

Gender and Society: Introducing Islam Social Life in Kathmandu

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Abstract

This paper investigates the basic social life of Muslim people in Kathmandu focusing particularly on gender dimension. It emphasizes that while Islam is often misrepresented as patriarchal, many injustices stem from interpretations rooted in cultural patriarchy rather than the religion itself. Despite limited literature on Nepali Muslims, this research explores aspects such as education, employment, and social roles through surveys conducted within the Muslim settlements. Findings reveal significant educational advancement among Muslim women, as evidenced by higher female enrollment in higher education compared to males. Nevertheless, traditional gender roles restrict women's economic participation, with a majority confined to domestic responsibilities. Political engagement among Muslims shows that most of them participated in recent elections, favoring a liberal democratic governance than the monarchy or communist, while community sentiments towards religious tolerance are notably positive. The study highlights a need for targeted interventions to address educational and economic difficulties, faced particularly for women, indicating the necessity of comprehensive strategies that promote equality and integration within the broader socio-political context of Nepal. Overall, the research contributes valuable insights into the socio-cultural and economic dynamics of Muslim people in Kathmandu, advocating for informed policy-making tailored to enhance the welfare and rights of this underrepresented demographic.

Keywords

family, gender, Islamophobia, livelihood, religion

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INTRODUCTION

Islam is a belief system focused on one God, Allah and its followers, called Muslims, consider Prophet Muhammad to be God's last messenger. The Quran is the holy book of Islam, seen as God's eternal word to Muhammad, offering guidance and emphasizing God's oneness. Islam is the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity, and is divided mainly into Sunni and Shia sects (Preston 2024). Islam is believed to be too rigid religion particularly its perspective on women but it is patriarchy which has made Islamic society more orthodox. While true Islamic teachings do not support gender discrimination, patriarchal interpretations often lead to injustices against women. Customs around modesty and honor restrict women's autonomy, affecting their education and workforce involvement.

Islam actually values knowledge, and the misconception that Islam prohibits girls' education. Research highlights barriers to education for women means that Islam is not necessarily the barrier of education of Islam women. There may be other barriers. The truth is that the Islam people face low literacy rates, which is more applicable in the Eastern Middle East, contributing to social unrest. Studies indicate that Muslims, particularly women, have lower enrollment and higher dropout rates in education due to traditional gender roles. The 2021 Nepal census indicates that Muslims make up around 5.09% of the total population (NSO, 2022), mainly living in the Terai region, with Urdu as their primary language.

Literacy rate of Muslim in Nepal and their enrollment in university education is far low. "The literacy rate of the Muslim community is 43.56%, which is lower than the national literacy rate of 65.9%. Literacy among Muslim women is even lower, at 33.98%. The Muslim community, with male-dominated socio-cultural norms, is still hesitant to send their daughters to schools and colleges with co-education. Most Muslim parents send their children to madrasas for education. Madrasas follow their own curriculum, and the education they provide is not in sync with mainstream education. Madrasas are funded by donations and Zakat from the Muslim community. Most

madrasas lack proper infrastructure and facilities. The academic certificates from Madrasa are not recognized by the government." (NMMWS, 2024).

The research on Nepali Muslims is limited, there is a lack of literature highlighting their specific issues, such as economic condition, social status, family dynamics, political consciousness, education, etc., therefore, the introduction of their fundamental social life is a priority undertaking. This study aims to explore the socio-economic status of Muslims in Kathmandu, and the issues faced by Muslim women and girls within family. Since understanding gender is essential for this analysis, it will look at property ownership, literacy rates, employment patterns, and women's roles in family decisions. Incorporating these gender aspects will help identify inequalities and guide policymakers in creating effective strategies for the improvement and integration of the Muslim community.

In addition to this, if we come to review the situation of Muslim people, their living standard in general and social status in particular, we can see the bitter truth. The findings of the Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS) 2022/23 reveal the national average literacy rate in the country to be 77.4 percent, reflecting a 1.1 percent increase from the 76.3 percent reported in the National Census 2021. The current data indicates that the national male literacy rate is 85.8 percent, while the literacy rate for women is just 70.1 percent. This indicates that the educated female ratio is 14.9 percent lower than that of males (Koirala, 2024). Consequently, it is crucial to investigate the extent to which Islam is rigid concerning gender roles or whether patriarchy is the underlying force that suppresses all women, particularly Muslim women, in this paper.

PERCEPTION ON ISLAM AND THE AVAILABLE LITERATURE

Modern democracy prioritizes the majority over the minority; consequently, minorities of any kind often become targets of majority oppression in all global societies. These minorities are demeaned in

such a manner that their realities are distorted or misrepresented. In Nepal, this has also been a prevalent global perception, where the Muslim community is often regarded as oppressive of women and unsupportive of women's rights. It is commonly assumed that Islam is an oppressive religion; as a result, women are compelled to don head coverings, are denied access to education, occupy a significantly lower status, and lack ownership rights in property or inheritance. To ascertain whether the Islamic faith truly oppresses women or if this notion is merely a myth, several critical literary works were examined.

One study (Tlaiss 2015) indicates that the Islam religion does not pose significant constrain on women and their entrepreneurship. Following a study on Muslim Arab women entrepreneurs in four countries within the Arab Middle East Region, the study explored how Islamic business ethics and values impact the way in which Muslim women entrepreneurs conduct their business in the Arab world. The study showed how Islamic work values and ethics are embedded in the entrepreneurial activities of these Arab women. The results illustrated how Muslim women entrepreneurs were successful in achieving well-being in their life and excellence in their work while running their businesses. The Muslim women entrepreneurs adhered to the Islamic work-related values of good and hard work, honesty and truthfulness, fairness and justice, and benevolence and perceived them as instrumental to the survival and success of their enterprises. The agency of the Muslim Arab women allowed them to construct and navigate their entrepreneurial careers away from the traditional, doctrinaire interpretations of Islam. This study thus contributes to the theoretical development of the interrelationship between gender and business ethics within entrepreneurial contexts, particularly in relation to Islamic religious values.

Another study (Meacham 2015) revealed, "The religion of Islam is often portrayed with false and negative stereotypes. If we expect our students to understand and participate in the global world and to be informed and engaged citizens in a democratic America, then it is essential that they develop a basic and sound understanding of Islam.

Furthermore, learning about Islam can facilitate the development of students' critical thinking. I describe how I engaged my students with Islam in a general education course with four hundred students and provide examples of critical thinking from students' papers. Given the importance of Islam at this point in history, America's colleges and universities should strengthen their general education programs by requiring that all students become more familiar with and knowledgeable about the religion of Islam."

Literature made by Meacham appeals to understand the Western researcher's fault of disparaging the eastern and southern beliefs including all the non-Christian religious beliefs. They often unnecessarily criticize non-Christian people and their ways of living. Dossa (2016) writes that the blaming of Islam is connected to the misuse of the so-called rational power of the western worlds. As Foucault believed that truth can never be outside power, it is a regime of truth, a general politics, which discredits Islam. So, based on the ideas of Foucault, Dossa believes that the liberal regime of truth consists of liberal fallacies. He further says, "This skill is now inscribed in public discourse. It is no surprise that liberals routinely pillory Foucault. As enthusiasts of imperialism, they lionize the West. In the nineteenth century, Marx called them "civilisation-mongers": they saw Islam as the enemy. Indeed, their fantasy was and is Muslimicide—the supersession of Islam. Islamophobia is the flawed term for this attitude." (Dossa 2016:175).

It seems looking at the analysis of Dossa that the Islam is the religion that the western Christian societies detest its growth. Therefore, they tried to distort the realities inside Islam, so that people do not try to be Muslim.

Another study said, "Overlooked, however, is the fact that scholars tend to examine aspects of women's rights (e.g., political rights) in which two of the key causal processes—religion and patriarchal culture—produce observationally equivalent outcomes. While largely neglected, the study of property rights helps overcome this limitation

because while Islamic law limits women's right to inherit, it prescribes equality in women's ability to own, manage, and dispose of property. Muslim women enjoyed property rights centuries before women in the West, even in countries regarded as paragons of gender equality today. Studying property rights therefore provides traction in examining the extent to which states conform to Islamic tenets when they conflict with the cues provided by patriarchal actors. Consequently, examining the degree to which Muslim states extend equal property rights to women allows us to differentiate between religious and cultural accounts of gender inequality" (Bishin and Cherif 2017).

THEORIES ON PATRIARCHY AND GENDER

We have a wide variety of theories on gender-based inequalities in social sciences; we call them patriarchy, feminism, and gender. Within the feminist theories, radical feminism seeks a complete overhaul of society to eliminate male dominance over women, viewing society as a patriarchal system that exploits women. It sees men as the ruling class and women as the ruled class, with patriarchy maintaining men-centric norms that control women's autonomy. Radical feminists aim to fight against patriarchal structures to free women from oppression and violence, asserting that such violence stems from societal norms rather than legal systems (Ritzer 2011). They argue that the subjugation of women is fundamental to all societies, where women face greater oppression compared to other groups. Patriarchy is defined as a form of violence, both overt and subtle, manifested in various social aspects, and radical feminists believe legal reforms will not effectively eliminate discrimination because women are socialized to accept these patriarchal norms.

Marxist feminism attributes gender inequality to capitalism, where men are positioned to dominate labor and resources. Historically, women enjoyed some independence in kinship structures but became increasingly subordinate as capitalism developed. Marxist feminists argue that women's oppression stems from both capitalism and patriarchy, emphasizing that women's unpaid domestic labor supports the capitalist system. They describe the nuclear family as a capitalist

construct where women serve as unpaid laborers, bearing and raising children to maintain future labor forces (Wasley 1989). As a result, capitalism is seen as both economic and patriarchal oppression, with women facing exploitation in varied forms across their roles.

Liberal feminism focuses on promoting women's freedom through participation in political and economic systems. It argues that restrictions confine women to dependence on men and calls for equal opportunities in public life. Liberal feminists advocate for women's property rights, recognizing the meritocratic nature of modern societies and stress that women are intentionally excluded from equal rights in education and the job market. They highlight that gender socialization at home perpetuates inequalities, advocating for gender neutrality in labor divisions and reforms for equal rights, treatment, and opportunities (Luintel 2018).

Socialist feminism combines class and gender oppression, positing that women's exploitation cannot be viewed solely through the lens of gender or class. It acknowledges that sometimes women themselves perpetuate oppression within family structures, illustrating an internalized aspect of women's subjugation. Theories regarding gender analysis emphasize the extensive social inequalities and injustices experienced by women, which remain largely unheard (Ritzer 2011). The focus is on how power dynamics facilitate oppression and how women's roles in societal structures often reinforce their subservience.

The concept of gender differences addresses how roles are assigned based on sex, leading to a division of labor that keeps women in less powerful positions. Gender inequality highlights that while men and women may share similar capabilities, social treatment varies unjustly. This exclusion from leadership roles fosters a cycle of inequality, illustrating those societal structures favor men. Additionally, gender oppression points out deliberate isolation and abuse, tying these issues back to fundamental power dynamics in society. Finally, structural oppression frames women's subjugation as rooted in broader societal networks of patriarchy and capitalism, indicating a need to

consider the intersectionality of factors such as class, race, and age in understanding and addressing women's inequality.

In my view, scholars often focus on aspects of women's rights like political rights, but they overlook how religion and patriarchal culture can lead to similar outcomes. Studying property rights is important because, under Islamic law, women can own and manage property despite restrictions on inheritance. This approach helps us understand how states balance religious rules with patriarchal influences regarding gender equality.

Upon examining the Quran, the Holy book of Islam (Al-Hilali and Khan, n.d.), one can observe that a woman is entitled to preserve her identity with honor. Even post-marriage, she is not required to adopt her husband's surname. The Quran bestows equal standing upon both males and females. It explicitly articulates that knowledge cannot be unequally allocated; it is essential for both men and women. European and American media and literature often malign Islamic society by fabricating myths. There exists no gender disparity in Islam; all women hold equal status to men. Islam venerates women as daughters, spouses, and mothers; indeed, a mother is regarded as three times more esteemed than a father within Islamic tradition. Moreover, the assertion that Muslim women lack inheritance rights warrants further scrutiny.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical investigation for this research was carried out in the Kathmandu valley, where Muslims constitute a distinctive religious minority group. The primary aim was to acquire an understanding of gender interactions within Kathmandu's Muslim community. Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, boasts a food infrastructure and various opportunities, coupled with advantageous climatic conditions, rendering it an attractive location for residence. It serves as a center for commerce and tourism, attracting visitors globally and generating diverse income opportunities. The educational framework is commendable, with numerous private and public schools, colleges,

and universities providing various tiers of education. Healthcare services are likewise accessible, with several private and government hospitals offering satisfactory care.

The Muslim demographic in Nepal is documented at 1,483,066, accounting for merely 5.095% of the total populace (NSO, 2023). Nevertheless, the Muslim community in Nepal originates from four particular backgrounds: Indian, Tibetan, Kashmiri, and indigenous Nepalese (Siddique, 2010). The researcher conducted a survey encompassing 30 Muslim households in the Kathmandu valley, concentrating on the Muslim residents of the Kalimati and Old Baneshwor regions. In order to make gender balance, I conducted interviews with an equal number of male and female respondents, consisting of 15 individuals from each gender. This sample size was deemed adequate for the study. Additionally, an observation was performed alongside a Muslim friend, who also participated as a respondent, to explore significant religious sites of the Muslim community in Kathmandu. Only qualitative data was gathered through observation, while both qualitative and quantitative data were amassed through interviews. Given the qualitative nature of this paper, the analysis focuses exclusively on qualitative data. Ethical research practices, including securing informed consent and maintaining participant confidentiality, were meticulously adhered to throughout the research process.

DATA AND DISCUSSION

Based on the observation and survey-based interview, following facts about Muslim people in Kathmandu can be shown.

Public Interaction in Mosques

Observation-based study revealed that the big gatherings of Muslim people take place mostly in mosques in some religious hours. This data was collected from observing Muslim-special places and from the observation-guide. Social interactions among the Islamic community primarily transpire around two central mosques: the Nepali Mosque and the Kashmiri Mosque, both located near to the Ghantaghar.

These mosques, surrounded by imposing walls, generally maintain secured entrances, with the exception of Friday prayers, which attract a considerable assembly and lead to local congestion. On regular days, these mosques accommodate a modest number of worshippers, including office staff, employees, visitors, and retirees.

The Muslim population in Kathmandu is characterized by a rich diversity, consisting of various distinct groups that reflect differing cultural and historical legacies. The Kashmiri Muslims in Kathmandu trace their heritage back to traders and experts who were brought to the city by the Malla and Shah dynasties. They are associated with the Kashmiri Mosque, where leadership roles are traditionally allocated to descendants of the original Kashmiri families. This community also includes recent migrants from Kashmir engaged in trade, although their religious practices may not completely correspond with those of established Kashmiri residents in Kathmandu. Nepali Muslims represent another significant group, embodying a national identity for Nepalese Muslim citizens, including individuals of Kashmiri descent. They are also affiliated with the Nepali Jame Mosque, which differs from the Kashmiri Mosque in terms of eligibility for leadership and interment rights within the Kashmiri section of the cemetery.

Tibetan Muslims in Kathmandu contribute a unique cultural presence, recognizable by their distinctive appearance and linguistic practices. They often shift between Tibetan, Urdu, and Nepali languages and uphold traditions such as arranging marriages within their community. The mosques in Kathmandu play essential roles in the social and religious fabric of the community. The Kashmiri Mosque, situated near Jamal, functions as a historical focal point, featuring a primary prayer hall, an annex, and a former madrasah. It is surrounded by meticulously kept gardens and houses the tombs of significant historical figures, highlighting its importance as an educational and religious institution.

In contrast, the Nepali Jame Mosque situated near Trichandra Campus serves as a crucial congregation point for non-Kashmiri Muslims in

Kathmandu. This four-story structure functions not only as a venue for worship but also as a departure site for pilgrims en route to Mecca. Adjacent to the mosque is a madrasah providing both secular and religious instruction to Muslim students from Kathmandu and its vicinity. Additional mosques, such as the Raqi Mosque in Indra Chowk and the Thamel Mosque located within the tourist district of Thamel, cater to specific Muslim demographics in Kathmandu, thereby enhancing the city's cultural and religious diversity. The Muslim Cemetery at Swayambhu exemplifies the various practices within Kathmandu's Muslim community, featuring distinct sections designated for Nepali and Kashmiri Muslims. The Kashmiri section displays ornate tombstones and adheres to specific burial customs, whereas the Nepali section follows Deobandi traditions that avoid grave markers. The cemetery also includes a small mosque and madrasah, further emphasizing its importance as a cultural and religious center for the Muslim population of Kathmandu. Overall, the Muslim community in Kathmandu is characterized by its vibrant cultural mosaic, shaped by historical migrations, unique religious traditions, and significant social institutions that contribute to its distinctive identity within the city.

In conclusion, the Muslim community in Kathmandu is defined by its diverse cultural and historical backgrounds, primarily revolving around two major mosques: the Nepali Mosque and the Kashmiri Mosque. Each mosque serves as a hub for different Muslim groups, with the Kashmiri community having strong historical ties to trade, while the Nepali Muslims embody a national identity. Tibetan Muslims add further diversity with their unique traditions and multilingual practices. The mosques not only facilitate worship but also provide educational institutions and serve as crucial social gathering points. Additionally, the Muslim Cemetery at Swayambhu highlights the distinct burial customs and practices of various groups within the community. Collectively, these elements illustrate a vibrant cultural mosaic that fosters a rich Islamic identity in Kathmandu.

Discussion on Muslim Social Life

Here, only the information that the respondents had provided during the interview is discussed and analyzed.

Educational status of Muslim people

In the examined 30 households, there were a total of 125 individuals aged over 5 years. Among these 125 members altogether, only 47 males were literate; 4 had completed Primary Level Education, 4 had achieved Lower Secondary Level Education, 29 had concluded Secondary Level Education, 8 had obtained Bachelor's Level Education, 1 had finished Master's Level Education, and the remaining 1 had acquired a PhD from the University.

Within the same households, 43 females had undergone formal education; the majority, specifically 15, had attained only Primary Level Education, 13 had completed Secondary Level Education, 10 had finished Lower Secondary Level Education, and the remaining 5 were University graduates. Data indicates that women had higher enrollment in primary education; however, their percentage decreased at higher levels. The data does not reveal any disparities concerning the literacy rates of males and females. Nonetheless, upon examining the illiteracy rate among the Muslim population in the surveyed households, which numbered 35, it is nearly equivalent to the average literacy rate of Nepal.

It was discovered that the Muslims in Kathmandu demonstrate an elevated consciousness regarding the importance of education. Numerous adults had acquired education from Madrasa; however, the majority of them are now disinclined to prefer Madrasa education for their children. They expressed that enrolling their children in Madrasa would hinder their broader understanding of the global landscape. It was noteworthy that the Muslim women surpassed the Muslim men in their community in attaining University education. Based on this data, it can be concluded that Muslim families and communities are highly receptive to sending girls or women for advanced education. This substantiates the concept that Muslim families are supportive of

women in terms of facilitating higher education for them. The interest of Muslim women in obtaining an education, along with the support from their families in allowing them to read and write, demonstrates that Muslim families, regardless of gender, are generally favorable toward the education of women.

Occupation and employment

In general, Muslim all over Nepal are involved in multiple occupations including agricultural farming. But in Kathmandu, none of the surveyed Muslim people was involved in agricultural farming activities. As an urban center, Kathmandu primarily offers job opportunities rather than farm activities. The survey intriguingly uncovered 3 Muslim people who had given their land in lease to someone, in Kathmandu, for agricultural purpose. Those 3 respondents said that the return from leasing the land for agricultural purpose was very low compared to the land used for other commercial purposes. It was found that only 3 men from the surveyed households were working in government offices as an employee, while most of others were involved in entrepreneurial endeavors, 9 men were working in some private companies. The data revealed that the major occupation of Muslim people in Kathmandu was their self-employment and business.

All women participating in the research perceived themselves as engaged in household work even if they work outside even as a regular employee or as a part-time or full-time wage-worker or as a self-employee or as businesswomen. Part-time work of Muslim women was mostly the cleaning and washing activities in other people's residences. Except purely household working women, 12 women were homemakers, 2 were teachers in government school, 6 were working in private schools, and 3 were entrepreneurs.

Voice on income and expenditure in household

Household income is a crucial aspect of household financial management. It contributes to establishing a stable family economy, facilitating a balance between income and expenditure. In situations where income is limited, a greater number of members concentrate

on minimizing expenses and increasing earnings. If the income is average, the family may anticipate a corresponding average quality of life. However, if the income is substantial, the family can devise a plan to ensure a high quality of life for all its members. Consequently, inquiries were made regarding the expectations of earnings for men and women. All respondents, regardless of gender, indicated that there should be no barriers to who is permitted to earn. However, they all consistently stated that men earn more and, therefore, should be given priority in employment opportunities. They also stated that women should engage in external employment, contributing to the household income regardless of the amount they earn. All respondents indicated that the decision to pursue employment should be afforded to women, as they carry the dual responsibility of managing domestic duties and child-rearing.

This indicates that Muslim families in Kathmandu were not opposed to women's employment. However, women are favored for household responsibilities rather than for roles in the external job market. The families exhibited a greater level of support for women, as they neither compelled them to engage in household activities nor obligated them to pursue external employment. It indicates that Muslim men, women, and families are supportive of women's rights. It is a significant misconception to assume that Muslim women are oppressed within their households.

Land ownership and housing

Kathmandu, as the capital city of Nepal, functions as a principal center for diverse facilities, including education, healthcare, income generation, business, and employment. The infrastructure is comparatively superior to that of areas outside Kathmandu. Consequently, individuals traveling to Kathmandu for various purposes seldom return to their place of origin. Consequently, the population of the Kathmandu Valley is rising daily. The respondents were inquired about their living conditions in Kathmandu, specifically regarding whether they owned their own home or were residing in rented accommodation.

Of the 30 households surveyed, only 13 were identified as residing in their own homes. The remaining 17 households were living in rented accommodations. Additionally, they were inquired about the ownership of land in Kathmandu. Seven additional households were identified as possessing their own land, acquired with the intention of constructing a residence in the future. However, the remaining 10 households lacked both land and housing in Kathmandu. Furthermore, all 30 respondents possessed land, whether small or large, outside of Kathmandu. Many of them also owned houses outside of Kathmandu.

Political engagement

Nepal has a multiparty democracy in which all citizen can be a part of political process. Previously, the constitution had declared Nepal as a Hindu state, as a result, other religious groups could not feel Nepal as fully their own country. This might have obliged them not to join freely in the political process. But the new federal republic constitution of Nepal has declared the country as a religiously secular state, where people of all class, caste, color, identity, religion, sex, etc., are given equal freedom. Muslim were also seen in the democratic movements for political change in Nepal. In the federal democratic Nepal, we have seen many Muslims have become the political leaders in the government of all levels i.e., from local level government to provincial and federal government. Muslim people have become highly aware politically, and they have shown their commitment to Nepali nationalism.

According to this research, the majority of Muslim respondents in Kathmandu were politically conscious. They said that they did not have direct engagement in political activities; however, they do express some opinions regarding politics. All the households were found fully participated in the latest local level election and national election, which took place in 2022. Based on the research, 20 respondents' families were found favoring a democratic government, 8 preferring a monarchy, and 2 were supporting a communist regime. When questioned about the direction of Nepal that the Nepalese political parties are taking, most respondents refrained from responding. A

few indicated that Nepal is moving in the right direction, but they also said that the current multiparty republic government has not given more than the previous constitutional monarchy-based multiparty democratic government.

Status of women in home

Household decision-making within Muslim families in Kathmandu District is a complex process shaped by cultural norms, socio-economic conditions, individual preferences, and power relations. The field survey indicates that decision-making is primarily a collaborative effort, 19 respondents i.e. 12 men and 7 women replied that the household decisions were jointly made by men and women. but 8 women replied that they were making decisions in household without consultation of anyone in the family, and they said that family has no complication about women's role in major decision-making. While only 3 men said that they make sole decision of their household. It seems that the women than men are the decisive force in making household decisions. It also verifies the notion that women are respected in Muslim households, and their leadership is accepted and trusted by other members.

Regarding their voice on job, most of the respondents indicated that the Muslim a strong desire to engage in work if presented with earning opportunities. They are open to both home-based and external employment, taking into account their family responsibilities. In fact, some respondents indicated a preference for external work, believing in their capabilities to succeed professionally, with some already employed. When asked what opportunities they would pursue if available, respondents mentioned interests in starting a business, freelancing from home, fashion design, government positions, bank accounting, beautification services, and social causes, with some indicating no specific preference if given the chance to employment and income-generating activities.

No Islamic faith or marital relation has stood as a barrier to prevent women in the Muslim community from participating in income

generation; rather, it is the scarcity of flexible earning opportunities that would allow them to balance family duties with professional responsibilities. The perspectives and suggestions from Muslim women respondents in the Kathmandu district highlight the need for increasing women's involvement in earning opportunities.

Some women expressed their readiness to run their own business if the opportunity arises. One respondent said, "We should endeavor to create a working environment where all married women or mothers can work from home and earn income while fulfilling their family obligations. "

DISCUSSION

Muslims in Kathmandu were noted to have a strong awareness of the importance of education, although many preferred not to enroll their children in Madarsha, as they believed it limited exposure to broader global knowledge. It was also observed that Muslim women were more likely than men to pursue higher education. This highlights a supportive attitude within Muslim families regarding the education of girls and women.

In terms of employment, Muslims in Kathmandu were not engaged in farming, unlike in other regions of Nepal where agricultural work is common. Three landowners in the study leased their land for agricultural use but found the returns were low compared to commercial uses. Most survey respondents were self-employed, with only a few working in government or private sector jobs. Women primarily identified themselves as homemakers, although some participated in part-time work, such as cleaning, clerical tasks, or crafting items. A small number were government school teachers, private school educators, or entrepreneurs.

Household income is essential for understanding economic stability and identifying social inequalities. Most households have a single income earner, but some have multiple contributors to financial support. Some families showed shifts in traditional roles, with women

partaking in income-generating activities, but many still adhered to conventional roles focused on homemaking.

The social life of Muslim women in Kathmandu reflects highly dignified than imagined, they however are susceptible to patriarchy. If patriarchy was not in practice, Islam would not be seen as a barrier to women's growth and happiness. Muslim women showed considerable involvement in formal education, with many completing secondary levels, and many of the women seen in higher education as well. The survey revealed that, while women are gaining much freedom from their family and society and have received supports in education and employment, and are given to choice of employment or household work, their exposure to the outside world, particularly in civil service, political sphere, scholarly field seemed very scanty.

The overall findings underscore the complexity of the socio-economic reality for Muslim women in Kathmandu, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address their challenges. The survey emphasized the importance of understanding these dynamics for developing effective policies and initiatives that meet the specific needs of the Muslim community in the region. The results pointed out the positive sentiments among Muslims regarding religious tolerance in Nepal, noting a lack of perceived discrimination in the current secular environment compared to the past Hindu state.

FINDINGS

The 2024 field investigation illuminated the complex interactions among cultural norms, economic challenges, and social expectations that shape the lives of Muslim women in the Kathmandu District. Despite progress in education and household decision-making, substantial barriers exist in areas of women's employment and financial sectors. However, their happiness in family and family issues should be highly acknowledged.

Western literature has defined Muslim people as rigid, even more rigid to the issues of women, it has been found that the Muslim people are more flexible than others. Women's solo role in household

decision-making or their joint role in decision making in their home indicate that the European and American-backed Western literature on Islam is biased. This research clearly shows that women's role in their respective households in Muslims of Kathmandu is far better than many societies of the world. Most of the Muslim people working as entrepreneur and self-employed means they were more business-oriented than conventional job-seekers. However, women were engaged more in household activities than in business.

The mainstream feminist theories and gender theories on patriarchy are not applicable to Muslim social life in Kathmandu. Key literature on gender and feminism has to make more rigorous study on women. The living arrangement of Muslim people in a family, their household size and structure, which is mostly joint family type, consisting in an average four to five people, indicates that the family harmony is exemplary. It further indicates that Muslim families in Kathmandu have made perfect social and emotional balance between their family generations.

The Muslim community especially in Kathmandu, encounters educational advantage. Their literacy rate is fairly high; there is a marked preference for private schools over Madrasas. Respondents expressed their desire for quality education in Madrasas, which was degrading due to lack of qualified instructors, advanced curricula, standardized courses in the contemporary global world. Muslim women have fair amount of educational enrollment. Their families were found highly positive regarding their education.

Most of the surveyed families were found having less interest in politics. Most of them said that they preferred liberal democratic system than monarchy, but communist regime was less preferred. None of the respondents was found satisfied with the government and its way of working.

Based on the surveyed households, Muslims in Kathmandu, were highly satisfied with the religious tolerance in Nepal. They did not have

any complaints with Hindu, Buddhist, Christian or other religious communities in Nepal. They had not felt any discrimination at the time Nepal was a Hindu state, and they are not finding any difference even if Nepal is currently transferred as religiously secular country from its previously Hindu state.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed a nuanced socio-economic landscape marked by social achievements and ongoing financial challenges faced by Muslim families in Kathmandu. Despite being receiving enormous amount of support from families, Muslim women have not been more visible in the outer society. Most Muslim people were engaged in self-employment or entrepreneurship, yet many women remained confined to homemaking. Political engagement appears low, with a preference for democratic governance despite dissatisfaction with current government functioning. Notably, the community perceives a favorable environment for religious tolerance, indicating a relative absence of discrimination. These findings underscore the complexity of the socio-economic and cultural dynamics impacting Muslim families in Kathmandu, emphasizing the need for targeted policies that promote equitable access to education and economic opportunities for women. Understanding these dynamics is vital for policymakers and community leaders to address the specific needs and challenges faced by the Muslim community, aiming for enhanced social equality and economic empowerment.

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