

Topic 1: Social Norms as Structural Foundations of Patriarchy in Nepal

1 Introduction

In Nepal, social norms are not benign customs; they are coercive instruments that regulate gender roles, dictate moral hierarchies, and perpetuate male dominance. These norms operate as informal institutions — unwritten but widely obeyed — shaping the collective consciousness of what is considered “natural,” “decent,” and “feminine.” They are not static remnants of a past society but are actively reproduced in everyday life, across generations, through rituals, language, family structures, religion, and media. Addressing gender inequality in Nepal without dismantling these norms is akin to repairing a roof while leaving the foundation in decay.

2 Defining Social Norms in the Nepali Context

Social norms are shared beliefs about acceptable behavior in a community. In Nepal, these beliefs are gendered — prescribing what men and women should do, how they should speak, dress, behave, and even dream.

For example:

- A man's assertiveness is interpreted as leadership; a woman's as disobedience.
- A son's success is communal pride; a daughter's ambition is potential disgrace.
- A man's freedom to choose is celebrated; a woman's choice is scrutinized.

These norms are not merely social preferences but are enforced through discipline, shame, stigma, and in many cases, violence.

3 Key Normative Mechanisms That Enforce Patriarchy

3.1 Ritualized Misogyny: Chhaupadi and Menstrual Taboos

Chhaupadi, still prevalent in Karnali and Sudurpashchim provinces despite criminalization in 2017 (Criminal Code Act, Section 168), forces menstruating women into isolation in animal sheds. This practice arises from the belief that menstruating women are impure — a belief rooted in Hindu ritual codes like the Manusmriti, reinforced by generations of religious enforcement.

Consequences:

- Dozens of women have died from exposure, snakebite, or suffocation.
- Girls miss school during menstruation, contributing to lower female literacy and school completion rates.
- Women internalize impurity narratives, diminishing their self-worth.

Even outside the Far-West, menstrual taboos persist in urban spaces — women are discouraged from entering kitchens, temples, or touching male relatives. The symbolic effect is the same: women are biologically framed as inferior.

3.2. Gendered Honor and Control of Female Sexuality

In Nepal, a family's honor is often linked directly to the sexual behavior of its daughters. Concepts like *ijjat* (honor) and *laj* (shame) act as instruments of surveillance over women's bodies. Pre-marital relationships, clothing choices, even laughter in public are policed.

Early marriage is still prevalent — 33% of girls are married before age 18 (UNICEF, 2023). Often disguised as protection or religious duty, these marriages are mechanisms of sexual containment and economic transference, rooted in the belief that an unmarried daughter is a liability.

The burden of chastity is never equal. Male promiscuity is overlooked, even valorized; female sexuality is criminalized and violently punished. This double standard is among the most durable pillars of patriarchal order.

3.3 Domestic Labor and the Ideal of Female Sacrifice

Women in Nepal are raised with the expectation of *sewa* (service), *tyag* (sacrifice), and *sahan-shilta* (endurance). The ideal woman is the one who does not protest, who absorbs humiliation in silence, and who prioritizes the needs of others over herself. These expectations are celebrated in folklore, religious narratives, and family rituals.

According to the Nepal Labour Force Survey (2022), women perform more than three times the amount of unpaid care work as men. This includes child-rearing, elderly care, cooking, cleaning, and maintaining social relationships. It is not accidental — it is systematically normalized from childhood through division of chores, praise for submission, and ridicule for ambition.

3.4 Public Shaming, Gossip, and Informal Surveillance

In tightly knit communities, gossip and reputation function as tools of control. Women who defy norms — through divorce, inter-caste marriage, political activism, or visible autonomy — are subjected to collective condemnation. The fear of being labeled “characterless”, “modern”, or “beshya” becomes a cage.

This surveillance is often carried out by other women, particularly elder female relatives or community leaders, showing how patriarchy uses its victims as enforcers.

4 Reproduction of Norms in Institutions

4.1 Education System

As documented by Pragya Paneru (2019), primary textbooks in Nepal consistently portray men in active roles (doctors, leaders, protectors) and women in passive roles (nurturers, cleaners, dependents). There is a near-total absence of female representation in STEM-related stories, historical figures, or political agency. Such representations are not merely reflective — they are formative.

Teachers, too, often carry and transmit gendered expectations, encouraging boys to be competitive and girls to be obedient. This educational environment silently reinforces the belief that leadership and intelligence are male domains.

4.2 Media and Pop Culture

From soap operas to radio dramas, Nepali media frequently valorizes the suffering, selfless mother or the submissive daughter-in-law. Strong female characters are rare; when they do appear, they are often punished by the narrative — abandoned, infertile, or disgraced. Popular songs and YouTube content — including Raw Barz rap battles (Sharma, 2025) — often carry explicit misogyny, normalizing violence, stalking, and colorism.

The media doesn’t merely reflect society — it shapes it, especially among the youth. When the only female role models are martyrs of silence, women grow up preparing for a life of endurance, not freedom.

4.3 Religious Narratives and the Deification of Subjugation

Religious texts like the Swasthani Bratakatha, as examined by Birkenholtz (2019), embed patriarchal values by presenting ideal womanhood as obedience to husbands and fathers, and glorifying suffering as spiritual virtue. Even goddess worship often centers around controlled power — the goddess is powerful only when contained within male-sanctioned rituals.

These stories are not optional entertainment. They are annual religious obligations observed by millions of women, further internalizing their subservience as divine duty.

Conclusion

Social norms in Nepal are not soft culture — they are hard power. They constitute the first and most enduring structure of control in the patriarchal order. They precede the law, shape institutional behavior, and persist long after policies change. Any meaningful transformation in gender relations must begin with the dismantling of these norms at the level of the family, school, media, and faith. Otherwise, legal reforms will collapse under the weight of cultural resistance.

This is not a cultural issue. It is a structural one. And it will not resolve itself.

Topic 2: Social Structure as an Engine of Patriarchal Control in Nepal

Introduction

Where social norms condition the mind, **social structure conditions opportunity**. In Nepal, social structure refers to the way **power, resources, roles, and status** are distributed across the population — by caste, class, gender, ethnicity, geography, religion, and kinship. It defines who has authority, who is dependent, and who is disposable. Patriarchy is not merely a set of beliefs; it is structurally embedded into the **architecture of daily life**, enforced not just by individual prejudice but by the **design of institutions, the economy, and the family unit**.

This section examines how Nepal's social structure functions as a system of **gendered hierarchy, material inequality, and institutionalized exclusion**, rendering women — especially those from marginalized backgrounds — economically dependent, politically silenced, and socially expendable.

2 Patriarchy and the Caste-Class-Gender Matrix

2.1 Caste as a Foundation for Gendered Power

Nepal's **caste system** (rooted in Hindu varna ideology) does not only classify people hierarchically by birth, but it also distributes **purity, access, and control**. Within this matrix, women from dominant castes (e.g., Bahun-Chhetri) face restrictions of honor and purity, while Dalit and Janajati women face both **gendered and caste-based oppression**.

The implications are layered:

- **Upper-caste women** are tightly controlled to “preserve purity” — leading to early marriage, domestic confinement, and symbolic seclusion.
- **Dalit women** are hyper-visible and vulnerable to **sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and state neglect**, often without the means to access justice.

Caste is thus not a separate form of inequality. It **intensifies patriarchy** — by producing gradations of what kinds of women are allowed to suffer, and how invisibly.

2.2 Class and Economic Dependence

Women’s economic dependence is not accidental — it is engineered.

According to the Nepal Labour Force Survey (2022):

- Women’s participation in the formal workforce remains **below 30%**.
- A large proportion work in the **informal sector** — as agricultural laborers, domestic workers, or vendors — with **no legal protection, benefits, or wage equality**.
- Female-headed households are disproportionately affected by **landlessness, food insecurity, and financial illiteracy**.

Additionally, inheritance laws historically favored male heirs, and although recent legal reforms permit equal property rights (Muluki Civil Code, 2017), **implementation remains weak**, especially in rural areas where local customs override legal mandates.

Result: Women lack the structural power to leave abusive households, fund their education, or exert political leverage — because their **dependency is systemic**.

3 The Family: A Patriarchal Institution

In Nepal, the family is not just a social unit — it is a **hierarchical command structure**. Most families are **patrilineal** (inheritance through male line), **patrilocal** (women marry into the husband’s family), and **patriarchal** (authority resides with senior males).

Implications:

- A woman is born under her father's authority, transferred to her husband's, and finally lives under her son's control in old age.
- Daughters are considered **temporary members**, sons as **permanent bearers of lineage**.
- Even in urban households, decision-making power — about mobility, career, reproduction — often lies with male guardians.

Family structure ensures that a woman's identity, security, and status remain conditional — always mediated through a male.

4 Political and Legal Institutions: Systemic Exclusion

4.1 Political Participation

Despite Nepal's progressive 2015 Constitution mandating **33% female representation** in federal and local levels, the reality remains dismal:

- Women are **systematically denied leadership positions** within parties.
- Those who are elected are often **tokenized and sidelined from key decision-making processes**.
- Candidacies for Dalit or minority women are often **appointed by male power brokers**, reducing their autonomy.

Kabita Dahal (2025) documents that many women fear party politics due to internal misogyny, threat of character assassination, and coercive political environments.

Thus, the state creates an illusion of inclusion, while maintaining a **male-dominated political core**.

4.2 Law Enforcement and Judicial Bias

Nepali women, especially rape and domestic violence survivors, often face:

- Delays in FIR registration (First Information Reports).
- Police mediation attempts, urging “compromise” rather than legal recourse.
- Victim blaming in courts, particularly in cases involving caste or inter-religious dynamics.

The legal system replicates the very social hierarchies it claims to challenge. Laws may exist, but institutions interpret and enforce them through **gendered and casteist biases**.

4.3 Geographic Disparities and Structural Neglect

Gender inequality is not uniform across Nepal. Geography compounds exclusion:

- In **remote districts** (e.g., Humla, Bajura), access to schools, health clinics, or courts is minimal, and patriarchal customs are unchallenged.
- **Madhesh and Tarai regions**: Women face specific cultural constraints (e.g., purdah, dowry) combined with political marginalization.
- **Urban poor**: Migrant women in cities often work in exploitative conditions — as cleaners, street vendors, or informal caregivers — without union protection.

Social structure is therefore not abstract — it is **material, localized, and unbalanced**.

4.4 Intersectionality: Multiplication, Not Addition

Saleem Dhobi (2024) provides critical insight into how **gender oppression intensifies when combined with caste, class, religion, and region**. A Dalit Muslim woman in Siraha faces **exponential vulnerability** compared to a Brahmin woman in Kathmandu. Yet both are victims of patriarchy — the former in the form of **disposability**, the latter through **surveillance and control**.

Policy that treats all women as a homogenous category fails — because it **erases the structural complexity of oppression**.

4.5 Conclusion

Nepal's social structure is **not gender-neutral**; it is a **patriarchal scaffold**. It determines not just who suffers, but how invisibly, and with how much institutional support. Until caste, class, and gender are understood as **interdependent systems of oppression**, reforms will continue to benefit only the most visible — and often most privileged — segments of womanhood.

This structure was designed. It can be dismantled. But only if its logic is made visible — in the family, the state, the economy, and the street.

Topic 3: Law as a Reinforcer of Patriarchy in Nepal

Introduction

The law in Nepal is often assumed to be an impartial mechanism for justice. But laws do not operate in a vacuum — they reflect the ideologies of those who create, interpret, and enforce them. In a patriarchal society, the law becomes a tool not of liberation but of **institutionalized inequality**. In Nepal, the legal system has historically preserved male dominance through **discriminatory statutes, gender-blind policies, and selective enforcement**. Even when progressive laws exist, **implementation gaps, judicial bias, and procedural obstacles** render them functionally irrelevant for many women.

This section examines how the legal system in Nepal actively and passively sustains patriarchy — from citizenship laws and property rights to the failure of the state to criminalize marital rape or dismantle structural bias in law enforcement.

2) Citizenship Law: Codified Male Gatekeeping

Nepal's Constitution (2015), Article 11, theoretically guarantees citizenship by descent. However, it embeds deep structural discrimination when a mother is the sole Nepali parent.

- A **Nepali man** can pass citizenship to his child by descent — even if the mother is foreign.
- A **Nepali woman**, however, must *prove* that the father is “unknown” or “stateless” for her child to get citizenship solely through her.

This policy effectively renders women **second-class citizens** — incapable of transferring nationality without male endorsement.

Consequences:

- Thousands of children born to single mothers, especially from marginalized communities or cross-border unions, remain stateless.
- Stateless children are denied access to education, health, property, and legal identity — entrenching a permanent underclass.

This is not an oversight. It is a **deliberate legal articulation of patriarchy** — where a woman's identity is not sovereign, but contingent.

3 Marital Rape: Legal Silence as Complicity

Nepal criminalized rape under the Criminal Code Act 2017, but marital rape remains partially exempt. Under Section 219(2), sexual intercourse with a spouse is not considered rape unless proven to be non-consensual with force or injury, and prosecution is limited to within three months of the incident.

This provision:

- Treats marriage as sexual consent by default.
- Ignores the structural power imbalance between spouses.
- Protects male entitlement over female bodies in domestic spaces.

The law, therefore, sanctions sexual violence within marriage by legitimizing male ownership of the wife's body, rather than recognizing her right to autonomy.

4 Property and Inheritance Rights: Paper Progress, Structural Neglect

The 2017 Civil Code grants equal inheritance rights to daughters. But the implementation is obstructed by:

- Patriarchal pressure within families to “voluntarily relinquish” land rights.
- Bureaucratic delays, corruption, and lack of gender-sensitive legal literacy.
- In rural areas, local customary norms override formal statutes.

Result:

- In practice, **men continue to inherit**, women are **gifted moveable property** (jewelry, dowry items), and legal equality remains symbolic.

Without institutional mechanisms to enforce this right — such as legal aid, documentation assistance, and administrative enforcement — the law functions as a **hollow declaration**.

5 Sexual Violence Laws: Structural Deficiencies

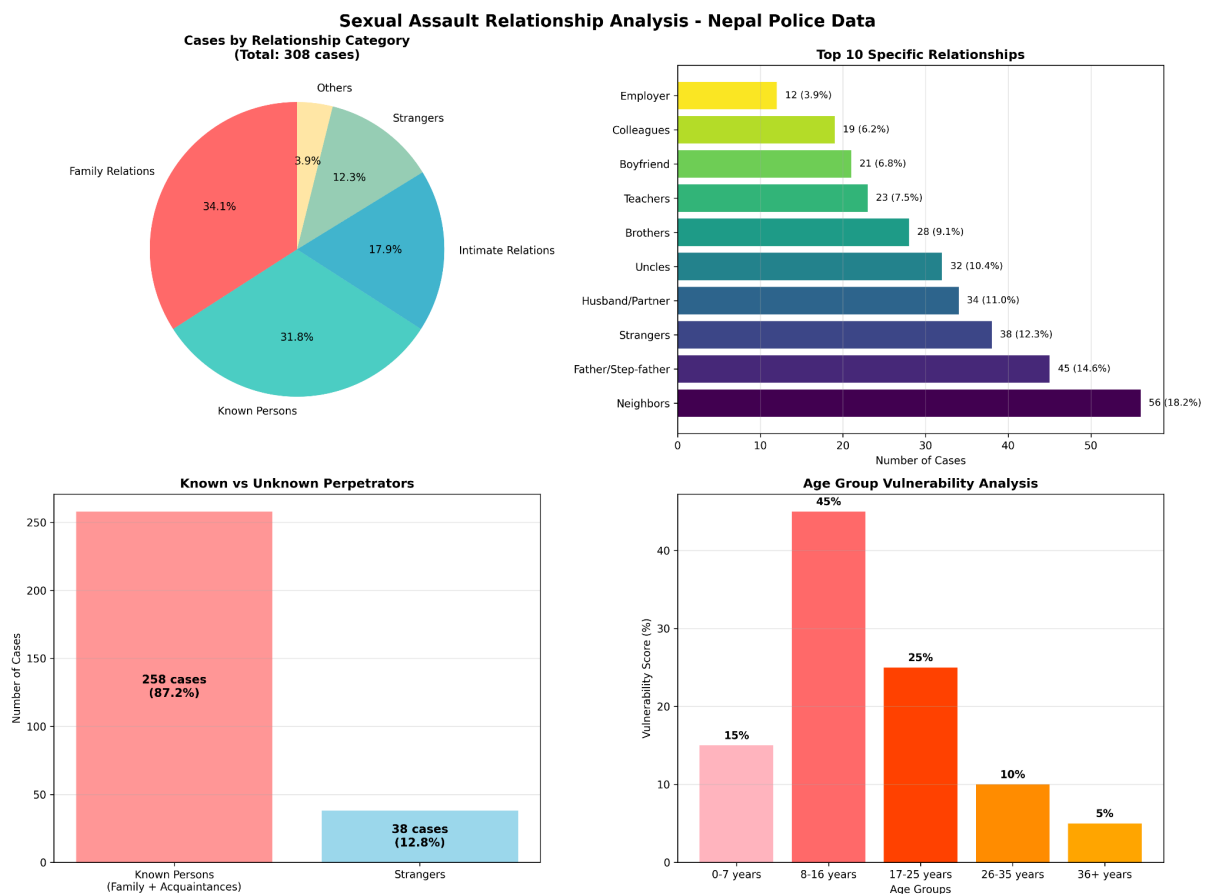
Nepal's rape laws define rape narrowly — as **penile-vaginal penetration without consent**. This definition:

- Excludes other forms of sexual assault and harassment.
- Requires “**visible signs of struggle**” to prove non-consent.
- Focuses on the moral **character of the victim**, rather than accountability of the perpetrator.

In courtrooms, victims are routinely asked:

- “Why didn’t you scream?”
- “Were you drinking?”
- “How many men have you been with before?”

Judicial attitudes reflect **institutional misogyny** rather than legal neutrality. As a result, conviction rates remain low, survivors face social backlash, and many cases go unreported.



This multi-chart visualization reveals that 87.2% of perpetrators were known to the victims, including neighbors (18.2%), step-fathers (14.6%), and husbands or intimate partners (17.9%). Strangers accounted for only 12.3% of cases, challenging dominant safety narratives. The most vulnerable age group was 8–16 years (45%), coinciding with periods of school dropout, early marriage, and restricted mobility.

These patterns demonstrate that Nepal's legal system and public discourse remain structurally **unprepared** to confront the realities of sexual violence, especially when perpetrators are family or authority figures. The law's narrow definitions and emphasis on "forcible rape" render many such assaults legally invisible.

6 Legal Mediation of Domestic Violence

The Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act, 2009 provides legal recourse, but it:

- Relies heavily on **mediation** between perpetrator and victim — even in cases of repeated abuse.
- Fails to fund **safe houses**, legal aid, or reintegration programs for survivors.

- Grants protection orders but offers **limited enforcement mechanisms**.

The state prioritizes **preserving the family** over protecting the woman. The message is clear: **compromise is expected; escape is discouraged**.

7 Gender-Blind Laws in Practice

Even gender-neutral laws — such as those governing employment, education, and political participation — produce gendered outcomes when applied in an unequal society.

Examples:

- **Labor law** allows for maternity leave, but no paternity leave — reinforcing the idea that child-rearing is solely a woman's job.
- **Constitutional quotas** for women's representation (33%) have no provision for meaningful participation — leading to tokenism rather than empowerment.
- **Criminal laws** addressing cybercrime or stalking are poorly adapted to address **gendered online violence**, such as revenge porn, doxxing, or digital threats.

Laws that claim equality but ignore **contextual gender inequality** fail to produce justice.

8 Law Enforcement and the Justice Delivery System

Women face systemic hurdles at every stage of the legal process:

1. Police Refusal to Register Complaints

- Victims of domestic or sexual violence are often discouraged from filing First Information Reports (FIRs).
- Police officers — especially male ones — may suggest reconciliation instead of legal action.

2. Courtroom Trauma

- Women are often cross-examined with humiliating questions.

- Testimony is doubted unless corroborated with physical evidence — impossible in delayed reports.

3. Lack of Legal Aid

- Poor and marginalized women cannot afford lawyers, travel to district courts, or navigate the system.
- Legal support systems are urban-centric and linguistically exclusive.

The law remains a **distant tool**, inaccessible to those who need it most.

9 Religious and Customary Law: Parallel Patriarchies

Despite the secular framework of the Constitution, **customary and religious laws** still influence judicial interpretations, particularly in rural areas:

- Local dispute resolution mechanisms, such as **Salish, Panchayats, or Bhalmanasa** councils, often favor male perspectives.
- Issues like inter-caste marriage, child custody, or dowry are frequently resolved through **informal settlements**, outside the legal system, reinforcing patriarchal norms.

These parallel systems operate with impunity, reducing the state to a **symbolic authority** and allowing patriarchy to remain operational through cultural legality.

Conclusion

The law in Nepal, rather than dismantling patriarchy, frequently **codifies, legitimizes, and conceals it**. It enforces a gendered social contract in which women's rights are secondary to male control — over the body, the home, and the state.

Legal reform alone is insufficient. What is needed is:

- **Structural accountability** within the judiciary and police.
- **Abolition of gender-blind doctrines** that ignore social realities.
- **Institutional support** for women seeking justice — from legal aid to state-funded rehabilitation.

- Rewriting of laws and legal interpretations through feminist and intersectional lenses.

The law must stop functioning as a fence that keeps women out and become a weapon they can wield.

Topic 4: Intersectionality and Compounded Gender Oppression in Nepal

Introduction

Patriarchy is not experienced equally. Gender oppression in Nepal does not operate in isolation — it intersects with **caste, class, ethnicity, geography, religion, disability, and language**. The framework of **intersectionality**, first articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), is essential to understanding how **multiple identities combine to produce unique and intensified forms of marginalization**.

In Nepal, where centuries of caste stratification, regional disparity, and ethnic exclusion coincide with patriarchal dominance, the experience of a woman is **shaped not just by her gender, but by who she is within society's layered hierarchies**. A Dalit woman in Doti does not experience the same patriarchy as a Brahmin woman in Lalitpur. This section explores how **intersectionality functions as the multiplier of oppression** — making patriarchy more complex, more violent, and harder to dismantle.

1 Caste and Gender: Hierarchies Within Hierarchies

Nepal's caste system, though legally abolished, remains socially pervasive. Caste operates as a **determinant of purity, access, labor, and violence** — and when paired with gender, produces two-tiered oppression:

1.1 Dalit Women: The Bottom of the Hierarchy

Dalit women face **caste-based exclusion and gendered vulnerability** simultaneously.

- They are disproportionately employed in **sanitation, labor-intensive, and informal work**, with no protections.
- **Sexual violence against Dalit women** is alarmingly high — but justice is rarely served. Dalit victims are often pressured into silence or “**compromise**,” especially when

perpetrators are from higher castes.

- In rural Panchayats and informal justice mechanisms, Dalit women's complaints are dismissed outright or settled with symbolic fines — denying both dignity and legal redress.

Data: According to the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO), over 70% of Dalit women who face violence do not report it due to fear of retaliation and disbelief from authorities.

1.2 Upper-Caste Women: Control Through Honor

Upper-caste women (especially Brahmin-Chhetri) face **honor-based patriarchy**:

- Early marriage, strict dress codes, and reproductive expectations are enforced through community surveillance.
- Their movements and ambitions are regulated in the name of family prestige.
- The burden of preserving *izzat* (honor) often justifies confinement and silencing.

Thus, caste creates **dual roles for women**: some are kept under control to preserve purity; others are exploited because they are perceived as impure. Both are victims — but in **structurally different ways**.

2 Class and Economic Disempowerment

Poverty intensifies gender-based violence and restricts access to justice, healthcare, and education.

2.1 Economic Dependence as Structural Violence

- Poor women, especially single mothers or widows, often lack land, savings, or formal employment.
- Many are forced into **exploitative domestic labor**, working without contracts or protection, especially in urban households of higher status.
- **Migration** is often the only economic escape — but this exposes women to trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse, particularly in Gulf countries.

Women from poor backgrounds do not lack potential — they lack **systemic support**. Their vulnerability is not the result of individual failure but of **deliberate structural abandonment**.

3 Ethnicity, Region, and Political Marginalization

Nepal is ethnically diverse, yet state power remains heavily centralized and dominated by a narrow group of elites.

3.1 Madheshi Women: Hyper-Visibility and Erasure

- Madheshi women in the Tarai face unique forms of control through **pardah systems**, **dowry demands**, and **political invisibility**.
- They are often **denied representation** even in Madheshi-led parties and excluded from constitutional negotiations, local governance, and policymaking.
- Madheshi widows face both community stigma and **institutional neglect** — lacking access to inheritance, shelter, or police protection.

3.2 Indigenous Janajati Women: Cultural Tokenism, Systemic Exclusion

- Janajati women are often **romanticized** as symbols of resilience, but their representation in state institutions is negligible.
- Cultural practices are used both to empower and to silence. For instance, matrilineal narratives in some communities are used to deflect criticism of patriarchal practices that persist in reality.
- The state's failure to recognize **indigenous customary rights**, **land tenure**, and **education needs** directly undermines Janajati women's autonomy.

3.3 Hill–Plains Divide and Rural Disparities

- Women in remote hill districts like Mugu, Dolpa, Bajura face **severe infrastructure gaps** — lacking access to schools, courts, and health posts.
 - Most services — legal, reproductive, economic — are **centralized in urban centers**, creating a geographic exclusion that compounds gendered exclusion.
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4 Religion, Language, and Identity-Based Oppression

4.1 Muslim Women

- Muslim women in Nepal face **gendered religious norms** and institutional indifference.
- Limited state outreach and cultural marginalization mean many Muslim girls **drop out of school early**, and forced marriages remain prevalent.
- State secularism has not translated into **equal protection** or inclusion.

4.2 Language and Legal Access

- Courtrooms and legal services often operate in **Nepali and English** — excluding large sections of the population, especially indigenous and regional language speakers.
 - Women who do not speak the dominant languages are structurally denied **due process**, reinforcing elite control over justice.
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5 Disability and Gender

Disabled women are doubly excluded:

- They face **higher rates of sexual violence**, often from caregivers or relatives.
- Legal systems are rarely accessible — lacking sign language interpreters, mobility aids, or inclusive communication tools.
- Families often **hide disabled daughters**, assuming they are unmarriageable and unworthy of investment.

Disability rights in Nepal have not been gendered — thus, disabled women are **invisible within both feminist and disability discourse**.

6 Intersectional Violence and Legal Failure

The justice system in Nepal fails to recognize **intersectional vulnerability**. Laws are written with a one-size-fits-all model, which:

- Ignores how caste status influences a police officer's response to a rape complaint.
- Fails to see how a rural Muslim woman's access to reproductive health is filtered through religion, geography, class, and gender.
- Does not account for how **structural barriers** (transport, language, fear, stigma) prevent reporting.

As a result, those most at risk receive the least protection.

Conclusion

Intersectionality is not a theoretical concern — it is the lived reality of millions of women in Nepal. Any attempt to dismantle patriarchy must begin with an understanding that **gender is never experienced alone**. The woman most failed by the system is not the average, urban, upper-caste woman — it is the **Dalit, disabled, poor, rural, minority woman**, whose survival depends not just on laws, but on **recognition**.

Policy, activism, and reform must begin where the oppression is thickest. Not where it is most visible — but where it is most ignored.

Topic 5: Patriarchy in Nepal's Education System and Knowledge Production

Introduction

Education in Nepal is often praised as the key to development and empowerment. But when educational systems are built on patriarchal foundations, they do not liberate — they condition. From textbooks and classroom practices to institutional policies and curriculum design, the education system in Nepal **perpetuates gender hierarchies** rather than dismantling them. Knowledge production — through academia, pedagogy, and public discourse — **privileges male voices, male perspectives, and male authority**, while marginalizing or erasing women's lived realities.

This section unpacks how Nepal's formal education system and its mechanisms of knowledge reproduction — including language, curricula, institutional culture, and scholarship — **systematically normalize patriarchal values**, and in doing so, reproduce structural inequality across generations.

2) Gender Bias in Curriculum and Textbooks

2.1 Primary School Textbooks: Socialization of Inequality

A 2019 content analysis by **Pragya Paneru** of government-prescribed primary level textbooks revealed a consistent reinforcement of gender stereotypes:

- Men are depicted as doctors, engineers, policemen, farmers, soldiers, and leaders.
- Women are shown as mothers, cooks, caregivers, cleaners, and school teachers — roles centered around **domesticity, dependence, and nurturing**.
- In science and mathematics textbooks, **examples and word problems** routinely use male names in active roles, while female names are absent or passive.

This early exposure conditions children to **internalize a binary worldview**: men are agents, decision-makers, producers; women are supporters, caretakers, dependents.

2.2 Language of Instruction: Reinforcement through Repetition

Textbooks often use phrases like:

- “Aama banchha — buwaa kam garnu huncha” (“Mother cooks, father goes to work”).
- “Chhori haru le ghar safaa gardin” (“Daughters clean the house”).

These are not isolated cases. They reflect a pattern of **naturalizing inequality** through language, making patriarchy appear ordinary, harmless, and culturally correct.

3 Hidden Curriculum: Teaching Obedience, Not Autonomy

Beyond the printed page, the “**hidden curriculum**” — the unwritten lessons conveyed through school culture — trains girls in **obedience, modesty, and conformity**.

3.1 Teacher Expectations and Gender Policing

- Boys are encouraged to speak up, compete, and explore; girls are praised for being quiet, neat, and well-behaved.
- Female students who question authority are labeled “difficult” or “disrespectful”.

- Uniform codes disproportionately police **girls' bodies**, with stricter rules for skirt length, jewelry, and makeup.

The result is a schooling experience that **discourages risk-taking and voice** in girls while grooming boys for leadership and dominance.

4 Access vs. Inclusion: Misleading Indicators

Nepal's **gross enrollment rate** for girls has improved over the last two decades. However, **enrollment is not empowerment**. The following contradictions remain:

- **Dropout rates** are highest among girls from rural, Muslim, Dalit, and Madheshi backgrounds — due to menstruation taboos, early marriage, household labor, and safety concerns.
- **Gender Parity Index (GPI)** in education masks the fact that girls are often channeled into traditionally “feminine” fields: home science, nursing, education, not science, technology, engineering, or politics.
- Girls in public schools are routinely denied access to **sanitary facilities**, making menstruation a reason to miss school or quit altogether.

Thus, while statistics may show near-parity in some districts, **qualitative experience** shows deep structural exclusion.

5 Higher Education and Institutional Patriarchy

5.1 Faculty and Leadership

- As of 2024, **less than 20% of professors in Nepali universities are women**. In leadership roles — department heads, deans, vice-chancellors — the number drops even further.
- Women's scholarly work is **less likely to be cited, funded, or mentored**.
- Academic gatekeeping often operates through **old boys' networks**, where informal influence trumps merit.

The message sent to young female students is clear: **you can study here, but you don't belong here as leaders**.

5.2 Curriculum Canon: Male-Centric Knowledge

The content of higher education syllabi across disciplines — literature, history, sociology, philosophy — is dominated by male authors, theorists, and case studies. For example:

- Nepali literature courses elevate male poets and novelists, while female writers are tokenized or omitted.
- Sociology courses may reference patriarchy, but often through Western theorists, ignoring the specific lived experiences of Nepali women.
- No major Nepali university offers a comprehensive, intersectional Gender Studies program that integrates Dalit feminism, indigenous women's issues, or queer perspectives.

This produces generations of students — including women — who do not see their realities reflected in academic knowledge.

6 Reproductive Knowledge and Sexuality: Education by Omission

Nepal's formal education system avoids teaching comprehensive sexuality education, especially to girls.

- Reproductive health modules are limited to biological processes — menstruation, conception — with no discussion of consent, pleasure, safety, or gender dynamics.
- Teachers, uncomfortable or untrained, often skip or skim these topics entirely.
- As a result, girls remain unaware of their sexual rights, increasing vulnerability to abuse, early pregnancy, and exploitation.

Silence is not neutrality — it is a pedagogical decision to disempower.

7 Gendered Violence in Educational Institutions

Schools and colleges are not safe spaces for many female students:

- Sexual harassment by male teachers, seniors, or staff is widespread but underreported due to stigma, retaliation, or lack of grievance mechanisms.

- Cases of “transactional abuse” — where female students are coerced into relationships for grades, recommendations, or access — often go unpunished.
- Many campuses lack gender cells, complaint desks, or trained counselors.

The absence of institutional accountability converts schools into sites of learned helplessness, rather than empowerment.

8 Knowledge Gatekeeping: Who Tells the Story of Women?

Knowledge in Nepal is controlled not just by what is taught, but by who is allowed to speak, write, and publish.

- Women scholars, particularly those from marginalized communities, face systemic barriers in getting published or promoted.
- Academic journals in Nepal remain heavily dominated by male authors, male editors, and male-centric themes.
- Feminist research is often delegitimized as “biased,” “emotional,” or “activist,” while male-authored “neutral” research is valorized.

This control over what counts as knowledge perpetuates the invisibility of gendered realities, especially those at the margins.

9 Reform is Not Inclusion — It Must Be Reconstruction

Adding “women’s issues” to an existing curriculum, or promoting a few female teachers, does not disrupt patriarchal knowledge systems. Reform must aim for reconstruction:

- Rewriting textbooks to reflect diverse, non-stereotypical representations of gender.
- Creating intersectional gender studies departments that do not erase caste, class, or ethnicity.
- Training teachers and faculty in anti-sexist, anti-caste pedagogies.
- Institutionalizing gender audits, harassment redressal mechanisms, and inclusive governance at every educational level.

Conclusion

Education in Nepal has the potential to be a weapon against patriarchy. But currently, it functions as a factory for its reproduction — sanitizing, validating, and transmitting gendered subordination through every level of schooling.

When girls are taught to be silent, to serve, and to disappear, the nation loses thinkers, creators, and leaders. Patriarchy in education is not an accident — it is a **curriculum**.

It must be torn out of the syllabus — and rewritten.

Topic 6: Media, Language, and the Normalization of Gendered Violence in Nepal

Introduction

Media and language are not neutral tools; they are **ideological battlegrounds** where power is produced, reproduced, and legitimized. In Nepal, both the formal media apparatus and everyday language operate as **active agents of patriarchy**. They do not merely reflect gender biases — they construct them, embed them in culture, and **train the public to tolerate, justify, and reproduce violence against women**.

This section examines how Nepali media (print, broadcast, digital) and the linguistic structures of Nepali society contribute to the normalization of gendered violence. It reveals how symbolic violence — in words, representations, narratives — becomes the **gateway to physical violence**, and how sustained exposure to misogynistic messaging reinforces systemic discrimination across generations and platforms.

1 The Myth of Neutrality in Media Reporting

Nepali mainstream media has long maintained the facade of objectivity while actively reproducing gendered power dynamics. The framing of gendered violence in reporting is one of the clearest examples.

1.1 Victim-Blaming and Passive Language

Media headlines regularly obscure the perpetrator and center the victim, using **grammatical passivity** to dilute accountability:

- “Woman raped in Kathmandu” instead of “Man rapes woman in Kathmandu”.
- “Schoolgirl elopes with teacher” rather than “Teacher exploits minor student”.

This framing:

- Shifts blame onto the victim.
- Erases agency of the perpetrator.
- Normalizes the idea that violence is something that *happens to* women — not something *done to* them by men.

1.2 Moral Policing through Media

- When women are victims of violence, their clothing, character, or relationship history are often mentioned — implying provocation.
- When men are perpetrators, their “good social standing,” “mental instability,” or “moment of anger” are emphasized — softening the act.

The media thus performs **cultural gatekeeping**, deciding which women are “worthy victims” and which are not.

2 Entertainment Media and the Glorification of Male Aggression

Nepali television, cinema, music videos, and online content routinely depict:

- Stalking as romance.
- Jealousy as love.
- Aggression as masculinity.

In most Nepali films and series, male protagonists are shown:

- Pursuing women who initially reject them, until they relent.
- Using emotional manipulation or violence to “win” her love.
- Defending “honor” through domination.

Such narratives condition audiences — particularly youth — to **internalize coercion and dominance as expressions of love**, thereby normalizing abuse within intimate relationships.

Case in Point: YouTube’s “Raw Barz” Rap Battles

As analyzed by Sharma (2025), rap battles on Nepali YouTube channels reproduce:

- **Misogyny** (“randi,” “chhori haru ko kaam kitchen ho”)
- **Colorism and casteist slurs** for shock value.
- **Normalization of gendered threats** as lyrical prowess.

These videos have millions of views — rarely censored, often monetized — turning public misogyny into **entertainment and profit**.

3 Social Media: Amplifying Abuse and Silencing Resistance

Nepali women — especially those in journalism, activism, or public roles — face coordinated harassment campaigns online:

- Doxxing, morphing of images, revenge porn.
- Threats of rape, acid attacks, or murder.
- Slurs targeting caste, ethnicity, and religion alongside gender.

Reporting these abuses is largely futile. Platforms like Facebook or TikTok provide little recourse, while local law enforcement treats digital threats as trivial. Victims are often advised to “log off” or “stop posting.”

The internet, instead of being a space of liberation, becomes a **digital extension of patriarchal violence** — unregulated, unaccountable, and globally amplified.

4 Everyday Language: Patriarchy in Speech

Language in Nepali society reflects and enforces hierarchies of power. This is not accidental — it is structural.

4.1 Gendered Honorifics and Erasure

- Men are referred to as *sir*, *hajurba*, *sahab*, *raja*, *pundit* — denoting authority and respect.
- Women are called *buwaaki chhori* (daughter of father), *kohi ko shrimati* (someone's wife), or *bariko maanchhe* (outsider) — identities that are relational, **never autonomous**.

This reinforces the idea that a woman's value is **derivative, secondary, and conditional**.

4.2 Misogynistic Proverbs and Cultural Idioms

Nepali is riddled with common sayings that normalize female subjugation:

- "A woman's wisdom belongs only in the cattle shed."
- "A daughter is another's property."
- "What a woman says doesn't matter, her labor does."

These idioms function as **everyday indoctrination**, teaching both men and women that patriarchy is common sense — not an injustice.

5 Symbolic Violence as Precursor to Physical Violence

Pierre Bourdieu refers to *symbolic violence* as the internalization of hierarchy through language and culture. In Nepal, this symbolic violence creates the **conditions for physical violence**:

- A girl raised to believe she is a burden will not resist early marriage.
- A woman bombarded with songs glorifying male dominance may interpret control as care.
- A survivor who hears the media blame rape victims may remain silent, rather than report.

Thus, cultural narratives directly shape behavioral outcomes — what men think they're entitled to, and what women believe they must endure.

6 The Marketization of Misogyny

Gendered violence in the media isn't just tolerated — it is profitable.

- Viral videos mocking feminists.
- Clickbait headlines that sensationalize sexual violence.
- TV serials that dramatize female suffering as an endless soap opera.

Advertisers, platforms, and production houses benefit from this attention economy. Misogyny is commodified — and the pain of women becomes a source of profit, not policy reform.

7 Resistance and Reclamation

Despite the bleak landscape, there are signs of resistance:

- Independent feminist journalists and digital platforms (e.g. *The Record Nepal*, *Feminist Dalit Organization*) are reclaiming space with critical counter-narratives.
- Young activists and artists are using spoken word, music, satire, and documentary to challenge cultural norms.
- Legal advocacy for media accountability, ethical reporting standards, and online safety laws is gaining ground.

But these efforts remain undermined by lack of institutional support, legal impunity, and social backlash.

Conclusion

Nepali media and language do not simply reflect society — they **manufacture** it. They script the roles men and women are supposed to play, normalize violence as romance, obedience as virtue, and silence as survival.

Until media narratives and public discourse are **reconstructed at the level of representation, language, and accountability**, gendered violence will continue to be treated as entertainment, gossip, or misfortune — never as a political and structural crime.

The battle for gender justice in Nepal must include a **battle for narrative power** — who tells the story, whose voice is heard, and whose pain is made legible.

Topic 7: Religion, Ritual, and the Theological Framing of Women in Nepal

Introduction

In Nepal, religion is not just a belief system — it is a **social architecture**, a **legal shadow**, and a **cultural script**. Hinduism, followed by over 80% of the population, is deeply embedded in state rituals, festivals, social norms, and political discourse. While religious texts and practices are often cited as moral foundations for society, they also **encode and sanctify a patriarchal order**, assigning women inferior, conditional, and symbolic roles.

This section dissects how religious doctrine, temple politics, and ritual practices in Nepal systematically **define womanhood through submission, purity, and sacrifice**, while delegitimizing female autonomy, authority, and agency. Rather than being a neutral force, religion in Nepal operates as a **moral shield for structural oppression** — spiritualizing inequality, and framing dissent as desecration.

1 Theological Foundations of Patriarchy in Nepali Hinduism

1.1 The Manusmriti and Hindu Gender Codes

Though not constitutionally enforced, the *Manusmriti* — an ancient Hindu legal text — has historically shaped the moral universe of Nepal. Its doctrines, widely quoted by priests and cultural custodians, declare:

- “A woman must never be independent — in childhood under her father, in youth under her husband, and in old age under her son.”
- “Women are by nature impure and incapable of spiritual liberation unless through service to men.”

These principles are not relics; they are **operational logics**. They manifest in marriage rituals, temple restrictions, inheritance customs, and moral policing.

1.2 Shakti and the Illusion of Empowerment

Nepali religious discourse often claims reverence for the feminine through the concept of **Shakti** — divine female energy — worshipped in goddesses like Durga, Kali, and Laxmi.

But this reverence is **symbolic, not social**:

- Goddesses are venerated when they serve male interests — as protectors of dharma, destroyers of evil, or providers of wealth.
- Real women are not given the autonomy that their deified forms represent.
- The power of goddesses is **ritually contained** within worship — not extended to women's actual rights or status.

This contradiction allows patriarchy to **hide behind divine imagery**, appearing progressive while maintaining control.

2 Ritual Practices and the Control of Female Bodies

2.1 Menstrual Exclusion and Ritual Pollution

Menstruation in Hindu theology is often linked to impurity. In Nepal, this manifests in:

- **Chhaupadi**: a practice (illegal but persistent) that exiles menstruating women to sheds, forbids them from touching family, food, or gods.
- **Temple bans**: women are prohibited from entering many temples during their periods.
- **Cultural shame**: girls are taught to conceal menstruation, associating it with sin or social danger.

These practices train women to view their bodies as **unclean**, and condition men to view female biology as **spiritually inferior**. This is not just exclusion — it is the **theological criminalization of womanhood**.

2.2 Widowhood and Ritualized Erasure

In Nepali Hindu culture, widowhood is treated as a **spiritual contamination**:

- Widows are often expected to **wear white, shave their heads, and avoid festivals**.
- They are excluded from auspicious rituals (marriages, pujas, births).
- Remarriage, though legal, is discouraged socially and ritually — especially for older women.

These restrictions arise from the belief that a woman's purpose is **fulfilled through her husband**. Once he dies, her spiritual and social worth is considered **expired**.

This is theological abandonment.

3 Marriage: The Sacralization of Female Subjugation

3.1 Kanyadaan and Dowry

In Hindu wedding rituals, the father performs *kanyadaan* — the "donation of the daughter" to another man. This ritual:

- Frames the daughter as **property**.
- Transitions control from one man to another, with **no acknowledgment of the woman's will**.
- Sacralizes the idea that a woman's identity is **relational, not sovereign**.

Dowry, while technically illegal, is often spiritualized as "**gifts for the bride's well-being**", normalizing the transactional view of marriage — and by extension, of women.

3.2 Ritual Language and Oaths

During marriage, women take vows of **eternal obedience, lifelong loyalty, and self-sacrifice**. Men, by contrast, vow to provide or protect. This asymmetry is not a legal requirement — it is a **ritual narrative**, deeply internalized by families across castes and classes.

4 Temple Politics: The Male Gatekeepers of the Sacred

Nepali temples — as institutions — remain heavily male-dominated:

- Priesthood is reserved almost entirely for men, despite theological flexibility in other Hindu cultures.

- Temple committees and trust boards are managed by male elders or businessmen.
- Female spiritual labor (cleaning, flower offerings, singing) is accepted — but **not female authority**.

This exclusion is not about competence. It is about control — of spiritual legitimacy and public reverence.

Even in Buddhist institutions, where gender roles are comparatively relaxed, **female monks (bhikkhunis)** face marginalization, lack of recognition, and unequal funding compared to their male counterparts.

5 Religious Festivals and Gendered Morality

Nepali festivals act as cultural curricula, transmitting patriarchal values through rituals and storytelling:

- **Teej**: Women fast for the long life of their husbands — reinforcing self-sacrifice as devotion.
- **Rishi Panchami**: Women perform purification rituals for menstrual sins — reinforcing menstrual shame.
- **Dashain**: Male deities and male elders are central; women perform **service roles**, rarely receive blessings as equal recipients.
- **Swasthani Bratakatha**: A month-long recitation tradition where female piety, obedience, and suffering are glorified through stories of wives who endure abandonment, torture, or humiliation.

These festivals shape collective values — and they do so through the **ritual glorification of female submission**.

6 Interfaith and Minority Contexts

In Muslim and Christian minority communities, patriarchy also persists through theological justifications:

- In Muslim communities in the Tarai, **purdah**, gender segregation, and child marriage are enforced as religious duties.

- Access to **religious education** for women is limited, and female leadership within mosques or religious schools is virtually nonexistent.
- In conservative Christian sects, women are often restricted to “helper” roles, barred from pulpit leadership or doctrinal authority.

These patterns, though different in structure, share the same core logic: **religion is used to limit the spiritual, intellectual, and physical space women can occupy.**

7 Resistance and Counter-Theology

Despite the institutionalized gender oppression within religious structures, **women are not passive.**

- Women have **reinterpreted rituals**: fasting as discipline, not dependence; widowhood as autonomy, not disgrace.
- Feminist theologians are emerging — questioning why suffering is treated as virtue only when it is female.
- Some temples now allow female priests in select regions, and activist groups are demanding **ritual reform**, not just legal recognition.

But this is still the margin. The mainstream remains **hostile to feminist reinterpretation**, labelling it as anti-tradition, anti-national, or Western contamination.

Conclusion

Religion in Nepal does not just reflect patriarchy — it **produces and protects it**. It creates a moral infrastructure where inequality is ritualized, obedience is spiritualized, and violence is normalized.

To challenge patriarchy in Nepal without confronting its **theological foundations** is to leave its strongest fortress untouched.

The sacred cannot be a sanctuary for subjugation. Reform must begin at the altar.

Topic 8: Patriarchy and the State — Governance, Budget, and Bureaucratic Exclusion in Nepal

Introduction

The state is not gender-neutral. It is an instrument — one that can dismantle oppression or institutionalize it. In Nepal, the state apparatus — from the Constitution to budget allocations, bureaucratic hierarchies, and law enforcement — operates within and reproduces patriarchal norms. It does so **not always through explicit discrimination**, but more dangerously through **gender-blind policy design, symbolic representation, underfunded protections, and institutional culture hostile to women**.

This chapter investigates how the Nepali state fails its women — not by accident, but by design. It exposes how patriarchy is embedded in governance structures, public budgeting, and everyday bureaucracy — and how these systems prioritize male comfort, authority, and visibility while structurally excluding women from power and protection.

1 Constitutional Guarantees vs. Political Reality

Nepal's 2015 Constitution proclaims gender equality, promising:

- Equal rights to property, reproductive health, and citizenship.
- A 33% quota for women's representation in all state bodies.
- Freedom from violence and discrimination.

Yet these promises remain **largely rhetorical**.

1.1 Representation without Power

While women have been elected to **local and national bodies** — often via quotas — real decision-making is still monopolized by male elites:

- **Deputy Mayors** are mostly women, but **Mayor positions** (with executive power) are male-dominated.
- Political parties fulfill gender quotas by nominating women with limited experience, loyal to male patrons, or related to male leaders.

- Within Parliament and provincial assemblies, women are rarely in **budgetary, security, or foreign affairs committees** — the core power centers.

The state treats representation as a **checkbox**, not a redistribution of power.

2 Gendered Bureaucracy: The State as a Male Workplace

2.1 Disproportionate Male Presence

Despite the promise of inclusion, the **bureaucratic structure of Nepal** remains overwhelmingly male:

- As of 2023, **less than 15% of gazetted civil servants are women**.
- At the highest echelons (secretaries, joint secretaries), the percentage drops even further.
- Technical positions — engineers, policy analysts, economists — are disproportionately occupied by men.

2.2 Institutional Culture of Exclusion

Women in government jobs face:

- **Sexual harassment**, with no effective complaint redressal systems.
- Exclusion from **decision-making meetings**, especially during field visits or policy negotiations.
- **Disrespect and undermining** from subordinates and male colleagues.
- Career stagnation due to **gendered expectations of mobility, overtime, or relocation** — often incompatible with family and societal roles imposed on women.

The bureaucracy is not just a workplace — it is a fortress of male continuity.

3 Budgeting Patriarchy: Where the Money Doesn't Go

Government budgets are **moral documents**. They show, in numbers, what a state values. In Nepal, gender budgeting remains **superficial, symbolic, and insufficient**.

3.1 Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB): A Failed Promise

Nepal began GRB reporting in 2007. By 2023, only 17% of the national budget was marked as **gender responsive** — and most of it was allocated to:

- Maternal health.
- Women-targeted microfinance or training.
- Social protection (elderly/widow allowances).

These are necessary — but **limiting**. They frame women as **dependent beneficiaries**, not **active stakeholders**.

There is minimal investment in:

- Women's entrepreneurship.
- Women in science, technology, and innovation.
- Infrastructure designed for women's safety and access (e.g., public transport, street lighting, housing).
- Gender-focused institutions with enforcement power.

The budget assumes women are **social welfare subjects**, not **economic and political actors**.

4 Policy-Making without Gendered Lenses

Most national policies — from agriculture to climate change — are drafted without gender analysis:

- Agricultural subsidies ignore that **a majority of smallholder farmers are women**, especially in remittance-receiving households.
- Climate adaptation strategies rarely consider that **women in rural Nepal bear the brunt of water collection, firewood gathering, and food insecurity**.
- Urban planning rarely includes women's safety — leading to **male-centric public spaces and infrastructure**.

Without intersectional gender analysis, policies are designed to **serve the already privileged**, often at the cost of women from poor, rural, or marginalized communities.

5 Law Enforcement and Judicial Patriarchy

5.1 Police as a Site of Intimidation

- Less than 10% of Nepal Police officers are women.
- Victims of domestic or sexual violence are often discouraged from filing FIRs.
- Police stations are rarely equipped with **women-only desks**, trained counselors, or legal advisors.

5.2 Courts as Male Domains

- Judges, public prosecutors, and legal officers are overwhelmingly male.
- Female survivors face humiliation during cross-examination, with their credibility often undermined based on clothing, relationship status, or delay in reporting.
- The judiciary remains insensitive to **intersectional vulnerabilities**, especially of Dalit, disabled, or minority women.

Justice is filtered through **masculine moral codes**, not feminist jurisprudence.

6 Data Politics: What Isn't Counted Doesn't Count

The state routinely **fails to disaggregate data** by gender, caste, ethnicity, and geography. As a result:

- Gendered impacts of policies go unnoticed.
- Invisible labor (care work, unpaid farm work) remains unmeasured and unrecognized.
- Sexual harassment, marital rape, or psychological violence remain under-reported — and underfunded.

When the state does not count women's realities, it **denies their existence** in policy.

7 Women in Federalism and Peacebuilding

Nepal's federal transition and post-conflict peace processes sidelined women at every turn:

- The Commissions of Inquiry post-conflict included few or no women.
- Transitional justice mechanisms ignored **gender-based violence** during the conflict — including rape, forced displacement, and wartime trafficking.
- Federalism was designed without grassroots consultation with **female constituencies**, especially in rural and conflict-affected zones.

Peace was built without justice for women — making it **a male peace**, not a collective one.

Conclusion

The Nepali state is not simply failing women — it is structurally **designed to exclude, marginalize, and symbolically accommodate them**. From political tokenism and budgetary neglect to bureaucratic hostility and gender-blind policy design, the state performs patriarchy not only through inaction but through **active reproduction of inequality**.

To transform this system:

- Quotas must evolve into **power redistribution**.
- Budgets must be **reconstructed through feminist economics**.
- Law enforcement and judiciary must be **institutionally sensitized and diversified**.
- Every policy must pass a **gender impact assessment**, especially those outside traditional "women's sectors".

Without re-engineering the state, every reform effort elsewhere will collapse.

Topic 9: Resistance, Feminist Movements, and the Rewriting of Gender Narratives in Nepal

Introduction

Where there is oppression, there is resistance. The patriarchal architecture of Nepali society — enforced through social norms, structures, laws, religion, and the state — has never gone uncontested. Across decades, women in Nepal have organized, spoken, marched, written, and survived in ways that challenge the dominant narrative of obedience, silence, and submission. Yet their struggles are often **excluded from mainstream historiography**, dismissed as isolated, elite, or Western-influenced.

This chapter traces the trajectory of **feminist resistance in Nepal**: from early struggles for education and representation, through grassroots mobilizations in rural communities, to the rise of digital feminist voices and intersectional activism. It interrogates not only what has been achieved — but also what has been **co-opted, criminalized, ignored, and still remains unfinished**.

1 The Roots of Feminist Resistance in Nepal

1.1 Early Reform Movements

The seeds of feminist thought in Nepal were planted during the **Rana and post-Rana eras**, where elite women began challenging social restrictions:

- **Yogmaya Neupane**, an early 20th-century ascetic and radical thinker, denounced caste hierarchy, gender inequality, and state repression. She led a women's movement demanding justice and equality — ending in mass suicide when the state refused to listen.
- The **first women's schools** (e.g., Padma Kanya in 1951) were born from reformist movements, often led by progressive male allies, but demanded by women themselves.

These early resistances were silenced in history textbooks — but they laid the foundation for future rebellion.

2) The Women's Movement Post-1990

The restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 created a political opening for organized feminist advocacy:

- Feminist NGOs and advocacy groups such as SAATHI, WOREC, Sancharika Samuha, and FWLD emerged, focusing on gender-based violence, legal reform, and media representation.
- Activists lobbied for the inheritance rights of daughters, criminalization of domestic violence, and recognition of sexual harassment.
- Women began demanding space in political parties — though often resisted, tokenized, or marginalized.

The 1990s was the era when feminism entered state language — but also when it became divided between NGO-ized activism and grassroots militancy.

3 Feminism During and After the Maoist People's War (1996–2006)

The decade-long Maoist insurgency transformed the discourse around gender:

- The People's Liberation Army (PLA) included thousands of women, many from Dalit, Janajati, and Madheshi backgrounds, who took up arms, led brigades, and challenged domestic servitude.
- The Maoist ideology promoted gender equality in theory — land to the tiller, equal pay, political inclusion — and created alternative spaces for rural women's empowerment.

But post-conflict:

- Many of these women were abandoned by the party during reintegration.
- Wartime gender-based violence was silenced in the transitional justice process.
- Former combatant women were seen as "dangerous" or "dishonored" — excluded from both state and society.

The war challenged patriarchy, but peace reinstated it.

4 The Constitutional Movement and Legal Victories

Women's rights groups played a critical role in drafting Nepal's 2015 Constitution, achieving:

- 33% representation in all state bodies.
- Equal rights to ancestral property.
- Provisions on reproductive health and violence against women.

But these gains were **partial and fragile**:

- Citizenship laws still discriminate against women.
- Implementation gaps render many rights symbolic.
- Intersectional voices — Dalit, disabled, queer, Muslim, rural — were excluded from drafting tables.

Nepal gained a progressive Constitution on paper — but not in practice.

5 Intersectional Feminism and the Rise of Grassroots Movements

The last decade has seen **decentralized, intersectional, and digitally-empowered feminist activism** rise across the country.

A. Dalit Feminist Uprisings

- Organizations like **Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO)**, **Dalit Women's Center**, and **Dalit Feminist Uprising** have reframed the conversation around **caste + gender**.
- Dalit feminists have exposed the **duplicity of elite feminist spaces** that ignore structural casteism.

B. Madheshi, Muslim, and Indigenous Feminisms

- **Madheshi and Muslim women's groups** in the Tarai demand inclusion beyond tokenism — access to schools, identity cards, and land rights.
- **Janajati women** have mobilized around language rights, land rights, and recognition of matrilineal customs.

These movements challenge the Kathmandu-centric, Brahmin-led imagination of “Nepali womanhood.”

6 Digital Feminism and the Hashtag Era

In recent years, online activism has catalyzed new feminist conversations:

- Campaigns like **#RageAgainstRape**, **#JusticeForNirmala**, and **#NotMyFault** mobilized thousands.
- Survivors of rape, incest, and workplace harassment have begun **speaking publicly** — reclaiming narrative power.

But digital platforms also bring risks:

- Women activists face **rape threats**, **doxxing**, and **hate speech** — often with no legal recourse.
 - Feminism is increasingly portrayed as “**urban elite noise**” by conservative backlashers.
-

7 Co-optation, NGOization, and Limits of Institutional Feminism

Many NGOs operate within donor frameworks that **depoliticize feminism**:

- Gender becomes a “development goal,” not a political movement.
- Workshops replace protests. Metrics replace transformation.

This has created a **two-tier feminism**:

1. **Elite, English-speaking, Kathmandu-centric NGOs** with funding but no mass base.
2. **Grassroots movements** with lived experience but no institutional power.

Until these spaces converge, feminism will remain fractured.

8 The Queer and Disabled Feminist Front

Queer and disabled women have demanded a seat in the feminist discourse:

- Organizations like Queer Youth Group, Blue Diamond Society, and Disability Rights Feminists have challenged heteronormativity, ableism, and tokenism within women's rights spaces.
- Trans women have demanded **recognition, not erasure**, in gender policies.
- Disabled feminists highlight how **accessibility is political** — not a charity issue.

This shift demands a **radical reimagining of what it means to be a Nepali woman** — one that includes all bodies, all identities, and all lived experiences.

Conclusion: The Unfinished Revolution

Feminism in Nepal is alive — but it is **contested, co-opted, and incomplete**. It has made the invisible visible, the private political, and the obedient rebellious. It has rewritten laws, transformed discourse, and birthed new solidarities.

But:

- The state remains patriarchal.
- The media remains hostile.
- The streets remain dangerous.
- And many women — especially those at the intersections of caste, class, disability, queerness, and geography — remain unheard.

The feminist movement in Nepal is not a moment. It is a **long revolution** — still unfolding, still threatened, and still absolutely necessary.

Conclusion

Bridging the Gap Between Promises and Reality

Since the last elections, politicians have made repeated pledges on women's rights, quotas, and legal protections. But in practice, **justice remains elusive** — especially for “ordinary” women whose stories rarely reach national headlines. These are not anomalies; they are structural failures.

Case: Domestic Violence Delays in Courts

Women seeking justice for domestic violence or property division often wait **five to ten years** before courts issue a judgment. During that time, many lose contact with their children or face continuing harassment. This is not the exception — it's entrenched. The law may grant protection orders, but **procedural delay kills rights**.

Case: Ignored Rape in Intimate Relationships

Police have been accused of ignoring rape cases involving adult women in consensual relationships. In one case, the victim alleges the station refused to register her complaint unless she relinquished efforts to prosecute. That reinforces the idea that *“marital or intimate rape doesn't count”* in the public imagination or many police minds.

Case: Statute of Limitations as a Weapon

Nepal's law requires rape complaints be filed within one year. This bars victims whose trauma or shame causes delay — especially minors or abuse survivors — from accessing justice. In 2022, young female lawyers petitioned the Supreme Court to remove this limitation. The very law intended to protect is being used to silence.

Case: Nirmala Panta — From Viral Outcry to Institutional Evasion

In 2018, 13-year-old **Nirmala Panta** was raped and murdered in Kanchanpur. The case ignited country-wide protests, but institutional response was slow and bungled:

- The suspect was released after DNA mismatches.
- Police officers charged for evidence tampering were later acquitted.
- The victim's family, under pressure and confusion, withdrew some charges.
- Even after years, no one has been held accountable.
This is a flagship case — heavily covered — yet still unresolved. What chance does the “average woman” have?

Case: Child Marriage Cases with Twisted Justice

An assessment of district court decisions on child marriage shows a gruesome pattern: in many cases, the **girl-bride is prosecuted** (in nearly 75% of cases), while the groom is either quietly fined or freed. Only 7% of such cases are even reported by the girls themselves; most are filed by family or police. The law meant to protect girls is used to further shame them.

Case: Conflict Sexual Violence Survivors Left Behind

Survivors of rape and sexual violence during Nepal's civil war (1996–2006) remain excluded from compensation or official recognition. The transitional justice processes consistently sideline these women. The state's "forgetting" is deliberate. Their wounds are invisible to the law.

Case: Fulmati Nyaya — Indigenous Girl Raped, Denied Justice

A 14-year-old indigenous girl, pseudonymously "Fulmati Nyaya," was raped and tortured by security forces during the conflict (2002). Her repeated complaints went nowhere; she finally petitioned the UN Human Rights Committee in 2014. In 2019, the Committee held Nepal legally responsible and recommended structural reform, but domestically she still has no justice. This shows how even international recognition fails to translate into redress at home.

The Backlash Pandemic: Social Media, Ideology, and New Religious Regression

While courts drag their feet, a **digital backlash against women** is escalating:

- Platforms host viral misogynistic content — from mockery of feminist demand to victim-blaming memes. Empowered women are recast as threats.
- The acquittal of **Sandeep Lamichhane**, Nepal's cricket icon, after a rape conviction, sent a chilling message: **celebrity + masculinity = immunity**.
- Online harassment, doxxing, and threats now routinely follow women who speak publicly.

Compounding this, recent sermons from **ISKCON-affiliated voices** (increasing in influence) have begun framing women as responsible for "**containing themselves**" — walking like saints, dressing like widows, not "inviting" violence by daring to live freely. Some sermons implicitly lay blame on women killed in public spaces, as though they failed to protect themselves. This is spiritual victim-blaming — religious patriarchy weaponized.

When theology asserts that women are *safe only when hidden*, and technology amplifies hate, the space for women to exist — let alone resist — shrinks dramatically.

Final Verdict: The Promise of Equality is Betrayed by Patriarchy's Muscle

Every major reform — quotas, legal amendments, policies — has been accompanied by “implementation retreat”. Patriarchy doesn't vanish because it is given legal lip-service. It fights back — with delay, loopholes, acquittals, reinterpretation, and coercive ideology.

A woman can climb the ladder, but the ladder leans on a wall built by men. And as long as justice is optional, womanhood will remain a risk.

We must do more than promise. We must **punish impunity, rewrite religious and cultural scripts, protect women in public, and rebuild institutional integrity**. Every case you cited, every girl silenced — that is the real metric of whether we are moving forward or just dancing around the edges.

Editor's Note

This document marks the **first installment** of *The Patriarchy Files* — an ongoing series dedicated to exposing the deeply rooted systems that institutionalize gender-based oppression in Nepal.

It is **physically and politically impossible** to compress every lived reality, every statistic, every silenced cry into a single volume. This report is neither exhaustive nor final — it is a **living manuscript**. What you hold is a beginning: the anatomy of how patriarchy endures — not merely in acts of violence, but in laws, institutions, language, and silence.

We acknowledge the stories not yet told, the data not yet accessed, and the survivors still in shadow. In our future installments, we will move beyond institutional critique to investigate **how gender inequality fractures Nepal's economic, psychological, and generational fabric** — because a society cannot thrive when half its people live in fear or erasure.

Let this be a mirror, especially to the rising generation — including those gripped by misogyny, confused masculinity, or political indifference. We urge you to reflect, not just react. **The question is no longer whether patriarchy exists — it is whether we are willing to dismantle it, for the sake of all.**

This report may be shared, cited, published, and circulated in all forms of media, provided due credit is given to the team behind it. To those who seek truth, justice, and structural change — this is yours.

— Goethe Sekiro
For the Akura.org

Claim	Sources
1. Nepal's marital rape laws are legally vague and weak in enforcement.	- "Laws on marital rape still murky in Nepal" — <i>The Kathmandu Post</i> (2024) - "Marital Rape in Nepal" — LawInPartners - Meera Dhungana v. Government of Nepal — <i>Global Health Rights Case Law</i> - Muluki Criminal Code 2074, Section 219 - Equality Now – Nepal Country Fact Sheet
2. Most sexual violence in Nepal is committed by known persons (not strangers).	- Nepal Police Annual Infographic Report (FY 2078/79) - Republica: "78.82% GBV cases domestic; 83.15% by known persons" (2022) - Equality Now – Nepal Fact Sheet
3. Underreporting of violence is severe; survivors fear stigma or inaction.	- Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2022 - World Bank blog: "Supporting Survivors of GBV in Nepal" - Sapkota et al. — PLOS ONE (2024) - "Domestic Violence in Nepal: A Systematic Review" — PMC - "Gender Inequality and Social Norms" Study — PMC (2022)
4. Sexual violence in Nepal is normalized in homes and hidden by families.	- PMC: "Gender Inequality and Social Norms in Nepal" (2022) - NDHS 2022 — PLOS ONE - Literature Review: UNFPA "Harmful Practices in Nepal"
5. Caste, class, and ethnicity intersect with gender in cases of GBV.	- UNFPA Literature Review on Harmful Practices (2020) - Equality Now – Legal Barriers Report - FEDO Nepal (Feminist Dalit Org) publications - PMC studies on GBV and structural discrimination
6. State and police often mishandle GBV cases.	- Republica / Nepal Police statistics - World Bank & Equality Now reports - Fulmati Nyaya case documentation
7. Public outrage has spiked after high-profile cases like Nirmala Panta.	- Nirmala Panta Case — Wikipedia / Court Archives - Fulmati Nyaya Case — Transitional Justice reports
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10. Most laws are reactive; systemic change is minimal.	- SSRN legal reviews - Feminist legal critiques (e.g. Kamla Bhasin, Sylvia Walby, Devaki Jain)

