

## **Assessing Barriers to Female Leadership in Higher Education of Nepal**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores diverse obstacles female employees have been facing in higher education of Nepal. Despite high qualifications, and robust competence and confidence, women are generally deprived of holding leadership roles in colleges and universities of Nepal because of the traditional mindsets about the roles of men and women. The impact of cultural and societal structured discriminations reflects in the poor presence of female leaders in academia of Nepal. I employ the qualitative research design to structure the paper by using the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with women teachers of Tribhuvan University to gather the data for strengthening the ongoing argument. The paper has intended to investigate into the intricacies observed by women when seeking career development in their workplace. The major finding of the research has been the continuation of the traditional principles and mindsets guided by the Manusmriti that underrates women's capacity and seeks women to hold on only subjugated positions in societal structures in higher education of Nepal even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although the constitution of Nepal 2015 ensures equal rights to all Nepalese citizens regardless of their gender, class, ethnicity, race and caste, the unequal distribution of leadership roles among the employees in colleges and universities in general and in Tribhuvan University in particular has marginalized women employees in respect of leadership. The implementation of the constitutional provisions regarding gender disparity in all aspects of Nepalese society is imperative.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Female Leadership, Inclusive Leadership, Manusmriti, Gender Disparity, Patriarchy

## 1. Introduction

Women in patriarchy become victims in numerous ways and they are often deprived of prestigious roles and responsibilities. Their deprivation from leadership roles in general and academic roles in particular stem from societal and cultural factors. Despite their academic qualification and psychological strengths, they hardly possess the leadership positions in most of the institutional structures of Nepalese society. The paper explores key barriers to female leadership in higher education in Nepal. The primary obstacles female educators face: a) gender stereotype b) professional discrimination c) dual responsibilities d) opportunities based on gender differences e) sexual harassment are some of many that discourage women from leadership positions. Women are normally expected to look after the children and get engaged in household activities. They are mostly provided nursing and subordinating roles. The impact of such expectations lingers with their professional journeys as well. Therefore, educated and competent women are looked down upon and are not easily trusted to be capable of holding leadership roles in academy in most of the cases. Nepalese society as such is guided by religious principles that discriminate with women in almost all zones of life. Objectives of this study are: to explore the gender equilibrium in academic hubs of Nepal and to analyze how female academics are still discriminated among intellectuals. This research has undertaken only Tribhuvan University and its constituent campuses for collecting data. Besides, it looks into the issue of academic inclusion at the representative and leading university of Nepal's higher education. The study is limited to the opportunities received by and provided to female academics in their workplace.

## 2. Literature Review

I have gathered a wide range of secondary information on the leadership roles of women in society in general and in education in particular. The existing knowledge on the barriers to women leadership reflects poor status and social injustice. Meanwhile, it has become clear no particular study has been conducted on obstacles to female leadership in higher education of Nepal yet in a way this paper investigates for the in-depth understanding of the topic. In the educational context, talented women faculties prefer to work with male students in universities and colleges. Consequently there is a gender balance.

On one hand, female leaders in higher education tend to include men in their projects and on the other they endeavor to balance the institutions in terms of gender differences. It is evident that women holding leadership positions perform better and prove to be the role models for new generations

according to Wilson (2009, p. 16). Nevertheless, the situations of educational institutions differ from country to country. Kausar et al (2024) have found the status of female leadership in a vulnerable situation. Women are hardly chosen for the roles in the top management. Instead, men are sought after for higher positions as high status is associated with a “male undertone”. Men are considered to possess all the required qualities for the leadership roles. Because of their masculine connotation in the management and leadership, similar behaviors and attributes are ascribed to men rather than to women. The preconception about men is that they deserve top management positions, whereas women lack the quality to occupy leadership roles (p. 8). The stereotyped roles of women reflect in cultural measures set which limit them to playing traditional roles. Leadership roles demand unwavering competence and tremendous freedom that women lack in patriarchy. Males have suitable qualities for “positions of administration and management” (Kausar et al., 2024, p. 2). In the context of the United States of America, women were accepted in the leadership roles only in 1920 although the presence of women in education was much high exceeding 86%. Women had to launch movements for their rights and equality. They sought for change in the educational status. The rise of teachers’ associations helped women to be elected as county superintendents. Historically, women for leadership positions have struggled much in the West. Consequently, the women acquired almost two thirds of county superintendents’ positions by 1928. The supervisory positions held by women had been picked up somewhat since the women's rights development had catalyzed females to organize into bunches to bolster the candidacy of women for school workplaces. Furthermore, suffrage had given women the correct to vote, permitting them to politically reinforce female candidates for administration positions. As women begun winning these political workplaces, bunches of men administrators, expectation on evacuation of the superintendence from the race handle, started pushing politically for changes in school locale administration (Brown, 2004, p. 23). The fluctuation in the selection of leaders based on gender differences in the history of West demonstrates that women have hardly been preferred for leadership roles.

Recognizable evidence of the administration boundaries for females ought to offer assistance within the annihilation of these boundaries by giving data to approach creators, college authoritative arrangement program pioneers, and school board organizations (Agriculturist, 1993; Walkins, Herrin & McDonald, 1993). Logan and Scollay expressed in their study about of college instructive organization office chairs that a few obstructions to work of ladies for tall school central and administrator positions included a seen ineffectualness of women in dealing with teaching, unwillingness to administer evening exercises, staff concerns around being driven by a lady,

community sex inclination around ladies as CEO's, and month to month intrusions, pregnancy and menopause (1999). Other obstructions that have been distinguished in contemplations about are male dominance or the “good ancient boys” arrange, need of political sharp, deficiently emphaticness, and women's perceptual need of scientific capacity in managing with budget issues (Logan & Scollay, 1999; Shepard, 1997). Bjork too distinguished future life plans, need of work security, need of portability, and moo part fulfillment as obstructions for women.

Women in school authority positions experience significant deterrents stemming from social, financial, and social components. The study demonstrates the discernments and encounters of female head instructors concerning the multifaceted challenges they stand up to whereas driving community schools within the Lalitpur Metropolis. In spite of the advancing scene, Nepal still hooks with the winning discernment of women as second-class citizens (Ghimire, 2023, p. 216). Female school heads frequently involvement expanded residencies in instructing benefit and authority positions whereas experiencing different deterrents that ruin their successful execution. Females confront differing challenges such as negative discernment inside the school community, parts and family connections, insufficient bolster from the community, socio-cultural deterrents inside the school setting, moo self-assurance and certainty, organizational setup inside the school, partial sexual orientation discernments, and regulation predispositions and separation (Ghimire, 2023, p. 220). Because of these traditional practices, women get deprived of leadership positions in secondary education of Nepal.

Viable authority is centered on encouraging successful instruction with tall desires for understudies, making a positive school climate and a vision of victory for all learners, giving ceaseless staff improvement openings, and observing understudy advance. Within the past, principals and directors had more of an administrative part within the schools. They made beyond any doubt that buses ran on time, that the buildings were clean and useful, that each classroom had a qualified instructor, that all vital assets were accessible for instruction, and the like. Presently, with expanded weights for responsibility, the parts of the vital and director have extended. They must be successful in two spaces: the primary a specialized and administrative space managing with strategies and implies, and the moment a esteem space managing with objectives and purposes centered on understudy accomplishment and instruction (Brown, 2004, pp. 29—30). Women experience unjust treatment that reduces their self-assurance. They confront social and social predispositions and unfair hones that result in reducing their individual and proficient desires counting administration parts. The nonappearance of strong socialization, familial back, utilizes of residential laborers and arrangement of essential direction has kept them denied of administration parts in higher instruction (Kausar et al,

2024, p. 1). The method of career arranging applies a favorable impact on the movement and development of women's careers, as well as their achievement of regarded authority parts inside the domain of higher instruction (Kausar et al, 2024, p. 10). The great share of members communicated the supposition that having a similarly adaptable work environment had an advantageous affect on their proficient advancement and business circumstances, coming about in higher levels of fulfillment, more self-assurance, and an in general higher quality of life (Kausar et al, 2024, p. 16). It is basic to subject the social, organization deterrents to a more careful examination and strong evaluate to encourage the enhancement of sex correspondence within the domain of higher instruction organization. It is imperative for women in the academic world to effectively lock in broad organizing at all levels, counting interior their particular divisions among staff individuals, and over the college. It is prudent for women to endeavor to develop their person capacities, effectively seek after their individual interface, and show faithful assurance in their interest of advance (Kausar et al, 2024, p. 17). Despite numerous endeavors for gender balance in leaderships, the practice does not seem convincing. In a study centered on the Kathmandu Valley, the researchers demonstrate that in spite of headways in measures for sexual orientation balance and women's strengthening, there is still a parcel less women in leadership parts in Kathmandu organizations.

Due to the nonattendance of sexual orientation differences in authority positions, comprehensive decision-making is hampered and may result in misplaced conceivable outcomes for organizational victory (Bhardwaj & Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 2). Women's progression and victory in authority positions are hampered by gender-based separation and predispositions that still exist in Nepali working environments. These biases seem in judgments approximately advancements, assignments, and get to assets, making an unjustifiable playing field for female leaders. Female leaders in Kathmandu are incapable to develop in their careers due to a need of viable mentorship and sponsorship systems planned explicitly to assist them. Women's access to part models and guides who can offer accommodating counsel and chances for advance is hampered by the need of strong frameworks and systems (Bhardwaj & Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 3). The researchers investigated how individual encounters contributed to their authority reasoning, which applies to pioneers of any sexual orientation.

The impact of outside bolster on individual and proficient development was a critical perspective as highlighted so far. it has been emphasized that the researchers want to create a positive effect on the community persuaded their administration way, despite the deterrents' experience (Bhardwaj & Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 14). Women's solid familial connections frequently deter numerous female teachers from seeking after advancements to school head positions, which require them to be absent

from their families. Female school pioneers experience numerous challenges, with one of the foremost noteworthy being the battle to adjust their work and family obligations. This challenge is especially articulated for ladies who at the same time hold administration positions in schools and are moms. Parental obligations can have different impacts on their careers, particularly for ladies with newborn children and youthful children, who regularly bear a unbalanced share of childcare obligations (Ghimire, 2023, p. 221). The basic challenges envelop physical and specialized troubles inside the work environment that compel the instructive objectives of ladies pioneers. Female school heads confront various challenges in their positions, and a few of these challenges stem from intelligent with their instructors. Analyzing these issues, different speculations, counting social, financial, social, and basic points of view helps to comprehend the complex nature of sex imbalance (Ghimire, 2023, p. 222). Educational change of the 1990s displayed an opportunity to play down or kill the obstructions to women and minorities as school principals and directors. Such imaginative changes as site-based administration, school chambers, parent and community inclusion, and educator strengthening, additionally changing school socioeconomics and an accentuation on understudy accomplishment, have made modern concepts in administration and policy-making (Brown, 2004, pp. 44-45). The modern concept of administration and policy making seeks for the inclusive representation of all levels of contributors. Women need to participate in the constitution of policies for effective application of the rules in academia.

The crave, vision, or mettle to assume a bigger stage may develop from an acknowledgment that more junior ladies require part models or coaches; then again, colleagues exterior of one's possess work environment who are portion of a formative arrange express certainty in a woman's capacities indeed when male-normed voices fall flat to do so (Madsen & Longman, 2020, p. 20). Hence, women's voices get functional and supplement the men's absence as they have capacity. The study gives data on the esteem of sexual orientation differing qualities in authority parts to partners, corporate pioneers and policymakers. It offers valuable suggestions for making laws, plans, and methods that empower women's administration, destroy impediments, and cultivate settings that are conducive to their development. This study includes to the body of information on sexual orientation differing qualities and administration in a specific setting by looking at the interface between female administration and company victory in Kathmandu. It offers shrewd data that organizations and lawmakers may utilize to form plans for advancing sexual orientation uniformity, upgrading organizational viability, and advancing maintainable advancement (Bhardwaj & Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 5). For the holistic development of educational institutions, the participation of women is imperative. However, the

existing literature does not present any research on the leadership roles of women in higher education of Nepal. This paper presents how and why women in colleges that impart higher education are deprived of leadership positions.

### **3. Methodology**

This is an exploratory research based on both primary and secondary data. This paper follows the qualitative research design to explore the causes of women's deprivation in Nepalese academia. What factors are the substantial barriers to women leadership and why women are less privileged than men are answered based on the information from the secondary sources including research articles, dissertations and research reports as well. Besides, the personal observation holds a significant position in the presentation and analysis of the data to strengthen the argument. The anecdotes as presented in the analysis section support the major claims to reflect the realistic scenario of academic leadership in Nepal. I have chosen five female academics to conduct in-depth interviews for their views as the source of primary data. Their perspectives, opinions and experiences collected through the open-ended questions are analyzed in this research paper. I have used the theory of inclusive leadership in analyzing the data to justify the argument that both men and women deserve to hold the leadership positions provided that they are eligible in terms of qualification and have the proactive behavior.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

The way women are treated in societal framework relies on the cultural values that guide human behaviors and their decisions. Hiring and promoting employees in colleges and universities largely depends on the system that expects the members in diverse roles. Men are generally expected to play main and decisive roles, whereas women are treated as subordinates to the counterparts. Despite constitutional imperative provisions for equal distribution of responsibilities in Nepalese academia, the practice is far beyond this theory. The barriers to female leadership in Nepalese higher education are numerous but few of them are discussed based on the data gathered from the Key Informant Interviews with women in higher education at Tribhuvan University. One of the female university teachers expressed her opinion that men who hold high positions in higher education think that only male members of academia are rational and daring to run the educational institutions. Therefore, they hesitate to accept the leadership of women if the latter are more qualified and competent for the position. This narrow mindset does not allow women to be acceptable for the leadership roles in many situations. In fact, this is gender bias that reflects in hiring, promoting and evaluating the employees in academia (*Interview, 22 November, 2024*). The abilities of people are assessed based on perceptions

rather than facts and performances. As long as this perception functions in Nepal, women will be deprived of leading the institutions despite their caliber and qualifications.

Workplace discrimination based on gender differences in South Asia in general and in Nepal in particular continues even in 21<sup>st</sup> century when technology and information seem to reach the peak. The impact of cultural legacy reflects in workplace especially in educational domain in Nepal. How women are perceived not only by men but also by their female colleagues relates to the principles of the Manusmriti that guides Hindu social system wherein women are considered as the second class people. Lerner has heightened subjugated position of women as accorded in the Manusmriti:

Women's sexual subordination was institutionalized in the earliest law codes and enforced by the full power of the state. Women's cooperation in the system was secured by various means: force, economic dependency on the male head of the family, class privileges bestowed upon confirming and dependent women of the upper classes, and the artificially created division of women into respectable and not-respectable women. (1986)

Due to the influence of the Mansmriti in Nepalese society, men do not generally prefer to share the power with men. Instead, women become the victims and remain on the margin in the academia. The majority of the participants in the key informant interviews stated that they experienced unequal discrimination of opportunities in both personal and professional realms. Women receive fewer opportunities and choices than their counterparts in almost all professions. In education, schools and colleges are deemed to be the temple of knowledge and Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge. However, men hardly trust women for the leadership positions. Consequently, women do not get the opportunities for professional development. In comparison to men, female teachers are left far behind from the leadership roles. The impact of this deprivation and discrimination reflects in the disparity of pay scale as well. Women receive fewer opportunities for financial growth than their counterparts do. Hence, leadership positions do not only encourage women for better performance but also help them to be financially independent.

One of the barriers women in education face is the allocation of traditional roles to them. Nepalese society treats them as if they are only capable of performing the nursing roles rather than leadership roles. This perception and practice lingers in education as well. When the time comes for holding leadership roles, women are sidelined and men get privileged in colleges and universities. The majority of the participants in the study highlighted the impact of traditional roles in academia. They pointed out that all the high positions including vice-chancellor, rector, registrar, Tribhuvan Service



Commission president and member are male. Only pro chancellor of Tribhuvan University is female, which is just an accident. The discrimination in promoting and appointing academicians in the leadership roles in Tribhuvan University is intense. The participants in the interviews expressed aggression against the hegemony of men in the sacred place. Similarly, the representation of women in constituent campuses of Tribhuvan University is very poor. The current situation demonstrates that higher education is highly patriarchal. Despite the constitutional provision of 33% women's representation in all the sectors of Nepalese society, women do not hold leadership positions in the oldest and largest university of Nepal.

When further investigated about the cause of poor presence of female academicians in leadership positions, one of the participants asserted that female teachers do not flatter the political leaders. Besides, they get busy in family affairs and cannot manage time for political activism. Therefore, the political leaders do not favor women. The lack of access of female academicians is because of their engagement in balancing family and workplace. The educational institutions do not have women friendly policies. In fact, women need more leaves than men. Besides, they need to be privileged in the leadership roles considering their familial roles. Even if society understands the complexity of women, it overlooks it and discriminates with women in a negative way. Instead of positive discrimination, women experience unequal distribution of opportunities for leadership roles in Nepalese academy. As a result, there is scarcity of women in leadership in almost all constituent campuses, research centers and institutes of Tribhuvan University. The young female aspirants for leadership roles do not get encouraged due to poor presence of female academicians in leadership positions. They look for their role models and accordingly hope for their better career growth in higher education.

There is a structural barrier to women leadership in higher education. The academic institutions in Nepal do not seek changes in terms of role sharing and inclusive leadership. Theoretically, inclusive leadership makes any organization healthier and more sustainable. Besides, the organizations can become more resistant to unrest and anarchy provided that theory of inclusive leadership is implemented. Inclusive leadership can boost up the energy and engagement of the members in creative activities. It ensures psychological safety and belongingness of all the members in the organization. "Inclusive leadership is relationship-oriented, focuses on affective behaviors, and is grounded in principles of social justice" (Shah et al., 2022, p. 2). To make any organization sustainable, theory of inclusion in terms of power and role sharing is imperative.

In a Key Informant Interview (29 March, 2025), one part-time teacher of Tribhuvan University raised the issue of inclusion in recruiting female teachers as permanent faculties. In her perspective,

there have been numerous barriers to female teachers for having access to the opportunities available to part-time faculties in general. Female teachers lack political access and they cannot afford to flatter the authorities for getting opportunities to become contract teachers as well. Meanwhile, the vacancy announcement from Tribhuvan University Service Commission is also very infrequent. Consequently, female teachers get discouraged and deprived of participating in the qualifying exams. On the other hand, male teachers even if they are part-timers have more access to the authorities and thus benefit from multiple opportunities.

The respondent highlighted the equitable aspect of teachers' recruitment. Female part-timers have not benefited from the inclusion. They need to be prioritized and privileged for empowerment. They should be judged on the equal scale used for male part-time teachers in the university. No implementation of the theory of inclusion in the case of part-time female teachers in the university demonstrates that the university policymakers compromise with the application of equitable procedure of recruiting and promoting teachers. Indeed, this ongoing practice impedes the advancement of female part-time teachers in particular and university female teachers in general. In order to retain the practice of inclusion in the academic institution, the authorities need to segregate the problems based on the gender differences faced by the university teachers. It does not mean that university should not remain concerned to the equality and meritocracy for knowledge development and career growth of teachers in general. However, the theory of inclusion needs to be implemented for the empowerment of female teachers at all levels. Both women and men with equal qualification and experience must be offered equal opportunities for all leadership roles. Then only, the exponential growth of higher education in Nepal can be possible. By addressing all the substantial barriers to women leadership in higher education, the theory of inclusive leadership needs to be implemented for the development of the educational institutions and for ensuring social justice to Nepalese people in general and educated women in particular.

## 5. Conclusion

The article has found that women in workplace in Nepal are hardly promoted to leadership positions of the lingering traditional values guided by the Manusmriti. The stereotypes about the role relations of men and women are questionable and unjustifiable. Women despite their high qualification and competence are still perceived as subordinates in academic institutions in general and in higher

education in particular. Accordingly, they are treated and discriminated in the workplace. The study has demonstrated that female teachers in Tribhuvan University have not reached the leadership positions because of cultural, societal and religious provisions and practices. Although women have been politically empowered and privileged in Nepal as accorded in the constitution of Nepal, 2015, they still lack cultural and social freedom to perform leadership roles in all sectors of society. Their marginalization and subordination have been due to lack of openness and lack of practice of inclusive leadership in higher education. Consequently, women face diverse complications in undertaking the leadership roles. Nepalese society needs to be open and liberal for including both men and women in all aspects for holistic development. The diminishing presence of women in leadership can affect the scaling of societal development educationally. By using the theory of inclusive leadership, the article has analyzed the views and opinions of university female teachers to strengthen the argument that both women and men need to be proportionally promoted to leadership roles for the effective performance of Tribhuvan University in particular and academic institutions in Nepal in general.

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