Importance of Historicity in Analysis of Gender Issues

Shukra Raj Adhikari, Ganga Acharya
Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

On the basis of sex and biological categories, society assigns the socio-cultural authority and responsibilities. Sex wises different socio-cultural responsibilities and authority; performances are recognized as gender. All of the socio-cultural creations are the factors of gender construction. The aim of this paper is to explore the discourses of gender in terms of historical circumstances and social context. Mainly, secondary data are used in this article. The information is collected and analyzed by the historical content analysis method under the qualitative research approach. It is difficult to identify the real form of gender issues without analyzing the social structure according to the historical context, so it is possible to analyze the real gender issues only by analyzing the social structure in historical context.

Keywords: construction, discourse, gender, historical, social structure

Introduction

A human being is both biological and cultural being. Biologically human is categorized in different sexual categories such as male, female, and third sex. On the basis of these kinds of biological categories, society assigns the socio-cultural authority and responsibilities. According to Lorber (1994), Sex wises different socio-cultural responsibilities and authority; performances are recognized as gender. All of the socio-cultural practices of human beings are historically constructed and transferred (Matson, 2005). These are associated with the root of human civilization (Henslin, 1997). Contemporary society is the result of historical context. Without historical circumstances, we cannot identify the contemporary issues of human work and authority. Contemporary socio-cultural practices are guided by historically religious, cultural norms, values, and faiths. A human being is the true follower of the historical value system. Without analysis of the historical context of the value system, it may be problematic in the generalization. Gender is a socio-cultural construction. The contemporary socio-cultural structure is the result of history. All of the gender-related social norms and values are influenced and guided by specific historical context. Similarly, the pattern of gender is usually different in different stages of society. In this context, this article is going to discuss the discourse of gender in terms of the nexus of historical circumstances.

Objective and Methodology

This article is focused to explore the importance of historical circumstances and nexus in discourses of gender. The article is guided by a qualitative research approach. Mostly the secondary data are used in this paper. The secondary facts are collected from scriptures and previous research articles, reports, etc. using
through historical content analysis method. Similarly, collected data are thematically analyzed through the content analysis method.

**Findings and Discussion**

**The Process of Socialization and Gender**

Stack (1974), Chodorow (1974), Tanner (1974), and March (2002) mentioned that the pattern of gender construction is determined by the process of socialization. Stack (1974) emphasized that a prioritized relationship between the mother and the child as well as the relationship between the children appears to be strong and good. Chodorow (1974) stated that because of socialization, the personality of men and women is different, and a woman raises her son and daughter in separate social and mental circles. She teaches her son to be fearless and self-reliant and teaches daughter to depend on others. Although considered to be the best of men by social norms, he considers himself immune and insecure compared to women. Social and mental conflicts also affect personality development. The son is raised at the best in the family and the daughter has been raised in a responsible way. And she adds that while their personalities are positive automatically they present themselves positively.

Tanner (1974) said that the identification of family power is determined by the role of mother. There is tradition that the children are closely related to mother and they have the tradition to support their mother. March (2002) has stated an example of Tamangs who follow the principles of Buddhism and added that gender is formed on the basis of the process of socialization.

**Hinduism, Patriarchal Family Structure and Gender**

Bennett (1983), Ahearn (2004), March (2002), Banerjee (2001), Geetha (2001), and Chowdhary (2001) argued that the processes of gender construction are determined by patriarchal family structure and male-centric thinking. Analyzing the social, cultural, and symbolic role of upper-caste women within the patriarchal family and social and cultural structure of Hinduism, Bennett (1983) said that the role of men is predominant in most of cultural activities. Describing Nari Kot village as an image of Hindu culture and patriarchal social structure, she adds that the role of women in cooking, washing clothes, collecting firewood, milling flour, beating rice, etc. is more within the house of such family structure.

Ahearn (2004) argued like the logic of Bennett (1983) that in a patriarchal family, women take food only after drinking water by washing their husbands’ knees, and men have more authority over the lineage and decision-making process. Singh (2007) stated that due to the patriarchal structure, religious prayers for daughters and maidens are not prescribed in the *Vedas* but there are many examples of prayers for sons. Bennett (1983) stated that in a patriarchal Hindu family, a woman’s daughter has a different role as a daughter-in-law. A girl is considered very sacred before marriage and even before menstruation; she is worshiped as a virgin in no moon day, full moon day, and first day of the month, various religious ceremonies, worship, and other cultural functions.

But when the same girl gets married and becomes a daughter-in-law, she is compared with the prosperity of her house. She is considered to be the culprit of various ominous cultural indicators that may and may not occur inside the house. As one person changes his social, cultural position, status, and role, it seems to be a drastic change in an individual role in social perception. As long as the daughter remains in her dignity and status and role, she is regarded pious. But the dignity, status, and role of the daughter-in-law are changed by the
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She is blamed and considered as the indicators of cultural indecent. In the position and role of the daughter-in-law after the marriage of the family, the family members of the daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, should be tolerant of the husband and behave accordingly, should not respond, not express their wishes, lie to the husband, drink water from her husbands’ feet after waking up in the morning. March (2002) discussed that the patriarchal family continued in the Tamang community. Women believed in fate in the Tamang community because of economic suffering and scarcity. In the Tamang community, men have more responsibility and role in cultural activities. Women seem to be more involved in household chores. In addition to household chores, they also participate in weaving, farming, and animal husbandry. Banerjee (2001) mentioned that Indian women had to be regulated in the workplace, both indoor and outdoor, because of their masculine structure and dominance. There is still the status of gender discriminatory labor division. The proportion of income also varies between men and women. As long as this discriminatory position between women and men exists, gender equality cannot be achieved despite the creation of separate employment opportunities for women.

Similarly, Geetha (2001) stated that women’s oppression is linked to social structure and masculinity. She added that the main goal of the women’s movement is to relieve the body and soul of a woman from the narrow circle of motherhood and reproduction. The women’s identity is as logical and self-respectful. It is inappropriate to combine traditional feminine beauty and physical textures with women’s self-esteem. She wants to make women aware of political agenda as a supporter but also as campaigners; they also struggle for their rights and for the harmonious and discerning society.

Chowdhary (2001) stated that due to the male-centered family structure, family consumption style gives priority to men. Women are not involved in any decision-making process. The women are considered weak physically and mentally and their advice is also considered as ridiculous and inappropriate. People are united by masculine ideology and culture; women have accepted inferiority from their birth. They have been embracing, defending, and empowering the ideology of masculinity and supporting their own marginalization and exploitation.

However, some changes are taking place in new social system. Men’s traditional attitudes and reactions are also changed. They also use contraceptives and that is rescue sign for women. Signs of resistance and protection have also appeared in women. The patriarchal legalized cultural and ideological practices still continue even in the new socio-economic environment. It is said to be accepted even by women. Dewan (2001) argued that the power of thought is weakened due to masculinity, associated with productive forces. She said women are forced to work as producers at home without any remuneration and become consumers without freedom. She added that men are dominantly involved in economic activities.

Labor Division and Gender

Rosaldo (1974), Cameron (1998), Ahearn (2004), March (2002), Chodorow (1974), and Banerjee (2001) mentioned that the pattern of gender construction is affected due to the division of labor between women and men. The domestic labor of women is not counted whereas male external labor is counted as productive. Rosaldo (1974) said that the difference between men and women in the world is due to the differences in domestic and social life. Gender differences are increasing due to women being restricted inside home. Social environment does not allow them to be associated with other men or other women. When a man is involved in household chores and provides the opportunity to woman into the outside world, the personality of woman will be changed and as well as the family structure. Our culture and society have a major role in pursuing women.
It is necessary to change the responsibilities of women and men in order to advance them and to inform the world environment. Rosaldo argues that women can begin public life when they are exempted from domestic work. Nelson (1974) challenged the view of the tendency of the social world to view women and men under private and public realm, as something imposed by Western cultural influences.

Sanday (1974) argued that the time and energy of women are spent on reproductive functions and motherhood which reduces their involvement in other areas. She argues that men extend their wider involvement in political, social, economic, and educational fields apart from maternal and infant care. This shows the pattern of gender construction. Cameron (1998) also agreed with Rosaldo’s statement and said that women are more involved in domestic work. Women spend most of their time to household chores such as baby caring, and cooking, while men spend most of their time working outside the home. In the division of labor in the lower-caste structure, men involve as the main worker and women as men’s aides, sewing clothes, watering, collecting bamboo, and carrying stones. Sexual activity also seems to be influenced by men. Compared with the American social environment, activities such as hanging out together, shaking hands, and talking openly to the sexual activities and practices of young people are considered taboo in Nepali society. But what happens between young men and young women is not considered otherwise. In the United States, they argue that such relationships are considered homosexual.

According to Ahearn (2004), the family system under patriarchal structure has shown that men are more involved in external income and women are more involved in household affairs. That is how gender relation functions. Banerjee (2001) in harmony with Ahearn’s argument said that women can be involved in remuneration based activities outside the home; prejudice towards them is diminishing and dependency is on the decline. She says that the main reason for the economic suffering behind a large part of Indian women is due to lack of employment. In recent years, due to job opportunities, economic level of women is going to improve. Although there is still a gender-discriminatory labor division. The proportion of income also varies between men and women. As long as there is this discriminatory status and field between men and women, gender equality cannot be acquired although there are many separate employment opportunities for women. Palriwala (2001) also explained that both mother’s home and husband’s home disguised the role of women. She concluded that women’s role as supporter or subordinate to her husband is the major factor of gender discrimination. She argues that women’s contribution of their work is devaluated in the family, so is in the workplace.

Only Discussion of Contemporary Events

Bennett (1983), March (2002), Ahearn (2004), Cameron (1998), Smith (2003), Chodorow (1974), Tanner (1974), Stanely, Zinn, and Smith (2012), Banerjee (2001), including Geetha (2001) and Maslak (2003) focus the discourse to contemporary issues. These researchers analyze the gender in relation to contemporary environment of a particular region, segment, race, class, and community. The analysis does not include the historical influences and transformation rules, laws, legislation, labor, reputation, rights. Bennett (1983), for instance, mentioned that the role of men on the occasion of child birth and death of somebody in the family is higher, while women’s role and participation is low because of patriarchal social structure as working in the area of Nari Kot. Now the point is what is the historicity of Nari Kot? Are their people of Hindu religion and what kind of change is there in their religious beliefs? What kind of production system and style of living is there? It does not appear to be explicit. Similarly to the context in which those laws were made and why they
are currently relevant or how these laws influence them. Are they relevant even at present? That kind of curiosity is not properly handled by Bennett.

Similarly, Ahearn (2004) mentioned that Hindu women should take food only after washing their husband’s feet and sprinkling water over her head and the practice is associated with Hindu patriarchy. The issue is interesting that in the present situation in the old village Magar community, these kinds of practices are seen, but in what historical context such norms, values and traditions exist? Why was it made? Why is such practice in use? Is it relevant at present or not? Every cultural aspect and social event is associated with a specific cause. To know about this, there should be knowledge of historical conditions to find out the specific reason. But these aspects are not found in Ahearn’s study.

Today, March (2002) has said that women in the Tamang community, who are suffering from economic poverty, have more faith in their destiny. But what was the historical context of Tamang women becoming more destiny dependent? The present society and culture is the result of past. The contemporary social structure is grounded on historical facts. March’s study did not even reveal the matter.

The Need and Importance of Historicity in Gender Issues

Looking at the mentioned discussion, scholars including Bennett, Ahearn, March, Banerjee, Geetha, and Chowdhary make study of gender relations only in a certain part of contemporary society. They said that the construction of gender was due to Hindu classical traditions, customs, manners, corresponding patriarchal family structure, patriarchal tendencies, and thinking. While saying this, what was the historical background of the area? What were the historical context and environment of that patriarchal family structure? They are silent to historical impact in the current trend of gender construction pattern.

Similarly, scholars including Chodorow, Tanner, March, etc., while conducting a field study in certain areas of society, say that the pattern of gender construction was created due to the process of socialization and the role assigned to a mother. But they have not discussed the mothers’ role and the process of socialization in historical context. Similarly, scholars like Rosaldo, Sanday, Cameron, Nelson, and others have discussed the pattern of gender on the basis of domestic and external labor. But they are silent, in which historical context such a division of labor has been framed.

The cited references are only examples. The major issues are discussed without relating to its historicity, historical context. They have made only a sociological study of the contemporary field, community, its effects, its transfers, and changes. It is not possible to generalize and there is danger of reality remaining unknown. Moreover, gender relation is abstract and emotional aspect when analyzed based on the practices of contemporary society. It is not enough to analyze the cultural feeling of people. It is not possible to change it even if we try to change it. So we should have to reach to its historical context and surroundings.

Yes, the mentioned literatures point out two major problems of gender issues. The study was based on contemporary field but it forgot the historical context and thereby it created a problem. The other side did the scriptural study but forgot the socio-cultural structure represented by the scriptures and that also created a problem. In order to study the pattern of gender construction from the actual sociological study, it is necessary to move the research forward focusing on the issues related to both types of problems as mentioned above.

As discussed above, gender is a unit of social structure. The pattern of gender is constructed within a social structure which also depends on a historical foundation. The elements of socio-cultural structure and their interrelationships are also different at different times and periods. These historical structures have been
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built and transferred within a long period as traditions followed cultural beliefs, norms, and values. Some aspects of gender issues seem to have been used only symbolically. Some contexts change over time. Particularly, evolving aspects of religious and cultural beliefs are also going to shift with different ways of cultural beliefs.

On the other hand, knowledge and ideas are being formed due to certain social system. There is a reason behind every social and cultural aspect. Although, the cause and relevancy of that period may be changed over time. But the context gives birth to it. Therefore, the context of time is of great importance in the formation of scriptural ideas and thoughts.

Conclusions

According to the above discussion, it seems clear that the problem is, analyzing gender issues only on the basis of contemporary society, on the one hand, leaves out the historical context and its implications and therefore becomes incomplete. On the other hand, when it is analyzed on the basis of scripture, the social system of constructing that scripture, leaves aside the aspect of its socio-cultural environment. In analyzing the gender issues, both sides seem to be incomplete. So, real gender issues are always in incomplete situations and questionable. Without exploring the historicity, its impact, the scriptural society, its foundations, it is not possible to carry out in a realistic way the process of construction of gender without addressing the question of historicity.

Every social structure is the result of its own kind of historical circumstances. Gender is guided and built by a specific socio-cultural system. Every social system is based on its own specific historical foundation. Gender relations are evolving according to the mode of production which provided the historical results, the social rules, and regulations. Therefore, it is difficult to identify the real form of gender issues without analyzing the social structure according to the historical context. So it concluded that the real gender issues should be analyzed based on the social structure with its historical context.

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