

# Social Status of Women Working in the Handicraft Industry

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Doi : <https://doi.org/10.3126/ppj.v2i2.52916>

## Abstract

*The labors are the backbone of the industry. The study revealed that the majority of the handicraft working women in Patan industrial Area. This study is based on handicraft industries located on Lalitpur district. The women labors in Handicraft industry, had lack of knowledge, training, education and skill for prestigious job. They are far away from the knowledge of economic rights, women rights and other rights of labors. Some of them were even harassed and abused. Primary as well as secondary data were used in order to explore the status of handicraft working women labors. Out of 112 different industries only 8 handicraft industries were selected. Sample sizes of total 40 women were selected from 8 industries. Therefore total number of sampled workers was 40. There were no special changing rooms or facilities for women workers. The workers had no conscious about labor law but owners had all the ideas to exploit in different aspects. Although there were lots of difficulties for the female workers in Patan industrial estate, handicraft working women were still happy and hopeful that their children will go to school and do a better job in future. They spent some hardly saved money for entertainment, buying new clothes and feasting some days. They faced lots of problem in their day to day life for living. They are struggling for uplifting their social and economic status.*

**Keywords:** Economic status, handicraft, women rights & women empowerment,

## 1. Introduction

In comparison to men, Nepal's population is make up about its half by woman (CBS, 2021). The economic contribution of woman was substantial, but largely unnoticed because their traditional role was taken for granted. When employed, their wages are very less than paid in comparison to men. In most rural areas their employment outside the household generally was limited to planting, weeding and harvesting. In urban areas, they were employed in domestic and traditional jobs, as well as government sector, mostly, mostly in low level position. For this, it is being prioritized on addressing the social economic condition of the women workers.

At the level of the national government there is lack of explicit policy and program formulation and reduce gender disparities; at the community level, social and religious norms and taboos continue to prevail and constrain the activities of women; and at the household level there is often and over discrimination against women. The consequence is

the status of women in Nepal continuous to be low. They are disadvantaged in many ways: as poor people they live under the same harsh condition as their male counterparts, as woman they suffer from social, cultural and political bias, and as head of household they have to carry out full traditional roles with the added responsibility of household and production management. In contrast men have benefited from expanded educational and employment opportunities, so that women's relative status has probably been declining (Ghimire, 2010).

Nepal's main economy is overwhelmingly subsistence agriculture and because women predominate in this sector, their total contribution to the household income remains as 50 percent as compare to 44 percent for male and 6 percent for children between the ages of 10 to 4. More and more Nepalese women are entering into the job market today because of their education qualification, economic necessity to run household and by the policy of government to include women. If one looks into the occupation distribution of families from 2001 to 2011 census, one would find in considerable increase in the proportion of women employed in service, profession and technical and sales service i.e. 10 percent in 2001 and 20 percent in 2011 (CBS, 2012).

Handicraft is the occupation of making by hands usable products graces with visual appeal. Handicraft include such activities as needle work, lace-making, weaving, printed textile decoration, basketry, pottery, ornamental, metal working, jewelry, leather working and wood working and the making of stain glass that requires complex facilities (Maharjan, 2063).

In the world even though women are the major fonder of the society, yet women have not achieved quality with men. Of the world's 1.3 billion poor people, it is estimated that nearly 70 percent are women. Between 75 percent and 80 percent of the world's 27 million refugees are women. There are many countries where women are second class citizens. No matter how talented they are, they never get a chance to develop. A lot of countries are there where women are treated as subordinate and second class citizen, though the equal rights are preserved in the constitution (UN, 1999).

The political participation of women in the world seems relatively low and it is duly because of the existence of patriarchal mindset even in the political parties in almost all countries in the world no matter how advanced and socially, economically, culturally and politically sound the countries are. The participation of women in parliament in Japan and USA is only 7.1 percent and 17 percent respectively. While in the countries like Rwanda it's 49 percent and in Sweden it's 46 percent. The status of women in developed countries is also lower in all sectors. Leaving some expectation of European, American and Asian countries, women in the world are socially, economically, culturally and politically dominated and they are excluded from the opportunities. Throughout the world, women face violence every day. From the battlefield to the bedroom, women are at risk from violence in all area of life. Violence against women persists because of society canopy. Virtually every culture in the world contains forms of violence against women that are often invisible because they are

seen as normal or acceptable. The underlying cause of violence against women lies in gender discrimination- the denial of women's equality with in all areas of life (Acharya, 1994).

Nepal, a Himalayan country situated in South Asia is one of the poor countries in the world. Major reason behind this is the political instability and undemocratic rule for long. Other crucial factors for being the country very poor due to lack of awareness and access to quality education. As a result people have superstitious belief, there is gender discrimination. And political leaders have decreased political vision. The socio-economic status of women is very poor in Nepal. The women are being discriminated in every aspect of society. These and so many other factors have contributed to turn Nepal a lower human development state (Karki, 2010)

The term 'handicraft encompasses a wide range of artifacts. The informal sector, which includes handicraft, has been described by International Labour Organization (ILO, 1995) as a part of economic activity characterized by certain features like reliance on local available resources and skills, family ownership, small scale operation, and labor intensity. Handicraft was first introduced in Nepal with the financial and technical support of UNICEF with the objective to meet marketing requirement of handicraft producers who are mainly women and operating on a very small scale, usually from their home. There are many kinds of handicraft production in Nepal, some of them are Nepali paper, Rice paper, Bamboo Crafts, Dhaka clothes, Paper envelope, hand bag, moneybag, water bottle cover and many more.

In the case of married women, they face more problems than unmarried. In this case, it is essential to study their existing situation in order to find out their socio-economic condition. But there is no exact calculation of female workers involved in these industries regarding their economic condition. So it became necessary to study about their different aspect of economy to improve in their economic-condition.

In handicraft industries of Patan Industrial Estate, women constitute about 50 percent of the total workers. But their contributions are overlooked. Therefore it becomes inevitable to look at their socio-economic condition and their important role in the development of handicraft industries.

### **1.1 General Introduction of the Study Area**

Patan industrial Estate was selected for the study because it was established on 12th Mangsir 2020 B.S. to promote art, culture, status of artists, small cottage industries (especially handicraft industries). Most of the handicraft industries of Patan are centralized in this area. There are 112 industries altogether and total 1247 workers work in them. Altogether 37 industries are handicrafts industries (PIEMO, 2066). Women workers from different places are involved in those industries. It exports large amount of handicrafts products.

## **2. Objectives**

The overall objective of this study is to find out the facts and figures social status of the women workers of the handicraft industries. Whereas the specific objectives is to find out the problem of women workers in handicraft industries of Patan Industrial Estate.

### 3. Methodology

This article is prepared by using both the primary and secondary source of data in order to meet the stated objectives of the study. Primary source of data has been obtained through interview methods. The owner and women workers of the related industries were interviewed to fill up set of question. Secondary data has been extracted from books, journals, dissertations brochures, magazines, Handicraft Association of Nepal (HAN) Patan Industrial Estate management office other related and relevant materials available.

### 4. Sampling procedure

This study used multi-stage sampling method to select the industry and respondents were selected from the purposive sampling method. According to the data provided by Patan Industrial Estate management office there are 112 industries. Out of 112 different industries 37 are handicraft industries. Among them 8 handicraft industries were selected for the data collection. From 8 industries 40 women were selected from purposive sampling method. Therefore total number of sampled workers was 40.

### 5. Discussion and Analysis of the study

#### 5.1 Age Group of the Respondents

Age is one of the factors, which affects the socio-economic status of women and they have different working capacity as different age group. So respondents were asked about their age during the process of collecting the primary data numbers of women with varying found in the handicraft industries. The following table and chart shows variety of age group of the female workers of handicraft industries.

**Table 1**

*Distribution of the respondents by age group*

Age ( in yrs ) Percentage	Number	
15-19	2	5.00
20-24	9	22.50
25-29	10	25.0
30-34	2	5.00
35-39	5	12.50
40-44	5	12.50
45-59	4	10.00
Above 60	3	7.50
Total	40	100.00

Source: Field Survey 2022

From the above table, highest percent of interviewed females (25.00 percent belong to the age 25 to 39 years. The second highest percent of interview females belong to the age group 20 to 24 years (22.50 percent). This data shows that the young and productive age group is highly involved in handicraft business. The women workers above sixty age does helper job like sweeping and cleaning job rather than core handicraft jobs.

## 5.2 Caste/Ethnic Group of the Respondents

Nepal is multi-cultural, multiracial country. It is heterogeneous in its ethnic composition. In the order to identify the social status of female workers, castes of respondents were also surveyed. Following table shows the caste distribution of 40 female workers of handicrafts industries.

**Table 2**

*Distribution of the respondents by Caste*

Caste	Number	Percentage
Newar	16	40.00
Tamang	6	15.00
Chettri	5	12.50
Brahmin	4	10.00
Gurung	2	5.00
Tharu	2	5.00
Sherpa	2	5.00
Limbu	2	5.00
Dhimal	1	2.50
Total	40	100.00

Source: Field Survey 2022

The above collected data clearly shows that most of the workers are Newar. Handicraft is the traditional work of the Newar of the Patan city. Therefore comparing to other castes Newar are highly involved in this industry. According to above figure many Newar community women are economically upgrading their lifestyle by working in the handicraft industries. The sample of the study shows that the majority of the female workers were from ethnic group of the Nepalese society. The female from so called high caste society were also involved in handicraft industries. Newars are the majority of workers in the industry. In addition, it indicates that worker of various castes and ethnic group have been working in the handicraft industrial sector of Nepal. A unique type of uniformity and harmony was observed among handicraft women population in the field which was remarkable.

## 5.3 Religion

Religion occupies an integral position in Nepalese life and society. Nepali people believe in various religious according to their ethnic group. The four major religion followed by

Nepali people are Hindu, Buddhism, Christian and Muslim. The following table shows the religious Status of female workers.

**Table No.3**

*Distribution of the respondents by Religion*

Religion Percentage	Number	
Hindu	24	60.00
Christian	8	20.00
Buddhist	7	17.50
Muslim	1	1.25
Total	40	100.00

Source: Field Survey 2022

Most of the female workers were from Newar ethnic group. They are mostly from Hindu community. Hence the number of Hindu is maximum (60 percent) in handicraft business. Among other religion the study found that Christian and Buddhist religion following working women were more satisfied in their job than other religion. In Hindu religion following women workers they were found not very satisfied as well as secure in their job due to various reasons. As Nepal is patriarchal society where the economic role is played by men member, women are not taken as powerful and capable of earning money. Mostly Hindu religion following people were from patriarchal society and their husband don't want them to work outside their house. Their husband wants their wives to work inside their household works only and control and take care of their children.

#### 5.4 Marital status

The researcher also surveyed about the marital status of respondents women with various marital status were engaged in handicraft industry. Married, unmarried widow and divorced women were found. The following table shows their marital status.

**Table No.4**

*Distribution of the respondents by Marital Status*

Marital Status Percentage	Number	
Married	25	62.50
Unmarried	11	27.50
Widow	3	7.50
Divorced	1	2.50
Total	40	100.00

Source: Field Survey 2022

Out of the total surveyed women, involvement of large number of married women (62.5 percent) were seen which is followed by unmarried women(27.5 percent) most of the

married women were in the work to support their family economically. Beside that 7.5 percent widow and 2.5 percent divorced woman was also being employed in those industries. Among widow women it was found that one woman was replaced in her husbands place to upgrade her family after her husband’s death. When we asked about the reason behind the divorce with the divorced woman the reason was domestic violence of drunkard husband.

### 5.5 Educational Status

Education is one of the basic activities of people in all human societies. It is a process of socialization. It makes man capable of judging himself, which always prevent him from harming others. It also provides self-awareness so that one can judge right & wrong. It is very necessary to have knowledge that the best way to empower. Girls in lower income groups get little opportunity to go to school at all. Those who do go to school can hardly further their education beyond the secondary level. Another compelling factor hindering women’s education in general is the fact that girls are transferred to their affiance household after marriage, with the results that parents have no claim on their work or income as adult women.

**Figure 1**

*Distribution of the respondents by educational status*

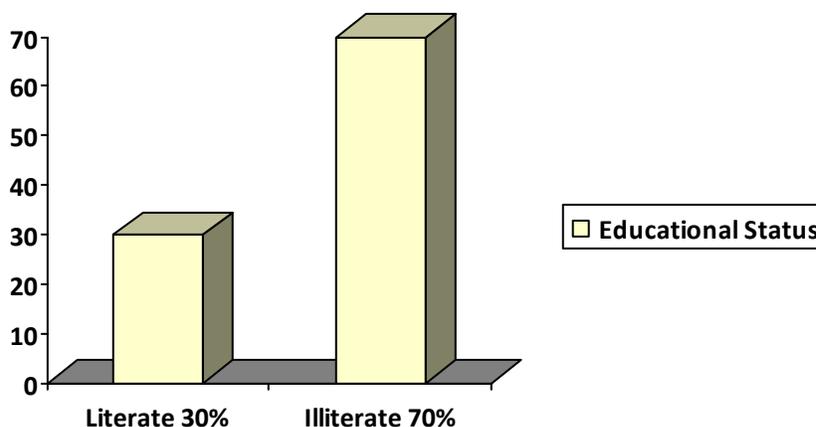


Figure 1 : Educational Status of the Respondents

The survey shows that out of 40 respondents more than half 70 percent are illiterate and only 30percent respondents were literate because they are from unprivileged societies. They were deprived of education due to the various factors since their childhood and also their parents cannot afford to send them to school.

## 6. Problems faced by women workers

### 6.1 Facilities

The basic root of every manufacturing company is their workers. Maintaining good economical, mental, managerial and physical support from the workers enables the management to get the better output from the factory. Workers work in the industry and they are provided remuneration in return. Beside normal essential facilities if the workers get some additional allowance and facilities then it make them more active to perform their job well. According to the respondents, they are not provided above facilities. This study is based only on Patan industrial area especially on handicraft industry and there were two types of problem founded in health sectors. When the workers have health problem the owners economically help them, to solve the problem .But in complex case there are no any help for complex case from industries, administration and owners. There was no any medical facility given to the women labors .As they have to work in dust, wool and it affects in their health directly or indirectly but they have to use their money for treatment, industry don't take responsible of their health.

## 6.2 Childcare Centre

Most of the industrial area, there were no child care center to care the child of workers in working periods. Their small kids were around there and the environment was not good for them. There were majority of female's labor and they had child. The biggest problem of weaving mother was to maintain a balance time for the child and the work. Children were not enjoying their right and mother was deprived from the basic human right. Nepali Society is patriarchal society so male is superior. Male works outside the house but women has to do all the house hold work. If she is engaged in work of outside, then her responsibility becomes double. She has to do household works as well as outside work. There is need to child care facility inside the factory.It is found that the there is a child care center inside Patan Industrial Estate and it is common for all the workers of all the industries of Patan Industrial Estate. All the industries have provided that facility to their women workers. Lack of care takers and lack of hygienic food are some weakness of that center. Most of the workers were compelled to keep their children in other child care center which is out of that industrial estate. They have to pay for those themselves.

## 6.3 Shelter

Shelter is one of the basic needs o the human beings. Shelter inside the industrial area is very much essential for those people who were migrated from other villages. Some of the industries have provided shelter to their workers. Industry providing quarters were not in good condition .They was of small size and was dark. There was no proper ventilation system in order to get natural air. From the study area, it is clearly found that the physical condition regarding health of weavers, and their children was found very poor and unsuitable. Though the condition is improving little from the past but still there are lots of improvement is needed for improvement of physical environment of the industry.

## 6.4 Bonus System and Insurance Policy

Bonus system in industrial sector is an important factor to empower the labor which helps to increase the high level of production and also improve living standard of workers. Bonus

system helps them to satisfy the basic needs .from this study observation and survey, no bonus system was found out. The weavers and workers were frustrated by this Women were not given any bonus and insurance in industry. They had no any idea or knowledge about insurance .Women worker in Patan industrial area has very low salary and they are not getting bonus on any festival or occasion .There are no any insurance policy for worker in case of some accident or dead. Bonus system generally encourage people (worker / for doing hard job and for more time. But in this area there is no bonus system available for women .Women usually works for more than 8 hours but they don't get satisfied wage and in big festival like Dashain, they don't get any extra salary as bonus.

## 7. Conclusion

In Nepal women have just started to work outside. But women were involved in handicraft industries since many years ago. Women from age 15 to above age 45 are actively participated in the handicraft industries of Patan Industrial Estate. But their socio-economic condition is not very good. Their work load is much higher than that of men after involving in the industries. They need to perform household works with their office works. Very necessary facilities area not provided to the women workers by the industries like- drinking water proper toilet, shelter to all the workers in industrial area, medical allowance etc.

Despite of all these difficulties and problem women weavers were hopeful that their earning makes their life little better. There is difference in the social condition of women according to the regions, castes, economic, religion and structure of the community. The women of lower castes have got involvement in industrial estate like handicraft working, as they have got more freedom but less chance of education and employment.

The art of handicraft is an old tradition in the kingdom of Nepal. The respondents were found not satisfied with their remuneration and working hours also. But the owners said they never complained and discussed about their dissatisfaction during the disbursement of their salary. This study has been examined on how illiteracy and poor economic status of women family forced women to work in industrial estate as in carpet industry, pashmina making, woolen material making by putting their health in danger and by less paid wages. In order to study the women condition and challenges by facing different kind of harassment abuse, violence, women are force to work.

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