

Gender And Sexual Minority: An Identity Less Identity

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Abstract—Gender and sexual minorities are struggling for their identity across the world. They wish their identity to be recognized with reference to their sexuality which the societies guided by patriarchy, stigma and heterosexism find problematic and declare their sexual behavior as antisocial and such identity unacceptable. Thus, they suffer from identity crisis. An ethnographic study under the qualitative framework accompanied with various tools and techniques such as community stay, observation and interaction, key informant interview were administered for data collection of this study. These people are forcefully pushed behind from the social frontier and living marginalized as forgotten citizens with their lost identity followed by discrimination and humiliation. Their inclusion to the social mainstream with dignified recognition has become a prime need for social transformation and sustainable development.

Keywords—Gender and sexual minority, identity, patriarchy, stigma and heterosexism

Introduction

In the sociological studies, the trio terms gender, sex and sexuality are perhaps the most discussed terms and found rendering a huge significance in the multiple dimensions of societies. The first two terms sex and gender are more often used interchangeably referring to each other considering them as two ways of looking into the same division. However, “gender is a term referred to the parallel and socially unequal division into femininity and masculinity which is socially and culturally constructed” (Luitel, 2008). It also denotes to the socially determined ideas and practices of what it is to be male or female (Reeves & Baden, 2000, p. 3) while the other term sex, in contrary is a biological entity which makes a man appear differently from a woman with respect to his physical construction and genital organ brought by birth. Therefore, sex is an individual's biological status which is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e. a blending of masculinity and femininity). “A person's sex refers to biological or anatomical identity as male, female, third sex or inter-sex” (BDS [Blue Diamond Society], 2010). It is very important to understand that gender is not to be necessarily defined by sex. Sex is a biological entity which an individual carries from birth, thus is a universal phenomenon while gender is constructed in a particular society along with an individual's sexual orientation developed while being socialized. Hence,

gender may be understood as a cultural, social and psychological aspect which an individual acquires from the society and it is different between/among societies and cultures that creates a distinct feature and a separate identity of an individual.

Similarly, the third term sexuality refers to the social process, through which social relation of genders are created, directed and practiced. By creating them social beings we know as man and woman, as their relations create society (Mackinnon 1989, as cited in Gautam, 2003, p. 35) with their intimate contact where particularly strong emotional bonds are forged (Connell, 2002, p. 91). Sexuality of a human being is generally considered to begin at puberty stage and it gets matured in adulthood. Both internal and external factors of an individual affect sexuality which has nothing to do with sex or gender. There are different types of sexualities, to wit: heterosexual or straight (i.e. a person having opposite sexual orientation), homosexual (e.g. Gay, lesbian); bi-sexual, pomosexual (a person having both characteristics i.e. hetero male and lesbian female or vice versa); asexual (i.e. a person having no sexual attraction with anyone); unisexual or monosexual (i.e. a sexual orientation with a single gender); pansexual (i.e. sexual orientation with unbounded desire); and omnisexual (i.e. a sexual orientation with multiple genders). These are all legitimate sexualities depending on someone's biology (Panthee, 2005, p. 3).

Who are Gender and Sexual Minorities?

The term minority, in general associates with the number less than others. So, applying this concept to define sexual/gender minorities, it indicates to those people who are oppressed/discriminated against due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (BDS [Blue Diamond Society], 2009). Likewise, the term “gender/sexual minority” also includes a variety of gender and sexual identities and expressions that differ from the prevailing cultural norms (Rodrigues, Leite & Queiros, 2017). Usually gender/sexual minorities are comprised of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals who are as diverse as hetero sexual in their class, caste, gender, religion, culture, ethnicity, language, profession and physical appearance (BDS [Blue Diamond Society], 2009). It is the global matter of fact that the hetero-normative societies with male-female dichotomy have created havoc in the life of gender/sexual minorities thus beclouding them as human beings (Math & Seshadri, 2013). The intent of this paper is to bring to light the lost identity of this

community and need for provision of establishing their identity, advocacy for equal opportunities and rights like any other citizens abiding by law.

LGBTI as Gender and Sexual Minority

LGBTI is commonly used acronym which is an umbrella term encompassing a heterogeneous group of lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender and intersex persons (Bista, 2013) with homogeneous concern of sexuality and identity. Hence, in this study the term is used to refer to a community of gender and sexual minorities groups comprising lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and intersex and a sociological discussion is offered incorporating with their identity issue.

To be specific, lesbians are women whose primary sexual and emotional attraction is towards other women and their sexual feelings towards other women are considered as normal and natural for them. Lesbians say that they feel emotionally and spiritually closer to women and prefer intimate relationships with women. During adolescence, many young women become physically attracted to men, where-as some other become physically attracted to women only. They begin to be aware of their sexual feeling and they may notice that they feel turned on by other women. My participant expressed that: *I am confident that I am a lesbian. I find girls attractive and I need a girl partner only* (Anita, [INT]). This narrative implies that she also likes to have a girl partner and marry a girl only. She is attracted to girls and wants to have relationship with the girl only. She gifted a girl partner with a mobile phone on the Valentine Day to impress her. Similarly, Niharika another interviewee also reveals about her relationship with another girl for a long time. In contrary to lesbians, gays are male persons with physically and emotionally attracted and fall in love with some one of the same sex. The German native Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825- 95) is considered as the initiator of the gay concept and for which he is known as the grandfather of the world 'gay' rights movement.

The word "bisexual" is used to refer to a person who is attracted physically and emotionally to both males and females (BDS, 2014). Bisexuality is the potential to feel attracted (sexually, romantically and emotionally) to and engage in sensual or sexual relationships with people of either sex. Although the degree of attraction may vary over time (<http://www.biresource.org>) the bisexual people possess the capacity to love people of their same gender as well as of a different gender including physical, sexual and emotional attraction, and/or relationships. Therefore, a bisexual person might feel attracted to men, women, transgender and/or gender queer people, or to one gender in preference to the others over time in life.

Similarly, the term transgender is often used as umbrella term to refer to a wide range of non-conforming gender identities to that typically associated with the sex to which they are assigned at

birth whose appearance, expression and/or anatomy do not fit into conventional expectations of male or female. Thus, they are new challenges to politics, government and law, and new opportunities to broaden the horizons of everyone who has a trans-person as their neighbor, co-worker, friend, partner, parent, or child (Stryker & Whittle, 2006). These people generally have treatments to alter the sex of their body and they are cross-dressers (Gilbert, 2014) as they have a feeling of being trapped in the wrong body such that their internal feelings and emotions do not match their external biological sex (BDS, 2014). According to literatures both male and female energies are present in the human body with significantly more masculine energy in male and more feminine energy in female but the imbalance in those energies and the opposite sex energy is significantly more dominating than normal this is when the gender deviation becomes apparent. Finally, inter-sex persons are those who have both male and female sexual organs which creates confusion towards cultural and societal expectations of a distinctly male or female (Chase, 2006, p.300). The medical science has identified them as hermaphrodites. Thereby, the collective union of the people of all these categories is commonly known as gender and sexual minority community.

It is understood that a gender identity is all about one's private sense of being a man or a woman and consists primarily of the acceptance of membership in a particular group of people: male or female. All human societies comprise a set of gender categories that can serve as the basis of the formation of a social identity in relation to other members of society. In most societies, there is a basic division between gender attributes assigned to males and females; however some individuals are not identified with the gender that is assigned to their biological sex.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to contribute an advocacy for the wellbeing of the gender and sexual minority community people as an ally for their identity, civil and human rights. Besides the following are the specific research objectives:

- To explore the identity of the sexual/gender minority community from both emic and etic perspective
- To appraise the social perception and position of the members of the community

Methodological Mapping

Methodological mapping provides helping hands to construct appropriate method for addressing research objectives which are established to examine social phenomena (Scotland, 2012). Owing to it, this research was carried out under the descriptive and analytical qualitative framework which is social justice oriented approach and it attempts to promote moral discourse for stimulating critical conversation about caste, gender, class and society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This research paper thus, has been prepared

based on the qualitative data obtained through the ethnographic investigation and that have been conceptualized via sociological perspective which the late modern social theorists have developed on selfhood in 'new times' (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992).

In order to examine the idea of identity, I have attempted to pave a mile stone of an ethnographic study of the gender and sexual minority community of the Kathmandu valley of Nepal participating in the field for an extended period of time and tried to explore further the trend of recognizing the new identity of the members of the studied community. Along the study, I gathered both primary and secondary nature of information; the targeted community was studied in the field by meticulous observation and thus the primary data were collected through informal ethnographic survey supplemented with informal communication, observation and key informant interview (KII) with purposively selected seven research participants belonging to the LGBTI categories of defined sexual and gender minority community as shown in the table below whereas the secondary data were collected from various published and unpublished sources.

Table 1: Purposive Selection of the Participants

S. No.	Categories	Kathman	Bhaktapur	Lalitpur	Participants
1.	Lesbian	1	1	-	2
2.	Gay	-	1	-	1
3.	Bisexual	-	1	-	1
4.	Trans	1	-	1	2
5.	Inter-sex	1	-	-	1
Total		3	3	1	7

Discussion of Findings

Gender and sexual minority: Identity without identity

1. *I am a female by gender and my sexuality is lesbian. I belong to LGBTI (i.e. a community of gender and sexual minorities).* (Niharika, [INT]).

2. *I felt that I had different nature right from my middle school days. I used to hear my other friends talking about girls, find them liking for girls but there was nothing as such happening with me. So, I was in confusion and questioned myself why am I having different feelings? Why do I not like any girls like my friends do? I did not know that I was a gay but I knew that I was different from the rest of my friends. They liked girls, it was natural for them but I liked boys only and it was natural for me* (Harish, [INT]).

3. *I am a bi sexual because I am attracted to both male and female. During my childhood, I played with both male and female peer groups. It was normal to the others but slowly while I became adult I noticed that my feelings were different with others as I was equally attracted with male and female. After a long time, I arrived here in Kathmandu city to expose my personal identity. I like to say that media is helping*

young generations to judge their emotional feelings. They have learned about LGBTI and their stories through media. Because of that young generations are easily exposing their identity with their family members and establishing their identity (Yassi, in personal communication, [FN]).

4. *I am a transgender woman; I was a male by birth. Physically and biologically I am a male but my behaviors, feelings, thinking as well as all the physical activities are similar to female. I like to become closer with females since my childhood. While I shared my feelings among peer groups, most of my male friends questioned many times about such behaviors and activities. I was in confusion with my future life during school time especially in village. While I left village and arrived in Kathmandu city, I got to contact with our society and established my identity as a transgender woman. For doing so, I applied hormone therapy and maintained my feminine looks. Some of my friends are also applying cosmetic surgery therapy for their looks (a transgender as told in Sajha Sawal: BBC Nepali Service [DA]).*

5. *I was born as a daughter. Probably that time female hormone remained dominant in me. So I was looking more like daughter. When I reached 13 years, physical development of a female did not take place in me. Rather male's physical development started occurring in me. So, my family was shocked. "Your son is born in the form of daughter" other people commented. Though I was born in the role of female the role of male happened to develop in me. It was the subject of annoyance to my family. Now I have both genital organs.* (Vijaya, [INT]).

All the above narrations were recorded during the study of the gender and sexual minority which reveal that the members of all categories of the studied community have identity crisis. Identity is a very complex entity of the universe which is quite difficult to explain. It has become a remarkable phenomenon and thus the recent years, various scholars have taken an intense interest on the matter of identity (Fearon, 1999). In general, identity is what something or somebody is known by/as. According to an online dictionary, the definition of identity is who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world and the characteristics that define you (<http://www.yourdictionary.com/identity>) so that you become a unique (Lynch, 1960). When it is thought from sociological perspective, identity is not a subject to be carried on by a child along with birth, rather it is an entity to be developed in the society along the role performed by an individual. According to Erikson as mentioned in Zagorka Golubović, children do not possess identities and adolescents strive to attain it (2010). Generally, we have an established trend of looking into anything from unidimensional perspective which may lead to incomplete and confusing interpretation of the entity. Therefore, there exist an identity crisis; we recognize something as which is not

and we do not get to recognize what it actually is. Thus, there is possibility of an individual to possess several identities, about which is usually spoken in terms of "social roles" differentiating that individual from the others (Golubović, 2010). In socio-political life, we find the concept of "identity" at the center of lively debates in every major subfield. In political theory, questions of "identity" mark numerous arguments on gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in relation to liberalism and its alternatives (Young 1990; Taylor 1989 as cited in Fearon, 1999).

According to identity theory, the situation has been stimulating their personal identity of gender and sexual minority community members made them self-reflexive and classifying self (Stets & Bruke, 2000, p.225).

Social Stigmatization upon the Gender and Sexual Minority Realization

Society is the most important institution for the overall development of a human being which acts as common home for all the people in absence of which perhaps the human life does not become meaningful. The behavior of a society towards an individual influences the choice and action of him/her. Social acceptance and interaction matters a lot for the desired status of an individual. The discourse of appropriate social development demands social interaction- "the social recognition of people and the way they interact in groups and society and the norms that facilitate such interaction also shape development process" (Davis, 2004). The patriarchy inspired Nepalese society possesses stigma and bullying to the members of gender and sexual minorities so that they do not want to come forward in the society with their open identity. A powerful system of patriarchy pervades the acceptance of non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming people and tinges many interactions from high politics to daily life (Knight, 2015). According to Herek, "stigma is the negative regard, inferior status and relative powerlessness that society collectively accords to people who possess a particular characteristic or belong to a particular group or category" (Herek, 2009, p. 441). Due to intolerant and unfriendly Nepalese societies they are always feeling inferior to other people and shameful with their identity. Social stigmatization of gender and sexual minority community is the result of heterosexism which is characterized by denial and denigration (BDS, 2009). So, they hesitate to come to the social forefront and remain aloof and isolated. Regarding this, one of my participants admitted:

I can't tell about my identity to anybody other than the BDS people. I want to stay aloof. I can't socialize with others. I want to go to the cinema alone. I have been involving only in BDS for a long time. I rarely involve in other sectors. I don't participate in social functions (Anita, [INT]).

It is not because the gender and sexual minority people do not behave with others properly but because others do not respect them and their feelings and they do not try to understand them, they are likely

to live hiding their real identity what they realize about what/who they are. Almost all the participants accepted that they do not participate in any political activities either as cadres or as leaders. They even do not participate in any socio-cultural functions except the fair and function of their own community. They understood very well that society is not accepting them till this moment. Therefore, for me without reforming existing socio-cultural structures they cannot participate in any social functions. They are struggling for establishing social identity for social acceptance. In the reference of social identity theory, identity cover 0-1 probability because social category is defined along stereotypical as held in culture (Stets & Bruke, 2000, p.229) because social stigma causes stereotypes and prejudice to exist in the society which renders sexual minority stress (Meyer, 2003a; b). Similar feeling has been expressed in the following remarks as well:

Those gender and sexual minority people are also the human beings, they are also the members of the society. They also can do something. They can support other members of the society, those who are in need of help and cooperation. But our stigmatized society does not allow us to do so. It is so disappointing to us. (Harish, [INT])

Besides these, other members of the community in informal communication also admitted that they were forced to become marginalized population in the state with deprivation to state privileges; they feel like biased, discriminated and forgotten by their family, society and the state as a whole. Few legal announcements, constitutional soft space and very little agentic attempts cannot act like catalyst helping them to overcome the problem and be a chariot of social transformation guaranteeing with socio-political rights along with the recognition of their different identity under the strong olfactory sensation of stigmatization.

Regarding my question "what do you want the government to do for you?" the members of the community answered that they didn't need anything specifically in person but they wanted the comfortable environment for their community. As I found those people repeatedly talking about the community, they have developed the community (we) feeling in them. They have been struggling in the Nepalese societies through the bond spirit of community. The only thing they want is the stigmatized, uncivilized and superstitious Nepali society to become changed so that the minority population like them could stay happy, they could find themselves lucky to have overcome so many hurdles. They would get the moment that brings a smile on their faces and gives their heart satisfaction. While interacting with many of them on these issues they emotionally expressed that:

We don't need any specific access. The problem of our community is social prohibition of our identity and ill treatment as well as unprotective role of the state towards us as if we are not human being. So, this problem has to be solved; social stigmatization should

be removed and the Government should formulate policies. We wish to survive with our gender and sexual identity. Till date the society hasn't been able to accept us and our existence. They easily accept the existence of other men and women. Words like equality and rights are only limited to books. We are deprived of basic rights like food, shelter and clothes (Based on FN collected on different dates during ethnographic study).

Due to social stigmatization and discrimination, the gender and sexual minorities are having difficulty in building their capabilities as they have always been subjected to pain and cruelty. The ongoing social humiliation and exclusion are compelling them to remain suppressed and inferior. Consequently, they are lagging behind in terms of their own development and thus the societies are also failure to be benefitted from their potential human capabilities. The Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities Nepal (FSGMN) and Blue Diamond Society (BDS) have been creating a strong network among the people of the community and have been rendering their contribution in the area of identity, health issues, advocacy and human rights.

Conclusion

This paper presents an integrative review of the lost identity of the member of gender and sexual minority community being based on their identity and social stigmatization. Because of the absence of perfect match between their body, behavior and sexual orientation, they have been suffering from social humiliation, familial ignorance and state partiality upon the revelation of their identity. Therefore, many of them suffer from stress, frustration and depression. Likewise, they also become the victim of social stigmatization and exclusion as the contemporary societal norms and values remain unfriendly for their social inclusion. Despite some inclusionary provisions recently adopted by the state, the social status of the gender and sexual minorities is yet not just and dignified. Therefore, it is recommended that the identity of the people of gender and sexual minority community has to be recognized, they should be counted as human capital and mobilized for the development of the country so that an equitable and harmonious social scenario could be created which would pave the way towards a transformative society and sustainable development.

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