aajkal ulto vako xa hami bato herxau" (in the past women used to go village to collect foods and their husbands were waiting respectfully to them but now just opposite, men are breadwinner and women are dependent on men). It has been taken that the Badi community as their namesake Badhyabadak (playing a musical instrument) as entertainer, story teller and singer but due to easily available music system and other instruments of entertain their professions became in danger. Badi community changed their occupation as a worker, daily wage labor, driver and other. Thus, slowly Badi women are subjugated, oppressed, dominated and disempowered.

Key Words: Social norms, Badi community, social location, occupational change.

Introduction

"Yatr naryasto pojyantay ramantay tatra Devta" where women are provided honor, gods are pleased in that society" (Manu, *Manusmriti*, 3/56).

Manu was not biased to women. We can see women empowerment in Manu's Law book. But slowly human beings forgot that verses and started woman subjugation, domination and suppression (*Manusmriti*, n.d. 3/56). In the past, Badi woman were bread winner and in an honour by the Badi male. However, slowly due to social change, Badi women lost their singing and dancing profession, with that they also lost their dignity. Now, Badi male started dominate Badi woman.

Then term Badi is derived from the Sanskrit word *Vadyabadak* meaning, one who plays musical instruments (UN, 2012). The Badi came to Nepal in the fourteenth century and settled mainly in the western part of the country. Like their namesakes in India, they managed a living as entertainers, performing songs and dances at festivals, weddings or private parties (Cox, 1992).

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My research method was mix method, however, mostly qualitative in nature. In Nepal, mainly, Badi are residing in mid and far western regions. Total populations of Badi according to CBS 2011 are 38603 among them male 18298 and female 20305. In Dailekh district the total population of Badi is 798 whereas male are 392 and female are 406, among them 40 female (14-49) and their husband were taken as a sample of the study. Descriptive research design with mostly qualitative method was used. In depth interview and non-participant observation was used, case studies were conducted for the supplementary technique of the study. Quantitative data were also used but not for statistical testing, however this data were to support qualitative data rather than to find out association or statistical testing.

Discussion

Following the findings of the research, literacy rate of Badi in Dailekh was 17 percent and female literacy rate was only 14 percent among them all were under SLC. However, their main source of livelihood was their role as entertainers and instrument suppliers but due to easily available music from Radio, TV and music players, their profession was in threat. Badi women are mostly involved in prostitution as their social norms, (Cox, 1992; 1994, Gurung, 1982; & Gibson, 2003). Badi community got threat from the adapting process when their profession did no longer exist and those who were in the city area some of them started prostitution for their survival. But in my study area nobody was involved in such that prostitution and my argument is that social norms also depend on social location. Because the location where Badi were residing was village, farmers were there. Badi community started making mud pipe to smoke, statue of gods and drums which were sold in the village to run their lives. Among the respondent's majority of the respondents stated that they were suffered from domestic violence (87.5) and only (12.5) respondents who were not suffered from domestic violence (please see table 1 for detail).

Cox (1994), conducted a research on the Badi: Prostitution as a Social Norm among an Untouchable Caste of Western Nepal. The objective of the research was to find out the social norms about prostitution. He believes that Badi women are the primary breadwinners in their society. They work as prostitutes, beginning at puberty (at an average age of 13 or 14) and continuing until they become too old to attract any more customers, or, in very rare cases, make enough money. The market for prostitutes continued to grow throughout the 1970s and 1980s as the Tarai 's population increased, and more Nepali men found out about the Badis' thriving commercial sex industry. According to him, by the late 1980's many Nepali men from Narayanghat, Pokhara, Kathmandu, Biratnagar, and other towns in central and eastern Nepal, were taking the long trip out west for the sole purpose of having sex with Badi women. Cox (1994) further says;

Until the 1950s the Badi were primarily supported by rulers of three principalities; Jajarkot, Salyan and Musikot, and to a lesser extent by some wealthy high caste landlords.... These patrons provided the Badi with basic needs: housing, land, clothing and food. In return the Badi provided them with entertainment and sex. At this time, however, Badi women limited their prostitution to patrons and some of

their male relatives. After the overthrow of the Rana regime (in 1950) and subsequent establishment of King Mahindra's panchayat government, rulers and landlords in west Nepal were stripped of much of their previous authority. (p. 20)

Badi community's social norm was not the prostitution and firstly, they were entertainer, music player, dancer, singer and story teller. Some of them may have involved in sexual activities with patrons. Secondly, due to population growth, they all were not dependent on patrons some were independently living in house because they were skilled in fishing, making idol of gods and goddesses, making mud pipe which was necessary for smoking such as *Sulpa* (mud pipe) *Chilim* (smoking case which is fitted with Hukka) and *Madal* (musical instrument drum). Lastly, Badi community's profession was replaced due to abolishment of patronage that was secondary but primary causes were; due to easily available music system such as Radio, TV replaced their singing and dancing. Seggrets (smoking) replaced *Sulpa* and *Chilim*, readymade idol replaced handicrafts Idol. Due to their profession lost some of them started agriculture and to date some of the Badi providing *Sulpa* in remote village but fewer in number and *Madal*. My argument is that, Some of Badi May have involved in prostitution who migrated in city area but among them estimated number was only six percent of the total of that city. Although an estimated six percent of Badi women and girls are involved in prostitution, the majority reportedly face harassment and social prejudice due to the stigma attached to their community. Recently, 12 years old Badi girl from Devsthal VDC, Salyan district dropped out of school due to continuous harassment by her classmates (UN HCRC, 2012). Norms, values all are social construction and profession also socially constructed what Mark Granovetter (1985) mentioned that market is socially constructed. Market also social construction, in city area brothels might need, however, in village, all farmers are busy with their farming. Thus Badi were also engaged to supplement farmers need by making statues of gods, smoking pipe, drums and musical instruments.

"Badi Community is a grossly misplaced, mistreated and misinterpreted as Dalit Community in Nepal" (Action, Aid Nepal, 2001). Due to the social stigma, those Badi community who are living hilly region facing different kinds of problems one of my key informant, she is head of the Badi Movement and working in local NGO, mentioned that due to those studies we are not able to convinced that we are not that community and we never involved in such as prostitution even that is odd to hear to us. Campbell (2005) puts his forth view saying that idea is created by social location. Those Badi who were in village, they started their profession as singing songs, dancing, supplying mud pipe and working in clay instrument². They have changed their 'adaptation process' singing and dancing for social ceremony such as marriage and other cultural program. Badi those who lived in my study area were involving in different works. Some of them were involved in agriculture. But due to the easily available music system, deliberately their profession became in danger and at last they have to change their redundancy. Now, most of the Badi

² They make sulpa (smoking pipe), idol and female goes to sell it in the village but now they have changed their profession now they do not work for this instrument and they do not sing a song.

male working as construction labourer, carpenter, driver and porter, Badi women supporting them by the household work and easy work in the field.

Impact of earning over conjugal relation

When Badi women were bread winner their position was better than Badi men. Badi women used to respect and love their husband although Badi male were fully dependent upon Badi women. Badi women were the main source of economic condition (Badi male used to make mud pipes, idol, and musical instruments however, Badi women were seller) for their homes. They never thought that they were superior to male and they used to love and respect their husband. However, Cox (1994) argues that their main profession was prostitution. In some cases, Badi women might be involved, however, in my research area, they were involved in different profession such as singing, dancing, preparing mud pipes, idol etc. that is why Badi are socially constructed, and their profession was by product of that society.

Now the role of Badi women has changed and they are dependent on male, due to that dependency, they are victimized by their husband. Their husband did not care them and started domination. They wish to have their past relationship, where women were breadwinner. They loved their husband, at that time, Badi male were toatally dependent on Badi women, however, now Badi Men are bread winner, and they started domination against women. “We want our love back but it is not possible because they don’t have heart as we have. They have strong and selfish heart which had forgotten what we did for them in the past” Badi women aged 65. Another Badi woman reported that one day she was suffered from headache and waited her husband. She wished he would help her but when he came he was fully unconscious due to alcohol. Instead helping her, he started to scold and asked for food. She told that she was not able to prepare food due to headache, however, he did not care. She wept all the night. Next day, she borrowed some money and went to medical. When her mother in laws knew that, she has scolded her husband and helped her for preparing food. She reminded to her son, what they did for their husband in the past when they were fully depended on their wives.

Changing role of Badi women

Badi women were more liberal than other women. When they were dancer, singer and bread winner at that time their status was good as well as well respected. Badi man wanted to have daughter rather than son. When baby girls were born, they celebrate. But now the norms of Badi community has changed they wanted to have son rather than daughter because only male can perform hardworking such as labor, wage labor and building construction which are far from female Badi. Badi women lost their position, status and economic power due to the changing occupation. Now they were limited at home. Now Badi women are not able to perform hard job like heavy work, it is believed that women are physically weaker than male (but that perspective always rejected by feminist theorist). Patriarchal social system is the main analysis for domination. It seems false because in some societies, in which sexual asymmetry carries no connotation of dominance or subordination rather, the task performed by both sexes were indispensable to group

survival (Lerner, 1986). Feminists theorist have focused on that gender was the main key for domination which is socially constructed but not sex which is biological. Badi men took their position and they were able to earn money so now they are dominating women. If Badi male sees his wife talking to another man she gets punishment. Badi male are strong in decision making and slowly their matriarchal norms are changing into patriarchy. When Badi women lost their job they also lost their power, status and they were dominated, limited and dependent, thus they became victim of domestic violence.

Male attitudes towards female

Information was collected from Badi male and female to minimize the biased information. Badi men have totally negative attitudes towards Badi women. They blamed Badi women that they did not work, however, talk too much; they did not respect their husband.

Hat Chalauna nasakne tara mukha chalaune (Badi males' attitude towards Badi women)

Badi men were biased. They accused to women that they were not able to work, however, they are talkative. According to them, Badi man has to work hard and sometimes they got tension. They take some alcohol to relief from tension and pain. They had to hard work because they had duty to fulfill their family's basic needs. When they took some alcohol, Badi women start scold them and ready to fight with male. "We are do not want bit them, but they do not work all over the day. They live at home without any work. They talk nonsense all the day. When we got home, tired due to heavy work, they blame us, they never ready to compromise. Even we try to teach them, they did not care about us. We got angry. If we call one word, they call ten words. There is no way to stop fighting. They are weak and they have to accept it. However, they think superior. Badi women are more *Mukhale* (talkative) than other female. Other female respects their husbands but Badi women did not respect us. They attack on our dignity among the other male. Other people told us, why don't you punish such type of *Badeni* (*Badeni is a derogatory word use to offence to women*). We stop them to come in our work side but they ignore it. By disobeying our orders, makes us angry, that is why we have to punish them. The main cause of punishing them is absence calling and scolding. *Badi male*

It is interesting and professional shift because Badi women were bread winner in the past. However, now Badi men are bread winner. Women were powerful in the past. They want same dignity and control Badi male. They have unique system. However, now Badi male are bread winner. They are guided by other culture. Other cast male complain that Badi male should control Badi women, because they do not understand Badi community's uniqueness. Due to that, Badi men beat Badi women. They think, they are male, they are bread winner. And they should dominate Badi women like other male do. One side Badi male are guided by the other culture, on the other side, Badi women were powerful in the past, they are not easily going to accept the new domination. That is the main cause of the conflict.

Psychological impact of criminal

In Badi community settlement, there was an accident. A Badi woman was killed by her husband with burning fire. The couple had started fighting for two years ago. One day her

husband set a fire in house and killed her. Unfortunately, he was accused as murderer. Police took him to jail. Now he is in jail. That seems, Badi women were suffered from domestic violence, not only that case but some others cases also have proved that. Another case, a Badi male stabbed a knife to local shopkeeper for refused to give him alcohol. Badi community seems danger because they had not enough knowledge and education. Lack of education and consciousness. Some young Badi male are involving in inhuman and criminal activities and sent to jail. Badi women were not able to stop it because they were also suffered from their male counterpart. Badi women were regretting regarding the settlement of that area (Now all Badi are gathered in one place by the government and NGOs) because when they were in different villages, they were happy. When they shifted from village, their bad day started, they have to face different kinds of violence. Badi women are now dependent on male, they are not able to fight against their husband. They perceived that male are physically strong, independent and free. Badi women are limited at home and dependent. They regret now remembering their past lives, where they were bread winner. Their job was lost and everything was lost.

Experience of Badi women in the study area

Most of the Badi women were familiar about domestic violence against them. Many organizations (Sosec, Action aid, PAF) provide knowledge. However, Badi women are facing domestic violence. They are physically attacked by their male counterpart. According to Badi women, domestic violence means physical attack. Because it was physically painful, they can tolerate other types of violence. However, physical violence was very danger and hurts badly. They have faced forceful sexual intercourse, economic violence, verbal and mental torture, however, taken as simple phenomenon.

Main cause of domestic violence against Badi women was having no access to economic production.

Table 1 Badi women suffering from violence

Suffering form violence	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	35	87.5
No	5	12.5
Total	40	100

Source: Field Survey 2019

Through the survey report, out of the total 35 respondents, 87.5 percent suffered from domestic violence. It shows that in Badi communities, women were suffered from domestic violence and they have knowledge of domestic violence. Only 12.5 respondents were not suffering from domestic violence. They have no power to speak against their husband and other dominator who made them victim. In the survey areas, people thought that men and women are the two wheels of the same cart. If women lie in the back position, that affect the male's progress.

Case study, Alcoholism as a weapon of domestic violence

Rama Badi-28 (Name changed) she said 'in daytime we work together. After finishing our work, I have to prepare food for my family members but my husband goes to drink alcohol and comes at midnight. When he returns drunk, starts beating. I tolerated it as due to my fate of previous birth. Because, if I could to bit him, he would not have done that. I am weaker than him. He repeats regularly and it is not new phenomenon. Police didn't come here, because it is a regular duty for Badi male. My friend had gone in Surkhet and won't come here. She is happy there. Once she told me to come with her but my husband didn't let me go out.

She told if her husband does not drink. Her family would be a beautiful. And they can make their happy life. But it is impossible. She thought that her husband won't stop drinking alcohol.

(Source: field survey 2019)

Changing the social norms

When easily available music system, and replacement of mud pipe for smoking³, their dancing and singing profession was also replaced by the modern equipment's. Many of the researchers have concluded that Badi belongs from the society that prostitution as social norms (Cox, 1992) but Those Badi who lives in city might have involved but in my research area there are not any Badi women involved in prostitution. Norms also changing phenomenon but in the social setting. Those who live in city also are not involving all the Badi women in prostitution where (UN, 2012) shows that, the emergence of radio and television at that time drastically reduced the demand for their traditional forms of entertainment and for the compensate of this sudden loss in livelihood a number of Badi women began to prostitute themselves to the wider public, encouraged by increasing demand from a rapidly growing population in the Terai and report shows that "Not all Badi women openly admit to be involved in prostitution". NGO report working with Badi shows some may have involved in prostitution. My study shows that social norms also changing but those who live in hillside have never perceived that prostitution as social norm. Norms and behaviors are also socially constructed.

Previous days were better than today

Ratna Badi aged 72 (Name changed) she has five sons and four daughters. Among them two sons are driver. Their monthly income exceeds more than fifteen thousand. She was eye witness about the condition of Badi women. **She reported that in her period, Badi women used to go to village to bring food for her families. And their males were waiting for their arrival.** At that time, their husbands used to cook food. They respect female counterpart. They preferred girls to boys because women were a breadwinner. Main profession of Badi women was to

³ Mud pipe (sulpa) is used to smoke but now it has been nor more used. Due to easily available cigarettes for smoking. But in the past there were no other means of smoking and people often used to smoke by the sulpa which were the domestic product of Badi community and they often depend the business of Mud pipe.

provide entertainment and collect food for livelihood. However, slowly time shifted. Their redundancy was changed. Now Badi male are more powerful than women. They earn more than eight hundred per day but Badi women earn only three hundred. Now Badi male drink alcohol at local market and beat their female counterpart. Badi women, sometimes sent their husbands to police. But next day they have to pay more than thousand rupees to bring their husband to home. So, now they do not send their husband to police station. She stopped talking for a moment and started now it's totally changed. In the past, women were bread winner the social norm was women have to work. However, now male are bread winner and women are household carer. When we were breadwinner at that time, we used to respect our husbands but now they did not. Badi male are becoming selfish and forget all those things what their women did for them.

(Source: Field Survey, 2019)

Preferences are also social construction

Badi community celebrate girl child's birth, not boy child's birth, and they prefer daughter. They prefer daughter because they took daughter as income source (see, Cox, 1992). That was in the past, now that social system has changed. My study shows that they prefer son because now men are the bread winner. Past profession of Badi women no longer exists. Now only available work is daily wage labor. In daily wage labor, there is discrimination among male and female. Badi male get paid more. And their demand is higher in the market. Badi women rarely get work, if they got, they are paid low compared to their male counterpart. Due to female dependency on male increasing. However, in the past they were independent dancer singer and seller of musical instrument, mud pipe and idol of different deities. But now it has been collapsed due to globalization⁴ and female are compelled to limit themselves in household work. And just opposite of the previous days. It was U turn of the Badi community, in the past male were dependent and female were bread winner but now female are dependent and male are bread winner.

Now Badi Males are bread winners

Hasta Badi 38 (pseudo-name) he is a tractor driver. He drinks a lot and beats his wife. He was arrested by police many times but did not change his habit. He drives a Truck Dailekh to Surkhet. In his family, there are six members'; three sons, a daughter, and wife and himself. He has to fulfill all the basic needs of his family. His wife also goes to work but not regularly. She earns not more than three hundred. He has to work hard. When he is celebrating leisure time in a pub with his friends his wife comes and starts insulting. I could not stop my anger. I beat her. It's not only my fault, she is also responsible for it. Because I have to work hard. I only got a day rest in a week. But she is free at home. She didn't care for children when I suggest something to her she try to talking with

⁴ Now people are listening the English music and using drum for ceremony but in the past Badi were entertainer they sang a song and danced they made musical instrument such as Madal, Dhol but due to globalization local music and musical instrument and their profession collapsed and all people are homogenizing.

unnecessary arguments and I can't stand. When she talks and argue in the pub, my friend humiliate me as inferior to women. She is always ready to fight with me. If she couldn't fight why she should be ready for fighting. It is her fault always scolding me.

He supposed not to want beat his wife. However, when he drinks, he can't control himself. Next day morning, he promises to his wife but again he drinks. Because he could not change his habit. Habit cannot be changed easily. Because he thinks he is superior. He is male. He is bread winner. Past is past. Now they have to live in present and accept what is happening. However, Badi women are not ready to accept it easily. They argue, they fight with their male counterpart. However, Badi male are more liberal than other male, however, when they drink alcohol, they start to fight.

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

Prestigious changed into dominated and suppressed and now it has changed to domestic violence. Firstly, Badi women were bread winner, still they loved and cared their male, however, when their profession was replaced and Badi male became bread winner, are slowly started to dominate women.

Conclusion

It is quite surprising that most of the researchers mentioned Badi community represents a matrilocal family. Due to that, there should not be domestic violence against Badi women. However, everything is changeable, likewise when profession shifted, Badi community changed their role and norms also changed. In the past Badi woman were respectable and provided honor comparing to male because they were bread winner. But now their role got 'U' turn and their honor, respect and social role was dismissed. When Badi male started to earn money, started to dominate women and domestic violence against women started. It was quite surprised that in the past, Badi women were superior and, in that community, now domestic violence occurred. Majority of Badi women (87%) reported that they were suffered from domestic violence.

In conclusion, due to occupational change, changed in social norms. Norms are also changing phenomenon. And those community who have represented woman as superior than male was changed. Badi community used to wish daughter, and daughter birth was great celebration. Now they prefer son. They are bread winner. In so doing, they started domination, subjugation, subordination and disempowering woman. Now Badi male are superior to Badi women.

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