

**RELIGION, MADARSHA AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION AMONG MUSLIM GIRLS:**

**A STUDY FROM KAPILVASTU MUNICIPALITY**



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**RECOMMENDATION**

Ms. Najia Khan, the researcher of M.A. Fourth Semester at Central Department of Sociology, Tribhuvan University, has accomplished the study on **Religion, Madarsha and Access to Education among Muslim Girls: A Study from Kapilvastu Municipality** under my supervision. I take this dissertation as in the requirement of partial fulfillment of Degree of Masters in MA Sociology. Therefore, I recommend this study for the final evaluation.



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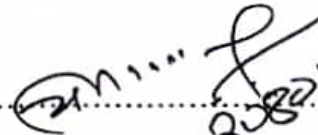
21 August 2023

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**APPROVAL LETTER**


This is to certify that the thesis work entitled "**Religion, Madarsha and Access to Education among Muslim Girls: A Study from Kapilvastu Municipality**" prepared by Mrs. Najia Khan has been accepted for partial fulfillment of the requirements of Masters Degree of M.A. in Sociology by the evaluation committee.

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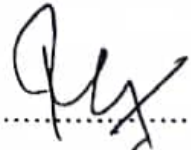
  
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Najia Khan

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the present thesis entitled, “**Religion, Madarsha and Access to Education among Muslim Girls: A Study from Kapilvastu Municipality**” is my original work done in the partial fulfillment for the requirement of the degree of Masters of Arts in Central Department of Sociology, Tribhuvan University under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tika Ram Gautam. All the ideas borrowed from the different authors are well acknowledged. The result of this thesis has not been resulted or submitted anywhere else for the award of any degree for any other purposes. I assure that no part of the content of this thesis has been published in any forms before.



Najia Khan

### **List of Acronyms/Abbreviations**

APA	American Psychology Association
B.S.	Bikram Sambat
C.B.S.	Central Bureau of Statistics
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women
DDC	District Development Committee
Et al	And Others
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HMG	His Majesty of Government
KII	Key Informant Interview
NESAC	North Eastern Space Applications Center
NPC	Non-Player Character
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
P.	Page
PP.	Pages
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WSSC	Women's Social Coordination Committee



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
Letter of Declaration	ii
Letter of Recommendation	iii
Letter of Approval	iv
Acknowledgements	v
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations	vi
Table of Contents	vii-viii
Chapter One	1
Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	7
1.3 Research Questions	8
1.4 Objectives of the Study	8
1.5 Significance of the Study	9
1.6 Organization of the Study	9
Chapter Two	10
Review of Literature	10
2.1 Madrasa Education	10
2.2 Educational Status of Muslims	14
2.3 Educational Status of Muslim Girls	15
2.4 Conceptual Framework	21
Chapter Three	22
Research Methodology	22
3.1 Research Design	22
3.2 The Research Site	23
3.3 Nature & Sources of Data	24
3.3.1 Primary Source	24
3.3.2 Secondary Source	24
3.4 Selection of the Respondents	25
3.4.1 Sampling	25
3.5 Data Collection Tools and Techniques	26
3.5.1 Key Informant Interview (KII)	26
3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	26
3.5.3 Activities	26
3.6 Data Analysis & Interpretation	27
3.7 Limitation of the Study	27
Chapter Four	28
Access to Public Education among Muslim Girls and Educational Practices in Madrasa	28

4.1 Access of Muslim Girls to Education	28
4.1.1 Enrolment	28
4.1.2 Dropouts	29
4.1.3 Higher Education	31
4.1.4 Opportunity	33
4.2 Barriers to Muslim Girls' Education	36
4.2.1 Economy	36
4.2.2 Religion and Culture	39
4.2.3 Gender Discrimination	50
4.3 Educational Practices in Madrasas	53
4.3.1 Evaluation Methods in Madrasas	54
4.3.2 Perceptions towards Madrasa Education	59
Chapter Five	66
Summary & Conclusion	66
5.1 Summary	66
5.2 Conclusion	69
References	
Annex	

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The study explored the access to education among Muslim girls to public education in Kapilvastu Municipality in Kapilvastu of Kapilvastu district. The ratio of girls going to public schools in Muslim community of the study area has been less than those of other ethnic groups. The gap prevalent in the municipality has motivated me to undertake the issue as my research topic. To discover the causes for filling up the research gap the research task has been undertaken. The presence of Muslim girls in Madrasa that implements the religion-based curriculum oriented to scriptures and Urdu and Arabic language teaching is higher than in public schools in the selected wards of the municipality. To study the variables that affect their inclination toward Madrasa education is the objective of the research.

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The study area covers one and two wards of Kapilvastu Municipality. The municipality lies in Kapilvastu district of Lumbini Province. According to the decision of the cabinet of Federal and Local Ministry Affairs on 21 Kartik 2073 BS, Kapilvastu Municipality was constituted of 12 wards. The administrative body of the municipality has been in existence as per the decision of the cabinet. The climate of the municipality is tropical. The Municipality is located at an altitude of 107 meters above sea level on Nepal's southern border across from Khunwa, Uttar Pradesh State, India. According to the National Census Report 2021, the population of the municipality is 87,281 including 45,318 (51.92%) men, 41,958 (48.07%) women and 5 (0.005%) third genders. The population of the study area including both ward 1, and 2 of the municipality is 15076 in which 7751 are men, 7323 are women and 1 is third gender. The number of households in ward 1 is 1378 and in ward 2 is 1159. The total households

in the study are 2537. The major ethnic groups in the study area as per the record of the household survey are Madhesi, Muslims, Brahmin/Chhetri, Dalits, Backward Caste, and Janjati. The number of Madhesi is 997, Muslims 508, Brahmin/Chhetris 342, Dalits 374, Backward Castes 271, and Janjati 45 (*Household Survey, 2021*). The data show that Muslims is the second largest population in the study area. The primary source of income for the population of the study area is agriculture, trade, and foreign employment.

The literacy rate in the Kapilvastu district can be seen in the number. The total population of the district is 614,334 including 299,627 men and 314,707 women out of which 238,606 men and 202,585 women are literate (CBS, 2021). It demonstrates that the number of educated women in the district is less than that of men. The municipality is diverse in terms of cultures, castes and religions. As patriarchy has prevailed over time, gender egalitarian communities have become co-opted to patriarchal values and norms through educational and legal systems.

Aslanbek Naziev defines education as “the socially organized and regulated process of continuous transference of socially significant experience from previous to following generations. The main way to receive an education is to take a course of training in the system of educational institutions” (2017, p. 1). The systematic and continuous process of imparting knowledge to the learners at a particular place is education. It is a kind of handing over information to the young generation for their future. Naziev further states:

Education was the process of transmitting and receiving. And what we were seeing in the most of our classrooms were in excellent accordance with this formulation. Who is not ready to the lesson? Who did not prepare their homework?—asked a teacher. Visible on the faces of the students is a mixture of astonishment and sympathy to the stupid teacher.

What is he saying? What homework? We came here to receive a transfer. Have you a transfer. Have you a transfer? If yes—give it to use! If No—leave us alone! (2017, p.2)

Hence, Naziev relates education with the transfer of both knowledge and methods used in the teaching and learning process. He recalls the methods used in teaching during his childhood. He highlights the conventional methods of education transfer. My study focuses on education that is catered in both ways traditional and modern. The data show that madrasas usually transfer information to students in traditional ways, whereas new trends of teaching and learning have been seen in the public schools.

There are three types of education: formal, informal and non-formal educations. Formal education takes places in schools wherein learners study elementary and academic courses. Formal education starts from the basic level and continues up to Doctor of Philosophy. There are certain rules and regulations that both students and teachers follow and conduct their teaching and learning activities in the classroom setting. Some of the specific features of formal education are: structured, planned, regular, graded, subject-based, and result-driven Informal education starts from childhood. Parents are the first teachers who impart information to their children about different aspects of life ranging from social to psychological. They learn something from their friends and relatives. Informal education is not planned and systematic. It does not have any curriculum to be taught to the children. Some characteristics of informal education are: independent, not-planned, random, natural, not-certified and ungraded. Non-formal education is the third type of education which is meant to educating adults from the elementary level for making them literate (<https://examplanning.com>). People can learn skills and behaviors for their career and personal growth. It is the conscious and planned training given to the people of

different ages. Swimming, cricket, football, and even computer training imparted to people in a flexible time and setting come under non-formal education.

Public education provided to children at schools is formal education. Madrasa education is also formal. The data collected in this study demonstrate that some of madrasas semi-formal and semi-informal as all madrasas do not implement curriculums and they do not have grading systems. Rather they keep all students in the same classroom and teach them certain books which are not interlinked to a large extent. Muslim girls who go to madras are bound to have such education does not meet all the standards of formal education as my study shows.

Since the study has been on access of Muslim girls to education, both madrasas and public schools have been taken into account. Madrasa refers to any type of school, the term *madrasah* was originally used to refer more specifically to a medieval Islamic centre of learning, mainly teaching Islamic law and theology, usually affiliated with a mosque, and funded by an early charitable trust known as *waqf*. Madarasa education comes under Islamic education system that focuses on teaching Islamic religious texts and the Arabic language. It is typically offered in specialized schools, and is often the only form of education available to children in some families of the study area. Madrasa education is based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and is typically seen as a way to preserve Islamic culture (Sharma, 2006).

Madrasas are religious schools that provide instruction in Islamic studies, including the Quran and Hadith. Madrasa education is offered mostly to girls and even boys have this education. Madrasa education in the study area is often provided by local mosques. Madrasa education is typically free of charge, and is open to students of all ages. The curriculum of a Madrasa is based on Islamic studies, and includes courses in Arabic language, Islamic history, and Islamic law. Madrasa education is not widely available in Nepal. However, the Muslim

families in the study area have managed to build madrasas and run privately by collecting funds from the Muslim families of the area. They do not have other sources except the donations from the believers (Siddiqui & Zuberi, 1993).

Education is one of the basics to empower women in general and Muslim women in particular. The status of women in the Muslim society is a much-debated subject. There are points of view put forth defending or condemning the position occupied by or imposed upon women in the Muslim countries. The position of women under Islam has been the subject of repeated controversies among educated Muslims ever since they came under the impact of Western liberalization (Siddiqui & Zuberi, 1993).

Equality of men and women and non-discrimination based on gender constitutes one of the vital human rights concerns, finding expression in all international instruments as well as in the Muslim communities. However, Muslim women in Kapilvastu Municipality constitute one of the most deprived groups of equal rights. Their deprivation and vulnerability derives from the sources: a) General Education and b) Vocational Education. The problems of Muslim women are closely related to the problems of the Muslim society as a whole. The 2021 census report reveals women to be far behind males in terms of education (CBS, 2021).

Madarsa is a religion-based educational institution that caters knowledge of idealistic world rather than practical life. There are uncountable numbers of Madarsas in Kapilvastu district. Since there are limited resources in terms of teachers, classrooms, toilets, books, and extracurricular activities, students at Madarsha do not perform as properly as students in public and private schools that are much better in terms of all the educational standards and facilities. The area chosen for the study has numerous Madarshas, where Muslim girls study. Muslim parents choose Madarsas rather than schools and colleges for their girls. Even girls who want to

study at schools are deprived of that opportunity. As a result, their access to public education has been lower. It is necessary for the Muslim girls in particular and women in general to realize and enjoy their full human rights and start a process of reform within the community and empowerment through affirmative action programs for their greater access to educational institutions and opportunities (Sharma, 2006).

Most of the ethnic groups are on the level of illiteracy. The study has focused on educational status of Muslim girls and the impact of religion on their choice to education type. “Muslim is not only separated from high caste but also from other groups including the ethnic groups. They are an exception and cannot be fitted into the linear hierarchy. They are "Water–Unacceptable" to all "Water-Unacceptable" castes. Even the untouchables refuse to accept water from them. Muslims are mostly classified as an impure caste and equated to the Mleccha, the main reason for this being their religion which is Vidharma from the Hindu point of view” (Hofer, 1979. p 162). The Muslims in Nepal possess a rich cultural heritage. However, they are lagging far behind in educational development compared to the women of many other communities in the study area. There is the wide disparity between male and female within the Muslim population in terms of education (ibid).

In Nepal, 5.09 percent of total population has been covered by Muslim population. The 2021 Census data shows that the literacy percentage of Muslim is below 30 percent and the Muslim women's literacy percentage is below 20%. The enrolment of Muslim children in government school is negligible. The numbers of Muslims attending the school steadily increased. Nowadays, most of the villages in Tarai have got Madrasas (Muslim School), where young children are only taught a basic knowledge of Urdu and other religious books. However, these Madrasas run poorly and they are unable to supply books and other materials to the

students. Besides, teachers are adequate in such educational institutions as they are under paid. The work burdens for these teachers are so high that most of them fly away for hunting other attractive jobs (Ansari, 1981). In the study area, educated Muslims can be counted on the fingers. The drop-out rate among the girls is high due to their forced engagement in household activities.

According to Samira Luintel, the situation for women of all groups has not changed because of superstitions and orthodox mindsets in patriarchy. The Dalit women hold the lowest status in education being doubly exploited as Dalit and women. The condition of Muslim women is not far from that of Dalit women as well (Luintel, 2003 pp 82-83). Literacy and education qualification are the vital indicators of women's social status. These are not only crucial factors for availing of employment opportunities created in modernization but also for communication with the outside world as with gradually more educated males within the household (Acharya, 1995). Due to low economic condition of Muslims, they are unable to afford education whether it is madrasa education or public education. Because of male dominance in the study area, Muslim girls suffer double exploitation and oppression. Their deprivation of education due to early marriage, gender discrimination, and poor economic situation has been the core aspect of the study.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The universal declaration of human rights by the United Nations (1948) has been to overcome the gender differentiation in various aspects of life. Women of developing countries including Nepal are still unprivileged in terms of human right. To improve their condition, the Declaration of the United Nations 1975 was the women's year. The United Nations, in its declaration for plan of action states that women are not minority group numerically as they constitute half of the total population of the world. By limiting women's participation in public

spheres, developing societies discourage them from full talents of half their number (UN 1997, VOL-III). In Nepal more than half (CBS 2021) of the population are female. The literacy rate of female is 69.4 percent, which is very low in comparisons with 83.6 percent of male. Literacy is a skill developing and accelerating factors, it is a potential added to existing human population (Shrestha, 1985). Women's contribution to economic and social progress is still constrained by their limited access to education that blocks the full development and utilization of their intellectual and productive capacities. Numerous studies have shown that the problems like infant mortality, maternal mortality and high growth of population, unhygienic practices and environmental degradation can be tackled by education. To educate a man is to educate an individual but to educate women is to educate whole family and then society. The main reason for Muslim women not accessing education is that the concept of women work should be limited only in household chores and the earnings of girl child (daughter) is not mostly acceptable by Muslim parents. They consider girls to be insiders and therefore they do not need education.

Kapilvastu is the multi-ethnic and multi-religious district comprised of social, cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity. Along with the diversity, the district is characterized by widespread inequalities and discrimination in terms of ethnicity, religion, caste, and gender. Gender inequality to empower women in general and Muslim women in particular can be justified in terms of the social and cultural context of the society. Excessive impact of religion in lives of Muslims has caused their backwardness in education. Due to the trend of sending girls to Madrasas rather than public schools has decreased the access of Muslim women to modern education. The strict observation of religious norms and values in Muslim community has put women on the margin in terms almost all dimensions of life.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The proposed study answered the following questions:

1. Why do parents send female children to Madrasas rather than to public schools in the municipality?
2. How do religion values affect the educational dimension of female children?
3. How does Madarsha education differ from public education?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the research was to study the access of Muslim women to public schools in ward one and two of Kapilvastu Municipality.

The specific objectives of this study were as follow:

1. To examine the access to education among Muslim girls to public schools in the study area
2. To analyze the educational practices in Madarsha
3. To study the role of religion in shaping access to education

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

As in the world, women constitute more than half of the total population in Nepal. They are the pillars of the nation in terms of caring, rearing, developing and cultivating. They play a vital role in the societies different dimensions of social developmental spectrum; they should, therefore be seen as integral partners in all developmental acts and efforts. Usually in the patriarchal society, women are deprived of participating in social, political and economic areas. The state must include gender prospective in their national development policies and should implement various programs to improve women's self-confidence and decision-making power. The significance of this study has been as follows:

- This study has explained education status of Muslim women in Kapilvastu Municipality.
- It has described the access of Muslim girls to public education.
- It has been useful to develop awareness in Muslim community for sending their children to public schools instead of Madrasas
- It is helpful to the organizations working to increase the literacy rate of Muslim girls.

### **1.6 Organization of the Study**

The study has been organized in five chapters. The first chapter deals with the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, limitation of the study and organization of the study. The second chapter covers the literature review collected from various books, journals, publications etc. Similarly, this chapter consists of conceptual framework as well. The third chapter embodies the description of the study area and it explains the research design and procedure the data. The fourth chapter deals with data presentation and analysis, participatory characteristics of the sample population and respondents. The fifth chapter presents summary, conclusion and recommendation of the study.

## Chapter Two

### Review of Literature

This chapter discusses the existing literature on the topic of the study. The source of literature has been books, journals, publications etc. Similarly, this chapter consists of conceptual framework as well. By reviewing the information on the topic, the study shows the research gap that is fulfilled by the research. Socio-cultural inequality has been a main problem in anthropological theorizing. There is have been numerous studies and writing on the topic of socio-cultural inequalities in access of education. Nevertheless, the operational definition of Madrasa education and status of Muslim girls in education in Kapilvastu Municipality refers to the comparative status of girls with the boys in Muslim community. Caste like gender is also one of the causes of socio/cultural inequality.

Anthropological research on schooling that relates to inequality dates back to the early 1900s. Ogbu (1994) over viewing of schooling research states that some anthropologist such as Hewett (1976 originally 1905), Boas (1928), and Malinowski (1976 originally 1936) all conducted research on schooling. Hewett has highlighted the educational problems of immigrants, American Indians and native of the Philippines, and has concluded that schooling forces them to learn the higher Anglo-American culture. Boas fore-shadowing Bourdieu's work of the 1970s have conceptualized a theoretical perspective that underscores cultural relativism and has argued that differences in culture brings differences in school performance while Malinowski rejects such a claim competing performance differences as a result of in his example Africans receive intellectually inferior schooling compared to Europeans (Koirala, 1996). His study demonstrates a comparative picture of girls' education with that of boys in Muslim

community. It shows relevance on making a rigorous study of Madrasa education and its impact on Muslim girls in the study area.

## **2.1 Madrasa Education**

Madrasas prepare students for spiritual journey rather than the practical life in rapidly modernizing societies. The complexity of the role and tasks of madrasas lies in its syllabi and strategies in educating children of Muslim community. Madrasa education and modern education stand opposite each other in terms of contents they impart through syllabi to the students. The literature has contributed more to confusion than clarity about the number of madrasas, their rationale, purpose, pedagogy, curricula, funding, administration, relations with the state, and global violence. The study presents an account of current debates of madrasa education and reform focusing on madrasas within the diverse Sunni schools of thought and denominations located across South Asia and Southeast Asia. Islamic schools struggle to uphold tradition and those that have begun to embrace modernization and integration in the global process of change is given. The extent that some Islamic education systems are endeavoring to collaborate with non-Muslims and in the process potentially enrich their circle of interest while engaging with the rest of the world in dialogue offers hopeful glimpses and a sense of hope for religious-based education in Muslim communities in the 21st century.

The relevant literature that the study has collected can be helpful to show the gap existing in the target area. The Muslim community forms 5.09% of the total population and it is the third religious minority of Nepal. The 2021 census report does not explain the general ethnic educational status in the country. According to the 1991 census the literacy percentage was 22.41% Muslim community exist in every district of the country and the Muslim literacy percentage is appallingly low compared to the national average (Tribhuvan University, 2003).

The research team of Tribhuvan University has studied the educational status of Muslim children particularly in Rupandehi district of Nepal and has explored that Muslim children prefer to go to Madrasa rather than to public schools available in the district.

Education is the pillar of overall development of a country. Therefore, education is indispensable for every human being or a nation. In ancient period, the concept of schooling originates among high caste Hindu people, the Brahmins. Besides, there are not any such records on educational development on that period. Middle of the fifth century under the rule of Lichhavi dynasty paid little attention to people's education and education of common people was seen as an extra burden for them (Sharma, 1986) though they were popular for their cultural and architectural development. The following regime the Malla dynasty (879-1768) demonstrated an interest in educating people but through their education system they were able to reach only high class people who were the ruling class family and families of traditional priests or pundits (Joshi, 1982). The development of education in Nepal also could not progress before Rana Period because the rulers were busy at war for expanding their states. During the Rana Regime (1846-1950), they paid attention to the development of education in the country in order to run the administration of the country and to train the Brahmin boys for performing religious rites.

Similarly, Bir Shamsheer opened the first "western type" of school which was named Durbar School (government school). Tri-Chandra College which is the first college of Nepal was established in 1918. It was administered first by Calcutta University and later by Patna University. In 1934, the first School Leaving Certificate (S.L.C) board was established in Nepal. Only one female named Sabina Kumari applied for school leaving certificate and not a single woman applied for college education before 1947 (Sharma, 1986). The state's first national education act, the Education Code of 1940, authorized the opening of community-managed

schools throughout the country and was therefore an important step in the development of formalized education policy in Nepal (Parajuli, 2002, p. 82). The consecutive Rana Prime Minister after Chandra Shamsheer started opening schools in the Katmandu Valley and other parts of the country. However, the participation of the students was only higher class or caste people. It is not surprising then that Daniel Wright, writing about the number of school in Nepal before 1951 would state, “The subjects of school and colleges in Nepal may be treated as snakes in Ireland, there are none” (Wright, 1879).

Nevertheless, the record shows that there were in fact a handful of schools and students. Although about 98 percent of the 8.2 million people of Nepal were illiterate in 1951 (Nepal Ministry of Education, 1970) and Muslim were then excluded from the formal schooling for centuries and not given an opportunity to make education their cultural capital or use education to transform their knowledge into cultural capital. Before 1940 Muslims were not allowed to attend any schools. After 1940s, Muslims were allowed to attend secondary schools and colleges and the Rana government eventually opened a Muslim primary school. With the declaration of free primary education up to class 5 for all Nepali citizens the number of Muslim attending the school has progressively increased (Ansari, 1981).

Hence, real progress of education development in Nepal began only after the dawn of democracy in 1951. The gradual development of education in Nepal appeared after establishment of democracy in 1951. People got chance to interact with the world only after democracy, people got right for their own interest. Therefore, democracy played the vital role for development of education. The government of Nepal also emphasized on education giving priority to educational institutions. Five decades have gone since the installation of democracy. However, Nepal is still far behind in the educational development.

According to Population Census 2021 out of total population of Nepal, only 83.6 percent people were literate. The literacy rate is concentrated in the urban areas. Similarly, in the case of female education out of total 69.4 percent of female population is literate.

## **2.2 Educational Status of Muslims**

Nepal has multi-ethnic caste society that represents mountain, hill and Tarai. The biggest block of Muslim population is found in the plain of the country. Muslim covers 5.09 Percent of the total population of Nepal. This rank is as third position among religious group in Nepal (CBS, 2021). Kapilvastu is the third largest district where Muslim population is highly dominated. However, in the field of education, the majority of Muslim attends only in-formal (religious/Madrasa) education. Out of the total literate population male literate population is 83.6 percent and female literate population is 69.4 percent. However, the literate condition of third largest group is very low, only 40 percent are literate and within them female literacy rate is only 15 percent. In Kapilvastu district total 41.5 percent population is literate out of them male literacy rate is 52.9 percent and female literacy rate is 29.3 percent. In the selected wards of Kapilvastu Municipality, more than 70 percent population is literate. There is also a great difference in educational status between male and female (DDC report, 2007).

According to the Qur'an, "Every Muslim boy or girl should pursue his or her education as far as possible." But in Muslim society it is only saying and doesn't exist in practice (Abdulaa, 1999). Before 1940s Muslim people were not allowed to attend any Nepali schools and after that they were allowed but conservative Muslim did not allow their children especially girls to have education. Only a few were given chance to continue their education. At present, the condition of education is not much more satisfactory. At first Muslims emphasize reading religious books like the Qur'an. Most of the females are limited with this type of knowledge and some receive

primary and secondary education in Madrasa. During Rana Regime, Muslim primary school was opened and it still runs as “Madrasa Islamic”. Nowadays large number of Madrasas is located in Tarai belt. Some Muslims continue to study Urdu and Persian in India and Gulf countries (Salam, 2005). A large number of the Muslims of Nepal live in the Tarai belt. Almost every Muslim child starts their reading and writing process in Madrasa. Hence, most of the girls are only limited to Madrasa education. Madrasas are established in 28 districts in Nepal. Out of the 28 districts 18 are in Tarai and 10 are in the hills. There are nearly about 3000 small and big Madrasas and Islamic schools in Nepal. Rautahat district has the largest number of students in Madrasa and Lalitpur has the lowest number. Moreover, parents forbid the female children with the education but they educate their boys in the government and private schools (Souvenir, 2007). The concentration of Madrasas is in the plain of Nepal as the biggest block of Muslims resides in this area.

### **2.3 Educational Status of Muslim Girls**

In Nepal, the issue of women’s role in development was formally addressed for the first time in sixth five years plan (1980-1985). The operational strategies for the investigation of women in development program were not incorporated in this plan but Women’s Social Coordination Committee (WSC) of Social Service National Co-ordination Committee (SSNCC) was mobilized to prepare national plan of action for women’s development in 1981. This plan of action proposed strategies for the implementation in “the field of education, health, employment, agriculture, forestry and co-operative development by government, non-governmental agencies and institutions”. It is also called for increased recruitment of women at all levels in extension and administrative field to have significance impact on subsequent government plans and policies (UNICEF, 1987).

The Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child are landmark treaties which together comprise an alarming code of rights for women and children. The committee on Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women has a reciprocally reinforcing nature. They should form the indispensable framework for a forward-looking strategy to endorse and protect the rights of girls and women and decisively eliminate inequality and discrimination. CEDAW was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1979 and came into force in September 1981. Nepal entirely ratified CEDAW in 1991. CEDAW calls for equal rights for women in political and public life, equal access to education and identical choice of curricula, non-discrimination in employment, salary and guarantees of job protection.

In 1994 National Council for Women and Child Development was formed under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Nepal. The objective of the council was to devise national policies in accordance with the world summit. Ministry of Women and Social Welfare was established in September 1995 to co-ordinate and observe all activities related to child rights and welfare and to enhance the status of women (UNICEF, 1996). The issue of formal education in Nepal is embedded within a powerful, global discourse on planned development that underscores positive links between poverty, education, development and literacy.

Formal education is definitely correlated with agricultural productivity, health, population control, social solidity and political awareness and, therefore, considered one of the most important ways to attain economic and social development (Dreze & Sen, 1999; Gurung, 1988; NESAC, 1998; UNDP, 2002; UNICEF & HMG/NPC, 1996). From this perspective, illiteracy and lack of formal education is given elevated priority in development planning with

specific implications such as financial and technical assistance to the educational domain and planning and implementation of the so-called non-formal yet exceedingly standardized literacy programs mainly directed towards adult women and out school children (Valentin, 2005).

This disparity begins with the time of enrollment at the primary level. Although the government of Nepal launched the program for a free and compulsory education in the Ninth Five Years Plan, girls' education did not improve significantly which indicates that the net enrollment rate at primary levels for boys is only 97 percent and only 61 percent girls. Only 42 percent girls accomplish primary level as against 65 percent among boys. Likewise, female adult literacy rate is only 34 percent while male adult literacy rate is well over 74 percent (Dahal, 2004). According to Seema Khan, Secretary of the Society, Muslims constitute 4.4 per cent of the population of Nepal which is now a secular democracy. According to 2006 Census, literacy among Muslim women is 26.5 per cent. Khan says of the Muslims aged 20 and above, only two percent people are either decently employed or hold positions in the public services or are in the professions including engineering, law, teaching, and medicine.

Every woman has right to take the Constitution of Nepal, 2047 BS has mentioned that the women are free to participate in any democratic activities. Nevertheless, due to their poor political activities, their presence does not seem effective these days (Mathema, 1998). The existing literature shows that the status of Muslims' education is low. Meanwhile, the access of Muslim women is terribly low. To increase the access of Muslim women to public schools is the need and responsibility of the stakeholders including the government of Nepal.

The literature on Muslim women's access to public education marks that Muslim girls are mostly deprived of quality education. A study by David Tyrer (2006) has shown that access of Muslim girls to higher education is poor. The Muslim women in Asian especially Muslim

communities have been socially deprived across all social indicators including education (p. 10). For Tyrer, both South Asian and Muslim family structures are naturally oppressive and therefore such family patterns become barriers to girls' participation in higher education and employment industry (p. 12).

Similarly, Pooja Saxena (2014) has studied about daily problems facing by Muslim women. In her view, Muslim community dominates women as reflected in the daily life of girls with sacrifices, duties, responsibilities, and marriage, dress code, and gender disparities. Such barriers do not allow Muslim women to aspire for better education and life. She adds that only education can help such women to release them from the societal domination that has limited their freedom of thought for centuries. Access to education is a significant indicator of women's status in a given society. There is a debate that Islam gives equal educational rights to men and women regardless of sex differences. Within Muslim communities in India, women still struggle for basic rights being expected to think in a certain way (p. 35). In her observation, firstly, Muslim women are usually not allowed to go for higher education. Secondly, madrasas teach mostly Islamic faith and do not provide secular education (Higher Education in India: Issues Related to Expansion, Inclusiveness, Quality, and Finance, 2008). The case of Muslim women in terms of education is not much different from that of Nepalese Muslim women.

Numerous Muslim women aspire to get into schools and become socially mobile. Nevertheless, the policy makers and policy implementers have not been able to reach every village, town and city. Public schools in Nepal do not perform and there is shortage of colleges and quality education institutes. In Nepal, Muslim women need inspiration from their family and society to acquire education and security. It is important to differentiate between the status of women in Islam and the present status of women in the Muslim world.

Biswamitra Saha et al. have asserted that high expectations are placed on modern education which seems unrealistic in the Indian context, where access to education is very unevenly distributed across caste, class, religion, ethnicity and gender lines. There is widespread discussion of different structural barriers that affect girls' access to education and that are reflected in gendered inequalities in learning outcomes. "Understanding these barriers is fundamental: unless we know what curbs girls' chances of being schooled in their formative years, we cannot explain their life-chances in later life" (2017). Muslims are India's largest religious minority, yet data such as those from the census and the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) specify that Muslims occupy India's economic, social and political margins. Muslims are poorer (NSSO 66th Round 2009–2010) and less often engaged in the formal sector that is commonly better remunerated than informal-sector employment. For Muslims, which permits unobstructed use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is correctly cited. Besides, they focus on the girls' education wherein gender becomes a barrier to them. The access of Muslim girls to higher education and their educational achievements are usually lower than those of Hindu caste girls (p. 177-8).

Tilak interrogates the neglect of secondary and higher education by the government due to postulations that it is less important than primary education for economic development. On the contrary, the Muslim and Hindu study participants' alike placed enormous value on higher education, which they perceived as an important resource for attaining independence and earning a livelihood (2007, p. 181). Popular discourses tend to reduce social and economic disadvantages experienced by Muslims in general and tend to result in 'victim-blaming' discourses. For instance, the root cause of Muslim women's poor instructive attainments is often suspected to be spiritual conservatism and an Islamic hatred to cultivating girls (Tilak, 2007, p. 188-9).

Even the report of UNDP shows the pitiable condition of Muslim women in education. The research by Mithra and Singh in 2000 and 2006 correspondingly has found that low literacy of programmed caste is the cause of poverty. Hence, the significance of education for all regardless of caste, class, religion and gender is paramount. The study explores the access of the Muslim girls in Kapilvastu Municipality to public education that is the pathway to their employment and health. Since the literature does not cover the arena, this research fills up the gap by finding out the variables that affect low presence of Muslim girls in public education.

#### **2.4 Conceptual Framework**

Cultural and economic status affects one's education. The type of education the family prefers for children relies on the economic and educational status of guardians. The impact of religion reflects in the choice of education in the study area. The preference for Madarasa education is a dependent variable as it is determined by the religious attachment and grooming in the family type. Besides, there is a role of religion in shaping the access of Muslim girls to madrasa education. Morality and values as highlighted in the educational materials in madrasas usually encourage Muslim parents to choose madrasas for their children especially girls' education in the study area.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Methodology**

This chapter describes the study area and it explains the research design and procedure the data. The chapter embodies the technical aspect of the research. Only one method is not sufficient to gather all kinds of information related to the study. To make study more reliable, different data collection techniques are used. Besides, it also imparts information regarding location of the study area, types of research design, data collection techniques, sample nature, sources of data and data analysis techniques.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study is especially designed to describe the causes of choosing Madrasa education for girls by their guardians in two wards: 1 and 2 of Kapilvastu Municipality. It is based on the explorative research design to fulfill the specific objectives of the study. The analysis is mainly based on primary data. The exploratory research design is used to investigate into the causes of choosing education types by the target group. It helps to inquire into the selected topic to find out the situation of unequal access of children to education in Muslim community. As per nature of the research data related to socio-cultural phenomenon perception towards education, equal opportunity, enrolment of female children in school, etc, were collected based on existing situation.

The research design that was adopted for this study is explorative and explanatory in nature as they investigate and explain the conditions and causes of the access of Muslim girls to madrasas and public schools and colleges in the study area. The main objective of this research was to find out the access of Muslim women to public education in Kapilvastu Municipality and the variables that affect the access of Muslim girls to education.

The density of Muslims is dominant in both of the wards of the municipality selected for the study wherein the focus group discussions were organized. The prime area is Masjid Tole that has dense population of Muslims. The area lies in the ward number one of Kapilvastu Municipality. Similarly, Bardahawa, the area of ward number two of the municipality has been taken for the study. Since the study focuses on education and access of Muslim girls to education, it covers the participants of the Muslim community. I used the convenient sampling as a method of sampling to select the informants and participants for Key Informant Interviews and focus group discussion respectively. I undertook the Key Informant Interviews with the Muslim leaders and guardians of the study area.

### **3.2 The Research Site**

I focused my research on Muslim girls who are sent to Madrasas for religious education because they seek security and no practice of coeducation for girls. Besides, madrasas teach morality and cultural values rather than practical and academic things. The study area has a considerable number of Muslim households comprising of villages and town. However, their brothers are usually sent to public schools for modern education in 1 and 2 wards of Kapilastu Municipality. How religion has influenced the decisions of guardians for providing different education types to their children based on gender differences has been the main point of investigation in my research. Education provided at madrasas focuses on Islamic history, Urdu and Arabic grammar and literature. In a few cases, some madrasas teach English and Nepali as sought after in the practical life. The presence of madrasas is good in the study area. I chose 1 and 2 wards of Kapilvastu Municipality as the universe of my study is because Muslims in both of the wards live in town. However, their decisions regarding children's education are influenced by both religion and gender differences.

### **3. 3 Nature & Sources of Data**

The data have been qualitative. The study has used data from both sources primary and secondary. The primary data have been gathered from the Key Informants Interviews and focus Group Discussions in the target area. The secondary sources include articles, reports, books and dissertations related to the topic of the study. The study has investigated into the impact of religion on girls' education in one and two wards of Kapilvastu Municipality.

#### **3.3.1 Primary Source**

For collecting first hand data, I sampled thirty guardians two focus group discussion. I had contacted fifteen for each group discussion. Nevertheless, only ten participants came to each discussion in the study area. All the guardians were from Muslim community. Most of them were females. I chose ten Muslim leaders and intellectuals for Key Informant Interviews. I used convenient sampling method to choose the participants and informants for the study. First I had collected information about the Muslims from the ward offices and then I contacted them. In the telephonic conversation, all of the people had been ready to participate in the study. However, only seventy five percent of the participants could participate in the study. I put forward the questions based on the objectives of the study. Accordingly, the participants expressed their views and feelings which I recorded and later on transcribed for interpretation and analysis. Similarly, I contacted some of the Muslim intellectuals and leaders of madrasas and conducted KII with them. As the interviews with them intended to gather extensive information on the topic of the study, I communicated with them widely and gathered their views.

#### **3.3.2 Secondary Source**

For the study, I collected secondary materials on madrasa education and the educational status of Muslims and Muslim women in Nepal and then used to set the background. To show

the research gap, I gathered existing information on the topic and accordingly I related that to the study for relevance. I used articles, reports, books and dissertations as the secondary source of information.

### **3.4 Selection of the Respondents**

The following tools and techniques have been used:

#### **3.4.1 Sampling**

Convenience sampling has been used to collect the data. As my study has been the field based, I had to visit the study area. The objective of the study has not been to explore quantitative data about their educational status. I used convenience sampling so that I could conduct the interviews with those who I could contact easily. Similarly I used the method to invite the stakeholders primarily the guardians whose children either go to public schools or madrasas in the Muslims populated area. It is a non-probability sampling method where units are selected for inclusion in the sample because they are the easiest for the researcher to access. This can be due to geographical proximity, availability at a given time in the research. The research has adopted this sampling method to conduct the Key Informant Interview and Focus Group Discussion. I held five Key Informant Interviews with intellectuals and Maulanas of Muslim community. Similarly, I conducted two focus group discussions one in each ward of the study area. Each focus group discussion comprised of ten participants who were selected through the convenience sampling.

Ten guardians from the households of the target area were selected for the focus group discussion. Focus group discussion with the guardians of Muslim girls in the central location of both ward 1 and 2 were conducted for information to explore the variables that affect the low participation of Muslim girls in public education.

### **3.5 Data Collection Tools and Techniques**

#### **3.5.1 Key Informant Interview (KII)**

I used Key Informant Interviews (KII) as one of the qualitative in-depth interviews with intellectuals and leaders of Muslim community to collect information with the assumption that they had the first hand information about madrasa education and its relevance. I had a wide range of communication on the topic of the study and gathered extensive information accordingly as well. I inquired into the causes of choosing madrasas for girls in the community. I held KII with five people who represented the community in terms of religion and culture.

#### **3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion**

To explore the access of Muslim girls to education, the study needed qualitative data. Focus group discussion was used to gather the data that consist of the participants' feelings and opinions on the subject. I conducted two focus group discussions each in each ward of the study area. First I contacted the Muslim guardians who children go to madrasas and then requested them to participate in the discussion. Indeed, I had contacted fifteen in each of the ward but ten to twelve members participated in the discussion actively. Muslim women of this study area were considered as interest group for collecting information through group discussion. I conducted the FGD with Muslim parents whose children go to either Madrasas or public schools. I collected qualitative data collected through group discussion. I carried out them to explore the causes of the educational status of Muslim girls in the study area.

#### **3.5.3 Activities**

First the participants were sampled and consulted after visiting the area of the study. Then the participants were contacted and requested to participate in the focus group discussion with the help of local assistants from the study area. Besides, the key informants were contacted

and scheduled their interview time as per their convenience. Thus, I conducted Key Informant Interviews with Muslim leaders and guardians. The data through both focus group discussion and Key Informant Interviews were recorded and later on they were transcribed. The transcribed version of data was coded in accordance with the objectives. Subsequently, the data have been analyzed and interpreted to explore the findings of the study. After accomplishing the analysis and interpretation, the study has been formatted in accordance with the APA documentation style. Based on the findings and interpretation of data, the conclusion, future direction and recommendations have been fixed. Besides, the references used for the study have been arranged with due respect to the latest APA documentation style.

### **3.6 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

All data have been presented and analyzed to fulfill the objectives of the study. The qualitative data have been analyzed and interpreted descriptively making the argument in a logical way. After the interpretation of data, the findings in accordance with the objectives have been explored.

### **3.7 Limitation of the Study**

Because of the limited resources, I confined the study to only one and two wards of Kapilvastu Municipality to achieve the objectives. This study is all about the educational status of Muslim girls in the study area. The study has not explored the theory. Instead it has been limited to the explanatory research design as used to find out the causes of poor presence of Muslim girls in public schools and colleges but their concentration in madrasas for religious education. Although this study cannot represent the multidimensional status of Muslim women, it reflects on their endeavors for education and its types.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Access to Public Education among Muslim Girls and Educational Practices in Madarsa**

This chapter analyzes and discusses the data and presents them to explore the findings to meet the objectives of the study. The discussion comprises of the participants' views and responses to the questions led by the research questions of the study. This character discusses the access of the Muslim girls to educational institutions including public schools, and madrasas.

#### **4.1 Access of Muslim Girls to Education**

Education plays a vital role in life of both female and male children. The access to education reflects in the enrollment, dropouts, and achievement of higher education. The access of Muslim girls to education seems to be affected by numerous variables. Right from the enrolment to their higher education, they experience diverse things. All the girls who get enrolled either in schools or madrasas seem to complete their higher education. This study demonstrates the access of Muslim girls to education through different variables as presented below.

##### **4.1.1 Enrolment**

Generally Muslim parents prefer their children to have knowledge on Islam and cultural practices in the Muslim community. The religious obligation leads them to put their children at madrasas right from their early age. Most of the girls are enrolled in madrasas. A few of the girls from the Muslim community get enrolled in the municipal schools and private schools. They have an access to education. However, most of the girls cannot complete their secondary and higher education. Mostly Muslim guardians seek their female children to start education from madrasas. According to the data collected from the participants in the study, around 75% of the community girls go to madrasas for education. Only 25% girls in Muslim community are deprived of madrasa education during their childhood. Madrasa education is considered

obligatory and therefore, most of the parents prefer to send their children especially girls to madrasas. The enrolment ratio in madrasas is higher. Although there is not strict grading system in madrasas, they do follow certain patterns for promotion of the students based on the time spent there.

#### **4.1.2 Dropouts**

All of the students who get enrolled in madrasas do not complete all the grades. Most of them drop out from madrasas. In his view, roughly 55% of those girls leave the madrasas after primary level, almost 20% leave after -secondary level and only 5% of the girls seem to have completed their higher secondary education. There are numerous factors that make children to leave the madrasas for public education. According to majority of the participants of the focus group discussion, employability is one of the causes many students drop out from the madrasas and they get admitted in public schools. Their access to public education increases because of potential opportunities with the modern education. At realizing that there is no use of Arabic language in Nepal as it is emphasized in madrasas, many students drop out from there and start studying in public schools. Besides, students with the madrasa education do not get any job provided by the government of Nepal as well.

Likewise, two third of the participants in focus group discussion emphasized the importance of education. Most importantly, both guardians and students focus on the education that can help them to get jobs after the completion of schooling. This attitude also affects the increase in the dropouts of the students in the madrasas. One of them stated, “There are many benefits of education. It is applicable in every aspect of life. Students can become medical doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, etc” (Focus Group Discussion First, April 26, 2023). This extract shows the high level of awareness among the Muslim women about education. The

informant reported that the students were mindful about the possibilities of career choice and development through obtaining the modern education. They associated education with life. However, they equally valued the role of Islam and its cultural practices in society. They believed in the blessings and mercy of the god is upon the children. Majority of the participants remarked, “Everything is positively affected by the education. We should educate our children. Education is very important, madam. It is the first ladder of life. Life without education is meaningless. We can make our lives better. Education is very indispensable for girls. We should encourage girls for study as they are the generators of the new generation” (Focus Group Discussion First, 2023). Majority of the participants specified the role of education in shaping the patterns of life in a positive manner. In their view, education can change life and especially girls should be educated as their education determines the future of the new generation. They had pure emotions and reactions to the girls’ education. They opined that education would help the girls as a weapon to fight against the challenges and difficulties wherever they would be in life. Training, seminar and education for girls were crucial as they underscored. Their views imply that Muslim women understand the use and importance of education in the lives of their female children. Education can reshape political, social, economic and spiritual aspects of life.

Undoubtedly majority of the participants in the study agreed on the importance of modern education. However, some of the informants associated it with the madrasa education as well. For them, even madrasas provide modern education. Thus, there are contradictions in understanding modern education. Most of the informants and participants interpreted modern education provided at public schools and colleges.

Thus, the data show that most of the madrasa students drop out after the completion of their elementary level and some of them join the schools. However, this trend is among the boys

rather than girls. Most of the participants reported that girls after the basic education from madrasas stay home and start helping their mothers in household chores. Only a few of them resume their study in public schools in the study area. Those parents who understand the value of modern education put their girls in the public schools after the basic level of education from madrasas. One third of the participants in the KII stated that modern education is necessary for life. This education is catered at public schools that follow the curriculum of the government of Nepal. For majority of the participants, Of course, without modern education, life becomes very difficult. People need to be capable of doing right and wrong. When the community is educated, educated people can contribute to the development process of the country” (Interview, April 27, 2023). For most of the participants, the awareness about education and its role in the developmental process of the country is paramount. The data show that the liberal and accommodating parents send their girls to public schools after they drop out from madrasas. Such parents seek for changes in their children’s life regardless of gender differences. Majority of the interviewees stated, “Without study, we cannot know the world. What is going on cannot be known without modern education” (Interview, April 27, 2023). They valued modern education, and focus public schools and colleges which can only provide modern education to students. Even after the dropping out from madrasas, a few children from Muslim community go to public schools for their study. The ratio of boys is higher than those of the girls in this regard.

#### **4.1.3 Higher Education**

Without higher education, people cannot get government employment. Although the Muslims understand this, most of them are reluctant to send their girls to colleges. Consequently, none of the girls was found who had studied at madrasas after higher secondary level. The data gathered to explore the access of Muslim girls to public education in Kapilvastu Municipality

demonstrate different variables that affect the choice of schools for girls. The exploration implies that the school chosen for children in Muslim community is based on gender differences rather than other variables. My KII with Muslim leaders and intellectuals helps to gather their opinions and feelings on the access of Muslim girls to public education. The question why the well-to-do families of Muslim community send their boys to mega cities such as New Delhi, Kathmandu etc for higher education, but they hardly send girls. Majority of the interviewees in KII states:

When girls start going to modern schools, it will violate the rigid law of religion as internalized by the illiterate guardians. They do not want to change their mindset because of illiteracy. There are some girls' colleges in India where they can study. But in Nepal, it is difficult for the parents to have that kind of college where only girls study. Of course, religion is both boys and girls. I agree with you that there is gender-based discrimination as evident in the trend that parents pressurize girls to perform namaz but do not force boys for the very ritual. The latter are free to enjoy their lives. (Interview, April 20, 2023).

The extract implies that illiteracy and religious rigidity are the primary causes Muslim parents do not send their daughters to schools and colleges for modern education. Such parents focus on the religious obligations and practices that girls do not need to participate in the public affairs. Therefore, they do not need technical, vocational and professional education. The assertion indicates that Muslim parents seldom accept co-education. This rigidity enforces them to limit their daughters to Madrasas located in their areas. However, they are open and liberal for the boys' education.

The situation of Muslim girls in terms of public education is more alarming than that of madrasa education. About 20 percent of the Muslim girls go to public schools. 65 percent of

them leave the schools after primary level, 25 percent of them drop out from the schools after secondary level, 7 percent of them leave the study after higher secondary level and roughly 3 percent of the Muslim girls are blessed to go to colleges as stated by one of the informants. His observation on educational status of women implies pathetic condition of Muslim girls' education. Besides, it indicates that Muslims choose madrasas for their girls rather than public schools. Although there are numerous primary level schools, secondary level schools and higher secondary level schools in the study area, Muslim guardians seem reluctant to send their girls there.

#### **4.1.4 Opportunity**

Since education ensures employability and it helps to get jobs even beyond the country, the aware parents have started sending their children regardless of gender differences to education institutions including madrasas and public schools. The possibility of getting opportunities for better career and life has increased the access of girls to education. Education affects the financial status of people as underscored by the key informants.

Two third of the informants stated that to make living, they needed education. They acknowledged the importance of education in practical life by referring to his daughters who have studied up to bachelor level. Their sons-in-law are engineers. Sons are educated. In personal life, the importance of education is high. Even the fathers stood against the project for education they had launched. However, they went against fathers and took initiatives for reforming the approach to catering education. Gradually people got to know their intent regarding the education revolution they had in Taulihawa. They endeavored to mainstream the religious education. They remarked that then children from Muslim community started growing educationally and professionally because of modern education which they incorporated in the

institutions. Without education, they could not help mainstream the cultural education. All Nepalese people are the tax payers. However, the government has imposed a particular pattern of cultural values on Muslims” (Interview, April 20, 2023). Despite having understood the importance of education, the informant sought after the government’s initiative for the development of Muslims in Nepal.

Majority of the participants asserted that the government of Nepal particularly privileged a single cultural group and its values and has been discarding and depriving Muslims of having access to the public benefits. They expressed their resentment against the government stating that Nepal is a country of diverse cultures and therefore, each culture and its practices should be valued and underscored by the government as every Nepalese citizen pays taxes. Although the government collects revenues from all cultural groups but empowers a specific group only.

When a renowned Muslim intellectual was asked about his views on the importance of education, he focused on Madrasa education and said that it imparts ethical knowledge to students. Accordingly to him, students will get a lot of blessings and boon from Allah when they serve the helpless and the parents during their age. He showed the reciprocal and interdependent relationship between man and woman. They are inseparable and their bond after marriage becomes stronger. He pointed out some drawbacks in the modern education as it teaches children to put their senior citizens in the common home during the age. For him, modern education disintegrates family and disturbs societal harmony. Therefore, Madrasa education surpasses modern education. He did not discard the importance of education. However, he was critical of modern education provided at public schools and colleges. It specified the problem with the modern education that it encourages youths to go for cohabitation. It ruins cultural framework of marriage that keeps family intact according to the informant. When he was asked about the role

of Madrasa education, he associated it with the religious education. For him, religion is the way of life and with due respect, Muslims follow the path of Islam shown by the prophet. His assertion explains why Muslims do not prefer to send their children particularly girls to public schools and colleges (Interview, April 24, 2023). His statements and feelings have grounded on tradition and belief system rather than logic. Modern education empowers both women and men and makes people critical and suspicious. Therefore, the religious leaders who by virtue garner patriarchy demonstrate problems with modern education. Such leaders like the informant provoke parents to go against the modern education that provides professional and vocational education.

Despite the fact that professional and vocational education help people to get better employment, lifestyle, most of the Muslim parents do not want to send their children especially girls to public schools. One of the informants in KII said, “Education is education whether it is worldly education or religious education. Both kinds of education are needed. Preserving science means retaining the status of Islam. Conducting research on society is the act as the part of Islam” (Interview, April 24, 2023). The informant associated science with Islam and for him, Islam is scientific and it cannot be questioned. In his view, Islam teaches people about management. However, added that there was no need in learning Arabic to know and practice Islam. He opined that Islam could be known through national languages such as Nepalese, English and Urdu. He widened the scope of Islam as it conveys preaches and lessons which can be understood through the language of the respective believer. He stated, “Whatever you are doing is the Islamic method. Even management teaches us about Islam; engineering, nursing, and vocational education. No need to learn Arabic in order to understand Islam. We can know Islam through other languages like Nepalese, English or Urdu” (Interview, April 26, 2023). The extract

implies the liberal aspect of Islam that can be learnt about through any languages of the world. However, his observation is based on hasty generalization and random observation. Whatever he told us about Islam is not grounded and reliable. He did not acknowledge the role of modern education that contributes to keeping the society intact with the development. In contrast to his view, another informant mentioned the significance of the modern education that is rarely catered by Madrasas in the study area.

According to most of the participants, public education helps to earn bread and butter, whereas Madrasa education prepares believers for the hereafter. They did not see any other benefit of madrasa as it is not practical and does not teach any skills that can contribute to the development of society.

## **4.2 Barriers to Muslim Girls' Education**

Despite willingness and efforts of Muslim girls to get education, they do not seem to have that because of numerous barriers. Culture, economy and gender discrimination are some of the major obstacles to their access to education. Most of the participants in both focus group discussions and Key Informant Interviews stated that culture is the first barrier that does not allow girls after puberty to go to schools and colleges. Coeducation is not acceptable in the Muslim community. Besides, majority of the participants specified economy as a major barrier to education in their community.

### **4.2.1 Economy**

Economy is one of the most crucial variables that affect Muslims' choice of education. Despite the fact that education provided at public schools is almost free, the key informants point out the economic factor as a cause for putting children in Madrasas instead of public schools. In responding to this question, one of the informants concedes, "The primary reason for not sending

girls to public schools is the nearness and the biggest matter is that guardians strictly prefer religious education for their girls. That is the impact of religion as imposed by the Maulanas” (Interview, April 20, 2023). The religious leaders namely Maulanas impose rigid ideas on the common Muslims to send their daughters to Madrasas instead of public schools. They oblige the guardians to consider girls as others’ properties. Therefore, there is no need in investing for girls’ education. Religious education is sufficient for girls. However, the educated parents do not abide by the dictates of Maulanas and they send their girls as well for modern education. The informant provides the reference of Pakistan wherein millions of girls are highly educated from advanced schools and colleges. According to the informant, problems are with both the religious leaders and parents that they limit their girls to religious education. The illiterate parents do not follow their prophet literally, which is a big problem in Muslim community as the informant opined.

Although parents give importance to education as it helps to differentiate between right and wrong, education provided at public schools is not focused. One third of the key informants who understand the importance of education states, “Education can cause change in our life. The educated can differentiate between right and wrong. Without education, no need can be satisfied. It is needed everywhere including office visits” (Interview, April 23, 2023). The extract implies the significance and optimal use of education in life. The informant is surprised why people do not send their children to public schools despite its high use and need in all aspects of society. When the causes for not sending girls to public schools and colleges were investigated into, the participants responded to this in numerous ways. One of the participants directly stated that the parents did not send their daughters to the public schools because of the religious obligations. They opined:

I do not send my daughters to the public schools. Religion does not allow us to educate our girls in public schools. Besides, the lack of resources is another barrier to girls' education. If we had money, we would put our female children in colleges for professional degrees as well. My daughter studies in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I have a plan to educate my daughter up to 12<sup>th</sup> grade in public school. (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023)

The excerpt shows the baffling state of the participant. On the one hand, majority of the parents deny sending their daughters to public schools because of religious obligation. On the other, they want their daughters to study at public colleges. They accepted that they ignored people's remarks about girls' education. They were found positive about education but lacked clarity about the differences between modern education and religious education. They wanted change in their family that was possible through education; they emphasized on education. Poverty forced them not to send their daughters to colleges. However, they had a plan to educate their daughters who study in 8<sup>th</sup> grade up to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. This shows the seriousness of Muslim parents about their daughters' education. They were sure that Madrasa education could not help to get employment as they referred to different examples of unemployed people with Madrasa education:

Girls with the Madrasa education do not get any employment based on my personal experience. Although they have had high level of education at Madrasa, they have not attained any public position. There are varieties of views regarding the public education. I have intent to educate my girls for higher study. Nevertheless, I cannot educate because of poor economic condition. (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023)

Poor financial condition of most of the Muslim families is a barrier to their children's higher education.

#### 4.2.2 Religion and Culture

Religion affects the decisions of most of the parents when choosing the educational institutions for their children. The religious parents most choose madrasas for children especially girls; moderate parents manage to send their children to both madrasas and public schools; the liberal and educated Muslims send their children to public schools. However, all types of parents prefer madrasa education for their girls under the principle of Islam. It is evident in the assertion of one of the participants who answered when asked whether there was discrimination between girls and boys in Muslim community. Majority of the participants expressed their observation:

Yes, there is discrimination because of illiteracy. Many of the Muslims do not know what Islam precisely says to them. Without understanding core values of Islam, they discriminate between girls and boys. Not allowing girls to have modern education is because of cultural practice. There is nothing to do with the religion. Patriarchal society is responsible. (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023)

The extract implies that although religion has allowed every person to have education as much as possible, people misinterpret the religious scripture, the Holy Qur'an. Just to control social evils that would take place, the religion has imposed strict provision of *burqa* for the girls. In the earlier times, the *burqa* system might have been relevant. Now it does not hold any significance. It weakens the position of women by confining them to certain area. Mental veil is necessary instead of covering the physical face.

Why most of Muslim parents do not want to send their daughter to colleges although they send to schools was one of the main aspects of the investigation. One of the participants opined that the early marriage of girls in Muslim community is rare. Therefore, the marriage cannot be the cause. Despite the fact that girls up to their physical maturity stay at home, parents do not

send them to colleges because of gender discriminations. One of the informants in Key Informant Interview opined, “They have fear. They do not want their adult girls because they suspect that their daughters may elope with someone. Because of this fear, the parents hardly put their girls in colleges. They assume that girls are related to honor. For their fake honor, they hardly send their girls to public schools and colleges” (Interview, April 27, 2023). The parents who do not send their children to colleges have a fear that their daughters can fall in love with opposite sexes and can fix their marriage on their own. If not, they can have adultery which is not permissible in Islam. The informant accepted that it is hypocrisy and gender discrimination. Such rigid parents deprive their daughters of higher education, which is not good at all as he mentioned. Public schools and colleges provide co-education which is not acceptable to the rigid parents. Therefore, they do not send daughters to public schools and colleges. Hence, it becomes clear that cultural and religious values in Muslim community hinder girls from having higher education.

However, the scenario is changing gradually. One of the participants asserted that there are other reasons as well that discourage Muslim parents from sending their daughters to public schools and colleges. One of the primary causes is poverty. The families of the low economic status cannot afford modern education. Poverty and co-education are the causes that they do not send their girls to colleges. In other communities, girls are allowed to have relationship outside marriage. Illiteracy is next reason that they do not understand the importance of education. Some parents do not put their girls in schools as investing in education of daughters is supposed to be the waste of money. The participant added:

Girls can progress in education with due respect to their cultural lifestyle. No need to show the body as accorded in the holy book of Islam. 80% of Muslims do not want to

invest money in the education of girls. They do not allow women to speak in the public.

Due to the girls' confinement to the household chores, they are incapable of undertaking the social responsibilities. (Interview, April 27, 2023).

The extract reveals that Muslim parents can educate their daughters with due respect to their cultural values as well. Nevertheless, they are reluctant in doing so because of prejudice and discriminations against female children. After marriages, girls usually go to grooms' homes. It is assumed that the family of the groom will benefit from her education. Therefore, investing in girls' education is meaningless as the assertion implies. The informant managed to be moderate in responding to the question regarding the need of higher education for girls. The data imply that even well-to-do families do not send their daughters to public schools and colleges because they do not want to invest money in others' properties as there is a trend in Muslim community that girls are other properties and after getting married off, the parents get free from the responsibility of their daughters.

Some parents who seek cultural security which is generally not ensured by public schools and colleges do not send their girls to colleges. However, such parents are gradually changing their attitude towards education. The informant highlighted the change in Muslim community and said that even they had been traditional in the past. Gradually society is becoming liberal in this regard. In Bangladesh, separate girls' colleges can be found. The parents want their daughters to remain virgin before the marriage. Therefore, they do not send adult girls to colleges. The opinions of the majority of the participants are mixed in the sense that they have accepted that change is natural which seems in society. At the same time, Muslim parents observe the cultural practices i.e. keeping their girls virgin until they get married off.

The data gathered from the participants of the focus group discussions demonstrate the mixed opinions about the public schools and colleges. Most of the participants opined that higher education is needed for both sons and daughters. In fact, some of them have started sending their daughters to public schools and colleges for modern education as well. Nevertheless, some parents cannot send their daughters because of numerous factors. One of the participants expressed:

People send their daughters to colleges. Madrasas are also colleges. My daughter studies in 12<sup>th</sup> grade at Madrasa. Early marriage in Muslim community, poverty, taking daughters as others' properties, and veil system, co-education are the reasons Muslim parents do not send their daughters to colleges. Here should be separate colleges for girls and boys. There is gender discrimination in patriarchy as undertaken by Muslims. (Focus Group Discussion First, April 26, 2023)

There has been a misconception among some of the Muslims that they take madrasas and colleges synonymously. Therefore, such guardians do not hesitate to send their daughters to madrasas for higher education. In fact, none of the madrasas in the study area provide modern education. They usually follow the suggestions of the religious leaders namely Maulanas for education of their children. They oblige Muslims to choose madrasas especially for their daughters. Accordingly, they send their girls to madrasas. As long as this tradition continues, Muslim parents prioritize madrasa education for girls. Poverty is a common problem in Muslim community. Nevertheless, this is not only the cause behind not sending children to public schools as up to the secondary level education, public schools nominally charge fees which almost all parents can afford. Most of the things are free at public schools. The information based on the reactions and opinions of the participants implies that co-education is a major cause that

discourages Muslim parents from choosing public schools and colleges for their daughters. This cultural assumption is embedded with gender discriminations as well.

Because of the Muslims' reluctance in choosing public education for their girls, more than ninety percent guardians send their daughters to madrasas from the age of 4. They study moralities and cultural values there. They also learn English and Nepali but the priority is given to religious subjects including Arabic language and literature and Urdu language and literature. They are taught the Qur'an and hadith there. Most often the students are forced to memorize the lines and stanzas from the Holy Scriptures.

In reflecting on the importance of education for Muslim girls one of the participants in Focus Group Discussion stated that with education, children can read and write their names and can find out the directions in life. They can possibly get jobs as well for living. They can put signature instead of thumbing on the legal documents. One of the participants asserted:

My children are literate. We are poor and landless. I can also put the signature. We are not educated. However, we want our children to study. They can become aware and intelligent. Then they can help us many ways as well. My children study. If they studied, we would be happier and get some advantage as well. We send our children to Madrasas for Urdu and Arabic. Children can know and they can become intelligent. They can take care of their families and children wherever they will be. (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023).

The informant reported that children are schooled in Urdu, Hindi and Arabic. Both husband and wife are passionate for their children's education. Therefore, they educate the children so that they can be literate and can lead a more comfortable life ahead. They mentioned that the students understood the importance of education. Although they did not have sufficient resources to

educate their children, they sent their children to public schools. She emphasized quality education imparted at private schools. If they could afford, they would send their children to private schools as well. Their assertion reveals that both fathers and mothers value modern education as it can change their children's future. They focus on capacitating children. One of the other Key Informants stated that education is a very important thing as it helps people to have success. Without education, people cannot have that much success. To work nowadays, education is very essential. People must know the system. If I do not know the taxation, I cannot do business. Even self-employment demands education. Education is a driving force as it helps transform life patterns. The practical life affairs can be understood and dealt with effectively with modern education as emphasized by the key informant. Employment cannot be achieved without education. Hence, the holistic changes in life can be imagined with education. The reference of taxation by the informant indicates the importance of professional and vocational education.

Muslim community is one of the major cultural groups in the study area. A considerable section of the community is still deprived of education. Especially Muslim girls as explored are discouraged from participating in the public affairs. Therefore, mostly parents do not take girls' education obligatory. They are usually reluctant in sending girls to public schools and colleges. Although none of the parents discard the use of education in life, a great many of them do not send girls to schools. A very few guardians send their girls to schools and colleges for practical education. Numerous parents prefer madrasas for cultural and religious obligations. The education girls have there do not prepare them to deal with life affairs as they generally learn moralities and ethics. Indeed, practical and vocational education provided at schools can help

girls to lead independent lives. Nevertheless, many of the girls are deprived of modern education. Modern education capacitates individuals to contribute productively.

The study shows that most of the Muslim parents choose madrasas for their daughters because of numerous reasons. The most common cause is the dominant presence of religious values in their lives. One of the informants stated that the illiterate parents want to educate their girls in madrasas that strictly follow the dress code for girls. Maulanas are their leaders who guide them and sometimes impose the rigid rules on the believers. Female students cannot abide by the dress code including veils and *hijabs* (head coverings) as obliged by the religion in the public schools. Therefore, mostly traditional Muslims do not allow their female children to study in public schools. Such parents can allow their daughters only in madrasas. One of the informants stated pertaining to the cause of sending girls to madrasas, “What I see as the cause is the parents who have not studied seek to educate their female with the dress code that is easy to be implemented in madrasas. Maulanas have inculcated the mindset that they need to put their female children in madrasas so that they can retain their cultural values including *burqa* system” (Interview, April 28, 2023). According to the Qur’an, the Holy Scripture of Islam, both men and women have equal right to education. However, the doctrine is not assimilated as it should be. Besides, cultural practices in Muslim community have been guided by the theology. There is a perception that they need to educate women about household activities. Therefore, Muslims do usually not invest in girls’ education as they will stay confined to the indoor activities. Meanwhile, they prefer to send their sons to public schools and private schools assuming their education will help to make living for the family.

Majority of the informants opined that the second reason is the economy that parents of poor economic backgrounds send their female children to madrasas. Thus, the choice of

madrasas by Muslim parents is influenced by both religion and economy. Similarly, some parents get their daughters married off when they reach puberty i.e. sixteen years old. Consequently, Muslim girls get deprived of higher education. After marriage, girls are deprived of the education. Their husbands usually do not want their wives to move ahead for higher education. It shows that gender discrimination in Muslim community is pervasive in Nepal. Religious education is a must for girls.

Despite the fact that people with madrasa education do not get government employment, Muslim parents choose to send their girls to madrasas. It results into keeping girls unemployed and staying dependent on the income generated from the male members of the family. One of the participants accepted, “I have not seen anybody to get the jobs with madrasa education. There is no salary to the Maulanas from the government of Nepal. The government of Nepal does not offer opportunities to the students with the certificates from madrasas. They go abroad as they do not find any government jobs” (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023). Madrasa education lacks employability. It does not capacitate students to get jobs in the market. There is low possibility of getting employment with the madrasa education as the madrasas do not offer modern courses including engineering, medicine, science, computer science, physical health, law, management etc.

Although Muslims understand the importance of medicine, and nursing, they do not normally send girls to colleges for higher education and modern education. There are thousands of students who study at madrasas but do not get any employment. However, they educate their children in madrasas. With madrasa education, children can only know their culture and religion. Life cannot be made better with the religious education. Public education is important. Majority of the participants stated:

Nowadays, parents focus on public education relatively. In the past, they did not understand the value of modern education. Now they understand and emphasize on modern education as it is related to employment and professional growth. Almost all parents send their children for Madrasas so that they can know their religion and culture.

(Focus Group Discussion First, April 26, 2023)

There has been a change in the trend of choosing public schools because of high need and demand of modern education in social and professional lives. Some of the parents send their children to madrasas in the morning and during the day; they study in public schools. The moderate parents make a balance between religious education and modern education.

Public education opens the door to many opportunities for employment ranging from banks to administrative offices (Focus Group Discussion First, April 26, 2023). This is why, most of Muslims are attracted towards public education. However, in the case of choosing schools for children based on gender differences, they discriminate between boys and girls. They usually prefer modern education for boys, whereas they generally send girls to madrasas for religious education.

None of the participants discarded the importance of madrasa education. Instead, they value Madrasa education at different ratios. One of the participants opined, “Madrasa education is needed as it can help children to know their religion and culture. Because of Madrasa education, their parents can have blessings and boons. Their education will become the source of mercy and grace from the almighty after their parents’ physical death” (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023). The extract implies that Muslims are sensitive about their religion and culture. They believe in the hereafter. Therefore, they educate their children in madrasas. They want to go to the heaven after the death. The more their children study religion and culture, the

more blessings of Allah there will be upon them. This predicament leads numerous parents to choose madrasas for their children. However, they are selective based on the gender differences. For many of the participants, there is a great benefit from the education. Children can become intelligent which is good. At least, children recognize their culture and religion. Wherever they go, they can deal with the affairs alone without seeking anyone's assistance. They can make their future better. Children with madrasa education get ethical knowledge on how they need to deal with their parents and how they can maintain rapport in society. They can turn rogues if they do not go to madrasas. The emphasis on madrasa education demonstrates the attachment of Muslims with the spiritual world more than with the materialistic one.

What children cannot get without madrasa education is a crucial question. According to majority of the participants, children can involve in nonsensical activities here and there. They can teach their parents what they learn at madrasas. They may not respect their parents without madrasa education. Besides, they cannot get to have the homage for Allah. They learn rituals and values of Muslim society. They learn how to perform namaz and pray Allah. They lead life under the control of the parents and also contribute to maintaining peace. One third of the participants stated, "If they do not go to madrasas, they will stay engaged in playing games and fighting with others. They will lack manners" (Focus Group Discussion First, April 26, 2023). There cannot be peace in family if children stay at home and do not go to madrasas. They learn reading and writing. They learn manners of namaz and fasting. They get aware and intelligent with madrasa education. Maulanas teach about religion and culture. They memorize the Qur'an so that they can pray for goodness of their parents. Female children learn the proper dress code of Islamic culture. They learn languages such Urdu, Arabic, Nepali and English (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023). The extract explicates that madrasa education is associated with ethics

and mannerism. It helps to lead an ethical and well-behaved life rather than to get opportunities to make living. The faith of the most of the participants in religious life enforces them to choose the madrasa education for their children. Although both madrasas and public schools teach moralities and ethics, Muslims choose madrasas because of their bias against public schools. Public education increases the possibility of getting jobs and helps to adapt to different social contexts. Nevertheless, Muslims do not prefer public schools.

The study shows gender discriminations in madrasas. Boys and girls are treated differently. Majority of the participants asserted that girls are taught with the veils. Mature girls are separated from boys. Madrasas do not accept coeducation. Maulanas take more care of girls and they focus on the girls' education as they are more vulnerable. Parents do not allow adult girls to madrasas. For them, boys can do anything. It means boys are free to lead and study as they like. But girls cannot cross the cultural boundary. Otherwise, they can stigmatize the family honor. The boys should study in public schools but girls need to study in madrsas as they do not need to work in the public space (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023). There are opposite views of the rural parents and urban parents. Basically rural parents have negative attitude towards higher education of girls. They do not like to send their girls to schools and colleges when the girls are grown up. However, the urban parents have started sending their female children to colleges as well.

Majority of the participants opined, "After listening to the reactions of the community people primarily in the villages, we become reluctant in sending our adult girls to public schools and colleges. Therefore, we send them to the Madrasas as thereby they are secure. Although children want to study, fathers do not want to put their daughters in colleges" (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023). Parents discriminate between male and female children.

Similarly, Maulanas discriminate between girls and boys at madrasas as well. The boys are excused at committing mistakes, whereas girls are punished. One of the participants said, “I have only daughters. Some of them study in madrasas and some of them in schools. The status of Madrasa in our village is low. We cannot send our girls to sophisticated Madrasas away from home as we cannot afford the expenses as well” (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023). Although some parents like the participant who wants to send her girls to madrasas for higher education cannot send because they cannot afford. The madrasas in the study area do not meet the standard of providing higher education to the girls according to the participant. Therefore, their girls stay home when they are grown up. In her view, teachers do not discriminate between girls and boys at madrasas. Fathers slightly discriminate with their daughters.

#### **4.2.3 Gender Discrimination**

Although gender discrimination is pervasive in patriarchy, the impact of gender discrimination in terms of education in Muslim community of the study is more intense. Majority of the participants in the focus group discussion second narrated that parents recalled their days when they had been students. Although they had been studying, their family members did not allow them to continue the study. One of them emphasized:

I was studying but my family members did not allow me to study because of my sickness. I have brothers who study at public school. My parents want to educate my brothers. However, they do not have any plan to educate. Indeed, I am willing to study. With the education, I would be able to think properly. (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023).

There is gender discrimination in her family as her parents send her brothers to school but she does not go. Besides, her parents do not want to put her in school although she wants to study. This shows the discrimination based on gender differences in Muslim community of the study area. On a similar note, there are some families in the study area that seek to educate their children but cannot because they do not have any source of income. Some of the women are daily wage laborers who find difficult to meet two ends of the day. For them, education is beyond imagination. One of the participants expressed her wants for education, “I have daughters. My husband died twenty years back. Due to no source of income, I have not been able to educate. We are daily wage laborers. If we had money and there was any high school in our locality, we would educate our children regardless of sex” (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023). Although the woman has strong desire to educate her daughters, she cannot because of poor economic status. She is a representative of the women in Muslim community that is marginalized by the state mechanism as well. Poverty and illiteracy are interdependent. Hence, the data show that illiteracy among the Muslim families is the effect of economic poverty. She reflected on the ground reality in the Muslim community. She mentioned that although parents want their boys to have professional degrees, they do not have any desire for their daughters’ education. To some extent, girls are educated at madrasas. Then the girls after reaching puberty get married off (Focus Group Discussion Second, April 26, 2023). Impact of gender discrimination can be seen in poor presence of girls in schools. The parents are serious about the quality education for their boys but negligent and reluctant when the case of educating girls comes.

Parents set their boys free to do whatever they like. These cultural practices show gender discrimination ubiquitous in Muslim community of the study area. However, the rate of

discrimination is declining in the urban areas. Even the Muslim girls in towns and cities go to public and private schools for modern education as reflected by one of the participants.

Gender discrimination prevails in Muslim community particularly in terms of education. One of the participants stated that because of the veil system in Muslim community, most of the parents do not send girls to public schools. Instead they send them to madrasas. Even poverty is the cause that some parents do not send their children to the public schools. Meanwhile, there are some parents who particularly send the girls to madrasas and boys to the public and a private school assuming that “investment in girls’ education is just the waste of resources” (Focus Group Discussion First, April 26, 2023). Such parents are biased towards girls. It depends on the parents whether to send girls for higher education. The participant argued, “I do not hesitate to send my female children to public schools. Both boys and girls should be sent to public schools for modern education. None of them should be deprived of opportunities for both worldly education and religious education” (Focus Group Discussion First, April 26, 2023). Despite the fact that gender discrimination in Muslim community is ubiquitous, liberal parents like the participant do not discriminate with their female children regarding education. In her view, money is not the barrier to educating girls. Just because of rigidity and narrow-mindedness, parents do not allow their girls to study at public schools. However, people are gradually getting to know the importance of modern education in life. Some parents just want to continue the tradition of their respective family that does not send girls to public schools traditionally. Patriarchy affects their life.

Majority of the participants opined, “Educated girls are highly demanded in the society when the time of marriage comes. When the matter of right arises, Muslim parents normally forget the provisions accorded in the Qur’an that emphasizes on the education of both girls and

boys” (Focus Group Discussion First, April 26, 2023). The excerpt demonstrates duality in Muslim community. On the one hand, people seek for qualified daughters-in-law. On the other, they are reluctant in educating their daughters in public schools and colleges. The Holy Scripture accords the provision of education to all regardless of sex differences. In practices, Muslims in the study area focus on the education of only boys. The rigid families do not allow their daughters to go out of home as they assume that they can fall in love with the opposite sexes before the marriages. Such narrow-mindedness leads the community to depriving girls of higher education.

According to majority of the participants, there is equality among boys and girls at the elementary level of madrasas. Coeducation is permissible at the lower level of madrasas. However, girls are not given the opportunity to involve in the physical sports. Games are only for boys not for girls. Although there is freedom for girls, there is no facility for sports centered to girls. Girls also complete their higher education provided in madrasas up to 50%, whereas the boys generally complete their higher education up to 90%. There is a slight discrimination in terms of the level of education given to boys and girls. There are two girls in my family who have become pharmacists and engineers (Focus Group Discussion First, April 26, 2023). The data gathered from the participants vary and do not show uniform situation among the Muslims. Overall, girls are discriminated regarding higher education attainment.

#### **4.3 Educational Practices in Madrasas**

Generally madrasas teach certain books selected for different age-group students. Most of the madrasas do not have systematic curriculum. Most of the madrasas have a single teacher who teaches almost all books to the students. Most of them do not have separate classrooms based on different grades. Students of all groups in the elementary level of the madrasas study together.

The selection of books and group formation take place based on the judgment of the teacher employed to teach there. The data collected for this study reveal certain educational practices in madrasas.

#### **4.3.1 Evaluation Methods in Madrasas**

Although madrasas evaluate students based on their recital capacity of the lines of the Holy Scriptures especially the Qur'an and upgrade and certify students accordingly, Muslim parents send their children particularly girls there for education. Most of the madrasas are not certified. However, they issue certificates which are not valued and validated by the governments of any countries. Due to lack of awareness, parents put their children in such madrasas. Those who are educated and aware do not send their children to such madrasas. Rather they choose the registered madrasas if they plan to educate their children there (Interview, April 19, 2023). This demonstrates that there is lack of awareness about education among most of the guardians in the Muslim community. There is no grade teacher in madrasas. Mostly, a single teacher teaches students up to primary level. Although students based on their time they have spend sit into different groups, they are taught by the same teacher. Students are usually asked to memorize the lines from the books rather than comprehend them. Sometimes, students are asked to translate one language into another. Those students who are good at memorizing are upgraded sooner (Interview, April 20, 2023). This indicates that memorization as a teaching method is implemented in madrasas. More than this, students are certified based on their memorization of the Holy Scriptures. Those students who find rotting lines boring and monotonous drop out from the madrasas before completing the expected years to stay there. Consequently, most of the madrasa students cannot reach the higher secondary level education.

Madrasa education can be modern provided that it adopts the advanced curricula developed by National Education Board of Nepal and Nepalese universities. A very few elementary levels of Madrasas have been registered under the Education Act of Nepal and only these Madrasas execute the curricula of National Education Board. Majority of the key informants mentioned that only a few Madrasas run based on the syllabus of National Education Board of Nepal like Al-Helal which is located in Krishnanagar Municipality. Even this Madrasa operates the mixed education system including the Qur'an and the syllabus of modern education. There is no harm in sending children to such schools. The madrasas which have only the classes of religious education are suspected by the parents. One of the informants opined, "I mean parents do not prefer to send their children to madrasas which are not in the mainstream. Such parents want their children to study English, Maths, social studies, and other life-related educational aspects which are not available in madaras where only Maulanas are involved in teaching and learning process" (Interview, April 28, 2023). The informant added that the primary thing is that all madaras have not come under the regulatory of the mainstream education. Even those madaras which are in the process of mainstreaming do not strictly follow the curricula of the education system of Nepal. Therefore, the future of students in madrasas does not seem bright.

There is a wide gap among Muslim guardians. The educated and leading figures of Muslim community send their children regardless of sex differences to public schools and most of them prefer private schools where they assume quality education is provided. The rest especially those whose financial condition is poor neither send their children public schools nor can afford to educate children modern and advanced schools. Majority of the informants opined:

Muslim parents whose financial condition is poor do not send because they think if their children cannot have Islamic education will be deprived of knowing their religion, and retaining their culture. Besides, most of Madrasas do not charge any tuition fee.

Therefore, financially downtrodden families prefer to send their children to Madrasas.

Public schools are not available in all villages. However, in the Muslim populated areas, at least there is the presence of Madrasas. This is why, I think parents prefer to send their children Madrasas. (Interview, April 27, 2023)

Their opinion cannot be agreed with as even public schools do not charge any fee up to the secondary level. Hence, the blind faith in religious and cultural practices is the main reason that Muslim parents choose madrasas instead of public schools for their girls. The presence of madrasas in the Muslims dominated area can be another reason that Muslim parents of the low economic income choose madrasas.

At probing that madrasas did not have any curriculum as prescribed by the National Education Board of Nepal and were not registered under the Act of Education of Nepal. However, students studied there. One of the informants mentioned two things: one either the proprietors of madrasas had failed to explain to the government about the importance of madrasa education or they did not endeavor to modernize and expand their education scope. What they taught in madrasas, they must have informed the authorities of education in Nepal. The explanation sounded good but not logical. Besides, the informant highlighted the madrasa education by pointing out to the believers in Islam who sought religious advantages from madrasa education. What the informant further told that the believers could take advantages of modern technologies for knowing Islam and its values. They did not need to send their children to madrasa for religious education. Instead, madrasas should have been the hub of modern

education. In the perspective of the informant, it could be possible provided that the state took initiative in mainstreaming madrasas with due provision of theology as an optional subject for students at madrasas and the rest curricula must be modern so that learners could have quality education. The Madrasas could not be and must not be discarded in Muslim community as they are the first schools for Muslim children. Overall, a moderate solution should be sought for the problem facing the Muslim community in terms of selecting educational institutions for children. However, the feasibility of concretizing the concepts could be a challenge in a diverse society of the study area. In other words, it is questionable whether the government of Nepal can provide the salary to the teachers at madrasas as it has already been facing financial crisis to fund the public schools located in almost every ward of Kapilvastu Municipality.

Majority of the informants emphasized on madrasa education as it could make children's future better provided that the true lessons of Islam as accorded in the Holy Scripture, the Qur'an were imparted to the students. They opined that the translated versions of the Qur'an must be taught to the students. Consequently, the children did not have to learn Arabic for understanding the Holy Scripture. He focused on the modernization of madrasa education. Although they resonated high in modernizing the madrasa education, they were not clear about the syllabi to be adopted by madrasas. On the one hand, they overstated the importance of modern education. On the other, they sought after the theology to be taught in madrasas of the municipality. Educational institutions cannot operate mixed curriculum of both faith and science. In the age of specification, they can go with any one of them.

Competition between students from madrasas with those of public schools cannot be imagined because the former do not have the systematic education, whereas the latter learn things systematic and logical that can help them to be apt for the professions and employment

available in the market. However, one of the informants spoke that students of madrasas can compete with the students of public schools and colleges if they adopted the curricula of National Education Board of Nepal (Interview, April 26, 2023). In fact, the parents who send their children either to public schools or madrasas have similar economic conditions. However, the quality and standard of education students receive at both types of educational institutions is not similar. There is a wide gap in terms of quality and content students get and learn. Therefore, they cannot compete with each other. The informant argued that language should not be a problem whether it is Urdu or Arabic. Content matters. What they are taught is the point. madrasas teach good things. Of course, language matters. The case is not as the informant stated in the Muslim community. A child who goes to madrasa has to learn multiple languages including Nepali, English, Urdu, Arabic and their respective dialect. The children get confused about the language variations. Meanwhile, they feel overloaded with learning languages. Consequently, they cannot perform better in curricular activities. They have a limitation of acquiring languages. Madrasas basically focus in teaching Arabic and Urdu languages and literature.

There are differences in the terms of syllabus of both madrasa and public education. Science is needed to prove the existence of Islam. Even maths, political science is also needed to be studied for comprehending Islam. Management is important. Even the religious people have started realizing that we need to engage our students in the modern education for adapting to the changing milieu of the world. The Maulanas are engaged in misinterpreting the Islamic principles. Madrasa education only incorporates the subjects on ethics and morality. There is nothing more than this, whereas public education includes Maths, science, social sciences, ethics, morality, physical science, management, computer science etc. which help to make life better.

Consequently, mostly students do not get employment with madrasa education. When they get, it is only in their community such as in teaching theology. There is a belief system as propelled by Islam and Muslims need to go according to that. Madrasas teach them how to perform namaz. Some of the madrasas teach English, maths, science, and moral science as well. However, their focus remains on theology rather than modern courses. Children get opportunities to be acquainted with their traditions and cultural practices such namaz, fasting etc. which cannot be learnt at public schools. Therefore, most of the guardians send their children to madrasas. In contrast to the general conception that students from madrasas cannot compete with the students of public schools, one of the participants stated:

I had studied in Madrasa up to lower secondary level. She was the best student in maths in 10<sup>th</sup> grade as she had come from the Madrasa. I think there is no difference. Madrasas have only one subject Arabic and the rest subjects include maths, science, social studies, science etc. My children study combined of both religious education and modern education at Madrasa (Interview, April 23, 2023).

The opinion of the informant regarding the madrasa education that it can help to get only teaching jobs in madrasas is controversial. The question is how many of the people with the madrasa education can get opportunities to teach at madrasas. The next question is whether girls get the opportunity to teach at madrasas or not.

#### **4.3.2 Perceptions towards Madrasa Education**

Mostly Muslim parents prefer to send their daughters to madrasas instead of public schools. With the education from madrasas, they seldom get job opportunities in society. As a result, Muslim girls remain deprived of employment. One of the participants acknowledged that students with religious education cannot have job opportunities. Provided madrasa education

incorporates the curricula of modern education, then students even in madrasas can have the possibilities of getting employment in the public space. They can automatically get the jobs. They can prepare for public service commission. Of course, they can be capable of getting opportunities to work in different roles. Majority of the informants presented an ideal condition which is not there in reality. Madrasas do not execute education regulations of Nepal in the study area. The hypothetical situation as mentioned by the informant can be questioned. Many of the madrasas are not registered and they do not have any regular fund to operate the teaching learning activities. Their dependency is on the donations collected from Muslim families for salary and other logistics. Consequently, they cannot afford quality teachers and cannot provide education without charging fees to the local guardians. In fact, the fees they collect are indirect. Therefore, illiterate parents consider the madrasa education provided to their children free.

One of the commissioners of National Muslim Commission when asked by the initiatives taken for educational development of the Muslim community, he simply blamed the state for all the mishaps. He said that the commission did not have any budget for the educational development of the community. Furthermore, they lacked budget to work for the development of the community in substantial ways. The government has simply formed different commissions including Dalit, Muslim, Tharu or Madheshi commissions. They submit reports with recommendations of their respective commissions to the state. But none of the recommendations are discussed in the parliament. Therefore, there is no execution of the recommendations made by the commissions. They are just rubber stamps. They do not have even Rs. 50 to work for education. The incapacity and lack of initiatives on the part of National Muslim Commission demonstrate helpless situation of the Muslim community. In his view, Muslim parents send their children to madrasas so that they can know Islam and can practice it. There is no any other

benefit from madrasa education. Students do not learn anything to deal with the life difficulties. madrasa only teaches students about religion. There is no other advantage of madrasa education. There is no use of such education in practical life. However, many parents send their girls to madrasas as they assume the female members in the Muslim families do not need to work in the public space. Such parents do not see any use of modern education in the lives of girls. One of the informants opined:

What will be the use of modern education for girls if they do not have to work in the public space? This is the mindset of most of Muslim parents. They simply want them to have religious education as they will go to other houses. There are some parents who do not like coeducation and therefore, they do not send girls to public schools. They assume that in Madrasas girls and boys sit and study separate. (Interview, April 23, 2023)

There is a general conception of free education in the name of religion. In the guise of free education, they have tempted poor guardians to madrasas. Muslims think about the hereafter. Even the Maulanas take advantage of language difficulty as most of the religious doctrines and laws in Arabic. For marriage, there is no obligation that we need Maulana. Marriage of youths can take place before the authority i.e. court. Only poverty is the primary cause that parents mostly choose madrasas for their children. One of the informants added that the religious leaders run institutions in a parallel way in Nepal. They collect money from different countries as donations. They keep the money with themselves. They think that only religious education can make people educated. They misinterpret the scholarship. They keep the society in darkness. The excerpt clarifies that religious leaders especially Maulanas keep Muslim community in illusion and their preaching leads poor Muslims to uncertified and unqualified educational practices provided at Madrasas. Thus, instead of educating the community, Madrasas indeed confuse the

people in the lure of the Allah's mercy and blessings. The Madrasa education promotes superstitions including the concept of hell and heaven dominant in the community. One of the informants clarified, "Madrasas only teach theology and about cultural norms and values of the Arabic countries. The students of public schools can perform better in the life course than those who are from madrasas. There are huge differences between madrasa education and public education. The former focuses on beliefs, norms and values. However, the latter emphasizes on logic and the practical life.

The data exhibit that there are some misconceptions about madrasa education among the Muslim parents who send their children to madrasas. Besides, some of the Muslim students lack knowledge on the use of madrasa education. One of the participants stated confidently, "The education introduced by the prophet is found in madrasas. If you are a Muslim, you need to have that education which is possible only in madrasas. Children can become doctors, engineers and so on with the madrasa education" (Focus Group Discussion First, April 26, 2023). In Nepal, there is no system of such madrasas that can provide such education. I think there are many differences between public schools and madrasas which most of the Muslim parents and children have not understood. Islam enforces dress code and confinement of girls to indoor space. They should not appear in the public. Muslims free the boys, whereas girls are confined to the household life. Girls need guardians to go to different places including schools, hospitals, government offices and other places due to the religious obligation stated by one of the informants in KII. Girls with madrasa education cannot even read and understand Arabic properly. Even Saudi Arabia does not offer jobs to the people without Arabic language proficiency. However, the concentration of Muslims has been on the madrasa education.

Children learn about their cultural and religious life. They do not learn anything professional. There are no physical activities to the girls at madrasas.

In public schools, students experience openness and liberal atmosphere. There are physical activities, whereas at madrasas girls are deprived of participating in any physical activities and games. Madrasas only focus on the cultural and religious values, whereas public education targets to make students professional and fit to deal with the challenges of the world. Only in some madrasas, students learn vocational activities including sewing, and embroidery. In some madrasas, even computerization is taught about. However, the situation of most of the madrasas in the study area is pathetic.

The reasons Muslim parents prefer madrasas to public schools and colleges are numerous. One of the common explanations as explored by the study is religious education is indispensable for every Muslim. This belief in Muslim community leads them to choosing Madrasa education. Normally they do not seek the reason why they believe. They perpetuate the tradition. One of the informants opined:

For proper comprehension of the Holy Qu'ran if it is taught through translation of Arabic books to vernacular languages. Muslims generally seek to ensure their life after death which as they think can be possible only when they observe the religious activities strictly as accorded in their holy books. (Interview, April 27, 2023)

Because of this mindset about lives, Muslims mostly prefer Madrasa education to modern education. They live in an imaginary world that they attain in the hereafter. Public schools do not teach Islam and Sharia. Therefore, Muslims usually send their children to Madrasas. I think the translated version of the Qur'an should be taught at public schools so that children of Muslim

families in Nepal can understand. People often plan for the life after the death. The informant stated:

I do not like Madrasas as their proprietors including Maulanas are not ready to modernize. Madrasas if adopt mixed curricula including Arabic, and Urdu and modern subjects such as Maths, Social Studies, Natural Sciences. Without religious education, people will move towards atheism. (Interview, April 27, 2023)

Despite the fact that the informant did not accept the traditional structure of the madrasa education, he could not discard madrasas. Rather the informant reported that the parents sought for the modernization of madrasas. The assertion implies dual position of many Muslims like that of the informant.

There is a deep impact of socialization on children. If children are exposed to religious education right from the beginning of their children, of course, they are affected by that sort of socialization. There is a deep effect of religion on children. Religion distances children from modern education and finally they get deprived of the life opportunities. One of the informants argued that children learn religious practices from both family and madrasa. Modern education is badly affected by religious. There are so many practices in Muslim community which are illusive. When people come with a particular approach, things can be comprehensive. They take things for granted which is the core concept of religion. There is no logic in religion. Nobody has seen the hell or heaven. People simply imagine the world to be after the physical death. Every religion is full of illusions. The informant generalized all religions including Islam that they create illusions and the believers have learnt to live with those illusions. What is clear from the assertion of the informant is Islam has hugely shaped the minds of the Muslims as reflected in their choice of education for their children especially for girls.

Almost all Muslims follow the dictates of the Holy Qur'an that says the sun and the moon move, whereas the earth is static. On the other hand, physics says, the earth moves. The sun is static. These two worlds stand opposite. Students at madrasas do not get clarity in this regard. There is discrimination between girls and boys at madrasas. Guardians normally do not want to invest in the education of girls, whereas they prefer to afford boys' education. Majority of the informants said that they did not favor veil system as it is not allowed in Islam by the Prophet. Although they argued that religion did not affect children's education, they did not discard that Muslims followed the principles of Islam when choosing education for their children. The cultural practice in Muslim community is that girls should be separate in public affairs after a certain age whether it is an educational institution or any other public space. Madrasas have that kind of education. They do not operate classes in co-education. Muslim girls go to both public schools and madrasas.

The belief system prevalent in Muslim community determines children go to madrasas or public schools. Majority of the participants opined that Madrasa is more important than public education. The former teaches cultural, ethical and religious values. It is a mistake of parents if they do not send their children to madrasas. First children should go to madrasas. If possible, then we can send them to public schools. Madrasa is greatly important for Muslims. They can study other things later on. Nothing is as important as Islam. Studies without madrasa education are meaningless. However, the number of Muslim girls who go to madrasas is higher than those who go to public schools. Generally Muslims are serious about religious education. For some of the parents both modern and madrasa education are equally important. They believe children cannot know Islamic laws and values which all Muslims need to know. For most of them it is parental responsibility to teach children about cultural life.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Summary & Conclusion**

This chapter embodies summary, and conclusion of the study. The chapter outlines the findings explored through the interpretation and analysis of the primary data gathered by employing focus group discussion and Key Informant Interviews. The chapter concludes the study and imparts some recommendations for the stakeholders. The chapter also shows the limitations of this study and presents the possibilities for the future research related to the topic.

#### **5.1 Summary**

This study was accomplished in one and two wards of Kapilvastu Municipality. The main places of the wards are Masjid Tole and Bardahawa respectively. The educational status of Muslim women in both of the wards has been investigated into to reach the conclusion for the way forward. Economy has affected education as stated by many of the respondents. I used both primary and secondary data to demonstrate the educational status of Muslim girls in the study area. To collect the primary data, I employed focus group discussion and Key Informant Interviews as the methods of qualitative research design. First I developed open-ended questions related to the topic to achieve the objectives of the study and then raised them to the participants in the group discussion. Similarly, the same questions were posed to the informants who are the leaders and intellectuals of the Muslim community. To collect deeper information, some probing questions were also asked to the informants in the in-depth interviews.

Due to the limitations of the resources and time, all Muslims of the study area could not be invited and interviewed in either of the methods of the qualitative data collection. Only ten key informant interviews were conducted and ten participants in each of the focus group discussion took part in the discussion. Thus, twenty female guardians and parents participated in

the focus group discussion. Including the informants, there were thirty representative participants from the Muslim community. They actively participated in the research work. The information collected from them was based on their experiences and observations. Why Muslims prefer to send their female children to madrasas instead of public schools was the main point of the investigation. Most of the participants opined that religious education was necessary for the children of Muslim community.

What kind of education is necessary and why it is so was responded to by majority of the participants that religious education is primary and the public education is secondary. As a Muslim, they needed to send their children to madrasas for Islamic education. Although many of them accepted that public education is necessary for living, they hesitated to send their girls to public schools and colleges because of three major reasons. The first reason was co-education which is not acceptable to most of Muslims in the study area, the second reason they take religious education compulsory and the third reason they cannot afford to put their children in public schools due to poverty. Similarly, some of the participants stated that their girls did not need public education because they did not have to work in the public places. They were considered to be confined to the household chores after marriages. Therefore, they needed to know cultural patterns and disciplinary things for leading the life of true Muslims. Some of the parents in the study area did not send their girls to public schools because others would backbite about the characters of their daughters. They normally chose madrasas where they assumed their girls were safer and more secure. Consequently, the family honor was saved.

For most of the participants and informants, madrasa education could be better if the government funded them and took initiatives for improvement of the curriculum and infrastructure. The madrasa teachers in the Muslim community should be trained and educated to

perform better for quality education. A very few parents complained that they were forced to send their daughters to madrasas because there were no public schools near their residences. They further stated they wanted to educate their children regardless of gender differences if they had resources. The informants emphasized on the importance of religious leaders in Muslim community that majority of Muslims take the words and dictates of Maulanas (religious teachers) for granted and do whatever they ask the Muslims to do regarding the education of their children. Under the influence of the Maulanas, most of the families send their children to madrasas. Although none of the madrasa graduates got any government jobs in the area, they prioritized that education because of the influence of religious beliefs that Islamic education is necessary which is imparted at madrasas.

The access of Muslim girls to education has been based on their enrolment in either madrasas or public schools. More than 80% of the Muslim girls are enrolled in local madrasas where they complete their elementary education. Around 50% of them are dropouts after the completion of the basic education. Most of the girls cannot reach the secondary level education of different barriers including culture, religion, economy, and gender discrimination prevalent in the Muslim community. The study has explored that most of Muslim girls go to madrasas instead of public schools because of culture and religion. For them, to know the cultural values and norms is the primary duty of all Muslims especially of the girls as they are expected to confine to the household chores rather than public positions and responsibilities. Economy is a barrier to their education. Although some of the Muslim parents want to educate their girls, they cannot because of their poor economy. The role of culture and religion in Muslim community is more determining than economy in terms of education. Even if the families that can afford quality education to their female children, they do not send them to public schools because of their

culture and perceptions towards coeducation. Most of the Muslims in the study area do not accept coeducation especially when the girls reach puberty. Consequently, most of the girls have been found deprived of quality and higher education because of their rigid culture.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

This study has explored that Muslim parents hardly choose public education for their girls. Instead, they prefer to educate them in madrasas which prioritize Islamic values and culture. For them, religious education is necessary without which their life becomes meaningless. Most of the participants in the study have focused on both madrasa education and public education as the former is needed for the life after death and the latter is essential for the living. However, the former is more important than the latter one. Although madrasas do not follow the legal and formal patterns of education, they teach good things such as moralities, cultural values, and the Islamic laws. Most of the parents in Muslim community choose public education for their boys and madrasa education is for girls. Some of the Muslim guardians hesitate to invest in the education of girls as they take it as the waste of resources. Most often the madrasas available in the study area do not provide higher education. The existing madrasas teach only up to elementary level of education. The major subjects madrasas teach are Arabic Language and Literature and Urdu Language and Literature. The recitation and memorization are the basic methods of learning at madrasas.

At madrasas girls are not allowed to participate in any physical games as such facilities are rarely available there. The girls who abide by the laws of Muslim society are considered good. Otherwise, they are immoral and characterless. The girls who go to public schools and colleges from the Muslim community are not respected as they are perceived to be immoral and characterless to a large extent. However, the educated parents in urban settlement send their

daughters to public schools and colleges for modern education as well. Even these parents hire religious teachers to educate their children about Islamic values at home. In other situations, their children go to madrasas in the morning and they go to public schools during the day time. Thus, most of the students in Muslim community are confused and overloaded as they cannot perform well in both of the institutions.

The low-income families in the Muslim community hardly send their children to public schools as they specified that they could not afford the education expenses. Rather they found madrasas easier for education. One thing that they failed to understand the public education is almost free and the government of Nepal provides education free of cost up to the secondary level. It shows that most of poor families in the study area due to lack of awareness about education facilities send their children to madrasas. Indirectly, Muslim families manage resources to run the madrasas on their own. Most of the madrasas do not receive any fund from the government. In fact, madrasa education compared to public education is costly. However, most of the parents do not understand this. Therefore, they have misconceptions about public education and are discouraged from choosing schools and colleges for their children especially girls although available in the study area. In terms of education, parents discriminate between male and female children. Most of the Muslim parents seek to invest in the education of boys but are reluctant to afford expenses for girls' education.

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## Annex

### Interview Questions

1. What are the advantages of education?
  - a. Knowledge
  - b. Employment
  - c. Information about society
2. What would happen if you did not go to madarsha?
3. What do children learn in madarsas?
  - a. Reading
  - b. Writing
  - c. Socialization
4. What are the similarities between students of public schools and those of madarsas in terms of learning?
5. Do you send your children to madarsas because of your religious faith or not?
  - a. If yes, why it happens? b. If no, why?
6. Do teachers at madarsas behave with the students differently? a. If yes, why? b) If no, why?
7. Are female and male children behaved equally or differently in madarsas?
  - a. What are the equalities? b. What are the differences?
8. What are taught in madarsas?
9. What are the similarities and differences in the learning at madarsas and public schools?
10. Where do students go with madarsas and what do they do there?
11. Do you get employment? If yes, why? If no, why?