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## Breaking the Silence: Systemic Challenges and Social Prejudices Facing Nepal's LGBTIQ+ Community

*Netra Kumar Ojha*

Lecturer, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Padmakanya Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu (Nepal)

E-mail: <netraojha@gmail.com, netra.ojha@pkmc.tu.edu.np>

### Abstract

*Sexual and gender minority individuals are forced to live with systemic discrimination and social prejudice in different areas of their lives in every corner of the globe. The present study focuses on the systemic barriers and social discrimination faced by sexual and gender minorities, particularly the LGBTIQ+ community residing in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Along the same line, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth, qualitative interviews with seven participants based on the quota sampling of the LGBTIQ+ population. On the one hand, I observed that sexual and gender minority individuals were subject to numerous challenges across various domains of their lives, such as name-calling, harassment, verbal aggression, physical aggression, and exclusion in the workplace. In addition, I realized that they were constantly being subjected to systemic discrimination and social stereotypes, including institutional ineptitude and the lack of effective policy implementation. On the other hand, the transgender and intersex populations often face significant stigma, such as being humiliated in healthcare facilities, having housing off-limits, and being harassed in public. For this reason, the present research proposes that the promotion of equity and dignity for all members of the LGBTIQ+ community depends critically on the presence of supportive environments, which are often dependent on family acceptance of individuals' LGBTQ+ identities and broader inclusive social attitudes. The proposed measures include public awareness exercises, more legal protection, and gender-sensitive facilities.*

### Keywords

LGBTIQ+, Systemic discrimination, Societal prejudice, Verbal harassment, Gender identity.

**Centre For Studies of National Development, Meerut**

Editorial Office : D-59, Shastri Nagar, Meerut - 250 004 (INDIA)

Ph. : 0121-2763765, +91-9997771669, +91-9412200765

## **Breaking the Silence: Systemic Challenges and Social Prejudices Facing Nepal's LGBTIQ+ Community**

### **1. Introduction**

Sexual minorities indicate a group of people whose gender identity and sexuality are not congruent with the normalized heterosexual orientation. This applies to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (UNDP/USAID, 2014; UNHCR, 2024; Ojha, 2024) people. In addition, each member of this category has a different identity and sexual orientation. Those individuals, primarily women who identify as lesbians, experience romantic or sexual attraction to other women. Just as, an example of a sexual and gender minority, gay refers to that male population that is attracted to other males, regardless of gender. Moreover, a second category that has emerged, bisexual, is individuals with sexual attraction to members of both sexes, disrupting the model of heterosexual attraction. Similarly, another group describes themselves as transgender individuals who redefine conventional standards of gender by identifying with a gender other than the one assigned at birth (Zambon, 2023). Equally, the group of intersex subjects also involves a category of physical or biological traits that do not strictly correspond to classical notions of the opposite sex. Just as some sexual minorities identify themselves as 'queer', meaning deviant from the normative gender binary or heterosexuality (Vijlbrief et al., 2019), another group of sexual minorities should also be recognized themselves under the term "queer".

The concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity are closely related but distinct. Sexual orientation refers to various forms of emotional and physical romantic attraction that can be contrasted with heteronormative perspectives (Moradi et al., 2009). In contrast, gender identity is the internal sense of self of an individual which can include or exclude conformance with expectations of a particular society that are based on biological sex at birth (NCTE, 2009). For example, transgender patients may require medical treatment to align their physical appearance with their gender identity. Prejudice in society, including homophobia and

transphobia, magnifies the marginalization of LGBTIQ+ people and takes the form of both overt aggression and covert microaggressions (Weinberg, 1972; Taylor & Peter, 2011; Kasula, 2023).

The LGBTIQ+ rights movement has been accompanied by both achievements and failures. Historically, events such as the establishment of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee in Berlin in 1897 and the Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969 triggered cross-cultural activism for equality. On the one hand, the legalization of marriage for same-sex couples in the Netherlands in 2001 and Argentina in 2010 stands as a landmark step toward equality. On the other hand, the fragility of these accomplishments is evident in cases like Russia's 2020 constitutional amendment, which explicitly prohibits same-sex marriage (Angelo et al., 2021).

In Nepal, the landscape is marked by paradoxes. On one hand, Nepal is recognized as a progressive state in South Asia due to its legal recognition of LGBTIQ rights at both international and domestic levels (Khadgi, 2024). By contrast, deeply ingrained social stereotypes perpetuate discrimination and marginalize these groups in schools, workplaces, and public spaces. This article investigates conditions of LGBTIQ behavioural discrimination experienced by LGBTIQ persons in Nepal, such as their social perceptions and lived experiences. Moreover, the purpose of this research is to explore the systemic challenges and social prejudices faced by Nepal's LGBTIQ+ community, particularly in the Kathmandu Valley, to raise awareness and promote inclusive social change by amplifying the voices of marginalized groups.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Understanding of Sexual and Gender Minorities**

Anthropological paradigms reveal that gender and sexuality are learned and culturally and socially embedded, that is, they are constructs of the history and social conditions of the society. Sex binary classification of the human sex (male/female) about corresponding characteristics and behaviours is neither stable nor universal (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2022). The traditional idea of biology as determinism, in which biological sex is associated with fixed gender roles, has been challenged by strong evidence of the social construction of gender and sexuality (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2022).

Gender role cultural variation provides compelling evidence of the dynamic nature of this construct. In the Lahu communities of

both China and Thailand, gender roles focus on complementarity, and the contributions of men and women are highly valued, in contrast to the hierarchical gender roles in the majority of other societies (Du, 1999). Also, social organizations that favour cooperative patterns of gender roles (e.g., matrilineal systems found in certain Indigenous societies) illustrate other models of gender role development emphasizing work, collaboration, and mutual trust instead of domination and control (Zhou, 2002).

Contemporary anthropological scholarship takes into account feminist, queer, and post-colonial perspectives when examining the relations between gender, power, and identity. The field of studies includes themes, such as reproductive rights and mobility, and the consequences of globalization and transnationally located and transiting populations for gender relations. These questions exemplify the role of historical and cultural backgrounds in forming personal experiences and collective organizations (Du, 1999; Zhou, 2002; Ojha, 2020, 2023a, 2023b). When anthropologists call attention to the cultural variation in gender expressions, they question the cultural fixity of Western gender categories, and they argue for a more culturally diverse understanding.

## **2.2 The Evolution of Anthropology in Sexuality Studies**

The anthropological study of sexuality has followed suit and is in step with broader social change. Pioneering research, such as Diderot's eulogizing of Polynesian sexuality in 18th century Europe (Diderot, 1989), placed non-European sexuality at the top of the hierarchy. The 20th and early 21<sup>st</sup> century evolutionary theories have interpreted sexuality through the paradigm of 'primitive promiscuity.' This view was then dismantled by scholars such as Malinowski and Westermarck who underscored that sexual norms differ culturally (Westermarck, 1906-08; Malinowski, 1987).

During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century interest in sexuality decreased as anthropologists became interested in gaining scientific respectability and bypassed sensitive or autobiographical issues (Lyons & Lyons, 2004). However, both the feminist, but also gay and lesbian people organizations "new wave" of the 1970s revived interest in sexuality studies and promoted a critical discussion on metropolitan and marginal sexualities. The queer theory emerged as an effective analytical device, deconstructing heteronormativity and providing complex understandings of sex identity (Lyons & Lyons, 2004).

### **2.3 Power Dynamics and Sexuality**

Sexuality operates within complex systems of power and morality. As scholars such as Foucault have shown (Lyons & Lyons, 2006), discourses of sexuality are woven into the fabric of social control (Lyons & Lyons, 2006). For instance, debates surrounding same-sex marriage in religious spaces have, on occasion, reflected a deeper war between institutional power and evolving moral perspectives. As a further example, problems such as human trafficking have revealed the confluence of coercion, consent, and structural disadvantages and have thus helped disrupt the discourse of sexual agency (Lyons & Lyons, 2006).

### **3. Study Area and Methodology**

This study focuses on the lived experiences of LGBTIQ people in Nepal, more specifically the Kathmandu Valley, an area of cultural pluralism and urbanism. In this study, I employed a qualitative research design and conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews to collect the data from the participants. Similarly, to fulfill the purpose of the study, I used quota sampling to select eight participants among the population of LGBTIQ+ in Kathmandu Valley. In addition, participants were reassured as to anonymity and confidentiality by the use of pseudonyms and, therefore, their identities were not disclosed. These ethical measures created a perception of trustworthiness and motivated study participants to share sensitive information openly and without any social or legal repercussions.

The study aimed at revealing patterns of behavioural discrimination, surveying social attitudes, and assessing participants' knowledge about their rights. Concentrating on the lived experiences of marginalized people and how it bleeds into the more general systemic problems of the LGBTIQ+ community in Nepal. This paper also contributes to an understanding of the hidden systemic challenges of the LGBTIQ+ population in Nepal, in which recommendations to foster inclusivity and equality can be drawn.

### **4. Systemic Challenges & Social Prejudices Facing Nepal's LGBTIQ+ Community: Evidence from the Field**

Nepal's LGBTIQ+ community has been facing many systemic challenges and social prejudices. During my fieldwork, I observed the

profound social constraints that sexual and gender minorities in the Kathmandu Valley face in every aspect of their daily lives. Moreover, individuals who identify as LGBTIQ+ constantly experience humiliation, harassment, stigmatization, and discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In addition, deeply rooted social stigmas marginalize this community, fostering hatred and violence that weaken them mentally, emotionally, physically, and socially. Opportunities for LGBTIQ+ individuals remain scarce, which further exacerbates their struggles.

On the one hand, Nepal's LGBTIQ+ community faces a deeply entrenched system of barriers and social stigma that pervades every aspect of life. On the other hand, despite the existence of laws meant to safeguard their rights, weak enforcement allows discrimination to persist across sectors such as education, healthcare, housing, and public services. Members of this community endure daily stigma and marginalization rooted in their sexual orientation or gender identity. Families reject many of them, employers bully them at work, and harassment on the streets is a common occurrence.

Furthermore, cyberbullying, economic exploitation, and institutional indifference reveal how deeply prejudice is embedded in Nepali society. These systemic failures highlight an urgent need for social acceptance, meaningful policy reforms, and stronger institutions that protect the dignity and rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals. Without addressing these challenges and enforcing existing laws, true equality will remain an unachieved goal for this marginalized community.

#### **4.1 Verbal and Physical Harassment**

While researching the fieldwork, I asked participants if they had faced name-calling and harassment. The answer to this question from lesbians was “not much”. Since this response was unexpected, I was curious and asked why. They replied that no one can assume their sexual orientation unless they reveal it. However, when I asked the same question to transgender men and transgender women, their answers were different. Anshu (Pseudonym), a 43-year-old Trans Woman, stated, “People recognize me because of my voice, and they call me names like chakka and hijra (a derogatory slur). I was also harassed while walking in an alley by some men. I was really scared, and I ran quickly”. This shows the reality of society, where people still mentally and physically torture transgender women. She also

added, “While I was walking near Ratnapark (a place in Kathmandu), they assumed I was a sex worker and came to deal with me. When I denied it, they used rough words”. Because of these experiences, she further stated, “People assume we are sex workers and harass us. I feel this is a very serious issue because not all transgender women are sex workers. People pass judgment based on a few transgender women who work as sex workers.”

A different response was given by Dhiren (Pseudonym), a 31-year-old, Trans Man. He stated, “I have faced verbal abuse in public spaces. They used to tease me, asking if I was a boy or a girl. But luckily, I have not faced any kind of physical harassment. In today’s society, verbal abuse has become very common because people think it is okay to say anything to anyone without thinking about others’ feelings.” While talking about name-calling and harassment, Rupak (Pseudonym), a 28-year-old Gay, expressed, “Five years ago, I was working in a company, and my duty was to lock the office after work. One day, one of my colleagues, who was senior in position, said he had a lot of work to complete but was just using his mobile. At 6 pm, he started making sexual comments. I felt a bad touch of his hands on my thigh. I was literally so scared, and I ran away. I left that job.” His story made me realize that offices are not safe for everyone. While we were having an in-depth interview, he said, “I am in a dilemma about whether I should share or not share another incident that happened to me.” I assured him to only share if he was comfortable. Rupak further expressed:

One day, my transgender friends dressed me up like a girl, did my makeup, and told me they would take me to Dohori Sanjha (a restaurant or venue where live duets are performed). My first client was a foreigner. I continued working as a sex worker for around two years. My clients used to come in cars and negotiate with me. One day, five clients took five of us to a hotel room and asked us to be naked. One of them took out a knife from his pocket and stabbed me in the chest. Luckily, the knife was not sharp. We shouted, and they ran away. We complained to the police, and they were arrested. However, the police gave them two or three slaps and released them just because we were dressed like transgender women. I still have the marks from the stab. That incident still haunts me.”

After finishing the story, he showed me the marks on his chest. This incident was breathtaking. Such incidents are life-threatening,

and it is hard for them to know whom to trust and whom not to trust. While researching, some participants did not want to share their stories, perhaps because they had to relive those incidents again. Devika (Pseudonym), a 29-year-old Trans Woman, shared her experiences:

My friends call me by my dead name instead of using my preferred name, which makes me feel super uncomfortable. Even my teacher asked me why I was behaving and dressing like a girl. They used to bully me, discriminate against me, and talk behind my back. I was so depressed that I could not concentrate on my studies.

However, she added, “Luckily, I have not faced any kind of physical harassment because I am an activist and raise my voice whenever anything wrong happens to me.” She further mentioned that most name-calling and harassment occur during school life. The response to name-calling and harassment from Suresh (Pseudonym), a 31-year-old Trans Man, was different. He expressed, “People bully me on social media platforms. They tease me by asking, ‘How do you have sex?’ They ask unnecessary questions on my social media platforms. They even threaten to photoshop my picture by attaching a nude body to my face.” He added, “I got so mentally depressed because of such harassment that, for my peace of mind, I stopped using social media platforms.”

A similar incident happened to Sonam (Pseudonym), a 36-year-old, Intersex. He stated, “I get lots of hate, vulgar, and threatening messages on my social media. Luckily, I have not faced any kind of physical harassment.” He explained that cyberbullying is faced by most LGBTIQ people who are on social media platforms. Since they try to avoid and ignore such messages and comments, most of them leave social media because of the humiliation they face. Anju (Pseudonym), a 37-year-old Lesbian, expressed, “I have not faced any kind of harassment or name-calling. I am feminine in nature, so people do not know I am a lesbian unless I disclose it”. After conducting my research, I realized that lesbians do not face harassment as often as others in the community.

#### **4.2 Harassment in Public Transportation**

I asked the participants whether people act differently toward them in public transportation, and the answers were similar. While sharing her experience, Anshu (Trans Woman) expressed, “While I



travel on public buses, people stare at me as if I have eaten their food. It is so uncomfortable.” She further stated, “I don’t like to travel on public transportation. When I take a bus, people gossip about me. I mostly wear masks so no one notices me.” Because of this, she feels suppressed and is forced to hide her identity or even stay confined within the four walls of her room. Such suppression often makes people anti-social. This sad reality shows how society forces them to suffer, even though everyone has the right to walk freely without being judged.

Sonam (Intersex) added, “I feel so uncomfortable on public buses when I am alone, so most of the time, I use Pathao or Tootle, which are more convenient for me.” However, he also mentioned, “It’s not possible for everyone to pay the expensive fares of Tootle, Pathao, or even taxis. In order for this to change, the perception of people must be changed.” Similarly, Dhiren (Trans Man) shared his experience before transitioning. “In public buses, when I reached my destination and talked to the conductor, he used to laugh and say out loud, ‘I thought you were a brother, but you are a sister’. All the passengers laughed at me, and I felt so insulted.” He added that it was very difficult to use public transportation before transitioning because of such behaviour from both conductors and passengers. However, after transitioning, he mentioned, “I haven’t faced any kind of discrimination so far.”

On the same question, Devika (Trans Woman) said, “I try not to speak while traveling on public buses. If I speak, because of my voice, they stare and talk about me.” She explained that staring and talking behind her back is quite common on public buses whenever people see someone from the LGBTIQ+ community. Moreover, Rupak (Gay) provided a different perspective, stating, “Since I don’t have any feminine behaviour, I haven’t faced any problems in public transportation so far.” Similarly, Anju (Lesbian) said, “I have not faced any problems in public transportation either.” Tanuja (Pseudonym), a-33-year old Trans Woman, shared a different response. She expressed, “Even if they tease me or say something, I don’t feel bad when I’m alone. But when I am traveling with my family, it really hurts.” Her experience highlights that while she has become familiar with the behaviour she faces daily on buses, people need to understand that it’s not acceptable to behave strangely toward someone just because they are different. Suresh (Trans Man) reflected on his experiences before transitioning. “Before transition,

it was very difficult to travel on public transportation. As our voices hadn't changed, they used to stare, point fingers, and laugh at us."

According to my research, most transgender men and women have faced discrimination in public transportation before transitioning. Although it is common for people to stare, gossip, or talk behind someone's back whenever they see members of the LGBTIQ community, the experiences of gay and lesbian participants were different. In my in-depth interviews, both gay and lesbian participants reported that they have not faced any kind of discrimination in public transportation.

### **4.3 Barriers in Healthcare Institutions**

During the field trip, I raised a question about the challenges they face in hospitals. Since transgender men take hormones to look like men and transgender women take hormones to look like women, they encounter various problems. Most transgender women have undergone breast augmentation surgery, and transgender men have had top surgery or use binders to hide their breasts. Moreover, both transgender men and transgender women take different hormones during their transition. Because of this, it becomes difficult to convince hospital staff about their gender identity, even while filling out forms.

In the in-depth interview, one of the participants, Anshu (Trans Woman), stated, "It is so hard in hospitals, even while filling up the form. They become confused about our gender identity. The staff in hospitals and health centers should have awareness and knowledge about sexual and gender minorities. In order to provide better care, it is crucial for them to create an LGBTIQA+ friendly environment." Tanuja (Trans Woman) shared a similar incident, saying, "My friend, who is a trans woman and dresses like a woman, had an accident. We immediately rushed her to the hospital, but the nurses there laughed at her and gossiped about her." While researching, I asked Devika (Trans Woman) the same question. She stated:

Government hospital staff have a very bad attitude and behaviour toward us. Although private hospital staff behave very nicely, we are forced to go to government hospitals for checkups due to financial issues. Doctors and staff in government hospitals assume that we are sex workers or that we have sexually transmitted diseases, and that is why we have come for checkups. Because of such discrimination and

humiliation, we avoid visiting these hospitals again, even if we are suffering from a severe disease.

I asked the same question to Anil (Gay), and his response was, “I have not faced any kind of discrimination in hospitals. However, for trans men and trans women, the behaviour is different. As a gay man, I have not faced any challenges in hospitals.” A similar response was given by Anju (Lesbian). She stated, “As a lesbian, I have not faced any kind of challenges in hospitals. Furthermore, most gay men and lesbians don’t have issues in hospitals.” In contrast, Dhiren (Trans Man) shared, “We face discrimination from the moment of registration. They tick ‘male’ on the form just by looking at us. Sometimes, we visit a gynecologist for issues related to the uterus or urinary tract infections, but because of their behaviour, we feel mentally and physically stressed and don’t want to visit the hospital again.”

Similarly, Suresh (Trans Man) shared, “In hospitals, trans men who haven’t had top surgery feel uncomfortable during x-rays. The staff are unaware and react weirdly. If we visit for a simple blood test or a normal health checkup, doctors make HIV/AIDS tests mandatory, which is very discriminatory. It gives us mental torture.” Although he acknowledged the importance of HIV/AIDS tests, he added, “Checking only our community is discriminatory. Such discrimination and stigmatization by hospitals must stop. They should educate their doctors and staff about LGBTIQ people.” Sonam (Intersex) also highlighted the lack of awareness among hospital staff. He stated, “It is very difficult for us to approach doctors. Even doctors are unaware of body tests and the hormones used during the transition period. Proper training and guidance should be provided to doctors so that they behave respectfully toward patients.”

#### **4.4 Discrimination in Housing**

While researching, I asked if it was easy for the LGBTIQ+ community to find rooms to rent, and the answers to this question varied from respondent to respondent. For instance, Tanuja (Trans Woman) stated, “People don’t want us to stay even on rent. They give different excuses because of our gender identity.” As a result, such behaviour makes them feel excluded from society. She added that it is a basic right for an individual to live happily in society, but this right is often denied to people like her. A transgender man, Suresh, expressed, “My landlord don’t know about my gender identity and

sexual orientation. I stay with my partner in the room. I have lied to the landlord that we are a married couple.” He further explained that if he had told the truth, the landlord wouldn’t have given them the room to stay. Because of this, he felt very bad about having to lie just to find a room on rent.

Another response to the same question came from Rupak (Gay). He shared, “Me and my partner faced a lot of problems. We were told to leave the room immediately. Some people poisoned the landlord’s mind against us.” Because of this, they were also denied the chance to live near the community. “People think we are a disgrace to society and create an imbalance in it. It is disheartening to hear such things and experience this behaviour,” he added. He also emphasized that society needs to accept the fact that sexual and gender minorities (SGM) are normal like straight people and deserve equal rights, which should be implemented. Dhiren (Trans Man) expressed a similar sentiment, saying, “While renting flats, we have to lie and keep it a secret; otherwise, they will not let us stay, even though we are paying. My landlord once kicked out a trans woman who was staying on rent because of her gender identity.” In addition, he shared that some landlords ask for legal documents like citizenship before renting out rooms, which makes it even more difficult to find a place.

Anshu (Trans Woman) echoed this struggle, stating, “Most landlords give excuses and don’t allow us to stay on rent. Even if they do, they charge double the price and increase the rent monthly.” She added, “It is inhuman behaviour. Just because our gender identity is different doesn’t give landlords the right to treat us unfairly.” Similarly, Sonam (Intersex) shared an equally troubling experience. “I have used my friend’s citizenship to stay in a room. If they knew my real identity, they would either kick me out or ask me to pay double the rent.” He explained that many in the LGBTIQ+ community are forced to hide their identity using others’ legal documents because they cannot afford to pay huge amounts for small rooms. However, Devika (Trans Woman) stated that finding rooms in some areas was easier. “In some areas, it’s not that difficult for our community to find rooms. People there are aware and positive about us. But in other areas, it’s very difficult to convince landlords.” In contrast, Anju (Lesbian) said, “I have not faced any kind of problems in finding rooms.”

According to my study, most LGBTIQ+ individuals hide their real identity in order to stay on rent. If they do not hide, they are often asked to pay double the rent for a small room, which increases

every month and makes survival difficult. From my research, it is clear that, except for lesbians, everyone in the LGBTIQ+ community has faced significant challenges in finding rooms or flats.

#### **4.5 Discrimination in Public Restrooms**

During the field study, I asked, “Do you use public restrooms/toilets, and did people pass any sort of comments while using such public restrooms?” The answer to this question was “yes” from most of the participants. However, the responses from gay and lesbian participants indicated no problems in public restrooms, whereas the opinions of transgender men and transgender women were different. They explained that there is no sign or provision for LGBTIQ+ people in public toilets. Public toilets are discriminatory because the signboards only display “male” and “female”.

Devika (Trans Woman) stated, “Gender-friendly toilets should be established so that transgender men, transgender women, gender-fluid, gender-binary, and non-binary individuals don’t have to feel uncomfortable using public restrooms.” Each respondent had different opinions regarding toilets. For instance, Tanuja (Trans Woman) said, “I have not faced any problems; I go to the female washroom.” Similarly, Rupak (Gay) shared, “I haven’t faced any problems in public restrooms, but they should focus on making transgender-friendly washrooms.” While researching, I asked the same question to Dhiren (Trans Man), and he expressed, “When I was in school while using restrooms, my classmates used to judge me for using the girls’ restroom by saying, ‘A boy has entered the girls’ restroom.’ He added that before transitioning when he used male restrooms, people used to stare at him.”

Discrimination in public toilets is very common. Because of this, most LGBTIQ+ individuals avoid using public toilets altogether. For instance, Sonam (Intersex) expressed, “Gender-neutral and closed-system toilets should be made so that it becomes easy for our community to use public restrooms.” I agree with his statement, as closed-system toilets would provide privacy and ease for all individuals. Anju (Lesbian) stated, “As a lesbian, I have not faced any kind of discrimination in restrooms because they don’t know my sexuality unless I reveal it to them.” A different response was given by Anshu (Trans Woman). She expressed, “It is very difficult for us to use public restrooms. Normally, I don’t prefer going to public restrooms, as I have already faced discrimination and

humiliation.” Suresh (Trans Man) also shared his experience, saying, “Before transitioning, I used to go to girls’ restrooms, and people would stare at me. After transitioning, I used male restrooms. It is common for people to stare whenever LGBTIQ+ individuals use public washrooms.”

In conclusion, the discriminatory design of public toilets, which are limited to “male” and “female”, should be changed. Gender-neutral toilets with a closed system should be introduced so that LGBTIQ+ individuals can use them without fear of judgment or humiliation.

#### **4.6 Discrimination in Markets**

During my field visit, I asked participants whether they faced any form of discrimination while shopping. For this question, Anshu (Trans Woman) stated, “People just look at us, pass comments, and laugh at us as if we have done something wrong. They stare, joke, and laugh, which makes us feel humiliated, insulted, and mentally tortured.” Because of such behaviour, many transgender individuals do not want to appear in public spaces. For the same question, Dhiren (Trans Man) shared, “When I went shopping, the shopkeeper discriminated against me by saying, ‘This is boys’ clothing; here is girls’ clothing’. Even though I dress like a man, such attitudes and behaviour while shopping hurt emotionally.” In contrast, Devika (Trans Woman) expressed, “I haven’t faced any kind of discrimination while shopping. I am very simple in nature, so their attitude toward me is very good.”

There was a different response given by Suresh (Trans Man), who stated, “While shopping, the shopkeeper tries to sell bad-quality clothes or ill-fitting clothes. As a trans man, I normally prefer wearing loose-fitting clothes. I don’t like visiting shops because customers stare at us, and shopkeepers force us to buy things we don’t even like.” A similar response was given by Tanuja (Trans Woman). She expressed, “While shopping, people stare at us, but I haven’t faced any kind of discrimination beyond that.” Likewise, Sonam (Intersex) shared, “People just make us uneasy and uncomfortable by staring at us.” However, Rupak (Gay) and Anju (Lesbian) both said that they had not faced any problems while shopping.

From this study, it is clear that transgender and intersex individuals experience discrimination while shopping, whereas gay and lesbian individuals do not. This is because people cannot easily

assume their sexual orientation or gender identity. For transgender individuals, however, their transition phase often involves cross-dressing and noticeable differences in voice, which makes it easier for others to assume their gender identity and discriminate against them.

#### **4.7 Ignorance by Authorities**

The government has made different laws and policies for sexual and gender minorities, but these have not been implemented. While conducting field visits, most participants stated that it is very difficult for them to access rights in each and every sector. Anish KC (Trans Man) said, “The government should provide constitutional rights and strictly implement them. Specifically, LGBTIQ rights should be clearly written like other minority groups in the constitution.” In addition, he suggested:

The health sector should have an LGBTIQ-friendly environment with some discounts for the community. In education, there should be a curriculum on LGBTIQ issues and a teacher training manual. Citizenship should be provided easily for us, just like for heterosexual people, and marriage equality should be ensured for all. In all provinces, awareness programs should be conducted, and educational documents should be made easy to change. Furthermore, there should be empowerment programs focusing on LGBTIQ people and the inclusion of LGBTIQ children in child-related policies.

Similarly, Devika (Trans Woman) stated, “The main ignorance of the government lies in the issue of citizenship. Marriage equality and adoption rules should also be made friendly for us.” She added, “Most transgender individuals go abroad for surgery because the government does not provide such facilities at a low cost. In order to create fairness, there should be a quota system for our community in public service commission exams.” During the field study, Rupswee observed:

Although laws and policies exist, they are not being implemented. For instance, the law regarding the right to obtain citizenship under one’s gender-male or female-is granted only after a full body checkup, which is humiliating and discriminatory. Because of this, most LGBTIQ people obtain their citizenship before they come out as gay, lesbian, transgender, intersex, or queer. However, there is no process to correct these documents after transitioning.

Tanuja (Trans Woman) expressed a similar concern, stating, “There should be equality in all sorts of opportunities because we belong to the same country.” Her statement was short but clear: “We should be given equal opportunities, and treatment should be equal for everyone.” Likewise, Suresh (Trans Man) emphasized, “The government should treat us equally and provide the same facilities that heterosexual people receive without any struggle. Whereas heterosexual people get all their rights without difficulty, sexual and gender minorities have to struggle just to obtain basic rights.” Sonam (Intersex) shared, “The government should provide identity cards for sexual and gender minorities so that we can get discounts for things like hospital services and bus fares.” Anju (Lesbian) shared a similar view, stating, “The government should focus on the proper implementation of all the laws and policies.”

In addition, Rupak (Gay) pointed out, “The laws and policies related to marriage equality, adoption rights, the right to change names in educational documents after transitioning, and the right to citizenship without discrimination should all be implemented by the government.” A similar response was shared by another respondent, Anshu (Trans Woman), who stated, “We face discrimination everywhere-whether it’s in schools, colleges, public spaces, police stations, buses, or even while shopping. Because of this, we are not safe anywhere.”

From my research, most participants shared similar opinions about the importance of implementing laws and policies, especially regarding marriage equality for all. Although laws exist, they have not been implemented at all. Therefore, this must change, and the government should take the initiative to ensure equal treatment for everyone.

## **5. Findings and Discussion**

The findings from the introduction and literature review show the shared and unique challenges faced by sexual and gender minorities. Anthropological perspectives highlight that gender and sexuality are social constructs rather than fixed biological categories (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2022). This perspective aligns with the experiences of Nepal’s LGBTIQ+ community, where deeply rooted social stigmas continue to foster discrimination, even though their rights are legally recognized (Khadgi, 2024). Both contexts demonstrate how societal norms marginalize LGBTIQ+ individuals-



whether through exclusion in Nepal's public spaces or through historically rigid gender roles globally (Du, 1999; Zhou, 2002). While Nepal's legal progress is noteworthy, examples like the gender-equal systems in Lahu communities (Du, 1999) offer alternative approaches that promote inclusion, contrasting sharply with Nepal's ongoing struggles in implementing its policies effectively.

The literature review also highlights the global shift in the study of sexuality, moving away from rigid heteronormative frameworks toward a more critical queer theory approach (Lyons & Lyons, 2004). Nepal's situation reflects a similar paradox, where legal advancements coexist with widespread societal discrimination. Foucault's insights on power dynamics in sexuality (Lyons & Lyons, 2006) resonate strongly here, as institutional neglect and cultural stigma hinder LGBTIQ+ rights in Nepal. Challenges such as discrimination in education, housing, and healthcare mirror global patterns, showing that even in regions with legal reforms, prejudice remains deeply entrenched in societal and institutional structures. These findings highlight the need for intersectional approaches that address both legal and cultural barriers to create meaningful, lasting change.

## **6. Conclusion**

The findings of this study, combined with insights from anthropological paradigms, highlight the shared and specific challenges faced by sexual and gender minorities. In particular, in Nepal, deeply rooted societal stigmas continue to marginalize LGBTIQ+ individuals, even though their rights are legally recognized. Similarly, this reflects global patterns where societal norms and institutional barriers maintain discrimination. Moreover, anthropological studies point to the social construction of gender and sexuality, with examples like the Lahu communities showing inclusive approaches to gender roles that challenge hierarchical norms. However, Nepal's struggle between progressive legal frameworks and poor implementation underscores the need for broader societal change to match legal advancements.

Globally, the evolution of sexuality studies highlights the shift from heteronormative frameworks to intersectional perspectives, such as queer theory, which deconstructs power dynamics in sexual and gender identities. Although Nepal reflects this global dichotomy, its legal progress is often overshadowed by institutional indifference and cultural stigma. Therefore, the findings of this research call for

intersectional approaches that address not only legal reforms but also cultural and systemic inequalities. In order to achieve meaningful change, it is essential to bridge the gap between policy and practice, foster greater societal acceptance, and amplify marginalized voices to ensure a truly inclusive and equitable society.

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