

## Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter introduces the background, problem statement, research questions, objectives of this research. It also explains the rationale of the research about why this research is important and the limitations this research has.

### 1.1. Background

The gender identity as male and female is historically acceptable and recognized in the society. When the identity surpasses these assigned gender roles, it becomes difficult for those who do not fit into these pre-defined categories. These categories however, are taken as pre-requisite of society and which is basically 'heteronormative'<sup>1</sup>. The gender and sexual minorities as being different from the defined roles in the society have to communicate their existence by showing that they also exist in this society as very 'normal' being. In order to know about the 'felt differences' about themselves, the sexual and gender minorities use different techniques and tool to communicate with each other in order to form the community and to communicate who they are. This research provides an explanation to how lesbian and queer 'women'<sup>2</sup> come out with their perceived different and diverse identities and communicate their identity in order to build their community.

In December 2007, Supreme Court of Nepal took an important step in recognizing the equality for LGBTI rights saying '*full, fundamental human rights for all sexual and gender minorities - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons*' (Bochnek and Knight, 2012). This is considered to be a significant leap in recognizing and protecting the rights of sexual minorities in third world like Nepal. It has been argued over and again that Nepal stand as one on the foremost to have legal rights provided to the sexual minorities in South Asia. This, however, cannot entail the daily discrimination, mental and social abuse these sexual minorities go through. Society that perpetuates the heterosexual relation (where gender hierarchy is manifested) as preference, nearly discard the presence of homo-erotic behavior and multiple gender

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<sup>1</sup>Merriam Webster Dictionary defines heteronormativity as an idea that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality.

<sup>2</sup>Queer is the word used for the person who do not like to be called as any gender but queer itself. For many, queer 'women' can be problematic use of both women and queer in one but I have put women as 'women' so that it won't be problematic.

and sexual orientation. In the case of women and their sexuality and sexual orientation if different from the expected norms of the society is talked as if non-existence. The taboo associated with the public discourse of sexuality has been significant in shaping the biasness and discrimination towards the sexual minorities.

Heterosexual normativity or heteronormativity has remained by default in society and it is the very basis in which these multiple sexual and gender identities try to adapt and build their own community as they challenge this normativity. And to ask society to recognize them while trying to communicate their existence as well as to fit into mainstream so that there would be lesser discrimination. In doing so, these identities constantly build their own way of communication which might or might not comply with the societal rules but will definitely give them a sense of belongingness and cozy feeling of being into something they call their own.

The realization of the difference in choosing the partner and sexual preferences which is different from the expected norms of the society has been a greater difficulty in life of sexual minorities especially among lesbians and queer 'women'. As women in general are confined to the reproductive role. Since, a lesbian is defined as "a female person who is attracted towards female" (BDS<sup>3</sup>, 2009), either the subject of lesbians is neglected or taken 'measures' to 'cure' their 'insanity' compelling them to 'fit' into what is called 'normal' in the socially defined gendered category. Society always emphasizes on pursuing heterosexual binary gendered identity which Adrienne Rich calls 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980). The difference in sexual preferences play a greater role in individual choices and freedom which normally is constrained by family and social taboo. This research provides a study of lesbian, transwomen and bisexual women who have somewhere been in relationship with same sex, regarding their attempts on finding and pursuing their identity as who they are and way they communicate their identity to others. The research also tries to explain the interactions that happens in the process of these women on accepting their identity as lesbian or queer as along the interaction within their group and as a whole, the attempts they have been making to communicate with society. This research also tries to find out the basis of their communication, the building of their community through the communication of their identity.

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<sup>3</sup>Blue Diamond Society

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

Besides some of the articles published in the newspapers or journals, most of the research about the Gender and Sexual Minorities (henceforth GSM) in Nepal are limited to the 'third gender'<sup>4</sup> (Sunar et.al., 2013), (Tadie, 2016) and (Bochenek and Knight, 2012) as a whole. However, the recent discourse on sexual and gender minorities are rejecting the concept of 'third gender' as they consider it to be broader and not limited to 'third'. They have been arguing that third gender or 'other' category listed in different cannot embed the diverse range of gender identities and sexual orientation. Significant and in-depth study about the lesbian and queer 'women' covering their day-to-day communication and their coming out process is lacking in Nepali academia. Though, there might be some researches which I might not have come across through. But most of the researches are reports by organizations which I have taken for the purpose of the study, have focused on the advocacy and legal frameworks for the sexual minorities. Also, academic researches are very less in number. On most of these literatures, third gender term has been used as key word and most of them are about the transgender communities in Nepal. Other online materials which I found are about the stories that describes the life of transgender mostly transwomen who have been quite visible in Nepal. Only a few has been written about other gender and sexual minorities. Even the studies and stories about day to day coming out process of transwoman is lacking. Most of the research are done by the foreign scholars and they are taken as reference while very few literatures are found about day to day communication about Nepali LGBTIQ community and very less about Nepali lesbian and queer 'women'. So, a significant aspect of lesbian and queer 'women' research is lacking.

Nepali society considers homosexuality as a taboo. Most of the male homosexuals (or cross-dressed) are addressed as, '*Chakka*'<sup>5</sup>. The word is both used as a demeaning word and a slang to mock the manliness of a person. A layman perception of different sexual orientations or gender identity for female (otherwise referred as female homosexuality) as of non-existence until a short time ago. The queer behavior as well

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<sup>4</sup>Third Gender as a category which eliminates the possibilities of sexual orientations has been dominant in study of GSM in Nepal. I retrieved several research papers on 'third gender' as a key word in Nepal than other words or categories.

<sup>5</sup>*Chakka* is the most common slang used in Nepali society for gay man, man showing 'girly' traits

as most of the people belonging to LGBTIQ community are perceived in some homogenous categories that are prevalent such as '*Hijara*<sup>6</sup>', '*Meti*<sup>7</sup>', '*Kothi*<sup>8</sup>' all of which refers to transwoman. The most prominent and culturally recognized are the *Hijaras* as according to BDS, 2003 'who cross-dress publicly and privately and are part of social, religious and cultural community and ritual castration is part of their identity' (quoted in Tamang 2003). *Meti*/*Metiis* also termed as those who 'use feminine behavior in public space to attract men for sex' (Tamang, 2003). Recently the terminologies like '*Lessi/Lessie*' is used to refer lesbian woman but has not been in wider use. In all these, transwoman as the most visible gender identity in our society are tend to be taken as the only third gender in society. Along with the discrimination and exclusion faced by this community as a whole, each of the individual homogenous entity within the group has to be studied so as to get a picture of how these identities are struggling to build their spaces. This research will be a contribution in understanding the nature of lesbian and queer 'women' communication process in relation to the society and to their community as a whole giving picture of how these communications are shaped. In such a scenario, the overlooked aspect of the lesbian and queer women communication in relation to their realization and interaction at the time of the socialization and the processes they go through while developing their identity are significant aspects of this study.

The interaction process among Nepali lesbian and queer 'women' community is still unexplored. Though there are organizations like Blue Diamond Society (BDS) and Mitini Nepal which works for the LGBTIQ community in Nepal, their research and works are mainly focused on the advocacy, reproductive and sexual health and channelizing the LGBTIQ rights movement. However, in depth study about the day-to-day life of lesbian and the communication process has often been neglected. These interaction and communication processes are the part of daily life and activities. Therefore, the thrust of this research is to seek answers to the following general research questions:

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<sup>6</sup> *Hijara* a Hindi/Urdu word (as a person and community) is historically recognized in Indian subcontinent as sacred being. While the word is also used as day to day slang for a cross-dressed person.

<sup>7</sup> *Meti* is commonly used as Nepali language slang among transwoman for addressing each other.

<sup>8</sup> *Kothi* refers to (gay) man who take on or behave as female gender role in same sex relationship.

1. What is the process of identity formation among Nepalese lesbian and queer 'women' in heteronormative society?
2. What are the processes and tools of communication and bases of the interaction among Nepalese lesbian and queer 'women'?
3. How do lesbian and queer women approach and communicate their identity to society?

Also, the questions such as the coming out process's alignment to identity formation, use of tools, symbols and perception of multiple identities will be explored in this research.

### **1.3 Objectives**

- a. To explore the process of realization of sexual orientation and aspects of the identity formation among lesbian and queer women
- b. To explain the basis and dimension of communication techniques of lesbian and queer women.
- c. To describe the process of community building and collective identity communication
- d. To see how multiple identities are perceived within the GSM community

### **1.4 Conceptual Framework**

The identity formation, coming out process in the heteronormative society are important aspects in life of gender and sexual minorities. The GSM community sees society as full of heterosexual normativity. In this context, the so-called normalized language already failed to include the gender and sexual minorities which makes it hard to communicate the feelings. In order to express oneself, make oneself recognized and include oneself so as to break the heteronormativity, there are several communication strategies used by lesbian and queer 'women' (also other GSM). These strategies tend to deconstruct languages while the basics of communication between two individuals in finding partners is the same. Though not to leave psychological distress of finding oneself different to difficulties of coping everyday communication of stigma. From finding partner to societal gaze of considering 'odd' in the society; gender and sexual minorities' experience these stigmas as everyday

phenomenon. The realization of being different is an ongoing process and the pressure felt by lesbians and queer 'women' to have normal attributes is immense in the society. So, they tend to find those who are with similar realizations. An important part of people coming together is communication. So, it is important to study the context, trends and processes involved in such realization and strategies that are adopted to cope with everyday situation.

### **1.5 Rationale of the Study**

In the context of the Nepal, the issues of the sexual orientation and the sexuality of an individual has remained under the private domain. Instead of focusing on the mainstream dialogue for the advocacy of LGBTIQ movement or mainstreaming of the subject, this study aims to provide a glance of understanding of the interpretative aspects of lesbian and queer 'women' individuals and their coping strategy while forming the identity. This study will be a contribution to the study of micro level aspects and medium of communication among sexual and gender minorities in relation to family, community and society. Alongside, the important part of the communication related to different aspects of lesbian and queer 'women' life has to be interpreted which will bring a new light on the study of their identity.

This research will be helpful for those trying to study about the communicative aspects of lesbian and queer 'women' life in country like Nepal. How, where these identities meet and how these communications are shaped. This can also provide a guideline to study more about lesbian and queer women identity formation.

### **1.6 Limitation of the Study**

This is study of identity formation and communication, community building among lesbian and queer 'women'. It does not however provide the detail study of each and every sign and symbols these sexual minorities use to communicate. Similarly, the stage wise description of identity formation model is taken from general 'homosexual identity formation model' developed by Cass in 1979. The 'homosexual' as a category is already considered as outdated term. So, in the light of such claims, the study might be lagging behind in constituting the modern concepts of identity formation. The words queer 'woman' has been taken for the purpose of the study

where transwomen, bisexual women and bi-curious women are considered in the category. However, queer as an identity is not associated with men or women. It is seen as the umbrella term for the people who do not abide by the general gender and sexuality norms. So, my use of the term as queer 'women' might be problematic to some of the GSM.

Similarly, this study is limited to Kathmandu valley so, the dimensions of study might be different in other parts of Nepal which is not the scope of this study. Kathmandu valley, by default is an urban setting and the study is solely based on urban middle-class GSM. So, there is the limitation of spatial and other class-based study. This study also limits to general communication and not everyday communication and manifestation of lesbian and queer women identity. The other sexual and gender minorities are largely not included as a part of the study.

### **1.7 Some Key Concepts and Terminologies**

Some of key words and concepts that are central to understanding sexual and gender minorities are as follows:

*Cisgender*: A person whose gender identity is as assigned at the time of birth. E.g. male, female.

*Transgender*: A person who transform their gender in due course of time. Transwoman, Transman.

*Gender Queer*: A general meaning of queer is 'to deviate from'. A queer is an identity where one does not like to associate with any of the gender identity and whose attraction span across different gender identities. The pronoun queer gender use is 'they'.

*Lesbian*: A woman who is attracted to woman is lesbian is a general understanding use for lesbian as attraction might not only be the key feature to define as lesbian. The emotional, affectional, intimate and affectionate relation are to be counted.

*Gay*: A man who is attracted to man is gay. Just as lesbian, attraction is not only the key.

*Bisexual*: People who are attracted towards both man and woman call themselves bisexual.

*Curious*: The people who are curious to different gender or curious about their sexual orientation like to call themselves curious.

*Questioning*: The people who are unsure about their sexual orientation or gender identity but are taking measures to find themselves like to call themselves questioning.

*Asexual*: People who don't experience any sexual attraction for anyone like to call themselves asexual.

*Greysexual*: People who are generally asexual but still sometimes experience sexual attraction call themselves greysexual.

*Pansexual*: People who are attracted to others regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity.

*Intersex*: Intersex is a terminology used for a person who sex organs that are not distinctively male or distinctively female. (Kapali, 2019)

*LGBTIQA+++*: Each one of the letters stand for sexual and gender identity which goes on like Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, Asexual and adding more when new terminology is defined. It is because of this, constituting LGBTIQ only has been problematic to community members having different identities and who seek to embed their identity in this community.

*MOGAI*: Since the integrated term LGBTIQA was used to refer to people of gender and sexual minorities, many people felt that the term could not fit them as they believed that there are many identities for which other different terms have to get integrated. So, the term MOGAI has been appeared which is more inclusive in use recently. MOGAI means Marginalized Orientations (both sexual orientation and romantic orientation), Gender Alignments (both gender identity and gender expression) and Intersex Bodily Variations (that include chromosomes, hormones, genitals or reproductive system) which constitute all of the defined categories as well the undefined ones (Kapali, 2019).

*Womyn/Womnx*: *Womyn/Womnx* has been a new initiative in defining gender since the word women has men as suffix in it and keep men at center in language (Kapali:2019) and could not also include woman of different gender identities. Some women used the word womxn.

## **Chapter Two: Interpretive Understanding of Identity Formation and Communication Process**

This chapter places the research problem and context's compliance with the literature. The concepts of sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity, multiple identities, identity formation and coming out are explained in this chapter with the historical implications of the queer movement in world and in Nepal.

### **2.1 Sex, Gender and Sexuality, Sexual Orientation**

Sex (noun) is perceived both as fact of being male and female as “biologically determined” (Tamang, 2003) and also the ‘act’ or ‘activity’ involving the vaginal penetration by penis (discarding the other forms of sexual relationship). Biological sex can be male, female or intersex as determined by having or not having specific organ/s.

Sexuality, however in general is regarded as the way one feel, preferences for the ‘type’ of sexual activity which are one or the other way related to social activities like relationship, identities that are ‘erotically significant’ (Jackson, 2006). A rather broad definition is given by WHO as cited by Tamang:

“A core dimension of being human, which includes the individual and social capabilities and conditions for eroticism, emotional attachment/love, sex gender, and reproduction. It is anchored in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs and values and it is expressed through identity, attitudes, values, roles, behaviors, and relationships. Sexuality is a result of the interplay of biological, psychological, socio-economic, cultural, ethical and religious/spiritual factors” (as cited in Coleman, 2002).

The construction of male and female sexualities is gendered according to the rule of the society and these gender roles requires that “women are supposed to be sexually shy, innocent, passive, dependent, unaggressive and submissive...” (Tamang, 2003) which comes as an exact opposite of what male are supposed to be. The gendered identities are “repetition of acts of ‘what girls are supposed to do’ or ‘boys are supposed to do’ which are routinized and accepted by the society in such a way that it

become natural and solidification of gendered identities (Tamang, 2003). The conceptualization and definitions of sex involving the male and female genital fusion is itself biased and based on heteronormative principle which perpetuates the presence of heterosexuality as normal and the other different to it as ‘abnormal’ or ‘diseased’ which should be cured.

Judith Butler in her ‘Gender Trouble’ mentions about how the contrast among the identities are that conceptualized from psychoanalysis comes in contest with the perceived gender identity of male and female in the society in respect to paternal law. Butler describes the sex and gender differentiation as have been mentioned as biological and cultural construction eventually making gender out of the matrix of sex as neither causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex (Butler, 1990). Though there is tendency to relate sex with the gender which retains the belief that gender is all related to sex, Butler points out that sex appears to be unproblematically binary, there seems no reason to assume that genders ought to remain as two. She further asks question on the histories of sex and the duality of sex. Butler’s take on gender is that it ought not be conceived merely as cultural inscription of meaning on pre-given sex; gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby sexes themselves are established.

## **2.2 Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

Sexual Orientation is defined by who one is attracted towards, loves, sleep or date. It is status of being gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual or asexual while gender identity means the terminology one likes to call oneself for e.g. male, female, gender queer, transwoman, transman. According to Yogyakarta Principles<sup>9</sup>:

“Sexual orientation is understood to refer to each person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender.”

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<sup>9</sup>Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. The Yogyakarta Principles are a set of principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. The Principles affirm binding international legal standards with which all States must comply. They promise a different future where all people born free and equal in dignity and rights can fulfil that precious birthright(March, 2007).

This definition holds as major basis of describing, differentiating and the relationship between the concept of sexual orientation and gender identity around the world. As described in the principle sexual orientation is solely related to one's own capacity and attraction over the intimate and sexual relation while the gender identity is related more to the experience which might not be same over the period of time as of birth identity. Nepal's constitution has adopted similar definition of the sexual orientation and have differentiated different concepts related to the same which 'leaves open the meaning of the sexuality which still can be expressed in each of the three different ways:

- a. Self-identification: how one identifies one's sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight/heterosexual)
- b. Sexual behavior: the gender of sex partners (i.e. individuals of the same gender, different gender or both genders)
- c. Sexual attraction: the gender of individuals that someone feels attracted to.

(UNDP, William's Institute 2014)

Referring back to the Yogyakarta Principle which describes gender identity to be referred as "each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms." (Bochenek and Knight, 2012)

Similarly, the misrepresentation of sexuality with the meaning of sexual orientation has also created the differences in referring person as either homosexual or heterosexual, a binary concept which is problematic in itself. Sara Ahmad in her book describes how these two are different from each other. Ahmed (1996/2006) writes, "Sexual orientation is often described in terms of the sex of one's object choice: whether that sex is same sex or other sex." So, the role of one's choice is important for one to orient toward particular sex which shapes the identity of the person in a particular way. As on same way, she views sexuality as "having an orientation which

itself is understood as being ‘directed’ in one way or another” (Ahmad, 1996/2006). While the use of the word ‘sexual orientation’ can be found less in the use when talking about the heterosexual aspects “the emergence of the term ‘sexual orientation’ coincides with the production of ‘the homosexual’ as a type of person who ‘deviates’ from what is neutral” (Ahmad, 1996/2006). The deviation of the individual from what is considered to be ‘normal’ is taken as ‘unnatural’ and treated in a way that escalates the isolation of the people with ‘differences.

### **2.3 Female Sexuality, Lesbian Sexual Identity and Coming Out**

Family, as an important institution goes on perpetuating the heterosexual identity and this is when sexuality comes out of being individual domain. The sexuality of a person has not been the topic of discussion and confined to home and only limited to the ‘function of reproduction’ (Foucault, 1978) making it obscene to talk about it beside this paradigm. It is also the foremost institution where the communication on sexuality will play a definite role in shaping the personality of individual. Foucault further emphasized that the sexual life is reduced to the simple terms of ‘reproduction’. This is where the discourse of power revolves around.

“All these negative elements—defenses, censorship, denials—which the repressive hypothesis groups together in one great central mechanism destined to say no, are doubtless only component parts that have a local and tactical role to play in a transformation into discourse, a technology of power, and a will to knowledge that are far from being reducible to the former” (Foucault, 1978).

‘Coming Out’ is a process whereby people from marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities make effort to accept their sexual orientation or gender identity and share these openly to the people. It is a process of communication where by these sexual and gender minorities try to make themselves seen among others. This is a continuing process and not necessarily happens at once or one time only and can not necessarily be defined into one small framework. It can range from speaking about oneself to the close friends to announcing the identity in public platforms. There are many stages for a gender and sexual minorities to actually come out as different. As pointed out by Butler (1991) naming oneself as a lesbian is also to make oneself lesbian. Naming oneself as lesbian is thus an effect of being a lesbian (in another

way). As all of the associated concepts of sexuality and sexual orientation has been a way to control and create the discourse of power, female sexuality has been so controlled and repressed as a way to control the reproductive power of women while homo erotic behavior for women has been repressed much more. In this situation, 'coming out' for lesbian and queer 'women' is considered, potentially to have negative consequences such as rejection by family, friends and subsequently homelessness. Coming out of the compulsory 'normalization of the sexuality' has also compelled the homosexuality as irrational to what Foucault says '...to annex sex to a field of rationality' (Foucault, 1978).

In the word of Sara Ahmed (1996/2006), "lesbian desire enacts the 'coming out' story as a story of 'coming to', of arriving near other bodies, as a contact that makes a story and opens up other ways of facing the world. Lesbian desires move us sideways: one object might put another in reach, as we come into contact with different bodies and worlds. This contact involves following rather different lines of connection, association, and even exchange, as lines that are often invisible to others. Lesbian desires create spaces, often temporary spaces that come and go with the coming and going of the bodies that inhabit them. The points of this existence don't easily accumulate as lines, or if they do, they might leave different impressions on the ground". It is in this context the process of coming out has to be studied thoroughly.

Many scholars have tried to describe the process. Among them the most notable was Vivienne C. Cass whose Homosexual Identity Formation model in 1979 was ground breaking model to understand the identity process, projects the idea of identity formation among homosexuals in six different stages. The linear analysis of such process has been given by psychologist Cass which is based on two assumptions: the identity is acquired through developmental process and that the locus of stability of, and change in, behavior lies in the interaction process that occurs between individuals and their environments" (Cass, 1979). Her model can be viewed from both the psychological and social perspectives and is considered as an important tool to describe the identity formation and communicating the identity among the homosexuals. The major part of her theory is also based on the distinction an individual makes between private/personal and public/social aspects of identity. The development of private and public homosexual identities is recounted and portrayed

as two separate but related processes (Cass, 1979). The six stages range from confusion to the last stage which entails for the ‘fully integrated within the individual’s overall concept of self.’ The development of private and public homosexual identities is recounted and portrayed as two separate but related processes. The private identity formation within an individual and the public expression of such identity is very much the part of communication process. With increasing identity development comes a growing consistency between the two identities, giving rise in the final stage to an overall and integrated homosexual identity.

The stages which Cass mentioned are: Identity Confusion, Identity Comparison, Identity Tolerance, Identity Acceptance, Identity Pride and Identity Synthesis which according to her goes on in a linear process with following characteristics:

- ) recognition that one’s feelings and behaviors may be homosexual
- ) tentative commitment to homosexual identity
- ) firm acceptance of homosexual identity
- ) positive contact made with others in community and a sense of community is sought out
- ) identifies with homosexuality as main identity and acknowledgement of social views on homosexual
- ) full acceptance of homosexual identity

If we were to analyze Cass’s model in modern days, the homosexuality as a concept binarily used as against heterosexuality is problematic for many. Similarly, the process described in the model assumes that all individual’s initial identity is heterosexual (Hasily, 2011) where Cass has ignored the gendered nature of the society. Cass’s premises that “throughout their lives, people encounter information about homosexuals and homosexuality. The majority probably perceive such information as personally irreverent, but some find themselves attentive to any input in homosexuality and assign personal meaning to it. A conscious awareness that homosexuality has relevance to themselves and their behavior (either overt, as in kissing, or internal, as in the case of thoughts, emotional, or physiological response) marks the beginning of the identity formation process” (Cass, 1979). It is true that

people are brought up in the heterosexual gender identity norms but that does not mean that all of the people born are heterosexual and only adapts homosexuality in due course of time. The foremost criticism of Cass's model has been its problematic explanation of linearity (Akerhind and Cheung, 2000) in Degges-White et.al., 2000). Also, the boundaries between the stages are unclear. (Degges-White, et.al., 2000). The linear progression of Cass's model after many changes have been experienced in the social climate and with emergence of new technology-controlled world of social media and popular culture, wider acceptance of sexual and gender minorities (Degges-White, et.al., 2000) and legal reforms might have made Cass's theory no longer valid.

Anthony D'augelli's 'Homosexual Lifespan Development Model' in 1994 was not stages-based model, and not based on linear process as of Cass's. The theory explained that the individual may experience different processes of identity formation at different times and they can occur multiple times. (D'augelli, 1994). The theory keeps 'coming out' in the center and explains the multiple coming out processes. These processes involve the exiting of heterosexual identity, developing personal LGB identity status which involves the process of coming out to self, developing LGB social identity by sharing one's identity to friends, claiming as LGB offspring by coming out to parents, developing LGB intimacy status by forming intimate relationship with same sex and entering LGB community by coming out in multiple areas of one's life. In criticism of Cass, McCarn-Fassinger developed the "Lesbian Identity Development" model in 1996 which looks at the identity development model both from the personal as well as group perspective. The model is based in stages of Awareness, Exploration, Commitment, Internalization/Synthesis. Each of the stages are viewed both from the individual and group perspective. These three matrices that are in interplay with each other at different stages and have recurring functional relation. Each of the component has affective element and it works either in positive or negative way. All of these components have something to do with cognition as person assigns some value to the perception.

## **2.4 Communication and Community Building**

Communication is an important part of identity building for the gender and sexual minorities. Communication necessarily involves the gestures, sign or the verbal

content of the inner feeling that people share while receiving and giving of the information. The character's identification of the other being through the signs expressive or mimetic as pointed by Schutz are particular importance as they are the foundations of the higher presentational forms, namely symbols. Communication is an important part to present the myths about sexuality as it is intended to make oneself 'understandable to other' (Schutz, 1967). The talks on sexuality not necessarily involves the expression of desires but also the desires to be accepted or to be inside of any group since we can hardly imagine our self -excepting with reference to one social group (Cooley, 1922).

The important part of the communication is use of perceived signs and symbols. These signs attached to the personal behavior of the perceived gender stereotyped role of male and female are seen as different among the homosexuals. As Schutz points out:

"To be understood the communicator has, before producing the sign, to anticipate the apperceptual, presentational and referential scheme under which the interpreter will subsume it". (Schutz, 1967)

Symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact. Mead points out the realization of self as one identity only arises after she is deployed in 'social process where interaction of individuals in the group implies the pre-existence of the group' (Mead, 1934). 'Self' is seen as coming into being in the ongoing process of self-reflection by the individual in society, manifested within these social worlds and web of meaning (Mead, 1934). Mead's understanding of self is particularly significant as he tells about the reflexive construction of self. Self is taken here as relational process bound up in the available forms of social knowledge through which people render themselves intelligible to themselves and others. (Coleman-Fountain, 2009)

Mead also offered the in-depth analysis of social interaction with conversation of gestures and the use of significant symbols. For Blumer these are 'non-symbolic interaction' and 'symbolic interaction' (Baghdadi, 2009). Symbolic interactionism as according to Blumer 'interaction as it takes place between human beings...mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one

another's actions (Blumer, 1969). Richardson (1984) views that as per symbolic interactionist perspective, a homosexual identity is the result of the social and personal categorization of sexual feelings and experiences as indicative of being a certain type of person.

So, to identify with other lesbian, it is important to communicate and the basis for this communication is already preset in the social environment people bring themselves into and the categorization of the feelings present inside them. Communication along with generating meaning from them comes from the 'social interaction' where each of the participants make sense of their own and other's gendered and sexual lives (Jackson, 2006) As signs and symbols are basic to the communication, a group identifies its unique cues to understand each other through these verbal or non-verbal signs, languages, meanings assigned to the objects. One of the key dimensions of identity is 'doing' namely notions of 'sameness' and 'difference'. (Jenkins, 2008 and Lawler, 2008 in Coleman-Fountain) as in the idea of Irving Goffman understanding of identity as a performance as it is shown by the performed behavior of slangs, loud voices, flags and other solidarity symbols. Goffman's view on stigma on how people with potentially stigmatizing attributes concealed their stigma, so that they may pass as normal. Goffman also distinguished between virtual and actual social identities and between 'discredited' and 'discreditable' to highlight the discontinuities between appearance and 'reality'. Goffman's stigma also highlights whereupon disclosure, he is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person, to a tainted discounted one. The reducibility of people to a singular, negative image of homosexuality could be characterized as a stigmatizing one which, as Goffman demonstrated was something to be managed. (Goffman, 1963)

Sara Ahmed's Queer Phenomenology talks about the concept of phenomenology on 'how objects and bodies acquire orientations in part by how they point' to each other, she further writes, how bodies become oriented by how they take up time and space. She further explains about how body and the transformation of sexual orientation into a species involves the translation of direction into identity. If sexual orientation is understood as something one 'has', such that one 'is' what one 'has', then what one 'is' becomes defined in terms of the direction of one's desire, as an attraction that pulls one towards others. So, sexual desire orientates the subject toward some others

(and by implication no other others) by establishing a line or direction. That desire is directed toward are already constructed as the “same sex”, or the “other sex”. Conversely, heterosexual desire is understood as ‘on line’, as not only straight, but also as right and normal, while other lines are drawn as simply not following this line and hence as being ‘off line’ in the very direction of their desire. Teresa de Lauretis’s(1994) distinction between lesbians who ‘were always that way’, and those who ‘become lesbians’; they might just become lesbians in a different way. While lesbians might have different temporal relations to ‘becoming lesbians’, even lesbians who feel they were ‘always that way’, still have to become lesbians, which means gathering such tendencies into specific social and sexual forms. Lesbian bonds can involve orientations that are about shared struggles, common grounds, and mutual aspirations, as bonds that are created through the lived experience of being ‘off line’ and ‘out of line’. Lesbian desire can be rethought as a space for action, a way of extending differently into space through tending toward other women. This makes ‘becoming lesbian’ a very social experience and allows us to rethink desire as a form of action that shapes bodies and worlds. To begin to think of lesbianism as contingent is to suggest not only that we become lesbians but also that such becoming is not lonely, it is always directed toward others, however imagined.

## **2.5 Lesbian and Queer Women in World History**

Lesbian women have used different methods in order to fight the repressive society, churches regulations so as to make them visible and collaboratively fight against homophobia in the past. Lesbian and Gays coming out in public and organizing social movements dates back roughly to 1870 and began as responses to centuries of persecution by church, state and medical authorities (GSAFE, 2005). However, in 1915 Emma Goldman defended lesbianism and homosexuality and her appearance prompted many women having to hide their lesbianism to share their stories with her. Similarly, in 1925 Eva Kochener found ‘Eve Adam’s Tearoom’, a lesbian gathering place which door read ‘Men are Admitted but Not Welcome’. With Radcliffe Hall’s ‘Well of Loneliness’ banned in UK for its lesbian content, it was reprinted in US and become the best seller. In the dawn of World War Second in 1941, gays and lesbian became part of mass mobilization. In 1955, Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon and six other women found National Lesbian Rights Group in San Francisco. After Barbara

Getting found the first East Coast chapter of Daughters of Bilitis, it holds the first National Lesbian Convention in 1960 (Morris, 2018). A decade after in 1970, lesbians staged 'Lavender Menace', protest action at Feminist Conference to change its stance on lesbianism. In 1974, Lesbian History Archive was made open to public. In 1975, Elaire Noble became the first openly lesbian in state parliament. The historic movement for lesbian and gays was Lesbian and Gay Rights march of 1979 after the Stonewall riots where a hundred thousand took part. After the AIDS crisis of 1986, the world became cruel to gays and lesbians. It began the era of new dialogues in conversation about sexual minorities and their issues. The first national coming out day began observing on 11<sup>th</sup> of October in the US as remembrance to the first march.

## **2.6 Lesbian and Queer History in India**

Indian society has recognized homosexuality through ancient times with the image of sacred deity Shiva as 'Ardhanarishwara' (half man and half woman). The acceptance of the 'Hijara' community as part of society and sacred being is also one of the characteristics of Indian society which history dates back to Mughal period. The modern history of coming out comes with 1986 Journalist Ashok Kavi Row's narrative explaining for the first time the meaning of 'gay' was published in magazine called 'Savvy' (Saxena, 2016) Row goes on to publish first gay magazine called *Bombay Dost* in the 90s. In the year 1996, Deepa Mehta's film 'Fire' which was about female to female sexual relation between Radha and Sita. The names being the two mythological and sacred women in Hindu religion brought public scrutiny especially from the Hindu right-wing group like Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena although it was not the very first lesbian story. The late 90s in India saw a huge development of lesbian and gay urban ghettos which created the platforms and meeting points for these sexual orientation groups. Also, there were platforms created for lesbians such as Sakhi, an organization which used to receive letters from these lesbian women with names 'women seeking women' or 'single ladies'. Similarly, CALERI (Campaign for Lesbian Rights) came out with manifesto titled "Lesbian Emergence"- a significant shift in what has so far been a male-dominated queer culture (Saxena: 2016). The first openly pride parade happened in Calcutta city in 1999 with only 15 participants. Now, pride parade has been spread across the major Indian cities and is celebrated with huge number of participants. Similarly, there are many night clubs, bars, meeting

points, popular social media pages which has been actively run as lesbian and queer spaces and Section 377 of Indian Penal Code which used to illegalize cohabiting same sexes has been ripped off in 6<sup>th</sup> September 2018.

## **2.7 Lesbian Identity: Historical Glance of Lesbian Visibility in Nepal**

Lesbian identity as a public discourse have arrives lately in Nepal. The prevalence of patriarchy with some definite set of rules that has to be carried out by women as they are gendered into existing beliefs. Since men dominates the most of the arena of social, political and economic dimensions, women have remained to submissive role limiting to private space giving them less chance to “come out as lesbians”. The patriarchal society also arcs for the women to ‘suppress their sexuality’ and prescribing some rules for assuring that ‘their bodies pure’ (UNDP, 2014). Because of a lot of social and structural dimensions, lesbians often face violence. Similarly, the principle of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality has set up for the procreating role of women which makes female homosexuality more undesirable.

With the organizing of gender and sexual minorities in different places of Kathmandu as early as in 2001, it gave path for the registration of Blue Diamond Society in Nepal in 2002 to work for the sexual health and rights. ‘BDS was both emblematic and groundbreaking in LGBTI activism in Nepal’ (ASTREA, 2015). There was time to time arrest and release of the members of BDS. With the establishment of the BDS, Mitini (which means close girl-friend than any other) Support Group was started as part of BDS which primary objective was to create separate and safe spaces for lesbians<sup>10</sup>. LaxmiGhalan and MeeraBajracharya led the group and became first couple to openly come out in public as lesbians. The group used to provide much needed platform for the lesbians including developing consensus among people about their identity and sexual orientation. Mitini Nepal’s hotline service was started in 2003 so as to communicate and reach out to lesbian women. This can be taken as the first public platform for the communication among lesbians. Eventually in 2005, Mitini Nepal was officially registered as ‘first women’s right LBT organization (ASTREA, 2015).

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<sup>10</sup>Based on the conversations with Mitini Nepal members

The case of two women Bhakti Shah and Durga, who were sacked from Nepal Army because of their ‘indecent relationship’ is one of the emblematic cases which came in the public knowledge and also among the women rights group about the right of sexual minorities.<sup>11</sup> Later both came out as lesbian couples. In 2008, the first ever lesbian women conference was organized by Mitini Nepal with support from different organizations.

In 2012, another case became of public knowledge. Prem Kumari and Rajani Shahi fell in love with each other. Rajani, 12-year married women with a child filed divorce case in court while her husband’s family began threatening her and she face physical violence. When the case reached the women commission, she was abducted and put into Maiti Nepal rehabilitation center against which Prem Kumari filed writ petition. The supreme court ruled in her favor allowing them to live together (The Himalayan Times, 2012). Similarly, in later days, many more cases of lesbian coming out and marriages have been public acknowledgement.

However, there are many instances in which the role of lesbian women has been discarded as lacking of visibility (ASTREA, 2015) and some women rights organizations like National Women Commission have been in tensions over the case of lesbians (as seen in Prem Kumari’s case). The role of lesbian and bisexual women in LGBTI movement has been tenuous, often characterized by invisibility which has been one of the reasons of criticism of lesbian in Nepal especially by transgender women whose has comparatively more visibility.

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<sup>11</sup> Based on conversation with BDS Members

## **Chapter Three: Methodological Approach**

This chapter talks about the research methods I have used to generate, process and analyze data. It includes sampling procedures, number of respondents, data generating tools like interviews and observation.

### **3.1 Study Site Selection and the Rationale**

This research tries to place the understanding of the interaction and communication process among lesbian and queer ‘women’ who are currently residing at Kathmandu Valley. But over the course of the study the researcher found that there were respondents who would like to call lesbian at one point of the time and give themselves other name at other time. So, the term queer ‘women’ suggests the person whose sexual orientation is bisexual, transwomen who are also in bisexual relation and women who like to call themselves bi-curious. The unit of study is these queer ‘women’ and the community formed by them on the basis of ‘identity’ related to sexual orientation and gender. Though the initial approach of the study were to two organizations Blue Diamond Society the umbrella organization of Nepali LGBTIQ community and Mitini Nepal, an organization established by lesbians. BDS was established in 2001 to work for the sexual and gender minorities. Initially established as an organization to work for male sex workers, BDS’s work has now expanded to all over Nepal and claimed to have reached out to more than million LGBTI/MSM (Male having Sex with Male). It works for health promotion for sexual minorities psycho-social counselling raising awareness of HIV/AIDS, promoting human rights and sexual health, documenting human right violations and violated, legal counselling and litigation services to the victims and families, legal and constitutional campaign, lobbying for policy change, advocacy and media campaign, income generation activities to poor LGBTI/MSM. BDS also organize innovative events such as a beauty pageant, and built and strengthen communities.

Mitini Nepal was established as non-governmental organization in 2005 and it has been continuously advocating for the lesbian’s right and focuses its work on advocacy, human rights and against gender and sexual violence and provide counseling to lesbian. It has continuously been organizing the programs to inform

people about the multiplicity of identity. Though these two organizations were not central to the study but they came as important reference point time and again.

Since many of the lesbian have not come out in the public, the study revolved around the respondents which researcher could reach out to. Through the contacts provided by the officials of BDS, respondents were first asked consent whether to participate in the research or not after giving information about the objectives of the study in the initial interviews. Later, the findings came from casual interactions with my friends rather than one-to-one interviews. These respondents further led the contact with other respondents. The research site was selected because this seemed one of the few options to reach out to the lesbians who are not open in public but are close to the organization. Another reason for choosing the organization was that respondents would agree to have conversation after a member of BDS convince them to speak. All of the respondents were interviewed within Kathmandu valley however most of them except few identified themselves as the one who have come from 'outside' of Kathmandu valley.

The annual pride parade and other different occasions where the LGBTIQ community tried to communicate their presence were also the unit of study. These includes Queer Hike, Pink Tiffany Restaurant (I was personally not present in the dating event though) and different social media pages. Out of nine Facebook pages that I found, only three were used to analyze. These were Confession of Nepalese MOGAI, Queer, GSM, Nepalese Tomboy and Nepalese Lesbian Community. These platforms were studied as to learn how lesbian and queer women communicate their identity through social media.

### **3.2 Research Design**

A research design provides 'framework for the collection of data' (Bryman, 2012). Since, gender and sexual minorities' study has been less talked subject in Nepal, research on female sexuality especially on lesbian and queer women communication is almost lacking. So, an in-depth method has to be used. This research uses qualitative research tools and techniques to gather the information and interpretation of data. This research is interpretive in nature under qualitative research design which is basically the understanding of the 'human behavior' (Bryman, 2012) as oppose to

positivist method. It gathers the preliminary information and analyze the forms of communication techniques as a part of socialization process among lesbian and queer 'women' in society which is heteronormative. As interpretive research, the meaning of actions that occurred in face-to-face interactions and in wider surrounding has been analyzed. These meaning of actions are noted through the participant observation in different events such as queer hike, pride parade, dating event. It also looks at the social construction of language and shared meaning for access to social reality of Nepali lesbian and queer 'women'.

### **3.3 Nature and Sources of Data**

The data collected were of qualitative and interpretive in nature. The research also uses primary data. primary and secondary. Primary data was collected from the interview checklists, participant observations and engagement in social media with the respondents who identified themselves as lesbian and queer 'women'. The secondary data were collected from online sources such as YouTube channel of Pahichan Media, videos in Youtube, conversations in Facebook, blogs and newspaper writings.

### **3.4 Sampling Procedure**

This research is one of its kind and sensitive as it deals with very personal life of the lesbian and queer 'women'. For this particular research purpose, I took the heteronormative society of Kathmandu valley as my area of study. The unit of study is basically lesbian and queer 'women' as specific to urban setting of Kathmandu valley and as discussed in limitations, rural/sub-urban display of communication or identity formation might be different and won't be covered by this research. As this research is sensitive, a strong and healthy rapport had to be built among the researcher and respondents. First of all, I purposively went to BDS who was my primary source to have access to. As it was hard to find respondents, snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling as according to Bryman (2012) is used when respondents are not available easily and a respondent roll on to another (or give information about another) as respondents might not be willing to talk to complete stranger. The size of the sample was not considered as important in this research because it is one of the gate-opening research. The number of persons interviewed were not according to

definite sampling size but it was purposive and whoever agreed to talk with me became my respondents. The other participants of the events such as hike, pride parade, dating events were not interviewed but these events in themselves were taken both as samples and universe because we have no idea about the proximity of such events.

First, BDS was approached and with the help from people at the organization, other contacts were developed. The respondents were chosen on the basis where they self willingly identify themselves as lesbians. The person who were in relationship with lesbians but identify themselves as 'transman' were not included at initial stage but later on they were included as there were very few females who would actually identify themselves as 'lesbian'. Similarly, there were respondents who were in bisexual relationship but would identify themselves as lesbian and bisexual. Some of the respondents termed themselves as 'bi-curious' and some were transman who were involved in lesbian relationship. After interview with a respondent was completed she was asked to provide contacts of other lesbian so that a network was built to identify lesbian community. A total of 11 respondents were interviewed. The sampling to select respondents seems statistically and purposively biased but it was the only way researcher could approach respondents.

### **3.5 Data Collection Techniques and Instruments**

As a qualitative research, data collection tools used were in-depth interviews, participant observation, analysis of content. A qualitative interview is flexible, responding to the direction interviewee takes and emphasize on findings of important issues. (Bryman, 2012) The primary data were collected from in-depth interview checklist where some 12 questions were prepared. These interviews were recorded and notes were taken which afterwards were translated and transcribed. The stories of lesbians shared in TV programs and internet portal were also taken as secondary sources of data. Similarly, the stories presented by visual media in YouTube were also used as source of information. In this research, interviews provide an in-depth understanding of how lesbians realize their difference from the society and how they come out from their closet for the communication. It also a detailed process of coming out and interaction process of some of the respondent are drawn and specific patterns

were as to find out the pattern of communication they been through and the stigma they face.

Participant observation, used as data collection tool, is the description of the events, behaviors and process in the chosen setting (Kawulich, 2005). As an interpretive research, participant observation was one of the tools to interpret the language, symbols and behavior in the communication and community building events for lesbian and queer 'women'. Observation checklist was prepared with only three things for consideration which were to look at the verbal/non-verbal communication, use of symbols and gestures. These were noted down after the field and analyzed thoroughly.

Content analysis was one of the other means used for collecting information. The content of the social media pages that were used by GSM community was analyzed to get a sense of how communication is done in the social media.

### **3.6 Methods of Data Analysis**

After the qualitative and interpretive data were achieved from the interviews, observations and social media pages, in the form of notes and recordings, they were translated and transcribed. These transcriptions were categorized in terms of different categories and themes were generated. After that, data was interpreted along with the themes and arguments. The age aspect (specially the realization) of lesbian has been thoroughly examined and two themes were generated separately according to the age. For comparatively older generations of lesbians, identity formation process was analyzed while for the younger one the tools and aspect of communication and community building was looked upon where the interpretation of symbols, colors, events were also added on theme. All of the data gathered from the secondary sources were helpful in making such interpretation. I have used interpretive data analysis so as to get understanding from natural setting like hike, dating event, pride parade so as to understand how people make meaning of social action.

### **3.7 Methodological Reflections**

As for the research, I chose this topic as I gradually became interested in lesbian. Having no clue where to start from, I initially approached BDS. I explained to them

that I was interested in knowing about the 'coming out' process and details about a lesbian's journey from finding oneself different to claiming the identity. After having conversation with one of the lesbian staffs, I sent her questions and we again sit for the interview. She suggested to make some changes to the question and I did accordingly. She gave me contacts of some of the respondents and I make a phone call to them. Out of the three contacts I received only one agreed to give interview. Other two simply denied because they had not come out in public and refused to give interview to me as a stranger though they were already told by the BDS member. As the respondents at BDS were open about their identity, it was not difficult to talk with two of them. So, some of the lesbian members of BDS were my initial respondents. It was not hard to build rapport with the one who agreed to give interview as she also worked with one of the organizations working for GSM. During the interview, I began facing questions such as why I was doing the research and what my gender and sexual identity was. My replies to such question in the initial interview was that I was interested in this topic whereas in later interviews I began to explore myself and I began answering that I am a cisgender woman and my status as 'questioning' as sexual orientation which made them easier to open up with me. I initially interviewed five of my respondents in 2017. They were all directly or indirectly associated with BDS, Mitini or other organization. My initial questions on interview were shaped around how did they come out, they even come out or not, the minute details on 'coming out' process. I felt I could not establish as strong relationship as I might have wanted. After some time, in 2018, I began approaching every possible way to get into the GSM communities surfing through the internet. I began mentioning that I was doing research and asked for the help to find respondents since most of the lesbians were not open yet. Some of the respondents were my close friends who revealed to me about their sexual orientation after they find out that I was doing this research. Social media site like Facebook worked perfectly for me as I found some of the vocal GSM friends. My participation in pride parade introduced me to some GSM friends who later became my close friends to whom I was more comfortable and share special bonding. My questioning status made me accessible to the queer only programs like queer hike and dating event.

The questioning status of me and researcher inside me were going on side by side. I was exploring myself and learning much as I could from the informal gatherings and

causal hang ups. It was sometimes difficult for me to choose between what to ask and what not to. So, my conversation with these friends of mine were very causal where I keep aside my status as researcher and would write on my reflections of these hang outs which are used for this research. While in ethical aspects, I have not mention any of their names and have asked them if I could use these conversations for my research which all of them have agreed.

## **Chapter Four: Locating Heteronormativity and Identity**

The sexual and gender minorities see society as extremely heterogenous in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity. This chapter explains about the processes of identity formation from the first realization to the inner and outer approaches and feelings experienced by the lesbian women in heteronormative society. This, however explains the identity formation process not in linear way as expressed by Cass in his model.

### **4.1 Confusion, Dilemma, Stress: Primary Characteristics of Identity Formation**

Confusion, dilemma and stress are the primary feelings that lesbians and queer 'women' underwent through in society which they view as extremely heteronormative. Almost all of the respondents in their interview shared their first encounter of consciousness of them being different than their friends or peers where it seemed to them that 'the world no longer appeared the right way up'.

"When in my age, everyone among my friends were talking about the boys they like and fantasies they have with them. For me I stood bland as I could not tell them that I don't have such fantasies rather I have fantasies with girls. I went through a lot of stress on thinking 'is my world different? Am I having some problem or is this a disease?'" (Respondent A).

Most of the respondents not knowing what was happening realize that they have developed feelings for the person from the same sex as theirs (in case of lesbians, transwoman). Not only for the lesbians who felt different than other in early year but for those who wanted to explore themselves and found themselves different in later age go through this stage of confusion, dilemma and stress. Refusal or denial being the main feature of the early identity formation process, the respondents hide themselves within the closet, become introvert and sharing of their feeling as that of their friends was non-existent. Not having access to any information specially for comparatively older generation of lesbians, they were left with 'why'. They felt massive pressure and problem to embed into friends' circle after realizing that the feelings shared about the likes and dislikes are neither same nor the thought process is. So, in order to address the pressure to fit into the gang, lesbians hide their true self

in this early stage. They try harder to become like their heterosexual friends, peer than any other time to be able to fit into the 'gang' with the curiosity to find what causes this 'difference' and what it really is. This curiosity led them into searching for the similar people, events or the incidents, but this didn't happen with the respondents of this research. The denial to be in heterosexual relation was the first strategy they took rather than searching for the person, topic of the feelings they have. Cass's theory that individual is at first heterosexual doesn't fit into lesbians and transwomen who from the very beginning realized that they were different.

"I was raised as a girl but from my early age, I liked short hair and wanted to be like other boys". (Respondent I)

"I didn't know what had happened to me. I thought I was suffering from some disease. I hope that I might get cured soon or later." (Respondent B)

This feeling was shared by the respondents who felt in their early life that they are different than others and not necessarily shared by those who explored their identities much later after having explored different orientations. As society always perceive difference with prejudice, the person who find themselves distinct from the group place themselves as in negative order. These negative aspects about oneself comes from the view that being different is 'abnormal' or being 'deviate' from the order which contradict from the emblem of society. For a lesbian to be different means that a lot of lesbians find themselves in double layer of discrimination as of being a woman and not to fit into the society's order of what a 'normal' woman should be like means that they realize there are a lot at stake. The difference as seen as negative, influence a lot in the life of lesbians as they are in the earlier phase of their age.

#### **4.2 Comparison: A Major Basis of Finding the Difference**

On the process of growing up, a person develops the sense of self whose 'characteristics' is 'object to itself, and that characteristics distinguishes it from other objects' (Mead: 1934). The construction of self as an identity is a continuous and ongoing process. Meanwhile the formation of 'self' as distinct from 'others' starts at the different age for different person. Respondent C shares, "I knew that I was different because I used to like girls while most of the girls in our class used to talk

about the boys they liked. From this I came to know that I think differently than them. But I never told them.”

But most of the respondents except the transwoman and the bisexual women’s realization started at the adolescent age. The average age group of the respondents’ entering the stage is 13-15. The other ascribed status of caste, religion or region do not seem as complex as the gender and sexual identity. As a socially uprooted in the heteronormative society, the sexual identity and gender roles are expected to be hetero. These processes are part of every person’s growing up phase irrespective of the gender identity and sexuality as grown up in pre-conceived notion of the heteronormativity of the society. First of all, knowing oneself starts with the ‘comparison’. When a person comes to an age where the cognitive development starts and have definite kind of knowledge about what else is happening in the society, she starts to compare herself and tries to place herself and her role in the society. In the process of the comparison, communication also happens side by side. When this communication finds her at the position of being ‘different than rest of the similar gang’, the real problems and quest for knowing oneself starts. This comparison led the respondents to find and know about themselves.

“While all of my female friends used to talk about their infatuation and attraction with boys, the persons from opposite sex, my desire grew as different. It was in the class 6 that I felt I was not in same line as my friends as I realized that I liked girls. I was 12 at that time. I began comparing myself with them. I asked myself frequent questions like, ‘Am I all right? Why am I not thinking like my friends do?’” (Respondent B)

However, in the case of women who aspire to be dressed up and look different from their assigned gender from an early age, their stories are more painful than others. Not only they were different while comparing themselves with their friends, they also wanted to ‘look’ different than what they were expected to be.

“As I liked to dress like boy and have short hair, I used to compare myself with other girls. I thought a lot about why I don’t like being girl since I was told that I had to have long hair, wear definite color or dress. I compared my behavior with others. Though I was unknowingly doing things I liked, I had sensed that my behavior for society was troublesome.”(Respondent I)

“Not only I knew that I was different, I wanted to express that these ‘girl’s’ clothes are not made for me. I wanted to look like a boy and this started when I was pretty young before I was adult.” (Respondent J)

“After finding myself different from rest of the gang, I was scared that why am I not thinking like my friends? Is there anything wrong with me? Is this a disease? May be it is a disease that will be cured.” (Respondent C)

These were the thinking the respondents had after they knew that they think different from their friends. The feeling of some taboo appears among them as they have been so much habituated with the heterosexual behavior and attraction. Their daily comparisons of the thoughts about the attraction they have with the same sex as of them lead them to complete frustration. plays the important role of orientation. As we are so much oriented with the thing or the other that when there is some bend on these tendencies, we feel it hard to adopt or cope.

#### **4.3 Interactions, Conversations and Finding Oneself**

The concern for most of the respondents before forming the identity has been the searching for partners. Since most of the respondents are of the view that they went through a lot of pressure to communicate about who they are which affected the process of finding partner. Most of the respondent only communicated with their friend after confirming that they were too close to them. This confirmation came from the proximity of their closeness to ‘reveal’ their actual likeness about the sexual relationship preferences comes only as they actually built the kind of relationship with the friend.

“First of all, I had to know how I felt. Then I told my best friend that I don’t think like her. In fact, I had crush on girl. She was shocked at first and then slowly she understood that it was okay.” (Respondent A)

It is important to note that the central to acceptance or denial to the difference to sort out the identity “lies in the interaction process that occurs between individuals and their environment” (Cass, 1979). The interaction process here refers to the conversations among the respondents with their friends when they first began to

realize the attraction for the opposite sex. The interaction started as the quest to place oneself as the definite category comes with the conversations over the sexuality. Most of the lesbians would not share their difference to anyone up until they reach the definite age. Average age for the actual sharing of the feeling for the lesbian, the first step towards the communicating the identity is 17 years. This is from this definite 'communication' they move towards identifying themselves in the locus. This movement for the respondents has always comes with the fear, anxiety and doubt about the acceptance. It is important to note that the information about the community plays an important role in gaining the confidence to talk about the identity. In fact, it is identity confusion and acceptance that takes a lot of time.

'Friends' are specifically used here because almost all of the respondent's first interaction was with their friends. Since the attraction towards opposite sex seems very 'normal' which they have been so much akin to, difference in thinking from 'regular pattern' definitely brings questions and doubt among the person who feels 'different'. This is the very first point when individual's thought is triggered by the 'difference' which follows the quest for knowing oneself as 'the identity is acquired through developmental process' (Cass, 1979). The decision to finally approach someone through the difference is the point where one realizes that one's identity though different has to be conveyed whether it is acceptable or not. The acceptance or denial of the identity is understood by the person at the stage when she begins to seek for the 'who' she really is. In doing so, she approaches the easy means that are available to her. For e.g.: most of the girls would tell their best friend who has always been the confidante of her secrets. The initial phase of interaction started as the secret sharing for respondent A. She shared her feelings about the friend she liked with her best friend and interacted on how she can approach the person she likes. Slowly the sharing of the secret mingled with the possibilities to find the meanings of these feelings. For respondent B, the interaction happened much later when she entered at the college and actually knew that there are people like her. Here peer group played an important role for her. Respondent C shared about her likes about the girls. All of the respondents interviewed were reluctant to tell their secret to their friends. Three of them have not even told any of her old friends about this. Two of the respondents were very vocal about the feelings and they both happened to be transgender.

#### **4.4 The Role of Information in Identity Formation**

Cass's assumption on role of the information that 'the encounter of information about homosexual make some of women personally inclined to them or to some consider them personally irrelevant', is not valid for the respondents whom I interviewed specially for those who were not aware of the popular culture while knowing that their sexuality is different. Also, because his assumption that information on homosexuality brings them closer to same sex is not valid in the sense that without prior information these respondents have already realized that they were different. However, it cannot be ignored that in case of 50% almost all of the respondents, the use of terminologies associated with their feelings were result of information they lately gathered. Out of 11 respondents, five come to know that their sexual orientation is called lesbian only after they get into college or in some kind of organizations or hub into social media much later. Most of them claimed that they didn't know what has happened to them because they have never heard of such thing exists in their society since they have seen their parents and other society members as heterosexual. For remaining some of them, they already knew they were called 'lesbians' because they encountered with popular culture and access the information through internet. Respondent D recalls "What has happened to me/ who am I? Why I am different? Was there any name to my feelings? Is there any other person like me or I am the only one? I always used to think about these things since I could not place myself into the same place as my friends. I only knew about the term and myself much later in college."

However, the importance of the influence of information over the identity categorization can have significant value. The knowledge acquired from the media helped some of the lesbians to actually realize their self and found a 'new way of life'. Two of the respondents felt that they never thought that they were different up until they wanted to give a try to the different sexual experience. They came to know about lesbian from the media and films, they develop a feeling of likeness towards them and began life as a lesbian. so, in a sense they felt themselves different after they knew that the community of lesbian exists.

"I used to have heterosexual relationships in the past up until I came to know about lesbian community. That brought a sense of curiosity and this curiosity led me to

begin relationship with a female. Now, I am very happy that I get to know about the community.” (Respondent F)

The point of identity is also crucial at the time when the person decides actually to approach the other person. The expression is an important phase which either comes before or after acceptance of the identity which is considered different from the rest of the gang. Approaching is a crucial task. You never know what might be the person sitting in front think of you. It requires a lot of courage at the same time it also requires that you need to tell these things either of the way since there are not any alternatives left aside now. This actual phase of communication is what determines the rest of the course and whether this particular person will communicate to others or not is also decided after this. Cass’s model has made it clear on how it comes to the stage when these things are actually made out at last. But here we will be focusing more on what actually is uttered in the communication.

Knowing the homosexual concept and knowing about the sexual minorities plays an important part in the identity formation. Respondent A remembers that she didn’t knew she would be called lesbian. Since, most of them didn’t have any idea about the type of feeling they have, they undergo through a lot of psychological tensions. None while gaining the information that they are different find a place to place themselves, the first thing that appear to them was a ‘fear’. Fear that they might not only be different but this difference is something that does not look ‘good’ and looks ‘abnormal’.

#### **4.5 Identity and Attraction, Searching for Partners**

Most of the respondents’ search for the partner led them to discovery of their identity. Many of them didn’t know that they are termed as specific group and belong to lesbian community up until they come in contact with their partner and somehow connected to BDS. While for those who happened to be young and knew all about the identities through media and other mediums are inside the closet and choose to be so. Their search for the community I only rested upon finding partners. They use social media and their confidante to find partner. Sometimes, their searching for partner is also an ‘experiment’ with their sexuality. Respondent K told, “sexuality is very flexible thing as far as I think since it is experimental and I love experimenting”. For

them coming to a community is none of the concern since they are ‘on their own way’ to things. Respondent H holds the similar view and told me she would like to term it ‘bicurious’ since she is curious about experimenting with sexualities.

Respondent G is very critical of the questions she has been getting regarding them and daily scrutiny she faces in simple and natural behavior as to falling in love. She says, “You know how girls and boys fall in love right? It is the same process. You don’t ask them are you a boy or girl. But it is true that the person has to be very intimate. After that falling in love is very natural process. I don’t understand why people would ask how you fall in love.” Her frustration comes from the fact that society always considers LGBTIQ community as not normal.

Most of the respondents viewed that they didn’t realize their difference as until they come to the age when they started having attraction. As soon as the difference is felt, they go in search for finding the identity that they would fit in. Most of the respondents confessed that there was a longer time duration between the realization that they were different and finding partners. To arrive at the point where they have knowledge that they are actually called ‘lesbians’, it took a lot of time. The average year duration between these two phenomena is some 8-12 years. So, during these whole processes, they have to undergo a lot of psychological pressure of finding oneself a category and to communicate what they really are. This period between realization of uniqueness and finding the similar unique others can be categorized as vacuum where a lot of interactions and communications takes place which are based upon the thing to ‘locate oneself’.

It took me some 12 years to come to the point to know that I belong to the category called ‘lesbian’. So, this period didn’t come suddenly. I have had to go through a lot of seeking and checking stages where in every conversation I would place myself and think about who I really was.” (Respondent B)

However, for some of the respondents, the categorical identity seems problematic. 30% of the respondents who first identified as heterosexual and had been in such relationship admitted that they started feeling themselves different after they ‘knew’ that these identities exist.

“I really didn’t know that this was possible. When I first heard the word lesbian and what that means I was shocked. I was like is it possible. Then, slowly I started feeling for a girl friend of mine. I shared the feeling with her and we sort of were in relationship. It all started with that information. Now, I explore my possibilities everywhere...” (Respondent A)

Other respondents said that there is no difference that information makes in finding oneself. Information is necessary in order to communicate with other person who shares the common things.

“Do you need information to tell yourself that you are a heterosexual? You go to college find a boy and start talking and dating. Things are same for us as well. We find our own dates.” (Respondent G)

However, the case is slightly different when one has information about the concepts and terminologies. One of the comparatively younger respondents recently discovered that she is a lesbian after having physical relation with a girl. Although her initial thoughts were not as of the respondents mentioned above. She thought she used to like boys and tried to have physical relation but could not when she gave a second thought that she should try with a girl. This really helped her and she now calls herself a lesbian. So, in both of the case if the part of attraction appears to be different than that of the peer group, then the person might go through lot of tensions and fear while the information can play a major role in reducing these tensions as a person might seek for the help or can discuss given that she knows prior information about what has happened to her and who are the people like her.

The matter of choice is also complicated. As in the case of one of the Respondent E, she had relationship with a boy which she enjoyed and later on she is in relation with a girl which she says she enjoys much and like to even call herself a ‘lesbian’. She says, “I have flexibility of calling myself whatever. At times, I call myself ‘lesbian’ and at other I call myself ‘bisexual’. Regarding me, as I was heterosexual at first, I didn’t go through the problems or thinking that the people who knew themselves different at early age face through.”

## **4.6 Conclusion**

The initial identity formation process is complex, complicated and a lot of processes involves for a person to switch between what they have learnt in heteronormative society. however, these processes are not linear and same for all of the person. The realization, complexities, comparison leads to finding of who they really are. In this way identity formation is a daunting process for some while some are pretty clear from the beginning because of help from the social media and popular culture representation in Kathmandu valley nowadays.

## **Chapter Five: Communication and Community Building**

This chapter explains about different ways of communication and community building strategies adopted by lesbian and queer women. These strategies are useful in making oneself recognizable in the community of LGBTIQ so that they can facilitate the interaction. The identity is communicated in two ways i.e. at individual level and at community level.

### **5.1 Visibility as way of Communication**

Visibility not only communicates with the community of gender and sexual minorities but also to the people outside of these groups. Being visible is searching for recognition in two different ways:

#### **i. Recognition from society**

“Being visible is also telling that I am here, recognize me. This society is equally mine as yours. So, recognizing me is essential. This is what I try to tell by becoming visible.” (Respondent H)

Showing oneself or being visible is one of the means to show one’s belonging to the community of LGBTIQ. The visibility is comparatively more associated with transgender community who generally prefer to be different from the gender roles they are expected to perform in the sex which they are born as and taking pride in this. Visibly showing one’s identity is also searching for social, political, cultural recognition. Acceptance as a member of society, recognition of more than two gender binaries and demystification of heteronormativity and homophobia are three of the major concern for these visible gender minorities community. For lesbians, who wants to be recognized as transman gender identity, they want to get recognition of their visibility in order to show that they are different then what they are assigned at birth.

#### **ii. Finding partners**

It is from my appearance, she was attracted to me which made her approach me and now we have been in relation for eight years. (Respondent A). For the lesbians who dressed up themselves as male, because of their visibility, it isn’t hard for her to communicate as she is visible from her outer appearances. And to find the partner is

not so difficult since their visibility makes them approachable to other lesbians. As in case of Respondent A, where she expressed her feeling at the early age to Respondent J as she saw 'him' every day and knew that 'he' was not like other girls and she used to behave like 'boys'. It is because of this visibility of 'him' which made her approach 'him'. While for the partners of transmen identifying lesbians, wear the traditional Hindu symbol of marriage like '*sindur-pote-chura*' (vermillion and bead and bangles). She expressed that these is symbolic that she is married and performing her roles as wife to her transman partner. The visibility works in different way for the couple on how they try to portray their identity and also behaving different than assigned gender identity.

I took all these 'being married' symbols because in one way I am trying to show that I am married and loyal to my partner and in other I am trying to convey that I am lesbian doesn't necessarily mean that I am 'not normal'. (Respondent A)

## **5.2. Ways of Being Visible**

### **5.2.1 Cross Dressing**

Cross dressing especially particular to transwomen and transmen in order to show their gender, is one of the important communication tools. Not only it entails visibility, it also assures that these people are communicating that they belong to some community. Cross dressing in and as representation of transgender community is one of cues that people try to communicate and built community through it. Even within the transgender community especially with the transwomen their visibility is of two types. The type one is transwomen who are visible as transwomen because of their body hair, make ups or even with hair and dressing style while the transwomen with surgeries, implantation cannot be recognized in their identity. But in all these the cues like 'voice, muscular body' can be few among the signs, the gaydar which makes them recognizable among the community.

In the case of a transmen whose difference was visible from the early age, the identity confusion aroused when the society directly questioned them about who they are or bully them as not fitting into the ascribed gender status and the rules to be followed under it. This made them hostile towards their environment and whether they will surrender to the society's expectations or they will find out their way. But the visibility has a major role to play in identity formation at the earlier stage. Since two

of the respondents, who consider themselves 'transman' told us that for them their identity of being visible as male matters a lot.

For two of the different respondents who cross dress, i.e. wears pants and loose-fitting clothes, behaves like men the identity and communicating pattern is different. Both are in relationship with women while one likes to call himself transman (without sex transplant surgery), the other calls herself a lesbian though she dislikes looking like 'girl'. Both of them while I was observing showed more controlling nature for their partners and liked to show that they are 'manly'. They stated they want to show their 'manliness'.

### **5.2.2 Short Hair and Body Feature**

Although it is not important that having short hair and muscular body are representation of being lesbian, but short hair in composition with other bodily features and dress combined makes up to the visibility of lesbian sexual orientation. Only two of the respondents has these features and were certain that having short hair and muscular body is their will rather than symbol of being lesbian/transman. They said that they wanted to be in that body feature because they wanted to look like 'man'. But they both agreed that they have no problem if people recognize them as lesbian just looking at their short hair and muscular body.

### **5.3 Collective Identity Communication**

There are many communication techniques that are used by the GSM in order to make them visible in public and let people know that they exist as a part of society. Some of these collective identity communication techniques are:

#### **5.3.1 Pride Parade**

The pride parade all around the world has been an important medium of showcasing LGBTIQ pride in recent years. Although started as a march against homophobia, it has become one of the important parts of LGBTIQ movement in most part of the world. The pride parade is celebration of the inside and outside manifestation of sense of belonging to the community and taking pride on own's identity. From the march of solidarity to celebration of identity, pride parade has been an important visible retrospection of LGBTIQ community. In recent years, it has been one of the important symbols to show the presence and identity of gender and sexual minorities and let

people know that they 'exist'. Not only a march for pride and existence it also is medium to reclaim the public space. Over the years, the parade has been changed from silent march to loud celebration with cheerful proud display. The first pride parade started in 1970 as a protest against Stonewall riots happened a year earlier. While June as a whole is taken as pride month and June 28 is taken as pride day. It is observed all around the world. In Nepal pride parade happens in GaiJatra. While this year (2019) there was other pride parade organized in the month of June. Both of the parades are discussed here.

### **Pride Parade A:**

I have named this pride parade as A. Every year pride parade is held in Kathmandu on the day of festival called 'GaiJatra'. GaiJatra is annual festival celebrated mostly by the Newa community. The day is celebrated in order to remember and pray tribute to the member of family died the specific year. Mostly, people dressed as cow and move around the city and the festival is also taken as the festival of humor. Most of the media stories are filled with humor and basically satire for politics to social evil. People are cross dressed in different attire showing the personification of animals, birds or even celebrities, politicians. It is on this day pride parade is celebrated in Nepal.

The history of pride parade has become some 15 years in Nepal. In early days, the participants of pride parade (which was not named as such) were mostly transgender women cross dressed. One of the reasons why this day was chosen is also because that cross dressing and visibility was norm of GaiJatra and people won't scrutinized transwomen on this day. One of the important reasons of pride parade happening in this day was also to mourn the death of gender and sexual minorities who died or killed because of hatred against them. One of the norms of GaiJatra, that has been unchanged since its beginning is its feature of collective march from all over Nepal.

On 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2018, 15<sup>th</sup> Pride Parade was organized by BDS, Federation of Gender and Sexual Minorities and other different organizations. People from all of the districts, who wants to part of the parade and recognize themselves as the member of the LGBTIQ community come to Kathmandu for the celebration. In recent years, people from other different countries have also been taking part in the parade. The route of pride parade has been same every year. At a given time people meet at

Thamel, a tourist center of Kathmandu and move ahead to Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, the main center of Kathmandu. It began with rise of rainbow flag and ends with lighting of candle. In between there are loud music, dance performances, people with fancy clothes and painted face shouting or silently moving with huge rainbow flag, symbol of LGBTIQ solidarity. Each year, the slogans are different ranging from contextualization to global issue which might not necessarily be LGBTIQ centric. “It is also a platform to show their identity for those who have already come out and creates an environment for those who wants to come out.” (Gurung, 2018)

The pride parade assures the possibility for those who are hiding behind the closet, to come out and celebrate the identity openly. It has also been a medium to change the perception of the people which they have for the LGBTIQ community as they come out in collective way important in a sense that it communicates to people, of the presence of the collective mass of gender and sexual minorities and symbolically ask for the recognition to be part of the society which rejects them. Its objective is also to change the acceptability of these identities.

### **Pride Parade B:**

Queer Youth Group with other organizations organized which they called ‘Nepal Pride Parade’ on June 29, 2019 which they called first of its kind in Nepal. They openly called for the participation in facebook and sent email to the organizations working for LGBTIQ+ communities in Nepal. People were invited at Maitighar Mandala at 10 a.m. There were some two hundred participants in the parade.

Participants brought different flags, rainbow-colored umbrella, music system and different placards with slogans. The placards consisted words in English and Nepali representing different gender and sexual identities. The main banner included the Pride Parade words in Nepali, English, Ranjana and Tamang(probably) script. Other placards consist individual slogans on colorful words which mostly call for the acceptance of their differences. Many of the participants’ face were painted.

Participants danced and yelled out before the parade. The pride march started at 11 a.m. headed towards Baneshor. There were songs played and participants dancing. After they reach to Baneshor, they shouted the slogan like, ‘Marriage Equality, Our Right’, ‘LGBTI Rights, Human Rights’, etc. Afterwards, participants take photos hugging and kissing each other.

## **A. Composition of the Pride Parade**

### **Pride Parade A**

The population composition of the Parade is not exactly known as people left and come without any formal registration. Since pride parade is one of the mediums to make oneself visible, there were all sorts of people in the parade. But because of their visibility transwomen could be recognized and can be said to be of maximum number. Respondent B is one among the organizer who assumes that some 700-750 participants were formally invited from the contacts with regional and district branches of BDS and other local CBOs in most of the districts of Nepal. The other international partners were also invited. For those coming from out of the valley, travel and food allowances were also provided. More of the participants who were visible came from Terai/Madhesh because of comparably more acceptance of such gender identities there and also because of the presence of organizations that works with sexual and gender minorities there. The population of lesbian, bisexual or other identities which are not visible is unknown. Apart from those who already have been in contact with the organizations, no recording of these participants has been done. But the organizers were sure that the composition of these identities were as much as that of visibly seen identities.

### **Pride Parade B**

It is interesting to note that the Pride Parade B has lesser transwomen who actually composite the majority at Pride Parade A and who come from all over the country. The actual composition is not clear but there were people who would like to call themselves queer and fluid. Comparatively there were much younger people than in pride parade A. In the scorching heat, the participants were dancing and making their way towards Baneshor. There were colorful flags and interesting slogans much of which in English which means that these participants belong to urban middle-class young generation youths. Many of them express their happiness to be part of the event. Since, the participants were fewer than in parade A, the proximity of knowing who is who was clear. Also, these urban queers seemed to present themselves than to hide.

## **B. Pride Parade and Lesbian Representation**

### **Pride Parade A**

Lesbians viewed pride parade somehow differently than that of transwomen who are visibly seen around. Respondent B, one of the organizers of the parade sees it as communication strategy for lesbian and queer women as well but in a different way. She received many personal messages on her social media account after she posted the event. These women ranged from different age group and some of them even anonymous, asked her if they can take part in the parade without signing up. Majority of such women did not reveal that they were lesbians while some of them did. They said that they will take part in the parade. On parade day, she remembers none of the women either recognizing themselves as lesbians or not came to her. But she believes that they probably have come to the parade. Many messaged her that they actually participated in the pride. She points out many reasons for their behavior:

1. They wanted to be the part of community their identity is close to but do not want themselves to be visible.
2. They wanted to see if there are possibilities for them to explore more about the identity.
3. They just wanted to see what pride parade looks like.

But the events as such in public has huge impact on people who are yet to come out or never willing to come out. As any people can be part of the parade, GSM can also participate just as a passerby. The spatial location of the program also encouraged the participants since these places are usually hoarded with tourists and general people, the parade crowd might not be seen as something different for those who want to take part in parade but do not want to get themselves visible as one of the members of the community.

“Had the event been in private place, the people who showed up would not have come since they have to make themselves visible in front of small group of people who might know or notice them. One of the advantages of public events is that the mass of people might not notice all of the participants, so no scrutiny.” (Respondent B)

Respondent F who was attending parade for the first time was here because of her curiosity. She was not lesbian until recently she tried to discover herself. After having

two heterosexual relations, she slowly began to recognize that she might be interested in girls as well. Being in the pride parade, she was able to feel sense of belongingness. She was able to access to the world of lesbian community after she posted photo of being in pride parade in social media after which she was able to find her lesbian partner. Parade is Symbol of freedom of expression. Alliance for solidarity for her. Although she didn't expect it to be, posting photo in being in parade become symbolic for her.

### **Pride Parade B**

There were a lot of lesbian and queer 'women' openly revealing their identity in this pride parade. Some of the lesbian couples were clicking photos and showing sweet gestures. Mitini Nepal members were present in the parade with their banners and a lot of other lesbians could be openly seen. Though I had interactions with only some of the people whom I already knew, I don't know the exact representation of lesbians in number but it was evident that there were quite a few.

### **5.3.2 Queer Hike: Quike**

The queer youth group is a loose affiliation of young queer/ MOGAI formed to challenge the mainstream LGBTIQ movement which they believe to be exclusionary in assimilating and raising issues of different identities within the GSM community. The group also tries to constitute the intersectional aspects of one's identity. The group is active in social media on the same name and organizes rallies, discussion series and hike. They announced the group hike called 'Queer Hike to Dhinacho'. For participating, a google form had to be filled mentioning one's gender identity and sexual orientation. The participants had to be one of the members of the GSM or people who identity questioning could also participate.

There were five participants in the hike including me. Lesbian, queer, curious and transwoman was the composition of the participants. Some of the participants didn't knew each other previously while some knew each other. The hike was meant to be a socializing and solidarity building event where these different identities came together to celebrate themselves. It was one of its kind in the way that it brought ease among the hikers.

### **5.3.3 Symbolic Importance of Hike**

The queer hike was one of its kind where some of the people who are not open about their sexual and gender identity and some who are open met and share a full day with each other walking through the top of the hill. While hiking in the forest, the hikers shouted, clicked pictures, wrote on stone and leaves which otherwise might not have been possible for them in any other place or circumstances. The placard written as 'Queer Hike' was signed by the participants and placed on the stone at the center of the hiking route. One of the participants wrote about the hike in the leaves to let people know that we were there. She also wrote in the stone stairs and clicked photos and posted in the social media later. It seemed as if they wanted to make themselves heard, pour out their inner self. They were shouting as if the trees were their audiences symbolizing them as society and people whom they want to get accepted.

### **5.4 Social Media as Medium of Communication**

In the age of social media like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, What'sApp, the communication process has been easier and they have facilitated the community building process. These platforms have given space for the GSM to form their own public pages with specific to the identity they are akin to and help communicate with each other and assist in solidarity building process. Networking, finding partners and bringing together for a common cause have been facilitated by these social media platforms. For this research, I have gone over to some public group pages in Facebook only. There might be other pages and in other platforms like YouTube and Instagram which are not the part of the study. Among the pages are Confessions of Nepalese MOGAI, Queer, GSM; Gender Fluid People from Nepal, Nepalese TransWomxn, Queer Collective Nepal, LGBT Nepal, GSM of Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities, Nepalese Bisexual People, Nepalese Tomboy, Nepalese Lesbian Community, which are not run by any formal organizations. There are other pages like Blue Diamond Society, Mitini Nepal but I have not included them as they are official pages of registered organizations.

Among the pages the most popular one is Confessions of Nepalese MOGAI, Queer, GSM which have 1598 followers in the page. This is a platform where people can post anonymously about their gender identity and experience of their relationship, their thought on coming out, specially confessions. These anonymous accounts can

send anonymous message in the page without revealing their identity. The confessions are numbered and posted publicly. Before confessions, the gender and sexual orientation identities are mentioned. There are more than 500 confessions in the page till May.

The confessions with 'lesbian' written, almost equals the number of other identities with their confessions. These confessions include form of attractions they have for the women, the invitation to love, finding partners, complications on the relationships to the break ups, societal unacceptance, family hardships, sexual fantasies. Sometimes explicit languages are also used to make the complexities of their identity understandable to the followers of the page. The comments in these posts range from simple reply to the post to the satire, asking for dates to expression of solidarities.

The other page which is specific to lesbian sexual orientation is Nepalese Tomboy page which has 1367 followers and was started in 2013. It basically posts the pictures, memes, cartoons, captions which are related to lesbian relation, female bodies and female to female attractions although its page says 'anyone of every sexuality supporting each other'. Although it has longer history than other pages and quite good number of followers, there are less post engagements. I am unaware if it has any private message platform but there are no engaging posts which GSM especially lesbians could involve into. Apart from this, because the page looks specific to lesbian and is public page, lesbians might not have been engaging because of fear of visibility and non-willingness to share their identity. Nepalese Lesbian Community also one among such platform and has 128 followers where only one comment has been about a woman who reveals her sexual orientation. Lesbian Nepal also appears in Facebook with only 13 followers in it. There might other close group which might have close group members but I have not accessed to these groups.

It is clear that these pages are helpful in a sense that they have created spaces for voicing the lesbian sexual orientation without being judged and building solidarities among themselves.

### **5.5 Use of Symbols**

There are symbols which are used by GSM so as to communicate to the world and have meaning associated with the symbol.

### **5.5.1 Pride Flag**

The LGBTIQ pride flag has been one of the important symbols of dignity and pride for the GSM community. The rainbow color flag signifies the colors of rainbow and acceptance of diversity and pride on being GSM. The use of pride flag on different ways such as batches, Facebook profile, small quirky souvenirs are symbolically used so as to inform people that the person belongs to GSM. All of the respondents agreed that they took pride in rainbow flag but public display of flag has been done by very less of them. In fact, it is interesting to note that the younger respondents who are updated and informed about the popular culture do not hesitate to use the pride flag and its colors than the comparatively older respondents who became aware of the popular culture much later.

Also notable is that there are different flags representing each of the gender identity or sexual orientations. These flags are personalized according to gender identity and sexual orientation in order to communicate one's identity. There are five primary color to the flag which are arranged according what one's identity is.

### **5.6 Use of Language and Slangs**

One of the important symbols of communication and community formation is use of the language by the lesbian and other GSM. The word 'Meti' is common slang used for the transwomen while 'Tepki' is slang used for cisgender women in Nepal. There is no local slang term which has been in use for the lesbian but some of the lesbians use 'Lessie' as slang for the lesbians. The use of these words and languages also works in two ways. First, it helps to reframe the feelings on their own which cannot be put together in the 'common language' terminologies. Second, it can be used as a symbol of interaction whereby they can be recognizable among the people of the community.

“Since there is short of language and terms that properly express ourselves and our feelings, we have to sometimes make our own language and terminologies and use them within ourselves. The use of these term is communicated in such a way that if we are using our own language, it is easier for the people to know that we are from the same community and also brings us closer to each other.” (Respondent G)

Another aspect of language use by GSM and lesbian is their use of explicit language. Within themselves in the group the use of slangs, explicit sexual terminologies and expression of sexual desire symbolically through sounds are common. The use of non-verbal gestures is also popular. The constraints by which the non-GSM community use language for sexual communication is not seen among lesbian and queer women. They use explicit 'vulgar' words in order to community and it is very common among the community. Respondent J who has just been socializing with the community finds it little difficult to adjust with the language and doesn't understand half of the 'double meaning' jokes but completely enjoys the company. 'Double meaning' jokes and language for the Respondent F, G and K are very much empowering since these terminologies and the use of language can help them express their hidden desires without feeling of being judged. The use of language also helps in understanding each other's feelings and desires.

### **5.7 Use of Colors**

The use of color has been an important symbol for the LGBTIQ community. The rainbow color has been an important symbol of communication. Pink color is also used as symbols by the lesbians. But it is clear that no color has been specific to lesbians. Since the rainbow color symbolizes diversity, any member of the community uses them as their pride. The colors are used in batches, dresses or even in the social media profiles. Because of the recent popularization of the rainbow color, the color has been used equally by the people who are not GSM. Also, the flag of different sexual orientations and gender identities are different which depends on the assembling of the colors. For e.g. a gender fluid person can have purple, white, black, light blue and dark blue as their identity flag colors. These primary colors are arranged in such a way that the person seeing this recognizes the identity of the person.

### **5.8 Popular Culture, Urban Ghettos and Acceptance**

The recent globalization on popular culture due to social media has changed the scenario for the acceptance of the lesbians, queer women and other gender and sexual orientations. The widespread resources available in the internet and access to such information has played an important role in shaping the community building process

for the GSM community. Not only the groups are formed within a city, but a global solidarity has been possible due to social media use.

The music and films which has been about different gender and sexual orientations has been popular and people at marginal part of the world has been able to access them. Nepali film 'Sungava' has been symbolic to portray same sex relation which is specifically about the lesbian relation. The films like 'Blue is The Warmest Color', 'Sungava', Tomboy are famous among lesbians in Nepal. Recent Nepali song called '*HataridaiBistaridai*' has been very popular among Nepali teenagers and specially among GSM community for its visual feature embracing different kinds of love although the lyrics is not explicitly about the community. The global celebrities like Ellen DeGeneres, Amber Heard, Miley Cyrus, Superwoman, etc. have been role model for the younger generation lesbians. These celebrities are taken symbolic for lesbians and their speeches, songs are in playlist of their audio phone.

I have huge fan of Ketty Perry especially her song 'I kissed a girl'. It makes me feel like the song touched my heart and I make my partner listen to this song time and again. (Respondent F)

For me Lady Gaga's 'I'm born this way' speaks so much from my heart as it expresses what I might not have been able to express through my words. (Respondent J)

The popular trends in recent years is use of YouTube vlogs, written blogs, Facebook or Instagram posts to come out and massive support of these stories through hashtag campaigns are the techniques famous among the lesbians. The most famous among others is using rainbow profile frame in profile picture in photos in these social media. Although search machine in YouTube for 'Nepalese coming out' has very less content and almost none for the lesbian coming out. The urban ghetto such as Pink Tiffany restaurant, private meeting spaces, platforms created by non-government organizations has been part of popular urban ghettos for the lesbian. Also, the commercialization of GSM community has created more social acceptance.

### **5.8.1 Lesbian Dating Event**

Lesbian Dating Event was created for the close group of people who identify as lesbian or have curiosity towards lesbian sexual orientation. There were some queer

women who showed up for the event. The event was organized at Pink Tiffany restaurant. One of the motifs behind the event was to create a platform and safe space conversation among lesbians. The primary motif was also to create platform to help find partners for lesbians (based on facebook posts about the event).

### **5.8.2 Pink Tiffany Restaurant**

Pink Tiffany Restaurant was established in 2015 and is recently located at Thamel. It is claimed to be one of the safe spaces for the LGBTIQ community. It welcomes people irrespective of gender and sexual orientation. In recent days, being in Pink Tiffany has been one of the symbolizations of support for the community and identity exploration. Although the place is open to all, GSM have specially been benefitted from such urban ghetto to communicate themselves in accordance to the popular culture. The GSM people find it interesting place and would prefer the restaurant over other. One of the reasons being the place to express oneself freely without fear of being judged and other being a place to find partners.

### **5.9 Conclusion**

The communication process and community building therefore is a complex process where the crux of identity recognition plays an important role. In order to communicate the identity individually and in a group, to build community, lesbian and queer women have been using symbols, gestures, cues, language and also public platforms to build network within themselves. These communication techniques have helped to build the community and ease the social recognition.

## **Chapter Six: Beyond Specific Identity: Multiple Identities and Intersections**

This section will explain about the multiple identities and intersectional perspectives among GSM.

### **6.1 Intersectional Identity and Being Lesbian**

The intersectional identity is one of the major aspects that has been a point of discussion lately in the LGBTIQ community. Along with the identity as gender and sexual minority, the identity of caste and ethnicity, religion, region, language which comes as intersection point has been a source of discrimination. The population composition of the respondents shows that there are intersections of identities among the respondents. Three of the lesbians who are from the Dalit community fears more about the social stigma if they were to reveal their gender and sexual identity. They have been facing discrimination within their community as well as a whole from the society. Since one of them is already hiding her caste so that she won't face discrimination in the place where she now resides, she is afraid that revealing of her identity as lesbian would be not acceptable. They are in the third level of discrimination- a Dalit lesbian woman.

“I have already faced so much of caste discrimination as I belong to the Dalit community. I am a Dalit woman which means I am also a victim of patriarchy and if I reveal myself as lesbian than I can't imagine what I might have to go through. That is why I will never reveal who I am to this society”. (Respondent B)

Another Dalit lesbian woman shared that her being a person from Dalit community has a lot to do with the discrimination and hardship she faced in her relationship. She was labelled as 'loose character and stealing someone's wife' along with her status being an untouchable caste.

Respondent F is a young lesbian woman from Dalit community who fears that if in case her identity as Dalit lesbian is revealed will be serious problem. She fears that after facing so many labelling to her as, 'Oh you are so beautiful even if you are from Dalit caste', 'You must have been lucky to have good economic status although you are from Dalit' and so on. She fears she might be called out and labelled '*yo Dalit haruyestaicharitrakahunchan*' (Dalits' characters are like these) if she were to disclose her identity as lesbian to the public.

Respondent A who is from Brahmin community expressed that it was hard for her after she expressed that she is attracted to girls. ‘Being Brahmin, my family said I had to care about my family’s reputation. What kind of thinking is that?’ She said that there are all sets of patriarchal caste notion that are to be followed by Brahmin women for their chastity and being born in high caste.

Another important point of intersection is the ethnic identity and being GSM. Within the LGBTIQ community, a person is asked to leave their ‘other’ identities than GSM and in society their GSM identities are not accepted. So, the ethnic identity which relates to different sort of culture and language than mainstream culture, they are often ignored and biased while neglecting the intersection points.

“I wanted to speak and write in my mother tongue which is not Khas Nepali, the coordinator of the program refused it. I insisted since I had done so much of hard work for that program, the person simply rejected it saying that the program in my mother tongue will not be effective.” (Respondent G)

## **6.2 Multiple Identities, Fluid Sexuality and Lesbian within LGBTIQ Community**

The mainstream LGBTIQ movement’s one of the foremost criticisms in Nepal like elsewhere has been its exclusiveness of the multiple GSM identities. It has failed to recognize among others the fluid sexuality and people who don’t want to be labelled as of definite sexual orientation. Their definition of sexual orientation is rigid and once a person identifies with such orientation, they have to remain in that for their lifetime. Nepal’s mainstream LGBTIQ movement has also got problem with being Queer or bisexual. This fluidity of identity and identity shift both has been regarded as ‘deceptive’ in the mainstream discourse. Within lesbians, people tend to find the male identifying transgender and female identifying lesbian as an ideal category. The shift in the identity is almost neglected.

“Even though I am a transwoman, my sexual orientation can be anything like bisexual or lesbian. It is not necessary I have to be with boys. When I express such views, they look me with big eyes. That is why I feel alienated from the mainstream movement. I don’t feel safe there.” (Respondent G)

Although everyone appreciates the role of pioneering organizations such as BDS, MN for their role in the movement in mainstreaming the agenda, but the younger

generations of lesbians and other GSM do not feel themselves and their 'different' identity incorporated by the mainstream movement. There is problem within the organization which has set bars and standard to the categorical definition of the identity. Apart from the gender and sexual identities it recognized, it is hard to convey them that there are other sexual minorities which evolves over time and needs to get imbedded within. Besides, these organizations kind of set rules as if like society that a person must fall under some of these defined categories and 'should behave in the way assigned as the particular identity.' This very rigid sense of identity categorization has been problematic for many people who know they are different and come searching for community for which they first approach BDS.

For lesbians who want to explore their fluid sexuality apart from their partners have brought themselves under the scrutiny of the mainstream movement and its members since they are labelled as 'characterless'. So, the LGBTIQ movement itself reflects the patriarchal structure of society within itself. Similarly, some of the male identifying lesbians often beat their partners, shame them, act as breadwinner and head of the family which has led to domestic violence. So, for some lesbians the fight has to have at many levels. so as to show that they

"I have long been in relationship as lesbian. But sometime I want to explore my sexuality, if I express such desire, my partner accuse me of deception and questions my character. I feel so sad sometimes." (Respondent D)

### **6.3 Bicuriosity: Identity and Communication Strategy**

Curious as defined by one of the respondents is 'keen to experience things with people'. Curios are interested in exploring their experience with any genders or people with sexual orientation. Two of the respondents, liked to call themselves curious because they think they do not like to confirm to any sexual orientation already defined. As an identity, Bi-curious claiming respondents claim that they do not want any conformity in being in any category. "Being bicurious for me is not about me being heterosexual or any other sexual orientation. It is just about being curious and non-conformity. I think being curious makes me able to communicate myself to the people so that I can know about myself more". Respondents H and K who claimed themselves bicurious agreed that, bi-curiosity has helped them to connect to the people who are non-confirming, male, female or any other gender. It

also makes it easier to communicate since they are not inclined to any specific identity. The term, however for both of the respondents, who heard it somewhere in the internet, best describe their sexual orientation. Though the similar term bisexuality can't describe their attribute.

“Bisexuality for me, is not what I connect myself to because for me, it means action while being curious might or might not change into action. I am happy learning and being this.” Respondent K

Bicuriousness an identity both as sexual orientation or as gender identity has been taken as problematic in the mainstream LGBTIQ movement. It is taken as deceptive terminology and concept and has not been recognized in mainstream GSM community. However, bi-curious and curious terminologies have been slowly being popular in the urban LGBTIQ community. The word and its meaning have still to be recognized by many even within the community.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Thus, the linear way of viewing community has not been changed in the Nepali GSM community. There are discriminations within here and acknowledging different identities is seen as risky to the progressive laws of Nepali state. While at the same time, the experiences across different identities are not only denied but neglected so that a uniform identity as describable can be maintained.

## **Chapter Seven: Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter summarizes this research and concludes the overall research process and findings.

### **7.1 Summary**

This research started with problem statement that process of identity building, communication process and community building has been an important part of being lesbian and queer women in Nepal and study of these aspects are missing in Nepali academia. I argued that the identity building is everyday process both in individual and group level. As the sexual and gender identity has been less discussed in Nepali society, the homogeneous community of one or two specific GSM has only been recognized more. However, being lesbian and queer women, is hard in the context of Nepali society not only because they are less recognized but also because of patriarchal thinking that constraints the female sexuality.

In order to address the research problem, three objectives I presented were to look on how the identity formation process happens in lesbians and queer women. Here, I tried to look upon the process of realization of different gender and sexual orientation to process of accepting the identity to finding of partner and recognize oneself as the member of community. My second objective was to look upon different techniques that these GSM apply in order to communicate with each other and to larger society. While looking at all those, I came over the understanding that most of the lesbians and queer women were wary of i.e. the multiple identities and intersectionality within the community.

As explained in the literature review, the critiques of Cass's model of 'Homosexual Identity Formation' has been mentioned and tried to analyze them in term of identity formation for the first of my analysis section. Later, the communication theories developed by theorists such as G.H Mead, Alfred Schutz, Erving Goffman which are mostly interpretive theory and phenomenological explanation helped to place this research on defining the importance of the different communication tools used by the lesbian and queer 'women'.

The research design was interpretive and qualitative. Snowball sampling was used as it was hard to find respondents who would openly have conversation with me.

Interpretation of the detailed in-depth interview, observation and content analysis technique was used as tool. To grasp the depth of the events, participant observation was also used.

The first chapter of my findings that as explained by the scholars there are several stages of identity building which unlike Cass model is not linear. The identity building process was discussed among the lesbians who were comparatively older. Every stages of identity building jumble with each other. The confusion, dilemma, stress, information (receiving and sharing), interaction, comparison, are the part of identity building. All these stages make them arrive at the point where they seek for the community but it does not mean the process ends there. Identity has to be reproduced and communicated and they have to come out time and again.

The second chapter explains the community building process. Communication and community building, however involves many exchanges of signs and symbols. These symbols however are assigned meanings which are understood in a way they facilitate the communication. These symbols range from color to signs and gestures of the body. It also explains the collective identity communication processes which include pride parade to use of social media.

The third chapter explains the intersectional aspects of identity, the problem of mainstream LGBTIQ movement and how multiple identities are not taken and welcomed within the community. The everyday emergence of new or per se that not recognized by the mainstream community is sidelined and many have not been able to associate themselves with the mainstream movement they want to be part of which has made these identities look for alternate spaces.

## **7.2 Conclusion**

It is important to note that identity formation, communication and community building among lesbian and queer 'women' is a complex process. The identity formation in itself is an ongoing and lifelong process which is neither linear nor as easy as to describe like a chain of events. The process is part of everyday life and happens in each and every moment in life of gender and sexual minorities. While considering heteronormativity as the character of the society by default, for surviving, thriving and claiming one's place in society, there are different techniques used by the lesbian and queer 'women'.

The identity formation process involves the confusion, dilemma, stress as the primary characteristics. Although there might not specific age for this since some of the women might find their identity very later in their life. But the process is not easy for sure for all. While in some of the cases, information might be the first thing since some of them claim that learning of the queer concept make them inclined towards this which is not true for many. Communicating through the knowledge obtained from information sharing is important while searching for the partners is the key aspects of identity and identity communication Each of the processes like confusion, information seeking, comparison comes with the build-up process that helps lesbians and queer women to come out of these dilemmas and into a set of identity recognition for themselves.

It is hard to tackle with the everyday realities of being different more than to fight against regressive law in Nepal. Communication between individuals and to larger society is important since the society is largely heteronormative and it is likely that these experiences and identities can be thoroughly neglected. So, in order to communicate each person has individual communicating strategies while the symbols associated with the group is taken as useful tool. These symbols are pride parade, pride flag, colors. The collective communication is done through group events such as pride parade, dating event or hike. The group communication happens through social media pages, blogs, Youtube channels and communities are formed from these platforms. Nowadays, GSM communities are also seen in popular culture and mass media and some have taken this opportunity to make money such as opening restaurants, Drag queen/king shows. The community building process is associated with the daily use of signs, symbols and the association of these signs and symbols in whole communication process. The use of these signs helps lesbians come together. The urban ghettos, social media has been both platform and opportunity to assemble these different identities to build network among themselves and a whole to let the society know about their existence.

Although, the lesbian and queer 'women' have to fight with the society in every aspect, they have to fight within their community because multiple identities and intersectionality has been neglected within the community as well. The mainstream LGBTIQ movement has failed to acknowledge the existence of different identities within the community and also the intersectional identity which makes it difficult to

communicate and build network specially among queer 'women'. The intersection of caste, language, region has not only been overlooked, they are taken as unimportant. While at the same time, the identities such as bicurios, bisexual and other are not taken consideration in mainstreaming of GSM dialogues.

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## **Annex 1:**

### **Consent Form**

You are being asked to participate in the research concerning overall aspect of communication that lesbians do while coming out and approaches they make to the lesbian community. This includes your participation in an in-depth interview about your experience during the coming out stage and while approaching the LGBTIQ community.

You have every right to limit the area of your answers or refrain from answering any questions. Also, you may withdraw from the study at any time. The interview will be audio-taped and written notes will be taken by the researcher; Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to this data. After the research is concluded the audio tape will be erased and the written notes will be destroyed.

If you wish you may choose to adopt pseudonym for the duration of the interview, for identification in the final document or both. In any case, only your either first or last name or a letter will be used to identify you. Your complete anonymity in this study won't be compromised. But, in case if you are asked by your friend to have an interview than there only your anonymity could be compromised.

For the purposes of respecting the confidentiality of all of the research participants, you agree not to disclose information concerning the identity of the other participants or the nature of the discussion to anyone who does not take part in the research process.

**I agree to participate in this research project in accordance with the conditions specified above.**

Signature of participant:

Signature of researcher:

Date:

## **Annex 2: Interview Checklist of Identity Formation Process**

### **1. Researcher's introduction and purpose of the study**

- a. Though the rapport is already established through the contact, re-explain about study as this is only for thesis writing and that researcher is interested including the respondent's view regarding their experiences of finding that they have different sexual orientation or gender identity, their coming out process and communication and community building.
- b. Tell the respondents that any personal details that s/he wishes not to be disclosed will not be disclosed. Also explain that their names will not appear anywhere and also that researcher will be using pseudo name for each of them.
- c. Explain or read the consent form to them and make them sign it and researcher also signs it.
- d. Ask permission for recording. If respondent feels uncomfortable, recording is optional.
- e. The researcher explains it to respondent that they can refuse, choose not to answer any question, if felt uncomfortable or stop the interview at any time they like. Tell respondent that recordings will be deleted after they are transcribed.

### **2. General Background**

- a. Respondent's details
  - i. Name
  - ii. Age
  - iii. Caste
  - iv. Educational Background
  - v. Profession

### **4. Specific Background**

- a. Sexual Orientation:
- b. Gender Identity:

### **5. Identity Formation and Coming out**

- a. Can you please tell me how you came to know your sexual orientation/gender identity?
- b. At which age you find out that you are different?
- c. At which age you found out that you are actually called 'lesbian'?
- d. Have you come out publicly/to your friends/family/partner?
- e. If not why?
- f. If yes, can you please describe the whole process?
- g. Which medium you chose to express yourself? Verbal/Social Media/Letters/Mass Media
- h. Why do you choose this medium?
- i. Do you think it has been easier to come out in recent years? What has been changed?
- j. What do you think about communication techniques in recent days?
- k. What do you think about visibility of one's gender and sexual identity?
- l. How do you communicate with other lesbian friends?

**4. Express gratitude and conclude the interview**

## **Annex 3: Interview Checklist of Communication and Community Building**

### **1. Researcher's introduction and purpose of the study**

- a. Though the rapport is already established through the contact, re-explain about study as this is only for thesis writing and that researcher is interested including the respondent's view regarding their experiences of finding that they have different sexual orientation or gender identity, their 'coming out' process and communication and community building.
- b. Tell the respondents that any personal details that s/he wishes not to be disclosed will not be disclosed. Also explain that their names will not appear anywhere and also that researcher will be using pseudo name for each of them.
- c. Ask permission for recording. If respondent feels uncomfortable, recording is optional.
- d. The researcher explains it to respondent that they can refuse, choose not to answer any question, if felt uncomfortable or stop the interview at any time they like. Tell respondent that recordings will be deleted after they are transcribed.

### **2. General Background**

- b. Respondent's details
  - vi. Name
  - vii. Age
  - viii. Caste
  - ix. Educational Background
  - x. Profession

### **4. Specific Background**

- a. Sexual Orientation
- b. Gender Identity

### **5. Communication and Community Building**

- a. Why do you take part in this parade/hike/dating event?
- b. Do you find associated with some symbols such as color/flag, why?

c. What is the influence of social media and popular culture on you as being GSM?

d. Why do you think being visible is necessary?

**6. Multiple Identities:**

a. How are the multiple identities viewed within LGBTIQ community?

b. Do you find detached/attached from mainstream LGBTIQ community?

Why

c. How is intersectional identity taken in LGBTIQ community?

**7. Express gratitude and conclude the interview**

## **Annex 4: Participant Observation Check List for Pride Parade/Dating Event/Hike**

### **1. Researcher's introduction and purpose of the study**

- a. Though the rapport is already established through the contact, re- explain about study as this is only for thesis writing and that researcher is interested including the interactions, happening of these events so as to study the communication and community building process through these events.
- b. Tell that the participant's personal details won't be disclosed. Also explain that their names will not appear anywhere and also that researcher will be using pseudo name for each of them.

### **2. Observation**

- a. Note the verbal and non-verbal communication pattern
- b. Note the display of symbols and if necessary ask these symbol's meaning to them
- c. Note the use of different languages

## **Annex 5: Profile of the Respondents**

1. Respondent A is not originally from Kathmandu. She is 23 years old and identifies herself as lesbian. She expressed her desire of liking her classmate when she was in class seven. Since then, she and her partner have faced many hardships. Both of them got beaten by the family members after they found out about their relation. They tried to run away and attempted suicide when finally, they knew about BDS. BDS keep them in shelter where she came to know that there are people like her. Now, she works as program coordinator for one of the projects of BDS. She is very vocal about her sexual orientation. Her partner also works here. Her family members have now accepted their relationship.
2. Respondent B is 29 years old, Dalit woman working in an organization which works for GSM community. She realized she was different at the age of 12 but never discovered herself until she went to college to pursue her bachelor degree at Kathmandu. She being and introvert loved to write poetry and was interested in politics. She however, never used to write poems to express herself in fear that people might know her sexual orientation. She identifies as lesbian in close circle of her community and friends. Her parents and family members do not know about her sexual orientation and she wish not to tell them in future.
3. Respondent C is 29 years old, vocal lesbian activist. She has endured much hardships in her life as a lesbian. She used to communicate with her mother than she is not going to marry a man when she was 13 years old. She knew that she was different and when in Kathmandu, she fell in love with a girl who was already married with a child. She faced legal to other threats from her partner's family and her case even got her to court. Now, she is vocal about her activism through social media and videos.
4. Respondent D is 35 years old and has a long-time experience working in BDS. She didn't remember of her likeness for girls earlier but when she was with another woman who was 'male-like', she came to know that she is different. Both she and her partner got fired from their job because they were accused of 'misconduct'. Since then, they have been vocal about rights of the GSM.

5. Respondent E was in heterosexual relation until eight years ago. She recognizes as bi-sexual and now she is in lesbian relationship. She is 34 years old and works at Mitini Nepal. She has not come out in front of her family members but she has been vocal about the rights of GSM. She feels as if she has come to new world of finding herself after being in lesbian relationship. She wants to continue being a lesbian as this relation has made her more empowered than being with a man.
6. Respondent F is 23 years old young bi-sexual Dalit woman who is now in lesbian relationship. She was in heterosexual relation and she began to discover herself recently. She has been surfing the internet about all the GSM terminologies and active in close group of GSM in social media. She embraces popular culture like songs, videos, speeches of queer people in the internet.
7. Respondent G is 19 years old transwoman and pansexual. She is indigenous, MOGAI activist who is vocal about intersectional identity. She is popular in social media with some 12 thousand followers. She is also a linguist and co-founder of Queer Youth Group. Her activism ranges from organizing discussion programs, organizing rallies and parades to managing different pages in social media platform. She has also authored collection of trilingual GSM terminologies.
8. Respondent H likes to call herself as 'Bicurious'. She is 24 years old and has both been in relationship with woman and man in the past. She likes to call herself Bicurious because she is curious about both of the male and female and would love to explore more. At a time, she likes both the sexes and like to explore. She is great admirer of Judith Butler and her favorite book is Gender Trouble by the same author. She believes that gender is a performance.
9. Respondent I is a transman in lesbian relationship. Preferring the pronouns, he/him/his, he is very vocal and cross dressed since he was a child. He is twenty-five years old and liked to be called head of the family. He feels that he is no lesser than a boy. He also feels that his partner needs to be submissive of him as in other heterosexual relation.
10. Respondent J is in lesbian relation and would not share what she likes to call herself. She uses 'she' pronoun. She is an introvert and have been recently discovering the terminologies and is being more open. She has short hair, muscular body and likes to look macho.

11. Respondent K is a queer and likes to use 'they' as pronoun and upon their request, I am not including the biography.
12. Respondent L is a curious and questioning cis-gender woman. She is exploring herself as curious. She likes to write poems about her identity, is 29 years old. She wants to marry and have kids while also likes to be in relationship with girls. She has not come out but has been mentioning that she wants to explore her sexual orientation.