Agency of Rural Nepali Women as Moderated by Community Learning Centres: a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective

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ABSTRACT

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This study includes the voices and experiences of fifteen Nepali women who participated in the activities provided at two Community Leaning Centres (CLCs). CLCs provide various learning activities for the women in rural Nepal, where education opportunities for adult women are extremely lacking.

Situated within a postcolonial feminist perspective, this thesis aims to investigate not only the benefits of the CLCs for women *per se* but the construction of women's agency through the learning using a combination of semi-structured interviews and a thematic data analysis.

This study identifies the perceived benefits of women participants and analyses the processes by which women negotiate social constraints in their learning experiences, and the spaces of agency that have emerged therein. Each form of agency is classified into one of three groups - intrapersonal, relational and collective agency.

This study particularly employs a post-colonial feminist lens to examine women's experiences and their agency. Viewing the subjects through this lens suggests that there is no homogeneous "average Nepali woman" archetype; however, there are women who are active in their responses to gender-ascribed unfavourable structures within which they situate with different individual and collective strategies, motivations and expectations. This phenomenon challenges the moral and ethical imperatives of development inherent in development processes.

KEYWORDS: AGENCY, EMPOWERMENT, ADULT EDUCATION, GENDER, DEVELOPMENT, NEPAL

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ALE	Adult learning and education
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CLC(s)	Community Learning Centre(s)
CONFINTEA	International Conference on Adult Education
EFA	Education for All
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO(s)	International Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
NFE	Non-formal education
NFEC	Non-formal Education Centre
NGO(s)	non-governmental organisation(s)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VDC(s)	Village Development Committee(s) (VDCs)

GLOSSARY OF NEPALI TERMS

Dalit: *Dalits* are located at the lowest end of the Hindu caste system and historically referred to as untouchables in Nepal. Even though the caste system was legally abolished in the 1960's, *dalits* still face enormous social discrimination and they significantly lag behind other social groups in economic, social and political indicators.

Dashain (Durga Pooja): Dashain is one of the biggest festivals among Nepali Hindus and celebrated for 10 days to worship the Hindu goddess *Durga* who is believed to have killed the demons to protect the people. On the tenth day of Dashain, all family members visit one of the elders' houses of the family to receive their blessings. They share gifts and food on the occasion.

Janajati: *Janajatis* are Nepal's indigenous nationalities who used to live in the hills and mountains but are now scattered in almost every corner of the country. *Janajatis* have been excluded from the mainstream in the history of Nepal together with *dalits*, and many of these people are living in poverty. Their rich cultural heritage has been largely neglected. Only after the demise of the Panchayat regime in 1990 have ethnic issues and cultural diversity attracted national attention. According to the 2011 population census of Nepal, there are 125 *janajati* groups who speak 123 different languages in all.

Madhesi: The people with Indian origin residing in the Terai region in Nepal are generally known as *madhesi*. This group does not include people who migrated to the plains, and *tharu* people do not consider themselves to be *madhesi*. The term *madhesi* is ambiguous and contested. It includes specific caste-based identity groups such as *brahmins* and *dalits*. Some scholars differentiate *madhesi* from other dwellers of the Terai region, while reserving it to refer a group or communities

discriminated by dominant groups. *Dalits*, *janajatis* and *madhesis* are often regarded as marginalised groups in Nepal.

Tamang: This is one of the indigenous groups of inhabitants (*janajatis*) of the Himalayan regions of Nepal. They speak the Tamang language.

Tihar: Tihar is the second biggest Hindu festival in Nepal after Dashain and is celebrated for 5 days. During this festival, people honour animals such as crows, dogs and cows along with Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and luck. During this festival of lights, candles and festive lanterns are lit inside and outside the houses in homage to Laxmi.

Tharus: They are known as the ethnic group of the plains areas (Terai *janajati*). They have their own language, called Tharu, and are scattered from the eastern plains to the western plains of Nepal.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research interest

The element of the feminist perspective in this study is characterised by the interactions between the people that I met during my work, particularly those of women, and me as a female development worker. My motivations for studying about women in developing countries are twofold. The first relates to the socio-political and familiar experiences as a woman in Korea. Living as a woman in Korean society illustrates the error involved in reducing my identity to socially constructed gender norms rather than in terms of the flourishing full potential as a human being. Many women are experiencing enormous discrimination and inequality in familiar, social and political spheres. Ambivalently, I both resisted and internalised the norms offered by discourses of sexuality and gender. Living in a highly-developed society under conservative circumstances brought me contradiction, confusion and frustration. My own experiences of discrimination, rejection, marginalisation and feeling threatened triggered by gender difference and the patriarchal tendencies of society made me question the inequitable socially established gender norms, beliefs and values in order to attain the 'I' that I aimed to achieve. Feminist thought has been helpful to conceptualise what 'I' is, and whether it is determined or constructed – and to envision and act in accordance to the associated possibility for resistance, subversion and the emancipatory remodelling of identity. Looking through a feminist lens provides me validation and a sense of agency whereas I had hitherto often felt unvalued and victimised.

The second source of motivation concerns my position as a development worker. A few years ago, I travelled to Northern Bangladesh to discuss better coping strategies in situations marked by severe erosion caused by frequent flooding. The team visited one of the disaster-prone villages, where the very real danger of losing one's land from erosion on any given day was keenly felt. There I sat together with around fifteen people in a meeting to discuss strategy. One colleague soon started to talk about her sister, specifically about how her sister achieved a great degree of success – having studied engineering and working in

a big company – even with all the disadvantages she had as a woman. That moment, which helped shape my attitude towards the people of this culture, unsettled me. I was faced with a question concerning the way I approach these people. How do I repudiate the paternalistic ideas of modernism and the dichotomous classification of the people as either Western or non-Western, often while presuming the latter to be lacking the capacity to choose for themselves?

These ideas that permeated the development contexts within which I used to work provoked me to reflect on critical questions. Firstly, if development is an inherently violent process towards people and their cultures (Escobar, 1995, 2004), and if developmental non-government organisations (NGOs) are part of a postcolonial industry, how I could deal with this inheritance without harming the people and their respective society? The second question was about the way understand a given local context. If it always depends on the contextual conditions, how can I better understand complex dynamics in macro- and micro-level socio-politics intersected by environment, gender, economics, religion, ethnicity and so on? Could I tell them what they ought to think and do so without diminishing their capacity to challenge structures of domination and power? Is achieving a high level of education and working for a company always good? How could inherent notions about 'what is (inherently) good' be negotiated through the perspective(s) of the local people? As Kapoor (2008, p. xv) argues, if development continues to "carry out a 'civilizing' mission in the claims to partnership and solidarity", how might I be able to establish solidarity and partnership with the people? I developed an understanding that critical engagement with gender and development discourse and those pertaining to agency might provide me valuable insights to these ever-unsolvable questions. Through engagement in feminism within development discourse the broader aim of this study is to better understand the nexus of gender, learning and agency; and in so doing to foster a wider interest in and a stronger commitment to promoting gender equality.

1.2   The thesis problem outlined

There has been wide-ranging and remarkable progress in girls' and women's lives over recent decades and more countries guarantee women and men equal rights under the law in such areas as property ownership, inheritance, and marriage (Klugman et al., 2014). There has been a gradual rise in literacy rates along with tremendous progress made in the educational sector, especially at the primary level. However, the case of the education of adolescent girls and women presents a far less rosy picture. There are still 758 million illiterate adults, most of whom are women, and adult education initiatives have largely neglected those women (UNESCO Statistics, 2017). Women in the Third World especially appear to be in the most disadvantaged position. This thesis attempts to weave together the women in the Third World emerging in gender and development discourse with the women situated in rural Nepal that have participated in activities in CLCs, so as to examine the benefits of learning, and to analyse the benefits as processes of intrapersonal, relational and collective agency. Situated within a postcolonial feminist perspective, this thesis aims to investigate not only the benefits of Community Learning Centres for women *per se* but their associated implications on the benefits to women's agency. Such benefits would be derived by employing a combination of semi-structured interviews, observation and informal interaction. Thus, the background to the thesis problem is a consolidation of three concerns: 1) the representation of Third World women as a normative development category within the development sector, relegated to the status of the poor and disempowered and devoid of agency - and revisiting this representation from a postcolonial feminist perspective; 2) the discrepancy between the rhetoric focusing on the significance of adult education that has notably emerged in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and recent UNESCO documents, and the reality of adult education practised in Nepal; and 3) the lack of discussion intersecting issues pertaining to women, development and adult learning in Nepal. Each concern will be overviewed independently before I draw them together to delineate the overall research aims and questions

1.3   **Organisation of Chapters**

This chapter has introduced the research interest, outlining the problem I wish to address in this thesis. It concludes by setting out the structure of the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework by reviewing the literature on the key concepts of the study: feminist approaches to gender and development, post-colonial feminism, agency and empowerment.

Chapter 3 describes the impacts and limitations of adult learning and education for women's empowerment with a focus on CLCs.

Chapter 4 describes the broader context of development in Nepal, particularly focusing on women and education in development discourse. It also describes the study context of Kolhuwa, Nawalparasi.

Chapter 5 presents the research questions.

Chapter 6 outlines the methodology employed in the study, namely semi-structured interview and thematic analysis.

Chapter 7 presents the research findings analysing social constraints to learning. It also describes the taxonomy I employ which consists of intrapersonal, relational and collective agency in the process of learning in CLCs.

Chapter 8 discusses the results focusing on gender-ascribed social and multiple forms of agency. It also analyses the CLC experience and their agency construction from the postcolonial feminist perspective. In closing, the thesis suggests further studies deemed necessary.

2   GENDER, POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM, AND AGENCY

There have been colossal efforts by development theorists and practitioners to eradicate gender inequality and to create new opportunities for women; and these initiatives have been driven by social changes, policy initiatives and practices in the field over the past few decades. A variety of evidence supports the perception that countries with greater gender equality in employment and education were likely to experience higher rates of economic growth and human development (Dollar, Gatti, & Filmer, 1999; Klasen, 1999; Lagerlöf, 2003). Associated with the proposed aim of achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women has become an increasingly popular concept within the discourse of development and the rhetoric of development agencies such as the World Bank and the UN agencies, as well as smaller NGOs (Mosedale, 2005, p. 243; Parpart, 2002, p. 39). Attention has shifted to persons as agents rather than victims. This shift makes it possible to view the women who are in the extremely marginalised conditions, and to see whether they can exercise their agency and direct it towards resistance and/or subversion. However, today's 'empowerment' often aims at realising the ideal of the 'self-optimising individual'(Cornwall & Rivas, 2015), and women's 'agency' is utilised as an 'instrument of social change' (Madhok & Rai, 2012). Thus women's empowerment and gender equality have been reduced to buzzwords and feel-good rhetoric that have largely not been actualised; and this situation even hinders feminist social activities (Cornwall & Brock, 2005). In neoliberal discourses and practices of development that focus on increasingly individualist and market-oriented prescriptions, the turn towards agency has created "a shift in who is responsible for these" (Madhok, Phillips, & Wilson, 2013, p. 4). This suggests that feminists should be cautious with advocating for the reclaiming of women's agency and emphasising their empowerment, considering the multiplicity of relevant perspectives and socio-political contexts.

Taking a historical approach, this chapter briefly traces the emergence and evolution of gender considerations in international development agendas as they

have been situated (or have not yet been situated) by the Women in Development (WID[1]) and Gender and Development (GAD[2]) discourse in relation to the ways in which this discourse aligns with the evolution of feminist thoughts. The chapter goes on to look at the postcolonial feminist notions pervading development discourse that seek to analyse stereotypical representations and prevailing images of the Third World. This leads to the discussion of agency in order to conceptualise it based on the feminist thoughts that have emerged in development discourse.

2.1   Feminist approaches to gender and development

"Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order." Harding (1993, p. 56)

Feminism is not monolithic; rather it encompasses a variety of interdisciplinary, intersectional, and interlocking perspectives and conceptualisations. Understanding how a variety of 'feminisms' have drawn on different theoretical traditions conceptualises women's oppression. Additionally, recognising the ways this oppression has been confronted and sought to be eradicated clarifies the different approaches, solutions and conceptual analyses proposed by feminist scholars in various fields of study such as development studies.

Despite a wide divergence among the prevalent notions, it seems indisputable that feminist traditions of thought urge us to take into consideration the invisibility of gender issues in social, political, and domestic spheres by challenging how we view women in subordinate positions and by analysing gender inequality in light of racist, classist and heterosexist subordination – while drawing attention to the women's voices, lives, experiences, and struggles. Engaging feminism thus has the potential to shed light not only on achieving gender equality within the aforementioned spheres of existence, but also on other forms of structural and institutional(ised) inequalities. Socio-political positions, experiences

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[1] heretofore referred to as the WID approach, WID framework, or simply as WID
[2] heretofore referred to as the GAD approach, GAD framework, or simply as GAD.

and knowledge represented by oppressed groups, whether women, the poor, or racial minorities, can produce a "less partial and distorted," and even an objective understanding of the human condition (Harding, 1993, p. 65); thus it holds "epistemic privilege" (Narayan, 204, p. 215). The relevance of feminist thought in delving into Nepali women's lives and learning experiences can be drawn on to perform inquiry into not only those who are disenfranchised and marginalised, but also those who occupy positions of authority. Although it is not the purpose of this chapter to provide a historical overview of feminism, it is worth highlighting some characteristics of feminist thought traditions that have influenced, been influenced by, and otherwise interacted with, gender and development discourse.

The emergence of WID

The 1970s resurgence of feminist activism in the West and its encounter with modernisation paradigms are the major influencing factors that have created the conditions for the emergence of hegemonic WID discourse (Connelly, Parpart Par, & Barriteau, 2000, pp. 106-108; Saunders, 2002, pp. 2-3). During this time, a number of differing feminist opinions and frameworks, characterised by the ways they view the causes of women's oppression, emerged. [3] The American liberal feminists who attributed women's oppression to legal constraints and discriminative social policies largely moulded the language of political strategy used by WID advocates (Miller & Razavi, 1995)**.** Together with liberal feminists' efforts to acquire equal rights for women in the United States, there was an emerging body of research on women in developing countries. Esther Boserup's pioneering work (1970), the first to analyse the Third World women's role in economic development, challenged the vision of modernisation within the boundaries of liberal feminism and played a significant role in advancing feminist theory.

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[3] Tong's (2009) classification of feminism - *liberal, radical* and *Marxist/socialist*, *psychoanalytic, care-focused, multicultural/global/colonial*, *ecofeminist*, and *postmodern/third wave,* grouped in accordance to the ways in which they view the causes of women's oppression - seems useful.

By showing women's productive labour in developing countries, Boserup challenged the idea of the "trickle-down effect" of development on the poor; rather Boserup observed the inequitable manner and harmful effects such dynamics brought about in derogating the status of women (Saunders, 2002). Her work created the basis for WID programmes that made women visible in the formulation and implementation of development policies around the world (Whitworth, 2006). The advocates of WID distanced themselves from earlier welfarism and rejected narrow women's roles as mothers and wives (Desai, 2013).

Critiques of the WID framework (e.g. Kabeer, 1994; Miller & Razavi, 1995; Njiro, 1999, pp. 47–48; Sunders, 2002, p. 5) point out several flaws. First, it was grounded in traditional modernisation theory that considers development as an evolutionary and unilinear process of change. Thus, as one would expect (in hindsight), it reproduced the image of Third World women as victims of patriarchy in need of help from western feminists to liberate them. Such narratives belied an indifference to contextual considerations. Second, the WID approach failed to adequately challenge the existing structures in which the sources of women's subordination and oppression are embedded; and it thus ignored a broad range of social divisions and social relations that constrain women's economic choices and opportunities. Lastly, the WID approach concentrated exclusively on the productive aspects of women's lives while largely failing to consider the non-market aspects of their lives. Neo-Marxist feminists, who see capitalism as the main cause of women's oppression and the abolition of the class society as a solution to the gender inequality, are usually labelled Women and Development (WAD[4]) theorists. They argued that women are always integrated into development processes, but that their inclusion may be granted in an exploitative manner, for instance by relegating women to peripheral positions. WAD provides a more critical view of the position of women, but some charge that it puts undue emphasis on unequal class structures and international structures while paying relatively little attention to gender subordination. Rathgeber (1990, p. 493) argues that "it fails to undertake a full-scale analysis of the relationship between

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[4] heretofore referred to as *WAD approach*, *WAD framework*, or simply as *WAD*

patriarchy, differing modes of production, and women's subordination and oppression".

Gender and Development (GAD)

By the late 1970s, GAD evolved out of and in response to the narrow foci characterising WID and WAD. The failure of WID-focused projects led to the realisation that targeting women alone was not enough (Kabeer, 1994). With its roots in socialist feminism that challenged capitalism and patriarchy at the same time, GAD shifted the focus from 'women' to 'gender', and emphasised the relative position and the interaction between men and women within the totality of complex socio-economic, political and cultural structures. In contrast to the optimistic trickle-down effect argued by WID, the GAD approach has emphasised that the marginalized position of women and their limited bargaining power place them in what amounts to an adversarial position. Thus, GAD has stressed women's emancipation through state involvement including education, healthcare, childcare, housing and pensions along with increased political representation on the part of organised women (Saunders, 2002, p. 11; Rathgeber, 1990, p. 494). Its bottom-up and people-centred approaches emphasise women as agents of change rather than as passive recipients of development. Kabeer (1994, p. 299) identified conscientisation as being central to increasing women's capacity to define and analyse their respective social situation or the structural roots of discrimination and subordination and "to construct a vision of the kind of world they want, and to act in pursuit of that vision." GAD also gave a special attention to the oppression of women in the private sphere and rejected the public/private dichotomy that undervalues family and household work performed by women (Rathgeber, 1990, p. 494). GAD proponents urged a fundamental re-examination of social structures and institutions within socio-economic and political structures in order to eliminate gender inequalities (Rathgeber, 1990, p. 495). *Gender mainstreaming*, proclaimed in the Beijing Platform for Action from the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995, is one of the important strategies in GAD

that seeks to increase gender awareness in all areas and levels and thereby achieve greater gender equality.

Its major flaw is that its mandate to commit structural changes and power shifts are rather unrealistic and difficult to implement. Despite positive changes the GAD brought, GAD tends to see Third World women as a homogeneous group and imposes its narrow ''Western'' feminist perspectives along with the implicit assumptions of the West's superiority (Bhavnani, Foran, & Kurian, 2003, p. 6; Rathgeber, 1995, p. 219) on the often foreign contexts it analyses. Feminists from the South argue that it fails to analyse the power relations intersected by gender, race, and class, which relegate Third World women to the position of 'other'.

2.2 **Postcolonial Feminism**

Feminist theories and practices have progressively evolved in response to criticism by women of colour, lesbians, and Third World women in the 1980s and 1990s. Feminist scholars from the South level the charge that the 'subject' in most feminist thought at the time represents little more than the experiences of white, middle-class, first world women (Liddle & Rai, 1998), while some feminist scholars that have been largely affected by the Foucauldian concept of power tried to situate Third World women in their own specific contexts. Foucault focused on the relationship between knowledge, power and the body that were intertwined in relations of power. Foucault (1972, p. 199) explains discourse as a "delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories". The site of hegemony includes everyday institutional experiences that culminate in 'common sense'; thus it masks the dominant groups' interests which implicitly define norms and standards to appear as normal (Deetz, 1992, p. 62). Development has fulfilled the production and circulation of discourses through professionalization and institutionalisation (Escobar, 1989). It prescribes norms imposed on the poor, dictating what is normatively good and bad for them, thereby

becoming a discourse in itself. Postcolonial theorists critique the discursive binary oppositions underpinning modernisation thought and point out that the polarities are constructed through discursive power relations, especially in light of the fact that such polarities can only come about when one entity is designated as the norm while its assumed (polar) counterpart is regarded as the 'other'. The postcolonial feminist embraced this approach with a focus on the representation of women as the other.

Postcolonial feminist scholars and activists have made a substantial effort to expose the universalising and colonialist impacts these movements brought and to racialize mainstream feminist theory, thus bringing feminist concerns into conceptualisations of colonialism and postcolonialism (Mohanty, 2003; Lewis & Mills, 2003, p. 3). Postcolonial feminist theory challenges the problematic representation of the Third World, particularly its assuming that they could best be understood as 'other' vis-à-vis the assumed "norm" of Western women. They argue that the Western feminists have created a notion of a monolithic Third World female entity, shown in the White feminist concept of "sisterhood". For instance, this notion finds symbolic expression in the manner in which the colonial Other and the Western Woman appear to be portrayed respectively as the norm and ones superior to same (Mohanty, 2003, p. 17; Marchand, 1995, p. 58). Through this binary opposition, i.e. of having the Western woman as a subject, the Third World woman as an object, the "average Third World woman" is regarded as a passive victim, sexually constrained, poor, bound by traditional values, and family-oriented -- and consequently those who are oppressed by patriarchal structures (Mohanty, 2003). Ironically, such a perspective brings about a new form of "oppression" in which Western feminists are "colonising" the political and historical agency of women in the Third World without due respect to the diversity and specificities that ought to be considered integral when situating every woman (Mohanty 2003, p. 39). Simply put, it is only from a Western vantage point that the cognitive construct of a Third World as the 'other' is possible, just as men typically locate women as the 'other'. Mohanty (2003) pleads for "situatedness" to move beyond the binary hegemonic humanist ethnocentrism latent

in many schools of Western feminist thought. Okin (1999) and Aguilar (1997) argue that abandoning cultural and religious values at the expense of women's rights can be a kind of feminist replication of intellectual colonialism. The meaning of *women* is continually constructed and reconstructed as it interacts with a variety of forms of oppression. If one accepts these heterogeneous subjectivities and pays due attention to these nuances, how can feminist politics of difference be strategically organised?

While acknowledging the significance of differences of women in the world, the differences on the ground should neither obfuscate nor deter the struggle to alter the gender subordination that remains a relevant form of oppression (Sen & Grown, 1987). Hence searching for common ground to reunite the women under different circumstances is important. In the discussion of global capitalism in feminist politics, Bergeron (2001) suggests that we adopt a notion of "strategic sisterhood" that accepts heterogeneous subjectivities to go beyond any universal feminist movement. Bergeron argues that transnational feminists might produce a homogeneous identity of women who have the same interests - and this can make women unaware of the possibility to pursue multiple transformative alternatives against a capitalist global market. Through denaturalisation and deconstruction of globalising capitalism, women need to see it as a socially constructed process and examine its complexities. Bergeron's analysis of women's self-organising processes in Tanzania and Mexico shows how women successfully adopted strategic forms of resistance in the context of global restructuring through working in informal sectors and establishing women's centres. This case shows not only how women change their material conditions but also how women "have transformed women's sense of individual and collective identity" through renegotiation their positions in the household, workplace, and community (p. 999). In the same vein, Mohanty (2003) illustrates the interconnections among women workers in India and Silicon Valley who are in different sociocultural contexts by describing ideological commonalities of capitalist processes which leave women in exploited positions in different geographical locations. "[T]here IS NO SUCH THING as feminism free of asymmetrical power relations.' (Grewal & Kaplan,

2000, p. 2; emphasis in the original), thus cross-cultural feminist work must be attentive to the micro-politics of any given context, as well as to the macro-level politics.

Postcolonial feminist perspectives provide significant insights for this study in three ways. First, listening to the various women's voices without universalising Nepali women as a sort of monolithic other or the oppressed under patriarchal dominance shall make the women visible in a way that more accurately reflects their actual situations. It also urges us to look at the idiosyncratic complexities that characterise the particular contexts within which these women are situated, particularly along the lines of class, race, religion, culture, ethnicity and caste. Secondly, the postcolonial feminist theory can provide a powerful critique of 'development' not only for the women in once colonised countries, but also in non-colonised countries. They can also provide a means to challenge to dominant ways of comprehending North–South relations. Postcolonial feminist perspectives raise important questions about the moral and ethical imperatives of 'improvement' inherent in development processes where gender equality appears to be integral to development (Harcourt, 2016). This perspective is especially important for those who engage in the process of development as 'experts' including me. Acknowledging the situatedness of our own knowledge prior to conducting an interrogation concerning the implications of what its constituent factors might mean for ourselves and women in different contexts (Spivak, 1988) thereby may enable us to acquire a more nuanced understanding of local politics than would be possible otherwise. Finally, postcolonial feminism provides alternative strategies in coping with deviations from any supposed broad solidarity. Differences and commonalities exist in relation to, and in tension with, each other in all contexts. Mohanty (2003, pp. 224-226) espouses a "noncolonising feminist solidarity across borders" and urges us "to analyse how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully". By engaging in critical analyses, the experiences of Nepali women become relevant for understanding and transforming the experiences of poor women elsewhere.

2.3   Agency in feminism

As fruit of its encounters of, and opposition against, the construction of Third World women as victims devoid of agency, the recognition and promotion of women's *exercise* of agency has gained popularity in many development interventions and has been adopted as an avowed goal of development institutions. Notwithstanding whether agency is defined as the ability to define one's goals and act upon them (Kabeer, 2001) or, alternatively, as an individual action within social structure and constraints (Giddens, 1984), the definition of agency includes ability to act. Agency as a concept includes dichotomies, and one of the dichotomies is the tension between individuality and relationality. The liberal humanist definition of autonomy as self-authoring that ignores power relations and social contexts has come under critical scrutiny by many feminists (Madhok et al., 2013). Due to the fact that this notion of autonomy grew out of notions projecting the need for modernisation, it consequently marginalises and misrecognises women's experiences in non-Western contexts.

In response, feminists have engaged in reframing of the view with a greater emphasis on collectivity which is aimed at building relational concepts of autonomy, agency, and the self (Messer-Davidow, 1995; Madhok et al., 2013). Messer-Davidow (1995) and others emphasised collective agency as having a mobilizing effect on women under oppressed and marginalized conditions via interpersonal practices of sharing and supporting. They called for collective action as a vehicle for women's empowerment (Sen & Grown, 1987; Kabeer 1999). Kabeer (1999, p. 457) also emphasises collectivity, arguing that even though individual action can come up against cultural values and norms, the impact to change the situation of women probably remains limited and that "they may have to pay a high price for their autonomy." Thus, it is important to think of agency both as a matter of collective transformation within the public arena and as a process whereby one develops enhanced individual self-awareness and individual action (Madhok et al., 2013; Mohanty, 2013). In emphasising collective and relational agency, recognition and reward emerge as significant factors in enhancing agency. Mann (1994)

argues that social recognition and reward are fundamental dimensions of individual agency and propounds the recognition of domestic and maternal activities of women as sites of social agency where they had hitherto typically been devalued and unrecognised in comparison to the public activities of men.

Women exercise their agency in a variety of ways. Examining the Egyptian context, Hoodfar (1997) illustrated how the use of veils that are widely believed as unfavourable to women enhances women's opportunities and protect them, thereby increasing women's control over their own lives. This example demonstrates that cultural normative traditions can be translated differently depending on context; therefore, critical evaluation of women's emancipation and understanding various ways that women's rights are assessed in a given context are significant. Kandiyoti's (1988) research shows that women living within the concrete constraints with different patriarchal arrangements employed different strategies to maximise security and optimise life options such as negotiation and bargaining. By doing so, they were able to exercise their autonomy and build strategies of resistance. This "patriarchal bargain" allows for a "powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts" (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 88).

The studies above also indicates that women experience multi-level, non-linear and incremental processes of agency (Logie & Daniel, 2016). Some studies (Zapata, 1999; Logie & Daniel, 2016; Mannell & Jackson, 2014) show that women experience multiple forms of agency such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, relational and collective agency even under vulnerable contexts constrained by structural barriers such as poverty and gender inequity. Intrapersonal agency includes self-efficacy, gaining knowledge, confidence and greater awareness. Interpersonal agency is developed through communicating, engaging in dialogue and speaking up for oneself. Relational agency, for instance, involves women acquiring emotional support. Collective agency is demonstrated through women's awareness of women's rights and challenging inequitable gender norms.

Women perform at varying degree of potential that offer passive or active resistance. Thereby feminist scholars argue that women may be agentive in ways

that are not congruent, or in accordance, with feminist expectations; and in light of this, the action and speaking-out bias tendency in theorising agency need to be rethought (Parpart, 2010; Madhok et al., 2013). For example, taking issue with patriarchal power through heroic and subversive strategies may be difficult for women under coercive social contexts. Women might choose silence and secrecy as survival strategies by choosing not to resist social inequality, rather than questioning subordinate social structures, and even provoking or participating in the subjugation of others (Mohanty, 1988; Mahmood, 2012; Parpart, 2010; Rinaldo, 2014). However, these kinds of strategies also can play a crucial role in challenges to oppressive regimes and social injustice (Parpart, 2010). The binary view that sees women as either heroines or victims may ignore the complexity of women's and men's lives. Madhok et al (2013, p. 107) propose adopting "a non-insistence on maximal or free action" in order to pay due attention to the sociality of persons and to the particularities of social and historical circumstances.

2.3.1   Conceptualisation of agency

Third wave feminists influenced by Foucault's (1980) method of 'genealogy' have created a genealogy of female subjectivity in order to gain an understanding of how women are constructed and reinforced as subjects by coercive discourses (Butler, 1990; Stone, 2007). Butler (1993) argues that sexual identities are constituted by regulatory practices and this is possible through gender performativity, which captures the ways in which gender and sexual identifications are continually recreated through "reiteration of a norm or a set of norms" (p. 12), and the "power of discourse" (p. 2). As discussed in chapter 2.3, women exercise their agency in various ways within different contexts. Accordingly, feminist theory needs to conceptualise agency through an "explanatory-diagnostic" lens in order to better analyse power relations (Benhabib, 1986; McNay 2000; Madhok et al., 2013, Allen, 2015). Subjection, then, can be explained in two ways. Individuals are constituted as subjects in and through a process of subjection to discourse whereas individuals are also the ones who maintain and reproduce subordinating gender norms by the reiteration of the norms. Even though Butler's analysis

of subjection provides a nuanced account of how gendered subordination works in all its depth and complexity, accepting the convincing accounts argued by Butler and poststructuralists leave us with a critical question: "how can we conceptualise and delineate what agency remains accessible to the subject?" The destruction of identity categories and the emphasis of capillary power have brought this question to feminism.

In the book *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange* (Benhabib, Butler, Cornell, Fraser, & Nicholson, 1995), Benhabib, Butler and Fraser expose the different positions that assess the questions associated with the relationships between agency, subjectivity, and power. Benhabib disagrees with Butler over the process of identity formation and argues that Butler's gender performativity provides an overly constructivist view of identity. Furthermore, the deconstruction of the subject makes only little room for a type of agency that is able to be reflected upon – a type that would be required in order to make it capable of conceptualising and acting towards any radical transformation that aspires to attain an alternative anticipated future.

However, reading Butlers' argument as a complete debunking of agency is misguided. Butler (190, p. 47), for example, explicitly states that the subject as constituted by discursive power does not mean that it is "fatally determined" or "fully artificial and arbitrary", but, rather, "the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency" (Benhabib et al., 1995, pp. 45-46). Butler questions the notion of subject as a pre-given premise and interrogates the construction of identity. Here, there is agency at work through the interrogation and recognition of power, producing an understanding of identity as something constituted by positions that are "embedded organising principles of material practices and institutional arrangements": "matrices of power and discourse" are what produce a viable subject (Benhabib et al., 1995, p. 42).

Even though Butler provides a fuller account of the temporal structure that allows autonomous action to emerge without losing its emphasis on social and historical specificity, Magnus (2006) and McNay (2000) argue that Butler under-

estimates the social specificity that structure the existence of subjects and the creative dimensions of the action of subjects who can determine their lives with the capabilities for self-reflection. The notion of agency argued by Butler is essentially passive because it reduces agency to the residue of resistance and the possibility of productive responses to challenges by negotiating complex social conditions to reaction.

Fraser (cited in Benhabib et al., 1995) argues that both Benhabib and Butler provide important insights to the subject and agency and that it is unnecessary for agency to be dichotomised. The empirical interrogation of power that doesn't involve losing the significance of pluralism and differences advocated by post-modernists can be integrated into the normative and political commitments advocated by critical theorists. In other words, we must remain critical when examining how a subject within a given context is constituted by discursive power. However, at the same time, we should not lose the importance of agentic subjects who are working within these power structures, envisioning emancipatory alternatives.

As Allen (2015) argues, feminism needs both explanatory-diagnostic and anticipatory-utopian accounts if it desires to adequately explain gendered oppression and subordination. Negatively defined emancipation without laying out a power-free utopian vision that implies the transformation of a state of domination into a fluid and mobile field of power relations, can contribute to lessen the tension that exists in the complexities and ambivalences of emancipation discourse (Allen, 2015).

In sum, the conceptualisation of agency drawn on feminist theory implies that agency does not float above the on-the-ground realities of everyday life. It is rooted in the relational and temporal contexts within historical and cultural settings on the one hand, and social/power relationships on the other and puts agentic subject at the centre. From this perspective, agency is not reducible to mere contexts and relationships. Put differently, it is important to understand the interdependence of agency and structure that is intertwined and entangled with gender, race, and class within structures of power rather than outside them. This

conceptualisation of agency is essential in any attempt to "to explain the differing motivation and ways in which individuals and groups struggle over, appropriate and transform cultural meanings and resources" (McNay, 2000, p. 4). The variety of ways agency is experienced and changes in a given context needs to be taken into account in any attempts to explore women's lives (Madhok et al., 2013; Mohanty, 2013). For this reason, interpreting the factors within the structural context that may catalyse or hinder the exercise of agency is important.

2.3.2   Agency and empowerment

Agency is central to the empowerment process because change, whether it is visible or invisible, arises as people exercise their agency. Corresponding to Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2006) and Narayan's (2005) definition of empowerment[5], Kabeer's (2001, p. 21) empowerment model defines agency as "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them." The process can take many forms such as bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance, as well as more tangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis (Kabeer, 2001, p. 21). This analytical line between 'efficient agency' and 'transformative agency' (Okkolin, 2013, p. 101) shows that Kabeer considers agency more than a matter of decision-making or observable action. This standpoint is in line with the aforementioned feminists' arguments (discussed in section 2.3) that reject action and speaking-out biases when analysing agency.

In Kabeer's empowerment framework, agency constitutes a defining criterion of the process together with resources as pre-conditions that include not only material resources but also human and social resources that are intended to enhance the ability to make choices and thus to exert agency; and achievements which are the outcomes of the empowerment process. Many (Kabeer, 2001; Kantor, 2003; Okkolin, 2013), however, point that women's access to improved resources is not a sufficient prerequisite for empowerment. To put it differently, increased access to resources (e.g. the freedom of mobility necessary to go to the

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[5] See Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) to find different definitions of empowerment

CLC) will only make women empowered (e.g. by altering or abolishing the practice of early marriage) if the women are able to exercise their agency (e.g. by realising the gender-ascribed aspect of the practice and deciding to put a halt to it) to achieve desired outcomes. In this process, agency appears to be central to the process.

Some (Samman & Santos, 2009; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007) explain empowerment as an expansion of agency. However, it does not mean that it priorities empowerment over agency. Rather, it is better to understand both concepts as interdependent and mutually inclusive, interacting through a non-linear process. Agency is a critical prerequisite for women's empowerment and it helps to utilise the available resources for empowerment. The outcomes of empowerment again serve to enable the exercise of agency conducive to attaining further empowerment. Because this study does not aim at evaluating whether the studied women are empowered or not as a result of programme intervention, looking at the dialectical relations between agency and empowerment enhance how to understand the women's agency as a process.

Samman and Santos (2009, p. 6) emphasise multidimensionality both in agency and empowerment. Agency is multidimensional because it can be exercised in different spheres, domains and levels. According to Alsop et al. (2006, p. 19), spheres refer to societal structures that shape or constrain the exercise of agency in the people embedded within them. The broad spheres include several sub-spheres as society includes the household and the community. The domains refer to the areas of life in which a person exercises agency, such as religion, education, health and freedom of mobility. It is important to take into account the different domains of life in which agency and empowerment can take place (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007). However, the increased agency in one dimension may or may not have spill-over effect in other dimensions. People exercise this agency at different levels varying at levels that range from the micro level, such as the household, to the macro level, such as the state.

Agency is closely related to the concept of power. What postcolonial feminists urged for women's empowerment – e.g. conscientisation and collective

'power with' - shaped early applications of the concept of empowerment in the 1970s and they soon became central to the demand for wider structural transformation in the 1980s and 1990s (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). When a woman (or man) possesses the 'power with' other people and 'power within' oneself, she (or he) can exercise 'power to' produce the results she (or he) aims at achieving through increased decision-making capacity. In sum, discourses on agency are bound up with the concept of individual and collective power, and how the different forms of power ('power within', 'power with' and 'power to') are mediated in the process of agency.

Two significant insights can be drawn by looking at the relationship between agency and empowerment. First, the nature of agency needs to be understood as multidimensional and a process. Agency is not something static that warrants treatment as an easily measurable variable, but, rather it needs due consideration about spheres, domains and levels of agency in a given context. Second, agency and empowerment intersect each other, and they need to be understood as interdependent and mutually inclusive without considering the empowerment as an end-result.

In closing Chapter 2 and section 2.3, I emphasise the importance of understanding the following aspects of 1) the context-specific; 2) the multidimensional; and 3) the relational nature.

3 ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

ALE is used interchangeably with concepts such as 'adult education', 'lifelong learning', 'adult literacy' and 'non-formal education' (Ahmed, 2009). ALE comprises all forms of education and learning encompassing formal, non-formal, informal and incidental learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work (UNESCO, 2016; OECD, 2003). Even though the scope and focus of ALE vary widely according to the needs, priorities, historical contexts and shifts in paradigms within a particular country (Ahmed, 2009; UNESCO, 2016), it generally includes learning opportunities for equipping adults with literacy and basic skills; for continuing training and professional development, and for active citizenship and popular or liberal education (UNESCO 2016). UNESCO has played an important role in supporting global dialogue and action in the field of ALE. Since the first CONFINTEA held in 1949, five CONFINTEA Conferences have taken place to provide UNESCO Member States necessary support for the development of ALE. Moreover, the Belém Framework for Action reaffirmed that adult education is an essential element of the right to education and is fundamental "for the achievement of equity and inclusion, for alleviating poverty and for building equitable, tolerant, sustainable and knowledge-based societies" (UIL, 2010). The fourth goal delineated in the Sustainable Development Goals aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'' (UNESCO 2016). The Framework for Action for Education 2030 emphasises the need for holistic and sector-wide approaches for education beyond formal settings. The framework upholds the establishment of multiple and flexible pathways to learning, signalling the need to reinvigorate the CLCs as the hubs necessary the goals -- for learning, information dissemination and networking -- declared in the SDGs.

While ALE has been amalgamated into the agendas of education and development, the arena of action is too often confined to a narrow interpretation of literacy skills in low-literacy countries, thus limiting the sphere of ALE (Ahmed,

2009). In many developing countries, adult education is not prioritised in the policies due to limited financial and human resources (Tanvir, 2008). In many countries, governments pay little attention to the learning needs of marginalised young people outside formal education. Consequently, NGOs attempt to fill the void by taking responsibility in responding their learning needs (UNESCO, 2010). Gender inequality is another major concern in ALE. Because girls are more likely to be excluded from school than boys and the majority of adults with low literacy are women (UNESCO, 2016), ALE is particularly important for women in developing countries. This chapter shall explain the significance of ALE and community based learning for women and point out how ALE may be limited in its potential to promote the empowerment of women.

3.1 The impact of ALE for women in developing countries

Given that adult learners exert extensive influences not only on their own personal lives but also within their homes and in their workplaces and communities, the impact of ALE can spill over to women. In this manner, ALE's benefits are not limited to the individual level but spreads throughout entire communities and societies (Connolly, Rees, & Furlong, 2008).

Many studies explain the impact of ALE on various areas of women's lives in low-literacy countries where ALE is found to be synonymous with literacy education (Ashe & Parrott, 2002; Burchfield, Hua, Baral, & Rocha, 2002; Stromquist, 2015). An overview of an extensive body of literature might support the view that a strong correlation between literacy and other determinants of wellbeing (Basu, Maddox, & Robinson-Pant, 2008). Two large scale research studies conducted in Nepal illustrated the impact of literacy and saving programmes for women. Burchfield, Hua, Baral, and Rocha (2002) assessed an extensive array of impacts linked to integrated literacy programmes in Nepal. This comparative research between literacy class participants and nonparticipants shows literacy has multiple significant long-term effects on health and reproductive health, civic and community participation, children's education and income. Ashe and Parrott (2002) also assessed the impact of women's participation in the saving/literacy

programme in Nepal. The women participants in these groups show increased self-confidence, enlarged sphere of influence in the household decision-making and likelihood to send their children to school.

Women participants in literacy class develop self-confidence and empowerment that give them voice to question social issues and to make autonomous decisions in the household (Egbo, 2000; Kabeer, 2005; Stromquist, 2009). Stromquist (1997) found female literacy class participants in Brazil learned through Freirean principles expressed greater confidence, assertiveness and self-esteem.

ALE also increases the likelihood that women will benefit their family along with their own well-being. Likewise, educated women also play an important role in improving children's development (Burchfield, 1997; Kabeer, 2005). In Nepal, Burchfield (1997) found that literacy class participants exercise better control over decisions to fertility and child spacing than non-participants. Nepali neo-literate women became more engaged in their children's studies, Neo-literate women in Bangladesh are more likely to send their children to school (Abadzi, 2003).

ALE can also enhance the political empowerment of women (Burchfield et al., 2002; Stromquist, 2009). Based on a Freirean perspective of learning, Magno (2008) shows how women's subjective experiences in informal education comes together with political knowledge to increase their personal and organizational political capital - thereby effecting social change. Carron, Mwiria, and Righa (1989) found that literacy graduates in Kenya exhibited increased political knowledge about the ruling party and elections.

3.2 The significance of CLC for empowerment of rural women

The idea of creating space as a tool for social change and delivering ALE for both individual learning and community development is not new. Community based learning spaces have served as vehicles to bring about positive impact in many South Asian countries (UIL, 2017). Since 1998, CLCs have been a regional agenda

in the Asia-Pacific region, exemplified by UNESCO's Community Learning Centre project within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Program of Education for All. In Nepal, the concept of the CLC was first introduced by the Education for Rural Development project in the form of the Seti Zone Education Project; the Tenth Plan of Nepal (2002-2007); and Education for All. National Plan of Action (2004-2009) underlined the significance of CLCs as effective and locally sustainable institutions for continuing education and the alternative strategy of learning for empowerment (UNESCO, 2011). A newly developed School Development Plan emphasises non-formal education for skill-development and income generation and recognises CLCs as the main mechanism for delivering the programmes (UNESCO, 2017). Currently, UNESCO is working with the Ministry of Education of Nepal within the framework of the Capacity Development for Education programme to promote literacy and lifelong learning through a close partnership with CLCs to promote educational development from the local level. In 2000, CLCs numbered only 20, but this number exceeded 2,100 in 2015 (UNESCO, 2016). Given that Nepal is predominantly a rural country and the majority of the people in rural areas are deprived of education, CLCs can be a vehicle to serve the multiplicity of educational needs of the rural population (Sharma, 2014). Women appear to be the main participants both as programmes participants and CLC facilitators in Nepal (UNESCO, 2017). Thus, CLCs can harness the potential and opportunities for women empowerment in rural area.

There are not so many studies conducted to assess the impact of CLCs systemically in Nepal, with the exception of a small number of anecdotal case studies. However, there are a variety of studies pertaining to the impact of women's groups on rural development and women's empowerment in South Asia (Tesoriero, 2006; Swain & Wallentin, 2009; Atteraya, Gnawali, & Palley, 2016). Moyle, Dollard, and Biswas (2006) found that Indian women in rural villages achieve personal and economic empowerment through participation in self-help groups. Such activity enhances many things besides income: meaningfulness in their lives, social networks, decision-making power in the home, independence and purpose. In Nepal, a few studies also show the positive impact of women's groups for

women empowerment. Acharya, Yoshino, Jimba, and Wakai (2007) show that credit groups can provide a driving force for illiterate women in hill district of Nepal to initiate small-scale economic activities that are effective in absorbing the female workforce in the studied communities. Community space is not only given but can be acquired by women. Enslin (1992) illustrates an example of a meeting place established by Nepali women who envisioned the centre as a place where women could meet, discuss gender-specific issues, and provide health and legal services and skills training in the Chitwan area.

Many studies also show the positive impact of women's affiliation to community based health education (LeVine, LeVine, Schnell-Anzola, Rowe, & Dexter, 2012; Shakya, Karmacharya, Afset, Bofin, Åsvold, & Syversen, 2015) and community forestry programmes in India and Nepal (Agarwal, 2009; Agrawal et al., 2006). Manandhar et al. (2004) show that women's groups in a poor rural population in Nepal facilitated by an action-learning cycle produced lower neonatal mortality rates with enhanced antenatal care; higher rates of institutional delivery and trained birth attendance; and better hygienic care than women without such groups. Agarwal (2009) found that women's greater participation in the forest governance structure produced significantly greater improvements in forest condition and regeneration in both Nepal and India.

Despite its positive impact on women and community and its recent emphasis in educational plans, as the scarcity of CLC impact study in Nepal demonstrates, there has been relatively little attention paid to CLCs. Thus, many CLCs have been struggling from problems such as insufficient budgetary provisions and lack of systematic recognition of CLCs at policy level. Sharma (2014), in her study of Sikharapur CLC, points out that lack of human resources, regular financial and technical support, the absence of a solid legal foundation hinders CLCs from being sustainable. In the UNESCO (2017) report, the same challenges were pointed out within fifteen CLCs studied. The report recommends the promotion of women leadership at the management level, awareness programmes, partnerships with local schools, and more strategic business plans for sustaining the centres. In a meeting with the director of the Non-Formal Education Centre (NFEC)

during the field visit, the director mentioned that they are amending the Education Act – and as a result the provision of CLCs might be incorporated in a national legal framework for the first time in history (the amendment has not been finalised as of May, 2017). Through such means, more systematic government support services are expected to offer greater accessibility to CLCs in Nepal than ever before.

3.3   Limitations of ALE for empowerment of women

Kabeer (2005) and Stromquist (2015) argue that the limitations of ALE for empowerment of women include an important question of 'what is learned'. The curriculum and the contents of training programmes of ALE focused on the reproduction of gender stereotypes are often problematic. If prevailing social construction of women's roles within a certain society locates women within the domestic sphere with narrow reproductive terms, the subordinate status of women would likely be reinforced. This would effectively locate women at a position where challenging existing gendered identity and structures is difficult (Kabeer, 2005; Stromquist, 2015).

In Nepal, gender issues have not been addressed explicitly in the NFE policy framework. And women's participation in NFE, especially literacy class, is often co-ordinated around traditional women's responsibilities such as childrearing (Hertzog, 2013). Leach (1999, cited in Hertzog, 2013, p. 20) points that NFE training programmes for Nepali women have continued to support providing goods and services "which are an extension of traditional female activity in the home, such as handicrafts or food production".

Hertzog (2011) shares her experience as a female expert to describe the inconsistency between the rhetoric and reality of gender development programmes including literacy programmes, arguing that the projects for women empowerment are channelled into the prevailing gendered power structure and strengthen the ruling elite and Western male patronisation.

The methods deemed to benefit women and thereby empower women may have different implications depending on context. For example, literacy has been

used as an indicator of the capability to read and write, but people might point out that they have that capability even if they do not pass standard literacy tests -- and minimal levels of literacy can already be very empowering for many (Basu, Maddox, & Robinson-Pant, 2008).

Literacy programmess are often considered part of neo-colonialist intervention in developing countries while Youngman (2000) argues that literacy programmes reproduce existing class, gender, and ethnic inequalities and legitimate the unequal social order.

Often, the view that literacy programme and NFE constitute 'second class' education reinforces gender hierarchies, and NFE become tantamount to "being the *only* opportunity to gain something of a *basic* education." (Hoppers, 2006, emphasis in the original) which gives neither real opportunity for life nor qualification for women. In addition, NFE tends to be arranged in small scale, short-lived, under-funded programmes with limited monitoring mechanisms; and as a result, its quality and effectiveness become questionable (Hoppers, 2008; Power & Maclean, 2011; Yasunaga, 2014). The delivery of NFE is constrained by several factors and, as a consequence, there are necessary trade-offs between allocating resources and addressing participants' potentials.

These limitations of NFE for women's empowerment do not negate the earlier positive findings. Rather they suggest that the impact of ALE on women should not be taken for granted. On the contrary, one must pay attention to the context, and the social relationships upon which the impact of ALE is conditioned (Kabeer, 2005). Stalker (2001) categorises attitudinal and practical obstacles of learning for women. Attitudinal obstacles include the attitudes of those around women such as their moral stances, emotional support or betrayal. Practical obstacles arise mainly from private-sphere relationships including women's roles as child bearer and caregiver. The barriers to participation in ALE and the gendered, classed, racialized factors women learners face should be accorded their due consideration.

4 WOMEN, DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION IN NEPAL

Through a closer look to the contextualised situation of gender and development discourse in Nepal, with a particular focus on educational policies and practice for Nepali women, this chapter shall show the following: 1) how women have been portrayed in development discourse and practices in Nepal; and 2) how the discourse and practices of development and education have been intertwined with various socio-political variables affecting women. In order to achieve this, I have started with an introduction to Nepal, covering geographical settings, historical, cultural and socio-political profile; gender considerations relating to development in the recent history of Nepal; and recent international donor agencies and their influence on Nepali development policies and practices.

4.1 Nepal – a geographical, historical and socio-political profile

Nepal is nestled between China and India where the stunning and magnificent beauty of the Himalayas are juxtaposed by cultural, demographic, and geographical diversity. This diversity brings considerable variation among three different geographical regions - mountain, hill, and plains (*Terai*) - across five administratively divided development regions (Eastern, Central, Western, Mid-Western and Far-Western) and among 125 castes/ethnic groups, 123 lingual groups and 10 different religious groups (CBS, 2012).

While diversity is an integral part of cultural heritage, it also may partly account for multiple forms of social discrimination across caste, gender, region, religion and ethnicity. Ethnicity[6] is a significant factor affecting social inequality. Gradín (2016) shows that some ethnic groups are facing higher risk of poverty than others. The differential in poverty rates, for example, between Hill *dalit* and

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[6] Due to the lack of anthropological/sociological survey, the number of ethnic/caste groups differs from one source to another. However, CBS (2014) identifies 125 ethnic/caste groups based on nine broad cultural categories.

Hill *brahmin* reached 50 percentage points. The inter-ethnic disparities in education begin to manifest at the elementary level, with a large gap in literacy rates and in the proportion of the population that has completed primary-level education.

Picture 1. The five development regions of Nepal. Nawalparasi district is located in Western development region (marked in red)

(Source: http://test.nepalnews.com/images/Photos/Society/nepal-map.gif, 10. May. 2017)

Hinduism is the main religion of 81% of the population followed by Buddhism (9%) (CBS, 2014). The forceful annexation of smaller political units in Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah in the late 18th century left Nepal's non-Hindu indigenous population a legacy of a hierarchical schema of caste categories. Nepal remains a Hindu-dominated caste system[7], with Chhetri (16.6 percent) and Brahmin (12.2 percent) being the dominant castes (CBS, 2012). Although legal restrictions based on caste have been abolished, many discriminatory attitudes and practices persist to the detriment of marginalised groups such as *dalits*. Within all caste and ethnicity, the incidence of poverty is the least among the *newar* (10.25%),

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[7] In Nepal, the Hindu caste system traditionally has four categorisations: *brahmin* (scholars and priests) at the top, *chhetri* (warriors) just below, then the *vaishya* (merchants and traders), and lastly, *sudra* (peasants/laborers) (ADB, 2010).

followed by the *brahmin* (10.34%); and highest among the *dalit*s of the Hills (43.63%) as of CBS 2011 report (Patel, 2012).

Due to legal and sociocultural norms, women experience poverty and inequality to a greater degree (ADB, 2010). Women have less opportunity for education than men. Even though there has been substantial growth in literacy rates between 1991 and 2014/15, there is a wider disparity between males and females in literacy rate that has continued even to today, as Table 1 illustrates.

The lower literacy rate of women is only an example among many indicators capturing deeply rooted gender-ascribed biases. Nationally, women's average income, for example, is 57 percent lower than the average for men in 2011 (UNDP, 2014). Women belonging to disadvantaged ethnic groups and castes are at an even more disadvantageous position. For example, among the *terai madhesi dalit*, 85% of women receive no education while 75% of women and 25% of men among other *terai madhesi* castes lack education. For Muslims, the respective figures are 78% for women and 42% for men (ADB, 2010).

Table 1. Literacy rate by sex and gender gap (15 years and above), %

Year	1991	2001	2011	2014/15
Female	19.4	33.8	44.5	53.3
Male	53.5	64.5	71.6	76.2
National	35.6	48	56.5	63.7
Gender Gap	34.1	30.7	27.1	22.9

Source: UNESCO (2017)

According to the UN Human Development Index, Nepal is one of the least developed countries, ranked 145th out of 188 (UNDP, 2014), and 25.2% percent of the population lives below the national poverty line[8] (Gradín, 2016). Nepal made notable progress in poverty reduction between 1995 and 2010, and the absolute

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[8] The National Living Standards Surveys (NLSS) estimates the national poverty line (absolute poverty line) following the cost of basic needs approach, which is the expenditure value in local currency required to fulfil both food and non-food basic needs (ADB, 2013).

poverty rate declined at a rate that was among the fastest in the world (World Bank, 2016). Despite the long history of planned development and progress, the rate of poverty in rural areas is almost double that in the urban ones (CBS, 2011). Moreover, the rural population is suffering from lack of infrastructure, education opportunity, modern health facilities and economic opportunities. Given that Nepal is predominantly a rural country in which about 75% of the total population resides in rural areas -with farming as a chief occupation (CBS, 2012)- a balanced development between rural and urban areas is urgent.

Migration is one of the important factors in Nepali society. One in every four households reported at least one member of the household to be absent or living out of the country, especially young people (CBS, 2011). Nepal's economy heavily depends on international remittances and the ratio of remittance inflows reached 29.1% in 2014. As a percentage of GDP, it was the country having received the third highest gross amount in remittances after Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic (Pokharel, 2015). No doubt, remittances play an important role in both the household and the national economy. On the other hand, remittances widen inequality in Nepal.

The new Constitution in 1990 described Nepal as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and democratic state with equal rights for all citizens (ADB, 2010). However, the democratic transition failed because Hill *brahmins*, *chhetris*, and *newars* occupied political parties and maintained the status quo. Their inability to represent and include the demands of marginalised groups such as *dalits*, *janajatis*, and *madhesis* triggered the Maoist insurgency in 1996 which continued until 2006. Recently, Nepal is struggling to recover from economic and environmental breakdown wreaked by the devastating earthquake in April 2015 and the suspension of cross-border trade with India between September 2015 and January 2016.

4.2   Women and development in the history of Nepal

'Development' might be the word used most pervasively when one constructs the idea of the Nepal. Ever since the United States President Truman first deployed the term 'underdevelopment' to illustrate the evolution of countries from

underdeveloped to developed at his inaugural speech in 1949, speaking against the backdrop of ideological bifurcation of the Cold War, a new global North-South hierarchy emerged (Rist, 2014). Given that Nepal is heavily depend on foreign aid from the West (Sharma, Upreti, Manandhar, & Sapkota, 2014), it has been 'development' through which the West influences Nepal together with the historical legacy of economic and political relations with India via British Raj (Tamang, 2002, 2009). The roots of the contemporary development project in Nepal dates to 1951 when dictatorial Rana rule ended. Due to its strategic geopolitical location between China and India, the Cold War influenced development policies and practices during the 1950s and 1960s. Fear of peasant rebellion in the Rapti area, for example, made international development agencies invest the region; and such initiatives made it suitable for showcasing the region as model of development as a Cold War strategy (Paudel, 2016).

An adult literacy programme also started in 1951 with assistance of the United States Official Mission. When the First Five-Year Plan[9] announced in 1956, the national literacy rate was an estimated two percent. Thus it was natural that ALE remained limited to literacy programmes until 1960s (Laksamba, 2005). Following the Five-Year Plan that emphasised a welfare approach focusing on women's reproductive role, successive development plans endorsed an efficiency and equity focus that corresponded with a WID approach until the 1980s (Tamang, 2002; ADB, 2010).

During the Panchayat period from the 1960s to the 1990s, the construction of a single national identity based on traditional Hindu norms had been central to the government's enterprise. Massive foreign aid supported this process. Under the guise of internal consolidation, the government did not value the peaceful coexistence of heterogeneous ethnicities; and this policy strategy was accompanied by deleterious consequences for gender-related issues. Nepali women were regarded as a homogenous group who are devoid of agency and became a 'category' for developmental intervention (Tamang, 2002, 2009). Nepali women as a

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[9] Since the First Five-Year Plan in 1956, the country has pronounced a total of fourteen periodic plans including current Fourteenth Plan (2016/17-2018/19).

category was "*constructed by the very institutions, practices and discourses*" of development (Tamang, 2002; emphasis in the original).

During the 1970s and 1980s, literacy classes mushroomed by the government, NGOs and INGOs; and it was emphasised extensively as an entry point for other development activities such as income generating activities and microcredit groups (Leve 2007; Robinson-Pant 2010; Hertzog 2011). However, the content and types of NFE available for women were oriented by the underlying assumption of women's traditional role as mothers and housewives confined to the private sphere. Thus, it did not challenge the status quo of women; rather it only reinforced long entrenched gender ascribed social practices and inequalities (Hertzog, 2013).

In 1990, Nepal experienced the demise of the party-less Panchayat regime, and the country then established a constitutional monarchy based on a multi-party democratic system. Even though the constitution recognised cultural plurality prioritising women and minority groups in parliament in rhetoric, in reality, there was little or no change in the positions of power. Women including *janajatis* and *dalits* raised issues of structural inequality and discrimination. The resulting increased awareness, together with disagreement between the political parties that made the system corrupt and indifferent to the suffering of the people, provoked Maoist insurgency in 1996. The decade long (1996-2006) People's War provided moments of empowerment, agency and transformation through women's active roles as they appeared as political activists and soldiers. But this revolution didn't come without exacting a heavy toll: it brought violence and despair to women as they became victims of sexual violence and war at the same time (Lohani-Chase, 2008). Until the conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in November of 2006, much of the population, including an estimated 70% of the countryside, was under Maoist control (Leve, 2007). The war had ultimately claimed more than thirteen thousand lives (Lohani-Chase, 2014).

During the 1990s and 2000s, a development paradigm shifted from WID to GAD focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment as it appeared in the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997–2002), the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–2007), and

the Three-Year Interim Plan (2008–2011) (ADB, 2010). Nepal adopted a liberal policy of privatization and liberalization as the basis of poverty reduction (Sharma et al., 2014) and resources flowed 'to incubate' the NGOs favoured by major funders. In this manner, they exerted a great influence over the educational policies and practices both in local and national levels in Nepal (Rappleye, 2011). Regmi (2017) analyses key educational policy documents of the World Bank, one of the major funders, from the mid-1980s to 2010 and argues that the Bank's educational policy recommendations had been based on the normative and hegemonic neoliberal assumptions prioritising marketization, privatisation, and decentralisation. Coinciding with liberal policies, the importance attributed to achieving functional literacy based on Freire's revolutionary pedagogy, has been downgraded, and courses have been re-valued as catalysts for women's empowerment. The shift, from "the revolutionary empowerment of subaltern subjects to an instrumental empowerment for capitalist citizenship" (Leve, 2007, p. 141), implies a shift in Nepali development vision. Laksamba (2005) argues that while external global funders manipulated the learning policy in Nepal, internal elites controlled the knowledge and resources only to benefit them. Thus the fifty years of aid has not been able to improve the situation of the poor of Nepal. The gulf then existing between the declared development and educational policies for women, on the one hand, and the real effects on the ground, on the other, would have seemed impossible to bridge.

Nepal has gone through a wide-ranging political transformation from the party-less Panchyat regime to the current republican system in such a short period of time, inspired by the hopes of many marginalised people. And as shown in the Maoist insurgency, women have had active role in political movements and have always been at the centre of the transformation, including the peace-building process. After the 2006 Peace Accord, women's rights came to be regarded as fundamental in the interim constitution. Efforts at attaining non-discrimination on the basis of gender culminated in a parliamentary resolution that stipulates an allocation of 33 percent of seats reserved for women in all state bodies (Crossette, 2010).

However, elite males who are from the three dominant caste/ethnic groups - *brahmins*, *chhetris*, and upper caste Buddhist *newars* - continue to dominate the major influential positions not only those in politics but also in NGOs and human rights groups (Braithwaite, 2015). What counts is a genuine and fuller implementation of laws, not a lack of adequate laws. It needs a means of going beyond the "add and stir" approach to women's inclusion and empowerment in political and development agendas. Women still remain far behind men in exercising leadership in decision making positions. This suggests important questions about "who is at the table, who decides, who acts, who strategies and who benefits" (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 409) in any initiative promoted as inclusive development for women from marginalised communities in Nepal.

4.3   Study context – Kolhuwa, Nawalparasi

Nawalparasi is one of the six districts of the Lumbini Zone in Nepal's Western Development Region located in the Terai area in Nepal. It has 75 Village Development Committees (VDCs) and a municipality.[10] Its population numbers 643,508, of which 88.2 % are Hindu, 6 % Buddhist, 3.8 % Muslim and 1.7 % Christian as of 2011. Hill *brahmin*, *magar*, *tharu* and *chhetri* are among the most prevalent caste groups as of 2011 (CBS, 2014a). The literacy rate in this region has drastically increased from 39.2% in 1991 to 71.1%in 2011 whereas women's literacy rate remains lower than that of men (CBS, 2014a). Agriculture is the main source of income for 71 percent of households – and wage labour for another 19 percent. In comparison with other regions, remittances constitute the highest share (21.5%) of the total household income in the Western Development Region where the Nawalparasi district is located (CBS, 2012). Access for females to financial resources is strictly limited, with 75% of females owning neither house nor land in the district. This means that the decision-making power of females in the household is low. Girls are often married at very young ages: 16.8% of all women get

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[10] Terai area has two-tier system of local governance, with village and municipal bodies as the lower tier and district bodies as the higher.

married between 10 and 14 years of age, and 59.4% of all women get married between 15 and 19 years of age. This greatly restricts the educational and employment opportunities of the women, and it also shows that youth generally lack decision-making power in the district.

In the Kolhuwa VDC, where the Fulbari CLC[11] is situated, there are 1,936 households with population of 8,798. *Tharu* is the biggest caste in this VDC, comprising more than half the population (51%). In Nepal, *tharu* communities are suffering from scarcity of economic means and opportunities, as well as falling behind in education. *Tharu* is the first mother tongue (50%) whereas people usually speak Nepali (38.7%) at the same time. National Population and Housing Census 2011 shows that the inhabitants of the region suffer from a general disregard for health and the lack of adequate knowledge about health care. A total of 18% of households do not have toilets in their homes, which increases the risk of water-borne diseases through contact with unhygienic environments. Moreover, health issues often intersect with prevalent gender discrimination, meaning that females are often found in environments that are disease-causing and more susceptible to health hazards. For example, 82% of households still use firewood for cooking, rather than using safer options like gas or biogas. This means that many women, who have to do the cooking in households, are susceptible to respiratory diseases and fire hazards. The population of men and women appears to be similar in the early ages, but the population of women increasingly exceeds that of men from the 20-24 age group. The ratio of the population between female and male becomes even when it reaches the 50-54 age group. This trend confirms the prevalent international migration of men. A UN report (2013) states that the youth unemployment rate in Least Developed Countries is relatively higher than of adults. The domestic realities are such that only a few jobs are available for youth that could be deemed a suitable match in relation to the education they

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[11] In many cases, CLCs indicate government initiated project in Nepal. However, many NGOs interchangebly use CLC with community centre, community resource center and community library. In this thesis I use CLC to indicate both government initiated CLC and Community Library and Resource Centres (READ Centre). Thus the two CLCs in this study are not governmnet initiative centres.

receive. Especially in the rural Terai area, where the economy depends highly on subsistence farming, many youth look for work opportunities in international markets - mostly new industrial economies like BRICS or some oil producing countries like Qatar and Saudi Arabia - instead of engaging in farming (Regmi, 2015). This trend was evident during the field research which found that all the women interviewed except one woman have at least one family member in a direct line who is working, or used to work, in foreign countries, notably in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as well as other countries such as Malaysia.

5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research was conducted over two months, between October and November 2016 in Kolhuwa and Paunauti, Nepal. With a Nepali-English translator, I interviewed fifteen women who had been participating in CLC activities. Building upon previous studies about the benefits of ALE, this study aims at analysing individual women's learning experiences in community-based learning spaces, with the aim of seeing how these experiences may influence women's agency. It is neither my intention to evaluate the benefits of CLC *per se* nor its ascribed results, including women's empowerment. By widening the scope of enquiry beyond the benefits, limitations and problems of women's learning *per se*, this research shall explore how women experience CLC for constructing their agency as a multidimensional phenomenon, comprising benefits, limitations and constraints.

Three research questions are:

1. *Within the social constraints Nepali women live in, what are the women's experiences of CLC?*

2. *How do the women construct their agency within their CLC experiences?*

3. *How does post-colonial feminist perspective explain the agency construction and the CLC experiences of these women in Nepal?*

6   IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

In this chapter, I outline the implementation of the research process. I give a brief description of the activities of READ Nepal and describe the details of participants and the research process. Here I continue to describe the various research techniques employed to collect data in the field and a technique to analyse the data, namely thematic data analysis. Furthermore, I discuss the trustworthiness and limitations of the study. Finally, I discuss ethical considerations.

6.1   The Context of the Study

Established in 1991, READ as a non-profit organisation has focused on creating community based spaces to live, learn and thrive in rural Nepal, India and Bhutan. Through the establishment of Community Library and Resource Centres, it aims to aid in social and economic transformation. Combining education, enterprise and community development, READ Nepal collaborates with rural communities to build these Centres, and to seed for-profit sustaining enterprises to ensure their long-term maintenance and success (Shrestha, 2013). It aims at collaborating with communities to develop self-sustaining library and community centres. Thus, CLCs purport to be of the people, by the people, for the people regardless of age, gender, or social status. In collaboration with READ Nepal, a Korean NGO and the community, Fulbari Centre opened in May, 2014. It was registered as a non-governmental organization on June 2014 with the District Administrative Office (DAO), Nawalparasi. The Fulbari CLC includes the following educational resources:

- A library with about 3,000 books and various other resources
- An information and communications technology section
- A women's empowerment section providing women-focused training, resources and basic medical examinations
- An early childhood section equipped with educational resources
- A multimedia and communications section, especially for youth

- Five storefronts for renting out as a means to sustain the operation of the CLC
- A training/meeting hall under construction

According to the 2014 report (unpublished) of the Fulbari CLC, this CLC provided trainings and workshops such as literacy, livelihood skills, information technology, women's health and empowerment in partnership with local NGOs and government agencies. Grihini class[12], a class for married women of illiterate and semi-literate, was conducted and funded by the local government at the elementary school nearest to the Fulbari CLC largely through the work of two mobilisers. The participants were in the third level which is equivalent to grade 6 of the school, and they were using the same book used in formal school. There also had been three-months functional literacy classes in an effort to eradicate illiteracy as a part of the governmental initiated programme 'Literate Nepal Mission'[13] through CLCs in 2014 and 2015.

There are 250 members in the women's cooperative. It provides 10% interest for savings whereas the banks only provide 2-3%. The cooperative also provides a financial literacy programme, agricultural training and debate competitions for women.

6.2   The Participants and the Research Process

Finding CLCs and interviewees

As a former NGO worker engaged in establishing the Fulbari CLC, I was deeply interested in the impact of CLCs on the lives of rural Nepali women. Thus it was natural to go back to where I had worked in the past. I contacted READ Nepal to

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[12] It was established as a form of formal education condensing the course of 10 years of general school into five years. The participants after succeeding 5 years of Grihini education are eligible for School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination, Class 10 in Nepal.

[13] The Literate Nepal Mission (2012-2015) is a government programme that aims to eradicate illiteracy in all 75 districts of Nepal by 2015. Nepal Government began total literacy campaign in Jan 2013 aiming to attain total literacy among more than 5 million illiterate people by the end of 2015. As a part of this campaign, Fulbari CLC was selected by the District Education Office, Nawalparasi to conduct 47 literacy classes at Kolhuwa VDC, Nawalparasi.

suggest conducting research. The request was accepted, and a signed acceptance letter was exchanged (See Appendix 1). The staff of READ Nepal helped me find a translator, who was a student having an educational background in social work, and arrange interviews with women. A staff member also came to the field for the first two days to introduce me to the members of CLCs.

The women interviewees

Fifteen women, twelve from Fulbari CLC participated in interviews after three from Gyanbikash CLC participated as piloting interviewees. In the interviewee profile chart affixed (see Appendix 2), the first twelve women interviewees are from Fulbari CLC and the last three are from Gyanbikash CLC. The experiences of women narrated in piloting interviews are relevant to this study as they are based on the same CLC model that includes the same constitutive elements. Hence piloting interviews are also included this research. The participants' ages range from 23 to 53. Notwithstanding the fact that the fifteen women represent different familiar and socio-economic backgrounds, a generally low education profile and high illiteracy rates characterise the women. (see Table 2)

Table 2. The intersection of age and education of the women

	Education	No education	Total
Age group			
20-30	2	0	2
31-40	3	3	6
41-50	2	4	6
51-60	1	0	1
Totals	8	7	15

Of seven women with formal education, three women accomplished lower-secondary level education, while four accomplished high secondary level. There were two female heads of household, one of them was a widow and the other

woman's husband was residing with another wife. The widow was a sole bread-winner whereas the other woman was a primary earner who, along with a son, was running a small shop. Except these two women, all other women were residing with a husband and had children. Of the thirteen women who had either a husband or children eligible for employment in terms of age and physically, eight women, all from Fulbari CLC, had husbands or sons who were then currently working abroad (six women) or used to work (two women) abroad. Except one woman with only female children, at least one young male member of the families of the women interviewed from Fulbari CLC was working abroad.

The main sources of income are diverse. Income from husbands' work in Nepal and international remittances were the two main income sources for women. However, most of the women who were relying on sources of income other than farming are farmers or subsistence farmers at the same time. The two women employed in business are engaged in tailoring and bag making.

Figure 1 : The women's main sources of income

■ Farminig ■ Business ■ Remittance from abroad ■ Pension ■ Rely on husband
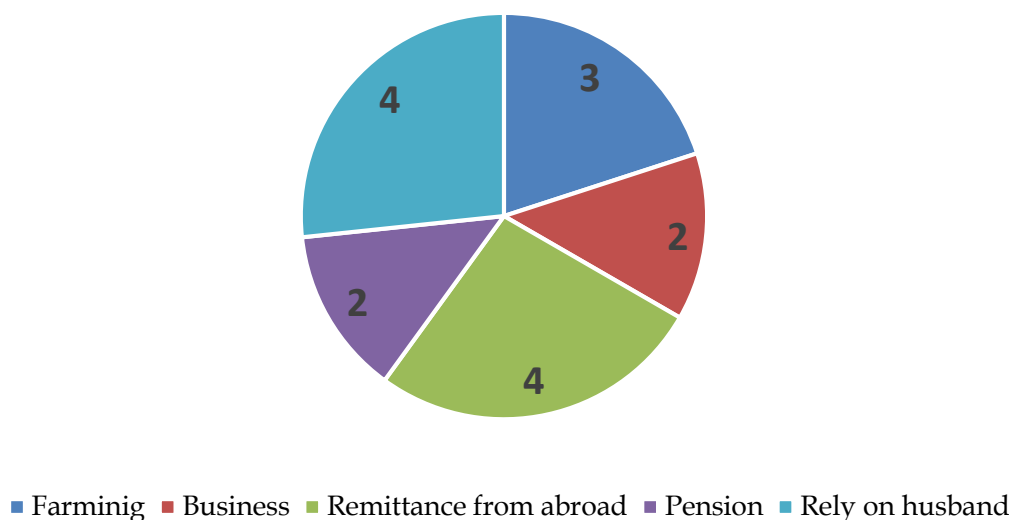
Of twelve women from Fulbari CLC, ten are *tharu*, the most populated ethnic group in the VDC. The ethnicity of the three women interviewed in Gyanbikash CLC was *newar*. The definition of the number of family members appears to be different among women. Aadarsh, for example, mentioned she is living with 24 members at the interview. The number of family members recorded in this study only includes the husband and the children.

All women interviewees have participated in various activities in the CLCs. Of the activities, all women participated in agricultural training. Agricultural training includes how to cultivate mushrooms, vegetables, rice and maize. All women having no education are participants of literacy classes, and all interviewed women are members of women's cooperatives set up by the CLCs. The participation levels of the income generating programmes appear to vary among women. Income generating programmes include doll making, candle making, training for bag making, and fish farming.

6.3   **Research Methods**

Pilot Study: "Do not take the risk. Pilot test first" (De Vaus, 1993, p. 54)

Pilot studies help researchers increase the likelihood of success in the main study. Pilot studies are conducted for a variety of different reasons (See van Teijlingen, Rennie, Hundley, & Graham, 2001). In the pilot test of this research, I interviewed three women in preparation for the main interviews in order to examine the feasibility and reliability of interview questions and to decide whether the proposed method, semi-structured interview, is appropriate in facilitating women's voices. The piloting interviews were conducted with three women in Gyanbikash CLC, located in Panauti Municipality-1, Kavrepalanchok District, Bagmati Zone of Nepal. The interviews were conducted for approximately one hour and half for each woman. In response to an evaluation of the piloting interviews, some 'Yes-or-No' questions were changed to open-ended questions to make the women explore their opinions more freely. Interview themes that place much weight on political changes through CLC participation changed to the broader benefits of that in familiar, social, economic and self-related psychological ones. In addition to the three pilot interviews, two plenary meetings were also held before the main study, with the aim of avoiding making inappropriate assumptions pertaining to perceived benefits of CLC activities for women based on only pilot interviews. Two plenary meetings were carried out in Fulbari CLC with nine villagers, and in Agyauli CLC with fifteen villagers in Nawalparasi

region. Members of women cooperatives and Centre committees, Presidents and Vice-presidents of the Centres, training facilitators, and women participants of literacy classes discussed previous and current programmes and trainings and its benefits for the community and women. The benefits of the Centres were discussed especially from a gender standpoint. To broaden the understanding of current government initiated CLC implementation and its policy development, two experts' interviews were conducted with a staff member from the UNESCO Kathmandu office and the director of the NFEC.

Informal discussion and observation

Interviewers need to gain the trust of their respondents in order to collect high quality data. As a previous NGO coordinator who had been involved in the establishment of Fulbari CLC, I possessed certain advantages in building a rapport with the NGO staff and the women, as I had already become acquainted with some of them. Observations and informal discussions were carried out during the CLC and literacy class visits, house visits and homestay. Observations and informal discussions helped me to find unique cultural and regional features of Kolhuwa VCD such as types of family, family relations, gender roles, particular educational situations, means of living, income sources, a variety of festivals and its celebration rituals, situations pertaining to migration (whenever applicable), and social practices such as polygamy and Kamaiya.

Semi-structured interview

The main interviews took place over the course of two meeting times with each of the fifteen women. The interview schedule had to be reorganised due to Tihar, one of the major festivals in Nepal and the harvesting schedule. One-to-one interviews were conducted in separate rooms in a school where literacy classes were conducted, while the choice of whether this occurred in the Centres or the CLC President's house depended on the availability of the participants. According to interview themes developed by referring to pre-existing research, pilot interviews and two plenary meetings, the interviews were conducted with semi-

structured questions and some open-ended questions (see Appendix 3). Through qualitative research, I focused on discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of women towards their CLC experiences by exploring meaning, purpose, and reality. As this approach embeds the description of the interactions among participants and researchers in naturalistic settings with few boundaries, it resulted in a flexible and open research process (Harwell, 2011) which was beneficial to the Nepali context where uncertain events could hinder the research easily (e.g. strikes, festivals, electricity outages, seasonal harvesting, etc.). Purposive sampling including consideration of different age groupings, and status markers such as educational background, occupation and marriage status were employed with the aim of examining various and different points of view on ones' respective CLC experiences. The goal of this approach was to select units based on specific purposes associated with answering the questions used in the research study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), while "snowball" methods were employed to identify extra women due to the cancellation of some interviews because of the harvesting schedule. While some core questions enable interviewers to maintain focus, the flexibility to ask further questions to clarify points raised by the interviewee allowed me to have more meaningful data (Bold, 2012).

Thematic data analysis

The primary data drawn from the combination of semi-structured interview scripts and field notes from non-participatory observations have been analysed. Observation without participation can make researchers concentrate on the observation and not be distracted by roles the researchers have to fulfil.

Analysing interview and observation data is a 'sense-making' process to make data reliable. To make sense of data, researchers must engage in the process of coding data. In accordance to methods propounded by Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 87) and Guest (2012), I analysed the interview using a thematic analysis process. The analysed data is annexed (See Appendix 4).
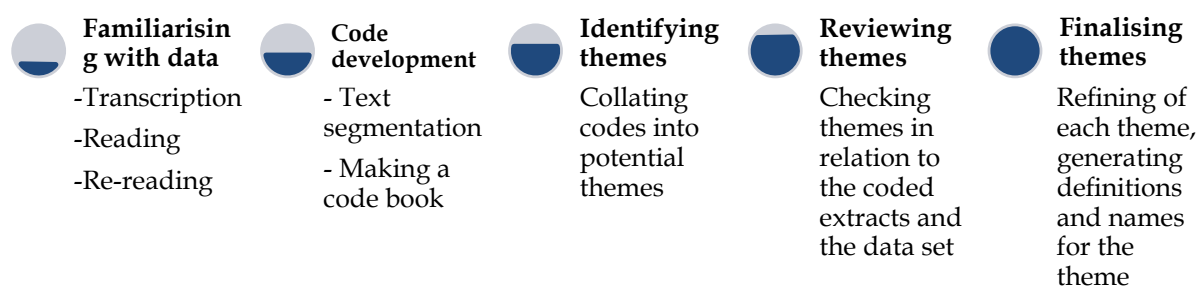
	Familiarising with data		Code development		Identifying themes		Reviewing themes		Finalising themes

Familiarising with data
-Transcription
-Reading
-Re-reading

Code development
- Text segmentation
- Making a code book

Identifying themes
Collating codes into potential themes

Reviewing themes
Checking themes in relation to the coded extracts and the data set

Finalising themes
Refining of each theme, generating definitions and names for the theme

Figure 2. Process of thematic data analysis for this study

6.4   Trustworthiness of the study

To enhance conformability, that is, the neutrality, of this study, I recorded all interviews and did transcriptions of eighty pages of interviews as they were. Some parts of the transcription were shared with my supervisor and I crosschecked some of the pages containing the study background with READ Nepal staff and a Nepali friend in an attempt to avoid including any misleading information on the context. In order to reduce the effect of researcher bias, and to strengthen internal validity, I focused on triangulation (Shenton, 2004). I used multiple methods prevalent in current qualitative research methodology for the research, namely, pilot study, semi-structured interview, two plenary meetings, a non-participatory observation, and informal interaction to avoid making judgements or false interpretations that could otherwise at least partly have been formed as a result of my limited pre-existing notions. I also compared my findings to other research in similar fields and in Nepal in order to corroborate and further inform my study.

6.5   Limitations of study

The limitations of this study are twofold. Firstly, this study focuses solely on rural Nepal; therefore, generalisation of findings to the larger population or to other settings may not be warranted or even feasible. Nevertheless, this study does not *intend* to generalise the findings as this study focuses on specificity of Nepali women's perspectives. Rather, I argue that there is no universal experience of women. However, as this study focuses only on a relatively small number of

women's narratives through short interviews, readers may perceive the study to be limiting, or failing to adequately consider the power relations vis-à-vis other women and men in CLCs. As the study of Madhok and Rai (2012) about women social workers, or *sathins*, in India shows, the local space is a complicated one where women can experience oppression, exclusion, violations in relation to their rights, and surveillance. As the CLC is a community space, it is important to examine women's experiences in relation to other community members, including local authority figures and groups, male counterparts, NGO people, and so on.

A second sort of limitation is comprised by the particular situations specific to this study. Many days of national and local holidays including Dashain and Tihar, coinciding with the harvesting season presented time constraints. I tried not to disrupt the participants' harvesting schedules and attempted to shorten the duration of interviews as much as possible. I kept each interview to roughly $1\,^1/_2$ to 2 hours, which was by no means adequate time to comprehensively understand any participant's perspective. Being an "outsider" has inherent limitations, especially since becoming a direct participant[14] of this sort of research seems neither always nor even ever possible. Because I do not speak the Nepali language, I entirely depended on my translators' abilities to facilitate my communicating with Nepali participants. The use of a translator when conducting cross-cultural research can introduce a form of interview bias (Jentsch, 1998). The translator's background characteristics—such as culture, age and gender—can have a decisive influence on the data obtained. Due to financial constraints, I was not able to hire a professional translator; and instead I went to the field with a recent university graduate who majored in social work. Notwithstanding the fact that she was knowledgeable in women's literacy programmes, it was nevertheless difficult to acquire a nuanced understanding. Two sentences, for example, can be understood in vastly different ways: "My husband allowed me to go to earthquake area" and "My husband agreed me to go to earthquake area". The first sentence might imply that one's husband exercises decision-making in such

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[14] "participant" is not to be confused with an interviewee, but is meant to be understood in a broader sense of the term

circumstances (or one might inductively draw a conclusion that he has control over her in general) whereas the second might warrant an inference that the women and her husband are equal as negotiators. These sorts of ambiguity in translating often came up during the interviews. Not only is there ambiguity, but also in my attempt to listen to what I perceive as "the women's voice", I might be the one who fails to allow the women to speak -- especially in light of the possibility that these voices of women are possibly mediated through my per-spectives and values. Given my position, as a previous Project Coordinator that could be inaccurately inferred to be a project sponsor, connected to READ Nepal, women interviewees may try to shape their narrative to make it suitable in ways they believe would satisfy not only me but also the people in an authoritative position. A salient point that I want to mention here is that I am aware that this research work is influenced by the particular vantage point that I (am perceived to) have associated with my position, including that in relation to interviewees. Thus there are limits to objectivity, and these are compounded by the complicit yet essential roles that the translator inevitably plays, along with the ones the participants have as integral in shaping the research results.

6.6   Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct research was obtained from READ Nepal (See Appendix 1) and the participants themselves, although not in a form of a formal consent letter. Nevertheless, verbal consent was recorded before the interview. Before any interview, I provided the women with the following information: basic iden-tifying information; my place of origin; the subject I am studying; the purpose of this present study; how long the interview will take; how the data will be used; and how it will be attributed. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees, I coded the names to secure data. I attempted not to take many photos of women as I found it unnecessary. Only a limited number of photos were taken during the interviews with the permission of the relevant participants. I intend to share the findings of the research with READ Nepal, and I will en-courage them to share these with the interviewed participants.

7   RESULTS

This chapter articulates the benefits these women acquired from their CLC experience and analyses how the benefits affect the construction of women's agency as it relates to three areas – intrapersonal, collective and relational agency. This chapter begins to look at social constraints that restrict the exercise of agency. Even though I classified these sorts of agency to identify them according to broad classifications, I acknowledge that each sort of agency is neither entirely consistent nor mutually exclusive. Rather, I understand all such classification as a process that is subject to change, for instance by reclassification as a member of a different type. I also believe that there are many points where the aforementioned constituents within the agency taxonomy overlap and influence each other.

7.1   Social constraints

When women's agency is examined, a reciprocal relationship interacting between 1) women and their multiplicity of contexts and 2) the ways in which women experience and exercise their agency, must be taken into account. The rural women's agency occurred within the contexts of multiple social constraints. Often, marriage is mentioned as one of the factors most detrimental to a woman's pursuit of furthering their education. Given that child marriage is most prevalent among the illiterate and the *janajatis* and the *dalits* (Aryal et. al., 2012), the practice is highly linked to educational level and social status. One of the oldest interviewees described her marriage as the worst memory of her life.

> I was thirteen when I got married…It was common to marry [at] such an early age when I was young...She[grand-mother] believed that if the grand-children gets married before menstruation started, it means pure. In marriage ceremony, parents and grand-parents should wash leg of bride and drink it as ritual. It was believed that if they drink the pure water, they will go to heaven. It was the worst memory…After I got married, my education was just over. My husband didn't give me any education. *Kumari, Fulbari CLC*

But the early marriage was not something that only happened in the past, but it is practised even today. Another interviewee, Ishat, acknowledged the harmful effect of early marriage on her daughter's education and life. However,

she made her daughter get married at sixteen due to economic difficulty. Most women articulated their level of education is lower than that of their male siblings. They could not choose to educate themselves in their early age. This was a choice mostly made by their parents, reflecting either discrimination or a rational response to gender preference in terms of returns on educational investment (Kabeer, 2016).

> My older brother is more educated than me…I felt discrimination when I grew up. Women need to be empowered nowadays. In old generation, girls were prohibited from taking education in Nepal. Old people thought that women education is not beneficial for them [the parents]. Traditionally sons were the one who look after parents and earn money for family. But the society has changed. More women also are looking for the parents. *Aadarsh, Fulbari CLC*

One of the women mentioned a traditional practice called Kamaiya[15] as one of the detrimental factors that hindered her education. Even though the Kamaiya system is legally abolished, its legacy is that it still continues to be practised in some area due to poverty (Acharya, 2015). Multiple roles within the family appeared to be a great burden for some of the women. Regmi, a librarian and the youngest one among the interviewees, was struggling to balance her duties as a daughter-in-law, librarian and student. She mentioned that she already registered at a local business college, but she does not know if she can continue the study and the librarian job. Jagan shared a similar problem from multiple roles.

> I got problems not from the family members but from the situation I am in. I need to take care of my grand-parents-in-law and parents-in-law… father-in-law needs to see doctor and mother-in-law is sick now. I didn't have time to come to library for one month. I also need to work in the agricultural field, I just came [for the interview] from rice cutting. *Regmi, Fulbari CLC*

> I said to my daughter that I feel like I am kind of relief organisation. All my family members are depending on me. Now I am ready to go wherever it is needed. But to do this, I sometimes need to wake up at 3 am to prepare food and to make everything is ready. *Jagan, Fulbari CLC*

For some women, international migration of male members in family appeared to be a problem due to loneliness, feelings of insecurity and multiple roles whereas for some, it does not seem to affect to their life much since they have

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[15] Kamaiya commonly refers to an agriculturally based bonded labour system practised in Western Tarai region. Kamaiya households either pledge children as collateral for loans, or children are sent to work in landowners' houses to secure Kamaiya contracts or to secure the rights to sharecrop.

families in the village whom they can rely on. As Chapagain (2015) shows, men's overseas migration may not render their wives dependent and feeling "left behind", but, rather, induce them to enrich their ability, identity and agency through enhanced bargaining power and negotiation. Being a woman head in a household seemed to be tough due to its emotional and economic hardship (Ramnarain, 2016). Chanchal and Ishat were the only two women-heads among the interviewees. Ishat was a widow and the Chanchal was under a polygamous marriage relationship. Although polygamous marriage is prohibited in Nepal by law, the persistence of this kind of marriage even in the present day has been documented[16]. As this practice is a gender ascribed one which is often disadvantage to women, it appeared to be disadvantage to Chanchal too.

Often, women illustrated the frustration from being ignored and blamed by community members as one of the motivations to participate in the literacy class. If they don't know how to read and write, the possibility to participate in trainings held in the community becomes limited. Many of the women were dependant on farming or their husband's income. For instance, Dipak mentioned tailoring is the only available option for women in the region where the Fulbari CLC is located. Many women showed their interest and will to earn income themselves and some of the women demanded more income generating programmes from the CLCs.

> "Even though I have money and property, I wanted to earn money by myself. Whenever I need some money I need to ask money from my husband…I also want to give money to my family, even small money, I want to contribute. Even small gifts maybe." *Parakram, Gyanbikash CLC*

Health problems and lack of freedom of mobility were understood as some of the individual constraints despite the fact it stems from and relates to socio-economic constraints. Based on the social constraints and CLC benefits women mentioned, this research found the space of agency as below.

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[16] The 2001 Census showed that at least 559,250 women are living in polygynous marriages. As the number was estimated by multiplying the number of men in polygynous marriages by only two, the actual number might be larger (CBS, 2014).

Table 3. Constraints, CLC benefits and space of agency

Constraints	CLC benefits	Space of Agency
Lack of education	Literacy class (freedom of mobility) IT training Reading materials	Decision to educate their children regardless of gender Decision to continue education for themselves Voice women's opinion to continue their learning Decision to learn different educational skills for their children and its use
Limited income opportunities for women	Income generating programmes Joining women's cooperative Help in setting up a store	Self-reliance Self-sustaining
Ageing and physical health problems	Health training programme Women's section with a function of health post	Decision to not let their children marry early Control of own body
Lack of freedom of mobility	Literacy class Volunteering opportunities Freely accessible space	Self-directed Confidence Sense of community
Disadvantaged social position	Women awareness programme Income generating programmes Literacy class Loan to start a business	Self-sustaining Self-reliance
Unsupportive family and community	Learning opportunities Promotion of library sector Voice through literacy class and women's awareness programme	Confidence Negotiation to change the perception of family and community
Multiple roles	-	-

Based on the space agency mentioned in the chart above, this study continues to explain intrapersonal, relational and collective agency. The detailed CLC benefits can be found in the Appendix 4.

7.2   Intrapersonal agency

Women expressed that their self-reliance, confidence, awareness about the importance of education and motivation have been strengthened through the participation of CLC activities. Women described how being literate increased their self-reliance. For all women in the literacy classes, CLC provides 'education' for the first in their lifetime. Women expressed their feelings as being less dependent on others for several tasks including using their mobile phones, calculating, visiting hospital, finding directions and reading letters. Jagan illustrated how she felt sad when she needed to share her private life with others due to illiteracy.

> "We [me and my husband] exchanged letters when my husband in India and I didn't know how to read and reply [at that time]. Whenever I wanted to reply, I needed other people to read and write on behalf of me…The letter had to be shared…If I couldn't find any close friends around, I kept the letters three to four days until I find close friends so I can write it back." *Jagan, Fulbari CLC*

After participating in literacy classes, she expressed that she got "a new life" without depending on others to do something on behalf for her. Most of the women in the literacy class mentioned how illiteracy hindered them from visiting doctors. Ishat illustrated her frustration with a doctor's putting her down.

> "Doctor took an x-ray and asked me to come back to a lab which I couldn't recognise. He blamed me for having no education. I cried so much and came back home…It is very important especially when I go to health post. Now I can read the name plate and sections in hospital". *Ishat, Fulbari CLC*

The illustrated women's story shows enhanced self-reliance through such things as freedom of using a mobile phone, and freedom from being dependent on others' help. This new self-sufficiency led them to take action based on their needs and interests. They thus experienced expanded agency to act according to what they value. Women who initiated their business with the assistance they obtained from CLCs and women's cooperatives showed great levels of self-reliance arising from being financially independent from their husbands. Dipak

mentioned, "I felt that I have to depend on my husband and I should always do [likewise] in the future…But after making bags, I can run the shop [on] my own and give trainings for others." The women's experiences in gaining self-reliance supports prior research that highlights the association with women's literacy and their self-concept (Egbo, 2000; Kabeer, 2005; Stromquist, 2009). Egbo (2000) researched the personal impact of literacy on women and she suggested that it resulted in an increase in one's self-esteem needed to bring about a better life.

Becoming literate consequently help women better communicate with family, friends and community members with confidence (Stromquist, 1997). Many women expressed that they were afraid of speaking in front of others due to either their simply not having any chance to stand or the fear of something going wrong. Being confident and being able to speak 'even with a mike[17]' in front of others enabled some women to engage in various committees both inside and outside CLCs. Of all the women, Jagan seems very active in participating in a variety of committees.

> "After I became literate, people made me a member of road construction committee and vice president of the library. The women who only could give fingerprint…became [also] a member of tourist area committee to promote tourism…" *Jagan, Fulbari CLC*

Harshil also showed how the education enabled her to be confident to become involve in cooperative works:

> "[Before] I was ignored by the people in the village, friends and family… [now] all the members of the women cooperative said that you need to serve as a member of committee to look after the cooperative and members. That's why I became a treasurer." *Harshil, Fulbari CLC*

Involvement in different committees, planning and facilitation of CLC activities such as organising cultural programmes at Tij (women's festival) generates crucial skills necessary for women to gain confidence. The increase of overall literacy may promote the value of education as the spill-over. Women frequently mentioned their increased awareness about the importance of education as a fundamental right of women and their children, and as a coping strategy in rapidly changing society (Burchfield, 1997; Kabeer, 2005). Some programmes provided

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[17] microphone

by CLCs include emancipatory elements that are related to human and women's rights, trafficking of girls, gender equality, sexuality and reproductive health. These emancipatory elements provided by CLC training and literacy classes made women realise the subordinate situation of women (Stomquist, 1997), and call for changes.

Women's agency was visible in the decision-making surrounding giving their children the same education opportunities and preventing their children from marrying early. Kumari spoke of the importance of education for women in gaining the right to own land and emphasised the parents' role of giving the same level of education to the children regardless of sex. As for Ishat, even though she acknowledged the harmful effect of early marriage on her daughter's education and life, she made her daughter get married in very early age due to economic struggles. Thus, economic conditions appear to affect women in exerting their agency in making decisions about what they want for their children's education. Aadarsh emphasised English education as a tool to cope with social changes, despite the fact that she might not speak frequently in her life. Some of the women also discussed coping strategies with unsupportive partners. Harshil recalled an argument with her husband.

> "Once my husband asked me "Does the class give you a specific job?... I answered, "If I go to school I become able to read and write which make me more confident about myself…[and] I want to read Bible by myself." *Harshil, Fulbari CLC*

Even though the reasons for participating in the activities offered by CLCs varied, many women had to negotiate with their family members, their roles in family and their husbandry and household work to make time to participate, sometimes in a confrontational way or a way that is more perusable (Bergeron, 2001; Mohanty, 2003). As illustrated by Harshil' narrative, in the negotiation process, their agency to choose to continue to educate themselves while standing in opposition to an unsupportive partner was visible. However, for some women, they had to negotiate for their participating the CLC activities by doing all the housework (e.g. by waking up at three in the morning). Provided that a supportive family is an important factor in continuing women's education (Stalker, 2001;

Messer-Davidow, 1995), nevertheless, women seem to negotiate their unfavourable circumstance in their own way.

The awareness of the importance of education seems to motivate women to engage in various CLC activities further. Women were confident that the futures of educated people would be different to that of uneducated people. The reasons that women think education is significant include its importance in enhancing employability, getting confident and independent in family and community relationships, reading religious books, and as a goal in itself. Kumari emphasised that education could provide women a proper job rather than rendering them only as volunteers. Among some women, being a farmer was considered something undesirable due to its physical hardship. As Aadarsh expressed "The woman who just brought the tea is educated, so she can teach students at school instead of being a farmer." CLC participation seems to increase women's awareness of the significance of education. It thus increases agency to conceptualise better opportunities for their future and to choose what they value for themselves and their family.

In response to the question concerning their achievement goals for education, some women expressed they want to study up to SLC level, even though they acknowledged that it may not bring any tangible benefits for old women. Not only functional benefits, but also their intrinsic aspiration to continue their education within the framework of formal education made them continue their education. As Regmi, a librarian, mentioned, "I was bored and could not know what is happening outside when I was at home… In the CLC, I can...know what is going on in the village and library. The library made me to dream [of] further education... It motivated me." Thus, CLCs apparently motivated the women to continue their education further in the future.

7.3 **Relational agency**

Women expressed that they experienced relational agency through acquiring recognition, enhanced visibility, social and family support, and sharing affec-

tivity and happiness with their family and community members. Women's cooperatives play an important role in assisting women in participating in the CLCs activities through membership and monthly meetings. All women were members of women's cooperatives organised by the CLCs, and five women took a loan from the cooperatives for farming and business. All women participated in at least one of the income generating programmes even though the level of participation seemed to vary. The benefits of income generating programmes included increasing income from farming and businesses that make them financially independent, easy to access capital through women's cooperatives, and making a new habit of saving and cultivating nutritious crops for family. Of all the women, Dipak seems most successful, setting up a bag making shop after participating in 12 days of bag making training, while making use of help and a loan from the cooperative.

> "Before I was unknown but now everyone knows that "Dipak is a trainer". It is hard to find businesswomen in this area…I am so happy and what I accomplished is only possible due to the training provided by the CLC…many people from library and municipality visited here, took photos and encouraged me." *Dipak, Fulbari CLC*

Dipak expressed a great sense of recognition in community gained through social support. Recognition by the community people and enhanced visibility in the community appeared as two important motivating factors to continue those activities, which, in turn, seemed to stimulate more involvement. Parakram, who had served as a president of a women's organisation in the village, mentioned "I was only recognised by my husband's or my daughter's name before. I was somebody's wife or mother. But now I am recognised by my own name *Parakram.*" A widow and woman under a polygamous marriage relationship seemed to have been suffering from economic insecurity the most. Chanchal whose husband had been residing with a second wife in another region opened a small shop for her disabled son at one of the storefronts of the library with a loan from the women's cooperative.

> "It is not easy to live without support of husband in this society. But if you are a strong woman, everything goes well. All the villagers have been supportive due to my hard work and diligence… It was great moment with full of happiness. I was very proud of opening a shop. All the villagers were also so supportive…When my first son was ten

and small one was four, my husband left me and married another woman. All the villagers witnessed what mv husband done to me that's why all the villagers are very supportive." *Chanchal, Fulbari CLC*

Acharya et al. (2007) show that women's cooperatives provide women not only economic benefits but also emotional and relational support. For Chandal, financial support from CLCs not only mean the monetary benefits but also emotional support from the community members help women to overcome the difficulties. They illustrated that Chandal's experience shows women acquire emotional support and happiness to continue to exert her agency in making the decision to continue her business. A number of studies carried out in Nepal show that inter-generational and family support are crucial to promoting girls' access to education and continuing women's education (Parker, Standkng, & Shrestha, 2014; Burchfield et al., 2002). In the case of the women interviewed, some mentioned that their husband and parents-in-law had not been, and still were not, not supportive about her education whereas others' family members had been supportive from the beginning. Supportive behaviours of family members include speaking English for fun in the house, cycling one's wife to the CLC, allowing wife to go to the earthquake affected area to work as a volunteer, taking over the wife's husbandry duties, suggesting more education and the participation of one's mother-in-law in literacy classes together with daughters-in-law. For many, the establishment of CLCs changed familiar negative concepts toward women's education and brought about their family's support for the women's continuing their education -- even though the negotiation strategies appeared to vary as mentioned chapter 7.2. Nalin indicated that in spite of the fact that her husband and parents-in-law had been narrow-minded, their perception about women's education had changed after she began participating in CLC activities, especially due to the realisation that it enabled her to speak in English with her children and use internet messaging applications with her husband. One of the READ Nepal staff mentioned that they emphasise the library functions of CLCs to elicit familiar support. Because libraries have the clear function of promoting reading and lending books, the characteristics of libraries cannot be easily criticised whereas 'CLC' sounds obscure and uncertain.

The CLCs became spaces for women to come together and share their feelings and experiences through interaction. Efficacy in mobilising women to act seems an important factor in exerting agency. In a casual conversation about the benefits of CLC participation, Chanchal said, "[When I came to the Centre] I felt like my health problems automatically disappeared. Talking to others and laughing and interaction helped me a lot to get out from the sickness." For some women, getting out of the home and meeting with other women to share their daily lives were important steps to engaging in other activities they wanted. Even though the Fulbari CLC does not have any committee to arbitrate people's problems, some of the women expected that soft skills and knowledge about women learned from the CLC training sessions could help community people engage in the problems such as polygamy and violence against women in the village.

Many studies found that women who participated in literacy programmes became more engaged in their children's studies and knowledgeable of health-related issues, thus increasing their decision-making power (Burchfield, 1997; Abadzi, 2003). In line with the previous research, women expressed how they actively engaged in dialogue about medical treatment and children's health concerns. Women who participated in health training sessions and camps stated that their understanding of the female body and causes of disease and its prevention has increased, especially in terms of information related to pregnancy. Kumari emphasises the significance of health training sessions for children and women. "[Now] I understand that delivering [babies] at home can be dangerous. It should be in a health post or hospital". Recently, the women's section of the CLC has been transformed into a health post intended to better serve the needs of the people of the community with increased accessibility and a clean and safe environment. Thus, participation in the health-related trainings and the CLC itself as a health post, generate crucial opportunities necessary not only for the women, but also for their children to gain better control of their bodies. Women with children portrayed the CLCs as safe places for their children and women-friendly spaces where the women can come comfortably.

> [Before] children played in dust. Now, the Centre provides safe place to play at the children section They[women] can put their children [to the children section] and do discussion or meeting. *Regmi, Fulbari CLC*

Women also expressed the benefits related to their children's education and rearing which both inspire a strong motivation for their learning (Abadzi, 2003).

> [I learned] how to [communicate and] behave with my children. We should not scold children severely, but rather be kind. *Mahant Gyanbikash CLC*

> Whenever they [children] tried to hide something, they spoke in English… But, now they know that I understand English so they don't do that anymore. *Parakram Gyanbikash CLC*

> Me and my two children are all in 6th class now. Whenever there is exam, we compare our answers…This is one of the happiest moment in my life…Without education, I could have cried until now. *Ishat Fulbari CLC*

> Knowing how to prepare balanced meals for children and how to feed was very helpful. *Harshil, Fulbari CLC*

> It [the participation of English literacy class] was mainly because of my children. If I do not know how to speak in English, my children will ask me, "Why should I study if you don't know neither?" *Nalin, Gyanbikash CLC*

7.4 Collective agency

Zapata (1999) describes collective power as the capacity to achieve with others what an individual cannot achieve alone. Notable scholars have pointed out that agency and power are both individual and collective (Messer-Davidow, 1995; Kabeer, 1999, 2001; Zapata, 1999). Women interviewed in two CLCs expressed the importance of collective action by illustrating the importance of volunteering, participating in social activities for the sake of the members of the community members and organising women's groups for solidarity with less fortunate women. Women interviewed at Gyanbikash CLC articulated they gained the freedom of mobility in a slightly different way than the women in literacy class in Fulbari CLC. All three women interviewed at Gyanbikash CLC explained how they were confined to home and to their roles as mothers and wives because of either unsupportive husbands and family members or lack of places to visit for women before the establishment of CLCs. Thus, it was not only the illiteracy, but also the patriarchal social norms imposed on women that play a great part in restraining women's freedom to move (somewhat) freely.

Nalin communicated that only after the establishment of the CLC could she participate in social activities and one of the ways she participated was helping earthquake victims in 2015. All women interviewed at the Gyanbikash CLC expressed strong solidarity with the earthquake victims and emphasised a culture of giving back through participation in volunteer activities by distributing food and clothes organised by a women's group in the CLC. Women expressed their enhanced engagement and commitment to community in various ways. It included volunteering activities for community members, organising women's groups, organising cultural events and participating in various committees. Parakram, especially, showed a great sense of solidarity with women who lack life opportunities in the region.

> "I became the president of that [women's] organisation…I was only [taking] care of one Ward, but now I oversee thirteen Wards. I learned how to organise a group from CLC. I know how to form and conduct meetings. I am trying to make groups in each [of the] thirteen village[s]. I luckily have a family who are supportive whereas not all the women could get the same level of support I receive…my goal is to make all women gather together to solidarity as one." *Parakram, Gyanbikash CLC*

Dhakal and Sheikh (1997) found that literate women can understand their legal rights and this enables women to initiate action for social change and protect themselves from abuse than those who are illiterate in Nepal. The women who learned how to organise a group and the value of collective action, are more likely to initiate action for social change. The enhanced visibility and confidence gained from learning enabled women to actively participate and lend their voices in various committees including libraries, road construction committees and tourist area committees. The librarian mentioned that women members in library committees are more active than men in the process of decision-making. Recognition from community members plays an important part in gaining the confidence that elicits further involvement. Jagan, the vice president of the library, explained how the recognition of community people became a motivator to become engaged in the community.

> [Before] it was not allowed [to participate in trainings in the village, but, now] all people said that you are educated women now and you can speak and understand the things…like others do. The kind of women who only was able to give fingerprint, now become a vice president and a member from the different kinds of committees. *Jagan, Fulbari CLC*

The women built collective agency through CLC activities in which the village women collaboratively worked in finding solutions to their family and social issues that transformed their lives effectively. Women expressed their sense of belonging by sharing their feelings and knowledge with other women by participating in regular cooperative meetings. They also did so through involvement in problem solving tasks in the community. The women's cooperatives, for example, are not only money lending organisations but also places where they provide solutions to problems.

"We do not only take micro credit loans [from the women's cooperative]. If someone's child is sick, the group can lend some money with low interest. Also, the group advises and communicates saying that you should take your children to hospital with the money from the group... if there is, for example, quarrels in some families, the women's group involves to minimize harm, counselling them." *Mahant, Gyanbikash CLC*

As many studies show, the role of small-group processes plays an important part in building agency (Moyle et al., 2006; Mannell & Jackson, 2014). Women showed their willingness to work with marginalised women. This can encourage women to reflect on the root causes of social inequities. It could open up new possibilities for people to define a sense of self and community. Fulbari CLC also brings women together to reserve and celebrate their cultural festival as kumara mentioned to "let the people know about the CLC and boost the use...in Tij programme we sing, dance and recite poet about library in front of the CLC to let the more people about the library." As Skinner and Holland (1998) point out, songs performed at the Nepali festival of Tij can be important ways whereby girls developed agency. Thus, the women's participation in festivals also promote women's agency in engaging and involving themselves more in their community.

8   DISCUSSION

Fifteen women expressed and shared their narratives about their experience with CLCs. The results illustrate how women gain the sense of agency through participating in CLC activities. The results show the perceived benefits of women participants in two CLCs in Nepal and it provides insights into the processes by which women negotiate social institutions and patriarchal norms in their learning experience, and the spaces of agency that emerge therein.

8.1   Gender-ascribed social constraints

This agency occurred within the contexts of multiple social constraints including unequal educational opportunities between boys and girls; stigma against widows; discouraging of marriage at a young age; social practices such as polygamy and Kamaya; expectations to fulfil multiple roles within the family; absence of family members due to international immigration; unsupportive community environments; and lack of income-generating opportunities. These social constraints were detrimental factors that constrain or hinder women's education and hamper their social participation, thus hindering women from realising their full potential.

Social and cultural structures based on patriarchy are often regarded as hindrances on women's empowerment in many parts of the world. Many of the constraints women mentioned were gender-ascribed ones that are deeply rooted in the customary norms, beliefs, and values that produce dominant models of masculinity and femininity (Kabeer, 2012). The women's narratives reveal that agency and the manner of its exercise deeply depend upon social norms and context, that is, "structures of constraint" that positioned women as subordinate to men (Kabeer 2001, p. 47). However, the structures of constraints appear to be the different among women (Madhok et al., 2013; Mohanty, 2013). When women participants in literacy class mentioned that being literate brought freedom of mobilisation – and, in turn, extended space for their agency -- women from the Gyanbikash CLC argued that they were confined to their home even though they

are educated women. Being literate is not sufficient to guarantee freedom of mobilisation for them. It was not only illiteracy, but also the patriarchal social norms imposed on women, that play a great part in constraining women's social as well as physical mobility.

This supports prior research in Nepal that highlights the associations between women with fewer opportunities, inequitable relationship power and patriarchal attitudes (ADB, 2010; UNDP, 2014).

Attitudinal and practical obstacles to learning (Stalker, 2001) were mentioned by many women. As illustrated by Harshil's narrative, in the negotiation process, their agency to choose to educate themselves while assuming a position opposed to that of an unsupportive partner was visible. For many women to participate in CLC activities, they had to negotiate with their family members in order to find time to participate while still fulfilling their roles within the family, their husbandry and domestic tasks; and this sometimes occurred in either a confrontational way or a one that is more persuasive (e.g. arguing with husband vs. waking up at three in the morning to do all the housework) (Kabeer, 2001). Pressing economic issues prevent women from doing what they value (Stromquist, 2015). Even Ishat was fully aware of the harmful effects of marrying early, which was a consequence of the fact that economic difficulty induced her to offer her daughter as a bride when the latter was only sixteen. Thus, the mere emphasis on individual and collective aspects of agency is insufficient and also demands understanding social structures if one aspires to make those structures more equitable, and thereby enable women to enhance their sense of agency (McNay, 2000; Madhok et al., 2013; Mohanty, 2013). Kabeer (2000, p. 27) stresses that for any change to translate into meaningful and sustainable processes of empowerment, it must ultimately encompass both individual and structural levels. Even though women find the space of agency through the participation of CLC activities within the unequal social conditions, making empowerment is a process that happens gradually. Accordingly, the centrality of social structure in rural women's experience of agency should be highlighted.

Thus more detailed studies are needed to investigate the relationships between women's agency and male migration as some women argued that it does not make them "left behind," and some studies show its positive effect on women's agency (Chapagain, 2015). For instance, Chanchal, who is involved in a polygamous marriage, mentioned that even though living as a female head is hard due to economic constraints, "if you are a strong woman", you can cope with the difficulties; and community members can be supporters in the process. Cultural and religious normative traditions may suggest that this is one of the most imposing curtailments of women's rights that serve as obstacles in the attainment of women's empowerment. However individual cases of women also suggest that it can be translated differently depending on context. Thus it is valuable to perform context specific examinations of women's agency through endeavours to understand various ways that women's agency and empowerment are assessed in a given context (Hoodfar, 1997; Kandiyoti, 1988).

8.2   Multiple forms of agency

CLCs open up various learning options for these women in rural areas where education opportunities for adult women are extremely lacking (Sharma, 2014). Even though there are some places such as other women's cooperatives and government offices where they provide social mobilising and agricultural training sessions irregularly, within each region only CLCs are open at all times with resourceful materials and safe spaces. CLCs may help catalyse the change necessary for women to resist and negotiate the social constraints that are disadvantageous to women. Discussions of women's CLC experience highlight experiences of multiple forms of benefits of CLC activities which can be categorised into four - socio-cultural, economic, familial and psychological benefits. The benefits women mentioned including effects on health and reproductive health, civic and community participation, children's education, income and improved self-concept greatly corroborate the previous studies on the benefits of literacy learning and ALE discussed in Chapter 3. Because it is not my intention to examine how

the benefits can actually be claimed to have empowered women, I focus more on how the benefits and learning in CLC make space for women's agency.

The memories of negative experiences in the past and the achievement and positive experience from the CLC within on-going social constraints concurrently stimulate and limit women's learning. Thus, the women have been able to exert some amount of control over their lives as well as express some agency in their relationships with others despite unfavourable conditions in societal structures. The space of agency investigated through their narratives has been distinguished according to processes of intrapersonal, relational and collective agency. Intrapersonal agency includes self-reliance, confidence, and awareness about the importance of education and self-motivation. The awareness of the importance of education for women includes the shift in patriarchal norms such as from preference for a male child (as opposed to a female child) towards attitudes reflecting increased gender equality. Women exercise their agency through expanded freedom of mobilisation, enhanced women's visibility in community and access to social spaces such as participation in social networks.

Relational agency fosters recognition, social support, enhanced visibility, unity and happiness. It highlights women's empowerment as the processes through which women acquire the capacity for exercising strategic forms of agency in relation to self as well as in relation to others, including families and community members. CLC provided the women with the space to learn and capacities they would not have acquired as individuals. In the case of women interviewed, a supportive husband apparently motivated them to engage in the learning process but also the struggle against the objections of their husband: they apparently developed their agency to cope with resistance and seek to transform it into support later on. As Chanchal's narrative reveals, women's participation in the CLCs helps women not only generate monetary benefits but also to increase sense of relational agency and community engagement through community relational support (Tesoriero, 2006). Jackson et al. (2011) demonstrate the importance of the promotion of informal networks among women encountering sexually abusive situations in facing difficulties; and they suggested that it leads

to women's mutual support and solidarity – and ultimately enables them to address unequal power relations. Women created informal networks through women's group formations in CLCs. Because structural inequalities cannot be addressed by individuals alone (Kabeer, 2001), the importance of CLCs is highlighted in providing opportunities to build relational agency which can build collective agency further.

Women express collective agency by illustrating the importance of social involvement through women's cooperatives, women's groups and a verity of village committees that provide space for acting together through regular meetings, volunteering, participating in social activities for others, and organising women's groups for solidarity. Collective agency makes women realise what they value to achieve with others what one cannot achieve alone otherwise (Zapata, 1999) through shared concerns and lived experiences. Through interviews it was not clear whether women were actually working in groups in "action" to achieve a common goal and to cope with external obstacles to pursue subversive changes. Rather narratives of the interviewed women reveal that they develop the ability to serve their community and work for women in marginalised positions through more amicable ways. The descriptions of agency as constituted by complex multiple forms that extend beyond a focus on action corroborates with previous studies (Zapata, 1999; Logie & Daniel, 2016; Mannell & Jackson, 2014). These multiple forms of agency have the potential to foster discussion on shared challenges and situate these challenges in larger social and structural contexts of power and inequity of women. In this light, women's relational and collective learning and activities possess potential to challenge gender-ascribed social constraints.

8.3 Post-colonial feminist analysis to women's experience and agency

Through investigating women's multiple forms of agency, this study tries to analyse women's experiences and agency from a post-colonial feminist perspective. First, this study conceptualises the category of women in a different way from how WID and GAD perceive women in the Third World as a homogeneous

group based on the underlying assumption of the West's superiority. The contribution of WID transforming women into a recognized constituency and an analytical category in development policy and of GAD to emphasise women's empowerment -- especially emphasising women as agents of change -- are fundamental in re-examining gender structures. However it only appeared to be a categorical and symbolic recognition of women (Okkolin, 2013) and the two approaches inherently make women in the Third World homogeneous. Paying due attention to the fact that often women from the same village do not share the same experiences, this study emphasises the differences and points to problematic representations of Third World women in relation to Western women. There is no reductionist "average Third World women" who is endlessly being victimized under patriarchal structures (Mohanty, 2003). However there are women who are active in their responses to unfavourable structures within which they are situated. All human beings struggle, thus the women in the Third World and their experiences of oppression vary. In coping with realities, women have different strategies and aspirations. A major aim in reporting women's stories was to illustrate both their struggles and their strength. Feminists posit that analysis begins in everyday experience and should be framed within a voice from their perspective. Employing a postcolonial feminist perspective, this study made a commitment to listening to women's voices about their learning experience in a community-based learning space. Even though the women who I met during the field visit are mainly from the same ethnicity group called *tharu*, they have different personalities and demands for their life and learning. On top of this, the women's learning experiences in CLCs resulted in developing a different space of agency.

Second, this study focuses on women as having agency. The women with strong motivation and learning expectations along with a sense of duty to contribute to community engagement was far from the image of Third World women as passive victims (Barker, 1998, p. 87). Many women had clear ideas about gender-ascribed social norms such as early marriage and the practice of preferring sons which limited their educational opportunities and argued that this should

not happen to their children in the future. The social changes in rural community were observable through the interviews and informal interaction. Thus the commitment of some women to changing the inequitable social norms for themselves and their children was obvious. They are the main actors who shaped the world they are situated in. Thus, any attempts to homogenise Nepali women should be corrected in any attempts to approach them. Dangerous assumptions about what Nepali women are like and "what they ought to want from life" have very little to do with these women's actual lives and of what they value (Leve, 2007). Any assumptions based on the concept of modernisation and utopian freedom of autonomous subjectivity should be avoided in any attempt to approach women's lives. In a similar vein, Robinson-Pant (2004), in asking provocative questions -- for instance whether Nepali women really want to read and write -- challenges the 'assumed link' between literacy and development. Robinson-Pant illustrates Nepali women residing in rural communities as confident figures possessing survival strategies even if many of them are illiterate.

This depiction clearly rejects the passive image of Nepali women and highlights them as agentic subjects. In addition to this, a concrete historical event, the Maoist insurgency, offers significant evidence of the important role Nepali women played in shaping the social, cultural, political and economic situation in Nepal (Leve, 2007). This shows that Nepali women are able to participate in organising national resistance movements -- and thus exercise their agency to determine their futures according to what they value. However it is not to dismiss Nepali women's ongoing subordinate situation in the guise of women's individual agency. Inclusion of women's issues into development agendas and practices is not only about giving women a voice to exercise their agency but also it is about creating an enabling environment of mutual respect in which people can be heard.

Thirdly, this study pays attention to gender-ascribed social constraints and collective aspects of women's learning and action that aid them in their efforts of overcoming difficulties. The concept of "double colonisation" reveals that women are colonised by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies. In the Nepali context, it suggests that women are significantly less likely to have important life

opportunities due to patriarchal ideologies which relegate women to a disadvantageous position. And the cultural ideals borrowed from Hindu-India which reinforce discriminatory attitudes and practices persist to the detriment of marginalised groups and women. It has long made Nepali women be excluded from adequate life opportunities. However, agency is at work in recognising the negative impact of traditional patriarchal norms (Butler, 1995) and efforts to change conditions through the learning together with other women and make their voices heard in the community based space. Emancipatory elements of CLC activities provide a space for conscientisation through which women can analyse their pending issues and social structural roots of discrimination and subordination, and ultimately suggest possible actions based on solutions (Kabeer, 1994). On the other hand, women are colonised by the North-South relations in the global capitalist world (Mohanty, 2003). As Kabeer (2001) argues while women may act to challenge the existing normative structures, their individual challenge often has a limited impact. Thus it is important to form collective endeavours. In this process, CLCs play important roles by providing space to get together, discuss, dispute opinions and help women to establish relational and collective agency.

To sum, the three points mentioned above challenge the moral and ethical imperatives of development (Harcourt, 2016) in general. This approach gives important insights for this study in order to realise the situatedness of my own knowledge and to think about its implication for women in different contexts (Spivak, 1988). In many cases, project sponsors have much influence over what constitutive ideas the programmes they are involved in should include. Just as many NGOs emphasise 'sustainability' and 'women's empowerment through income generating' initiatives, the NGO where I used to work in order to establish the Fulbari CLC focused on those two constitutive factors without due consideration of local conditions. Even though more NGOs are aware of the importance of local people's voice when they implement development programmes, in many

cases, their voices are 'inserted' into the report (Hertzog, 2011) without considering them as agents for social change. These voices are interpreted in ways that fit NGOs' or sponsors' focused agendas.

Moreover, the constitutive factors of READ Nepal's CLC model are much in line with today's popular mainstream focus of development practices and agendas. Economic empowerment and women's empowerment are two of the four main activities of READ Nepal. As discussed in Chapter 2, critiques argue that today development programmes become increasingly individualistic and based on market-oriented prescriptions. Even though the purpose of the CLC is not solely related to promoting women's economic status, the elements of income generating programmes are central to many activities provided by the CLC. In addition, in order to sustain the CLC itself, READ Nepal introduces money making mechanisms through establishing small shops in front of the Fulbari CLC to rent. The women's literacy courses in Fulbari CLC functioned as a 'lead-in' (Leve, 2007) to other sectoral activities, especially income generating activities. This might reflect neoliberal ideology underpinning development discourse in Nepal as discussed in the Section 4.2. The postcolonial feminist perspective has shed light on the market-centred approach in the development process and questions women's empowerment approach that focuses on facilitating women's participation in income generating forms of production which may reflect donor's demands.

However, on the other hand, READ Nepal's mobilising strategies for women's empowerment seem much in line with what the postcolonial feminist perspective insists are the ways in which they promote cultural distinctiveness and women's collectiveness. It also promotes their autonomy in managing the CLC by registering themselves as local NGOs rather than staying under READ Nepal's affiliation to be more responsible and sustainable in the long-term.

What we assume as a popular and mainstream approach to development appears to be mixed with the elements of postcolonial feminist approach. Thus, the total negation and rejection of mainstream women's empowerment model will be a waste. Instead, one should examine whether it is reducible merely to a

limited financial venture and it pays due consideration to the multiplicity of perspectives and socio-political contexts. When one claims socio political structural changes individually or collectively, the emphasis on women's empowerment and its value remain.

READ Nepal as a local NGO seems successful in mixing the demands from outside and voices from inside. However, even with their endeavours to sustain the Fulbari CLC, the financial constraints the CLCs face seem critical as the financial support from READ Nepal comes to end soon. Due to a lack of systematic interventions and provisions for providing different learning opportunities for those without access to formal education, the CLCs cannot expect much support from the national government, but rather must rely on external funds from NGOs or funds from community members. The women also frequently brought the financial issue during the interviews as one of the biggest hindrances to sustaining the CLC. It appears a daunting problem to face the inherent dependency problem in Nepal where financial resources for educational institute are lacking. Getting back to the research interest of this study, if the development is a 'civilizing' mission in the claims to solidarity, should NGOs and workers negate all the possibility of solidarity with the people in Third World? Development is a complex process with a series of failures, and there are no easy answers for this. Kapoor (2004)'s revisiting to Spivak's work for those who involved in the development field seems useful in giving an answer to this. Firstly, we should avoid positioning oneself as developed in contrast to the marginalised ones in the development field. Realising one's situatedness would reduce the risk of assuming a presumptive arrogance and this will enable a non-hierarchical encounter with Third World. Through 'unlearning one's privilege as loss', this strategy helps one to rethink the things taken for granted. In addition to this, the 'learning to learn from below' allows us to reverse the information and knowledge production so that they flow from South to North. This makes the voice of the South clear and allows those who inhabit the South to define themselves. 'Working without guarantees' is about becoming aware of the vulnerabilities and blind spots of one's power and representational systems. These suggestions help developmental

workers to involve themselves more cautiously but sincerely without projecting themselves as superior ones.

I found that READ Nepal has created innovative models to sustain and flourish the CLCs in Nepal. The community members and the staff members are deeply aware of the importance of being independent. The community is engaged in this process to promote greater independence. I hope this CLC continues to serve the community members for a long time. If I gain any further opportunities to go back to rural Nepal and study the women in the community where Fulbari CLC is located, I want to track the development of the CLC to see how it evolves with the community members.

8.4   Further studies needed

The women's narrative exposes different agency experiences than previous studies at the same time. As many (see Magno, 2008) assume, NGOs can function as stepping-stones into the formal political sphere. However, the CLCs exhibit little impact on women's political knowledge or interest in political participation thus promoting collective political engagement. (Burchfield et al., 2002; Enslin, 1992). Gandhi claimed that engaging in politics is a man's duty and she never participated in voting due to her writing skill. Except for Nalin who realised the importance of elections through her first-hand experience of the library committee election (she stated that she will make an identification card for the national election for the first time), others stated that CLC participation did not motivate political engagement. All women in the piloting study stated that they never raised political issues nor participated in any political activities in the CLC. Moreover, they all agreed that the library should be a politically neutral place. It appeared to be similar in the interviews in the Fulbari CLC. Given that Nepal has been suffering from long standing political upheavals, this silence or indifference on politics cannot simply be understood as a state of being devoid of agency (Enslin, 1992). However, the role of CLCs in promoting political collectivity of women in rural communities should be examined, paying attention to the power relations between women and men. Even though participation in formal politics can be

considered "at best inefficient, and at worst corrupt and illegitimate" (Enslin, 1992), the participation of women in the decision-making process at the CLC level can extend to the community policy level, thereby challenging the existing status quo in society.

These power relations are deeply linked to the fact that even if some women exercise agency in giving an opinion in the meetings of family and community, socio-cultural constraints still restrict the space in which women act and speak out. Women perform at varying degrees of potential that offer passive or active resistance. Many scholars challenge us to question whether we hold action bias and speaking-out bias in our attempts to analyse women's agency (Mahmood, 2012; Parpart, 2010; Madhok et al., 2013). I agree with those who advise us to be more attentive to contextualised women's lives. However, at the same time, it is important to have an anticipatory vision to bring about changes in women's lives without laying a power-free utopian vision (Allen, 2015). Thereby this study which analyses women's agency from individual interviews can further be developed in order to interrogate how the expanded agency actually brings empowerment in different spheres, domains and levels of women's lives (Samman & Santos, 2009).

The success of income generating programme appears to vary among women. While some women's success illustrates the impact of income generating programmes, many argue that the income generating programme has not been successful or inappropriate for them due to lack of market, lack of opportunity for participation due to limited seats, health condition, and short-sighted programmes. The concern about different demands and different level of success of income generating programme may suggest that homogeneity in group formation could be a crucial factor in the success of matching women's needs to the CLC initiated programmes since women's needs appeared to vary per their health condition, age and desires.

In addition to this concern of matching women's needs to income generating programme, given that there has been much debate around income generating opportunities and their empowerment potential for women (Kabeer, 1999,

2000; Kantor, 2003), participation in women's cooperative can merely become additional workload by engaging in small business and debt but does not resulted in widespread poverty reduction (Phillips, 2015). Wilson (2008) points that the idea of income generating suggested by many development institutions inherently includes the structures and practices of patriarchy. Wilson's argument is parallel with what I discussed in Chapter 3.3. Even though there are emancipatory elements in the learning process in the CLCs, women empowerment programme and the women's cooperative of CLCs tend to posit women as a mother and mere contributor to their household economics based on the patriarchal assumptions at the level of both economic relations and ideology. Thereby the programmes intended for women might not challenge "the marginal place assigned to women within development" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 34). If the norms, practices, and procedures embedded in the development programmes remain unchanged, the results of women empowerment will remain the same.

All these arguments suggest the need of further study focusing on the importance of analysing power relations in all its depth and complexity, without losing feminist emancipatory hopes.

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APPENDIX 1. PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT A RE-SEARCH

Permission to Conduct a Research

Date 03/08/2016
Mrs. Sanjana Shrestha
Executive Director of READ Nepal
Bishal Nagar, Kathmandu 44600, Nepal

RE: Permission to Conduct a Research
cc: Elina Lehtomäki, Research Advisor, University of Jyväskylä

Dear. Mrs. Sanjana Shrestha

I am writing to request a permission to conduct a research study which is entitled "How does the literacy programme extend agency and freedom of women in Nepal?"

I am currently enrolled in the Development and International Cooperation programme at Jyvaskyla University in Finland, and am in the process of writing the Master's Thesis.

Due to the nature of the study, I hope to interview women participants and users of the READ community centres and literacy classes. If approval is granted, the interviews and observations will be conducted voluntarily with the women and users mostly in a classroom or other quiet setting in the village.

The research process should take no longer than two months (See Appendix1). The interview and observation results will be pooled for the research and individual results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your organisation or the individual participants.

Please sign the document and return it via e-mail (boram.kim.ngo@gmail.com).
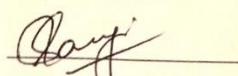If you have any concerns regarding the study, do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Boram Kim, University of Jyväskylä

Approved by:
SANJANA SHRESTHA

Aug 8, 2016

Name and Signature   **Date**

APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEWEE PROFILE

	Coded Name (Age), Ethnicity	Familiar background	Educational background	Means of living	Migration in direct family	Programme Participated
1	Regmi (23) Janajati (Tharu)	Husband, 3 children (+parents-in-laws)	12 years	Remittance/ Librarian of the CLC	O	Agricultural and fishing training Management training Librarian training
2	Kumari (53) (Bramin)	Husband, 2 children	8 years	Pension/ (Volunteer as health mobiliser)	O	Agricultural trainings. Awareness programme. Women's cooperative
3	Aadarsh (32) Janajati (Tharu)	Husband and 3 children	No formal education	Husband/ Farming	X	Literacy Mushroom farming training and other agricultural farming training. Women's cooperative
4	Baikuntha (43) Janajati (Tharu)	Husband and 3 children	5 years	Remittance/Animal rearing and poultry farming	O	Income generating programme Fish farming and agricultural trainings. Girls trafficking, gender equality and empowerment organised by library Women's cooperative
5	Chanchal (40) Janajati (Tharu)	2 children	6 years	Tailoring/Subsistence farming	X	Social mobiliser-Management training Agricultural training Women's cooperative
6	Dipak(32) Janajati (Tharu)	Husband, parents in laws, 2 children	10 years	Bag making and training	O	Agricultural training Bag making training Women's cooperative
7	Gandhi(39) Janajati (Magal)	Husband, 3 children	No formal education	Farming	O	Agricultural training Women's cooperative Literacy class
8	Harshil (45) Janajati (Tharu)	Husband, 3 children, (+3 daughters -in-laws and 5 grand-children)	No formal education	Remittance/ Farming	O	Agricultural training Literacy class Women's cooperative

9	Ishat(38) Janajati (Tharu)	5 children	No formal education	Farming	X	Agricultural training Literacy class Women's cooperative
10	Jagan(50) Janajati (Tharu)	Husband and 4 children	No formal education	Pension/Subsistence farming	X	Income generating Literacy class Women's cooperative Agricultural training Health
11	Kanak(45) Janajati (Tharu)	Husband, 4 children	No formal education	Farming	O	Income generating Agricultural training Literacy class Women's cooperative Health camp Health related training
12	Loken (45) Janajati (Tharu)	Husband, 3 children	No formal education	Remittance/Tailoring and training	O	Income generating Agricultural training Literacy class Women's cooperative Health camp Health related training
13	Nalin Newari (26)	Husband and one children	11 years	Husband/Part-time government coordinator	X	Agricultural training women related-Income generating programmes Basic English class Women cooperative Library user
14	Parakram Newari (43)	Husband and 2 children	10 years	Husband/Subsistence farming	X	Agricultural training Women related-and income generating programmes Basic English class Women cooperative
15	Mahant Newari (35)	Husband and 2 children	8 years	Husband/Farming	X	Agricultural training Women related-Programmes(health) Basic English class Women cooperative

APPENDIX 3. INTERVIEW THEMES

Background Information
- Name and surname, age, ethnicity, and marital status
- Education level
- Occupation and roles in the family and society (e.g. member of other women's group and committees outside CLC)
- The status of other household members (e.g. the status of international migration, jobs of husband, the education and marital status of the children & etc.)
- Typical day

CLC participation
- Kinds of activities participated and participating in the CLCs
- The use of CLC (e.g. what type of sections used the most and why)
- The frequency of CLC use
- The most beneficial activity

Personal changes and benefits
- Individuals' self-concept and identity change
- Educational opportunities and choices (in the past and present)
- The value and meaning of education
- Challenges for learning and participation
- Expectations/motivation/future plan

Familiar changes and benefits
- Changes in family relationship
  (e.g. perception changes, the level of support of family, negotiation & etc.)
- Benefits related to family (e.g. health, child brining up & etc.)
- Benefits related to the economic status of women
- Challenges at the level of family

Socio-community changes and benefit

- Community involvement and the level of influence in the community (e.g. women related education and advocacy, committee, volunteering, cooperatives, women's group & etc.)
- Changes in community (e.g. people's behaviour, perception and relationship)
- Collective actions and changes it brought
- Challenges at the level of community

Political changes and benefits

- The need of political elements of CLC
- Changes in political perceptions through CLC participation

APPENDIX 4. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Bene-fits	Themes	Household level	Community level
1. Familiar /interpersonal benefits	Support	Behaviour and perception changes supportively of family member toward women's education and their social participation Sustained and increased family support (e.g. speaking English for fun in the house, cycling wife to the CLC, allowing wife to go to earthquake affected area for volunteering, taking wife's husbandry duty, suggesting more education and mother-in-law's participation in literacy class together with daughter-in-law.)	Community members' emotional support to open a shop Community members' behaviour change to educated women
	Children	More attention to children's education Acquiring child-rearing skills Knowing about what nutritious food is	Safer place for the children in community Women can leave the children while they have meeting
	Health	Understanding women-related health issues Enhanced chance to get treated Grow nutritious food for own consumption learned from trainings	Community centre transformed as health post available for regular check-ups and children vaccination Assess to doctor
2. Social-cultural benefits	Visibility	Enhanced freedom of mobility (due to literacy class or the establishment of CLCs)	Becoming members of different committees Making speech in front of people confidently Smooth communication with people

Bene-fits	Themes	Household level	Community level
			Assess to city centre with bus Engaging in volunteer activities
	Community space	Resource for agricultural activities Resource for women's health	CLC opens to everyone CLC for organising cultural and regional festivals
	Recognition	Be respectful from their children Be recognised by their partner	Enhanced recognition from community members
	literate	Doing things without other's help (using mobile, calculating, visiting hospital, finding direction and reading letter) Reading religious book	Invited to committees, meetings and trainings
3.Psychological benefits	Self-esteem	Knowing about the importance of education	Making women's group in the villages Community awareness programme
4. Economic Benefits	Economic benefits	Various opportunity to make income Contribution to household economy New habit of saving for them and their children Easy access to capital Financially independent due to income generating programmes and loan from women's cooperative	Suggesting different women's role in community such as business women