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**Exploring Intersectionality: Theoretical Concept and Potential
Methodological Efficacy in the Context of Nepal**

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Abstract

This article engages in theoretical discussions of intersectionality on such issues as: how does Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality theory function in various forms of social divisions, and how do various scholars respond to it? Why is intersectionality theoretically and methodologically critical to examining Nepali political and social contexts, especially on women and Dalit's issues? This article examines the overview of intersectional theoretical standpoints explicitly based on Crenshaw's ideas and how it problematizes political practices of domination and discrimination against minority groups in societies today. Rather than providing an empirical and positivist approach to findings, this write-up offers a theoretical framework that helps conceptualize and utilize it in examining power exercise and politics in the Nepali context. It emphasizes discourse analysis to explore the systemic discrimination and the genealogy of structural violence to moot debates about central and marginal subjects concerning women and Dalit issues in Nepal.

Keywords: intersectionality, women, Dalit, systemic discrimination, power and politics, Nepal

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Intersectionality has gained magnitude, with various responses to its efficacy and functioning in analyzing nation-states' politics and policies, especially in the context of Western societies today. Recently, scholarship has been enriched with ground-breaking debates on intersectionality theory and its praxis, particularly concerning power and politics that have been practiced. In this context, intersectionality theory focuses on a broader variety of questions—gender, race, and ethnic minorities—fostering debate with ideas in pursuit of knowledge within and beyond academia (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Intersectionality as theory and methodology is not bound to any geographical location or political practices within a specific nation-state concerning only on the gender issues. As a critical theory, intersectionality has attracted an abundance of engagement in dealing with social and political problems produced and practiced in the liberal democratic political structure within a Western political context and non-Western politics and social categories of difference based on the hegemonic dominance of power: gender, language, caste, religion, and ethnicity (Carbado et al., 2013). This paper engages in the methodological discussion of intersectionality and its importance to study Nepali political practice concerning the systemic discrimination against minority groups (Ahuti, 2010; Carbado et al., 2013; Gurung, 2009).

The first section of this paper discusses Crenshaw's theoretical concepts entailing three categories of intersectionality. As part of literature review for this paper, it brings various perspectives of the scholars discussing the theoretical and methodological efficacy and limitation of intersectionality, which is relevant for underpinning the argument concerning the significance of intersectionality as a methodological tool to examine the social inequalities, uneven power distributions

and political practices from history to the present context of Nepal. This paper then analyzes how political practices and power exercise established a systemic regulation of social hierarchies and discrimination against people who are demarcated in different categories such as women and Dalit. Within these broader categories, intersectionality is imperative to examine the micro and macro experiences of the people that intersect their everyday understandings of how power has been practiced elusively to silence them (Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This paper utilized historical data and existing literature such as the sources from scholarly published materials that discuss Nepal's socio-political practices and analyze using discourse analysis as a tool to examine the genealogy of hierarchies, social inequalities, systemic discrimination (Hodes, 2018; Van Dijk, 2001; Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2008). Since this conceptual paper uses secondary data, discourse analysis allows us to revisit the center and margin of political discourses and power exercises regarding discrimination against women and Dalit in Nepal. Finally, it offers ideas regarding why intersectionality as a methodology is essential to explore people's experiences in Nepal's diverse socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural structures.

Crenshaw and Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a term created by Crenshaw (1991), has been an effective and popular critical theory that relates to differences in women's experience, especially in the context of Western liberal democratic policies and

practices. This theoretical idea in current political contexts contributes to shaping the lives and experiences of those who have long been subordinated and discriminated against (Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2006). In Crenshaw's argument, intersectionality alludes to the intersection between social variables such as race, gender, ethnicity, language, and culture. Crenshaw explicitly interrogates the concept of identity politics in the United States for its failure to address the experiences of those who have been politically marginalized.

Crenshaw's particular focus lies on the issues of women of colour in the context of political and social structures and the exercise of power in the United States. She argues that intersectionality significantly explores the issues of the injustice continuously encountered and experienced by women of colour in their everyday lives. In the given context, intersectionality allows women of colour to explore their lost identities, even in the cracks between feminism and antiracism (Crenshaw, 1991). This argument informs how intersectionality considers the overlapping identities in liberal democracy. However, some scholars criticize intersectionality theory as being theoretically over-reliant on Black Women, impacting the other dimensions of politics and power relations (Kurtis & Adams, 2016; Nash, 2008).

Crenshaw has categorized intersectionality into three folds: structural, political, and representational (Crenshaw, 1991). In Crenshaw's perception, structural intersectionality is a tool that explores various forms of injustices and violence against people of colour and suggests how these unjust policies can potentially be reformed. Crenshaw provides an operational definition of structural intersectionality through field-based research and examines the experiences and resilience of battered women taking shelter in Los Angeles. One of the dominant findings of her research entailed how Black women faced the issues of racism, poverty, unemployment, gender, and violence. In such situations, the women of colour were found vulnerable since they failed to meet the requirements to be eligible for permanent resident status in the United States (Crenshaw, 1991). The reason behind such eligibility requirements directly aligns with systemic barriers in the policies of immigration law and language (Collins, 2000, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2006;). We argue that these barriers, based on power, politics, and practices, escalate the domination patterns that explicitly intersect women's domestic violence experience. The situation of women of colour in terms of social, political, and economic distributions depicts how they reluctantly accept

the domination and biases created by those in power (Foucault, 1980). With the discourses of power and politics, the dominant group marginalizes the women of colour both socially and culturally and silences them politically (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Women of colour are situated in at least two subordination dimensions in political intersectionality: women and racialized groups (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw's study reveals how domestic violence has been deliberately politicized, reflecting the working strategies of social institutions. Crenshaw exemplifies the reluctance demonstrated by the Los Angeles Police Department to provide domestic violence statistics and emphasizes the intensity of violence. She strongly remarks that the atrocities that the women of colour faced went beyond institutional and racial discrimination. Explicating this bitter truth, Crenshaw problematized the liberal feminist discourses that surpassed the minority struggle and experiences.

As argued by Crenshaw (1991), representational intersectionality is concerned with the political representation of women of colour in liberal democratic practices. Regarding the mis/representation of women of colour, Crenshaw highlights "recent controversies" regarding race, gender, and ethnicity. These controversies occur because of the categories of policy discourse that prevent women of colour from occupying their space in the political apparatus. This argument leads to the point that the tendency to place a marginalized group to a distinct category of visible minority identifies how social structures dehumanize people by categorizing them as 'others' (Collins, 2015). This practice of dehumanization of those in the margin is politically constructed and historically conceptualized through the discourses of power and politics (Crenshaw, 1991). There is an ongoing interplay of power and politics in contemporary society regarding how society and culture define racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This directs to the fact that those in power

invalidate the discourse of those in the margin. This invalidation is apparent in political practices when politically disadvantaged groups are considered, especially when we perceive them in conjunction with their roles, rights, and responsibilities in the United States and beyond.

Intersectionality: Spectrum of Various Perspectives

Intersectionality has been the center of attention within academic and non-academic debates among scholars and beyond. Intersectionality theory is popular among scholars because of its tremendous utilization to map the socio-political and socio-economic disparities, social hierarchies, and inequalities that are implicitly and explicitly present in societies. As a critical theory, intersectionality is not only popular among scholars; it has also equally been of interest to feminists, politicians, and social activists today. Recently, Jason Kenney, the premier of Alberta, Canada, became controversial when he castigated intersectionality theory in a racist expression (Woods, 2020). Along with politicians and public figures' engagement, it is imperative to discuss how scholars respond to intersectionality since this paper aims to delve into the theoretical debates and methodological significance in the context of Nepal.

Intersectionality is considered a tool for exploring a matrix of domination in terms of a society's organizational structures and power relations (Collins, 1998, 2015). Drawing from Crenshaw's ideas of overlapping identity politics, Collins builds on the notion of intersectionality, linking it more to how knowledge is produced and consumed in different social settings where there is a disparity in the names of gender, inequality, race, and identity. Intersectionality serves as a theoretical framework that contributes to revealing social realities. Critiquing Crenshaw, Bilge (2013) concerns more with "whitening intersectionality," referring not to the colour of skin but the "genealogical thematic re-framing" regarding the theoretical and methodological significance. It is argued that the tendency to whitening feminism creates a potential danger to bypass the origin of

black feminism and battle racism within white feminism (Bilge, 2013; Tomlinson, 2013).

Carbado et al. (2013) also draw from Crenshaw and further elaborate the concept of intersectionality as a method to map social disparities and geographical movements. It is stated that "our failure to attend to intersectionality movement has limited our ability to see the theory in places in which it is already doing work and to imagine other places to which the theory might be taken" (Carbado et al., p. 303). Intersectionality has been acknowledged as a methodological tool across disciplines and has also been widely understood as a controversial theory across the globe. Despite this controversy, intersectionality can be considered a crucial tool for mapping dimensions that prioritize hierarchies in our social and political structures. We argue that these structures demand intersectionality to operationalize the long-standing concept and continual practices of power through social and political bodies. So, it is imperative to note "what intersectionality is" and "to assess what intersectionality does" (Carbado et al., 2013).

As Vardeman-Winter et al. (2013) discussed, intersectionality exists and operates in all disciplines, which is demonstrated in the scholarly works of feminists and critical race theorists. Their works indicate the implication and impact of intersectionality across disciplines such as "philosophy, education, political science, sociology, psychology, public health and geography" (Vardeman-Winter et al., 2013, p.285). Going beyond the Black women, MacDowell (2013) focuses on the implication of intersectionality to examine an intersectional analysis concerning other women of colour's identities. Strongly supporting the critical race theorists, May (2014) claims that "intersectionality challenges the pull of prevailing mindsets, in part by drawing from political expectations, lived experiences, and analytical positions not crafted solely within the bounds of dominant imaginaries" (p. 96). These arguments lead to the point of reference which covertly supports the claim that intersectionality can be a crucial

tool to excavate diversities and unfold social realities of marginalization and silence.

McCall (2005) considers intersectionality a theoretical intervention to penetrate and unfold issues around women of colour. While doing this, the author projects some methodological complexities of unfolding social and political issues of those in the margin. In respect to the methodological implication and complexity of intersectionality in conducting social research, Clarke and McCall (2013) note that "there is a wide range of empirical research by scholars who do not necessarily claim the mantle of intersectionality but who nevertheless enable our work and serve as an important resource for an intersectional analysis" (p. 350). Unlike these arguments, it is discussed that intersectionality is a particularized theory that concerns only women of colour (Bilge, 2013; Tomlinson, 2013). However, Nash and Warin (2017) insist that "intersectionality was positioned as a counter to the problems associated with identity politics precisely because it acknowledged differences among women" (p. 72). Let us discuss how intersectionality as a methodology to map the social inequalities and differences established uneven power distribution and systemic domination in Nepal is applicable for researchers and critics.

Normative Structure and Power Exercise: Discrimination against Minorities

Heteropatriarchal normativity has been a long mainstream political structure that has founded and promoted the bias discourses to define and operate marginalized groups in Nepali society (Pradhan-Malla, 2001). In her argument, these discourses have separated who exercise and execute power and who are deprived of social and political representations. Women, in particular, have been the recipients of these bitter experiences in the patriarchal society of Nepal (Levine, 1987; Pradhan-Malla, 2001; von Furer-Haimendorf, 1957). Apart from the dominance of heteropatriarchal normativity, religion also plays a central role in promoting intersectional realities often experienced by those in the periphery

(Hofer, 1979). Hinduism, for example, still remains at the center of politics, legitimizing the various forms of discourses to authorize its executors (Gurung, 2009; Hofer, 1979). The monarchical system introduced this practice of dominance that intersects between gender and religion (Hachhethu, 2007; Pradhan-Malla, 2001).

Snatching the sovereign power from the monarchy, the Rana Regime in Nepali political history exercised the state power and promoted the caste system, placing some at the center and others at the margin (Hachhethu, 2007). Both political practices and socially constructed caste systems victimized women, leading to a culture of punishment (Pragya, 2015). There are certain improvements in providing justice to women in today's Nepali society; however, the forms of violence against women are still structural and political (Joshi & Kharel, 2008). These forms of violence are evidenced in the contemporary scholarships:

As in many other countries, the laws relating to violence against women in Nepal is also neither adequate nor human right sensitive to redress the problems. In the Ninth Five Year Plan, the issue of legal provisions to ensure women's rights and institutional legal provision to prevent Violence against women, especially domestic violence was raised. (Joshi & Kharel, 2008, p. 5)

Although the Constitution does not allow discrimination based on sex, caste, creed or colour there are more than 150 discriminatory provisions against women in the forms of denial access to and control over resources, restricted mobility, low representation in decision-making positions in civil services, politics and public sectors. (Pragya, 2015, p.7)

These expressions imply that the politics of exclusion and discrimination against women are a persistent threat to women in Nepal. One key contributor to such violence against women is the discriminatory law that creates a division between

males and females in exercising their rights (Pragya, 2015). The political change in 2008 and the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015 promised to secure women's rights; however, these rights are not yet fully effective (Pragya, 2015). The ineffectiveness of women's rights and century-long anti-female discourses are still deterring women from their political rights guaranteed by the constitution. It shows the influence of both religion and patriarchal normativity in the politics of discrimination. These historically descended cultural practices and current political provisions intersect and yet minimize women's rights with an unjust imposition of suppression.

The Nepali socio-political practices within the monarchical system upheld the patriarchal values based on power exercise (Pandey, 2016). The political violence and discriminatory policy to access the resources underlines a systemic problem that has created depression and mental health issues among minority groups, including women and Dalit at large (Gurung, 2009; Kohrt et al., 2012). As a methodology, Intersectionality in the Nepali socio-political context is significant to investigate, understand, and flatten out standardized systems of social hierarchies and discrimination that have established male-centric and caste-centric regulation of power and politics (Crenshaw, 1991; Gurung, 2009; Pandey, 2016). The way patriarchy dominates women in the guise of cultural values is worth linking to what Foucault (1975, 2003) calls the dominance of power and discourse on 'right to kill' or 'let live' is structural and political. The political practices and the system of punishment seem to have been improved in a way, but the practices of discrimination have been intensified due to the stealth patriarchal legacy and caste system in Nepal. The violence against marginalized groups has now turned out to be a "necropolitical" in its practices of destroying and instrumentalizing human bodies to the precarity of living (Mbembe, 2003). Sexual violence and death after rape have been proliferating, and the victims are deemed to be of the working family (Kamdar, 2020; Panday, 2020). The question of what it means to

be a woman and what it means to be a man and woman of low caste and class is imperative to investigate through the lens of intersectional methodological ideas.

Genealogy of Structural Violence and Politics of Discrimination

The social and political systems of Nepal have structurally discriminated against women and the Dalit community. However, the experiences of the political representatives of the minority groups intersect with their everyday experiences of victimization. These intersecting complexities are the identity markers and signifiers of social problems that might have been influenced by the political ideologies that hinder investigating an in-depth exploration of the genealogy of differences, hierarchies and social inequalities practiced through the past centuries.

Caste position was a critical issue. For one example, the lower-ranking and non-Hindu groups could be enslaved for certain crimes, while the higher ranks could only be downgraded in caste. There is a gradation of fines and punishments in legal code too, according to the castes of the victim and the person who committed the crime. (Levine, 1978, p. 73)

The caste system characterizes its politics for categorizing people and establishing discourses to create crime and punishment subjects. The violence against Dalit in Nepal explicit and implicit, but it has an underlying root of structural violence established and legitimized for centuries. Intersectionality as methodology allows examining social divisions and politics of discrimination (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Nepalese political history shows that despite frequent political transition to a democratic inclusive system, marginalized groups like the Dalit are still politically excluded and oppressed in society. The structural injustice induced by caste hierarchy persists and causes multidimensional effects on Dalit, and it is a principle reason for Dalit exclusion and powerlessness. Ineffective implementation of policy and a lack of institutional mechanisms to enforce those policies are the prime impediments, as well

as the political parties and rulers not being sensitive to Dalit concerns.
(Bishwakarma, 2017, p. 263)

The politics of discrimination against the Dalit community has been superficially improved, but the underlying systemic exclusionary practices still exist in Nepal. The representation of marginalized communities is the broadly absent presence (Espiritu, 2014) in the policies of inclusive exclusion resulting in these people's lives grimmer than before because of the racializing nature of the systemic and political operation. The politics of categorizing people and practices of power exercise constructed inferior subjects of operation in Nepali political and historical practices signifies structural violence that legitimized political, social, and cultural hegemonic control of one group over another.

The state's power was under the control of certain elite groups in history that established class and caste hierarchy, neglecting people's capabilities and craftsmanship (Ahuti, 2010). The cast-based discrimination is a social construct that needs to be debunked with subversive strategies through shared values (Ahuti, 2010). Dalit's issues did not get any space in earlier monolithic and armchair ethnographic studies (Chaulagain & Karki, 2020; Folmar, 2007). The genealogy of the structural violence against women, Dalit, and other marginalized communities is now crucial for a move to debunk the patriarchal mindset and caste-based political discourses and practices. The move on social research deploying the intersectional approach creates an avenue in the socio-political and socio-economic arena by offering micro and macro subversion to the existing political practices for a social change concerning equity, equality, and social justice. The politics of inequality produces and reproduces various problems explicitly affecting the daily lives of people who have no power, have been categorized as low social status, deprived of political representation and decision making. Viruell-Fuentes et al. (2012) argue that "racism reliably produces and reproduces social and economic inequities along racial and ethnic lines, and, as

such, it is a fundamental cause of disease" (p. 2100). The underlying structure of political, cultural, and economic inequalities and exercise of power has created an inferior subject in Nepali societies by silencing the voices and rights of the so-called minority communities.

There are more than 125 ethnic communities in Nepal, and the majority of ethnic people are also peasants. These ethnic peasants, especially the minority groups, have been culturally, politically, and economically suppressed and exploited by the Hindu upper-caste rulers, merchants, and priests for centuries, especially after the forceful incorporation of small principalities into the united Nepal in the eighteenth century. (Paudel, 2016, p. 548)

The politics of categorizing and practices of othering are deemed essential in neocolonial domination, intensified racial and gender discrimination against minority people in Nepal (Guneratne, 1998; Laczo, 2003). Intersectionality as a methodology for social research examines multifaceted political problems, which have been historically in the system of political operation and the variables to create differences through a single-dimensional system of power exercise. As a methodology, intersectionality should not only be taken as an instrument of criticizing power exercises, political practices, and discursive formation; it should also be perceived as an idea of generating new insights into the knowledge economy by thoroughly investigating the disadvantaged groups' experiences. This methodological underpinning examines lived experiences of people in the present hierarchical societies through a different lens, examining the genealogy of systemic racism practiced in both intra- and inter- nationalities and ethnicities in the society.

As a social research method concerning Nepal's power and politics, intersectionality travels to the marginal corner of political history and mechanism of operation to investigate the realities of inequalities and subjugation, generating

knowledge for social change. Intersectionality intervenes in the existing paradigms of social inequalities and hierarchies that trace a long history of operation in Nepal to reproduce knowledge by questioning the discourses about social hierarchies, dispassionate distribution of power, the controlling mechanism of the state, and categories of class and caste. Carbado et al. (2013) highlight that "the goal" of intersectional theory "was not simply to understand social relations of power, nor to limit intersectionality's gaze to the relations that were interrogated therein, but to bring the often-hidden dynamics forward in order to transform them" (p. 312). As Foucault (1980) illustrates and is further explained in 1994 and 2003 about the genealogical approach, intersectionality's effectiveness as a method has travelled to various geographies and social and political histories and practices as a genealogical investigation of discourses, subjugation, and power.

The politics of creating differences and structural domination and patriarchal hegemonic belief systems, for instance, are some of the central issues in Nepal in which intersectionality functions not only for producing new knowledge but also for identifying how politics and policies work in the categories of difference such as caste systems that have been perpetuated for a century. This political operation is systemic and discriminatory that depicts state racism (Foucault, 2003) against certain groups of people. Intersectionality suggests exploring the genealogy of the marginal, neglected, and dominated realities in Nepali society based on people's experiences and silences. Silence is political; silence normalizes its silencing notion. Intersectionality offers methodological intervention for examining many such ethnic, religious, and cultural issues that have been explicitly and implicitly influenced by power dynamics and political practices in Nepali socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural context need to revisit and re-examine that will be a new method of understanding social disparities.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper offers a methodological framework to explore and examine social hierarchies, discrimination, and injustice, structurally functioning in Nepali politics. The paper provides a valuable point of departure for conducting field-based future studies, employing intersectionality as a tool to examine the current socio-cultural scenario and explore the history of dominance and discrimination against socially neglected groups and communities in Nepal. Regardless of this limitation, the paper's method allows future researchers to map political practices and the legacy of discrimination produced through the social structure by questioning the existing power relations. In other words, the paper contributes to the scholarships to redefine what counts as humanity and dignity, looking into the dominance of century-long discourses and practices and investigating the tendency to sexualize and racialize otherness in the Nepali socio-political apparatus. This paper's methodological ideas can potentially contribute to unfolding issues of ethnicity, which is severe and critical to examine in the Nepali political context.

This paper has considered intersectionality as a methodological tool kit that travels every corner of the globe. As a methodology, it is applicable to map racial discrimination in the West in a narrower sense; however, it is also an approach to examine power dynamics and political practices of non-western societies, including those in Nepal. This informs that intersectionality can be understood as an activity to examine a micro-study of individuals' and groups' experiences in societies and identities constructed by national and international regimes of power and political discourses. The intersectional approach allows exploring the genealogy of social inequalities and the various discourses of categorizing people into groups to understand the history of political operation and liberate people from such operation, taking an epistemological travel to the ontological process of rethinking humanity.

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