

**EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY OF SOCIOLOGY STUDENTS**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Central Department of Sociology

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts in Sociology

Submitted by

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## LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

This is to certify that Leena Naharki has completed the dissertation on “**Educational Journey of Sociology Students**” under my supervision and guidance. Therefore, I recommend this dissertation to the Final Evaluation Committee for its final evaluation and approval.

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April, 2021

## APPROVAL LETTER

This dissertation entitled “**Educational Journey of Sociology Students**” submitted by Leena Naharki has been evaluated and accepted for the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Master's Degree of Arts in Sociology.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “**Educational Journey of Sociology Students**” Submitted to Tribhuvan University, Central Department of Sociology is my original work done in the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology and it contains no material published. I have not used its material for the award of any kind and any other degree.

.....  
Leena Naharki  
April 11, 2022

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would begin my acknowledgment with my loving and caring mother, Durga Naharki for her encouragement and support, my father, Bimal Naharki for his patience, and my supervisor Dr. Pramod Bhatta for his guidance.

I am also thankful to Professor Peter Graif, Dharendra Nalbo, and Muna Gurung, along with my cohort members, Anupama Gurung, Dia Youzon, Natasha Kafle, Rajaram Khatri, Susma Giri, Swasti Uprety, for their love, support, and guidance.

I will also like to thank my friends Alina Chhantel, Asmita Baniya, Chandika Sapkota, Hema Bhandari, Piyush Gautam, Rabindra Suba, Sanjay Chapagai, Santosh Pokhrel, Shamjana Chapagai, Sonam K.C, Tara Parajuli, and Yadav Gurung for their time, support and encouragement.

Last but not the least; I would like to thank my husband, Prabin Mainali for his support and understanding, and all other well-wishers, families and friends.

## **Abstract**

Education is the key asset in today's world. It is believed to be the shifting point from "ascription" to "achievement." It is the key to opening doors for opportunities and life possibilities. It is the basic skill set to survive in this modern world. In most countries, primary and secondary education is mandatory and is provided by the nation. However, higher education is as per individual choice and preference; one may choose any subject or in contrast, one may quit. Higher education, in a sense, is liberal and may seem to be the free will of a person. My objective is to analyze why and how students prefer sociology as a subject in their higher education; what were the guiding factor and how do they fit in the larger social spectrum. It is based on interviews conducted with sociology graduates, which has tried to track their educational journey. The finding show that, though higher education at first glance seems like a free will, such choices are indeed structured by, among others, one's previous degree, previous performance, and availability of subject choice.

## **List of Aberrations**

EDP- External Developmental Partner

INGO- International Non-Governmental Organization

I/NGO- Non-Governmental Organization and International Non-governmental Organization

MBA- Master of Business Administration

MBBS- Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery

NGO- Non-Governmental Organization

NEB- Nepal Education Board

RR- Ratna Rajya College

SEE- Secondary Education Examination

SLC- School Leaving Certificate

TU- Tribhuvan University

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Since society move from the agricultural era to the industrial era, education become increasingly popular for occupation, and in today's modern world it is becoming more and more specialized. Education provides the skills set for occupation/ employment, and hence has become the predictor of occupation, and thereby success. Hence, with no doubt, the importance of education is increasing, as well as the faculties and students.

However, the relationship between the availability and choice of higher education is complex, and relatively few studies have been conducted in this arena regarding why student end up studying the subjects they study. Some sociologists/ thinkers argue that education is bureaucratic and is reproducing the new form of capitalism. *"...some observers have noticed that opportunities are not becoming more equal and that the children of the same social classes and racial groups get more or less the same relative rewards as their parents got, regardless of how many efforts people make to give everyone more schooling. This has led to a resurgence of a new "scientific" racism and hereditism... (Collins, 1979).*" Bourdieu proposes the idea of "cultural capital" to understand the opportunities and choices that are available to people and how they are determined by one's class and networks, etc. He defines cultural capital as social capital, *"a set of cultural outlooks and predisposition that children receive from their home environment and invest in formal education (Collins, 1979)"*.

Moreover, *"educational choices are complex events- more complex than generally represented- and even more uncomfortable in believing as I do, that they probably reflect a complexity which is a common feature of many other socially relevant decisions (Gambetta, 1987).*" Educational decision; choices/preference is guided by social, cultural, and economic factor. It as well has to do with regional opportunities and the market; occupation availability over there.

The researcher, herself has an interesting educational journey. She has changed faculty and subjects. The reasons, she jumps from subject to the subject are difficult to explain. It is attached to her social and cultural setting, along with the timeline. Similarly, the researcher met other transfer students and started wondering about the phenomena behind it.

In Nepal, it is a widespread belief that pure/natural science subjects are difficult to study in comparison to subjects in other non-pure science faculties. In the SLC examination, most students would fail either in science or math. English is another subject in which students would fail most, but it is an exception only for government school students. Anyway, when a student secured a good score in SLC examination s/he is supposed to join the pure/natural science stream, or management at least, whereas the humanities and social science stream is left for the academically weaker student.

The education history of Nepal is short. However, in a short time, Nepal has done some incredible progress. It has a high literacy rate. Education indeed is recognized as a basic right and infrastructure of development. Though, Nepal's education system is still weak and solely dependent on the grading system. Marks/grades scored in the terminal examinations are a decisive factor in many cases, even the good and bad students are categories in basic of their grade. Likewise, when it comes to students and their faculty choice there are institutional constraints and rational choice. This study explores how students choose their subjects as they go on to pursue higher education.

Specifically, this study is about the educational journey of students pursuing sociology in the graduate studies; how and why students choose sociology. How do students come to know about sociology and what drives them to pursue it?

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Nepal education system is a replica of Indian education system. It is somehow in hierarchical orders or per se irreversible. Students from pure science background can move to any faculty but not vice-versa. Nepal Education Board (NEB) has defined the eligibility criteria to get enrollment in Bachelor level, Universities. *“Students who have secured minimum D+ grade in all the subjects of Grade 11 and 12 are eligible to study General/ Core subjects whereas students must have secured minimum C or C+ grade in all subjects of Grade 11 and 12 are eligible to enroll in Technical/Applied subjects (edusanjal, 2021).”*

### Eligibility Criteria for Bachelor Degree Programs in Nepal

Programs	Minimum Grade in 11 and 12
BA, BSW, BBS, B.Ed- (TU)	D+ in all subjects
B.Sc, BSc.CSIT, B. Math.Sc, B.Tech Food (TU)	C in all subjects
Bachelor of Engineering- (TU)	C in all subjects
BBA, BBM, BIM, BPA, BHM, BMS- (TU)	D+ in all subjects
BCA (computer Application)- (TU)	D+ in all subjects
BSc.AG.- (Far Western University)	C+ overall
B.Engineering- (Pokhara University)	C in all subjects
B,Sc Nursing, BPH, BSc.MLT- (Pokhara University)	C+ in PCB and C in other
B.Pharma- (Pokhara University)	C+ in PCB/M and C in other
B.Sc Nursing, B.Physiotherapy-(KU)	C+ in PCB and C in other
B.Sc Nursing- (PAHS)	Overall C+ in PCBE
B.E, Agriculture, Forestry, B.Arch, BCA, BIT, PBN, B.Sc. Nursing, BPH, B,Pharma- (Purbanchal University)	C in all subjects

Source: edusanjal, (2021)

This requirement of grade put technical and applied subjects in top of theoretical subjects. This intensified with the job markets and the salary one received. Hence, in Nepal pure science subjects and field is valued over any other field/ subjects, by all educational institutions, families and society. All most all students reading social science has some stories related to this experience.

“I do not think if you or any other person would have been in my place, with all that pressure, you would still have made the choices I make to join Humanities and Social Science. Ultimately we all want our parents to be happy; we want to live up to their expectations.”

This statement by Ram (pseudo name), speaks so much about our social norms and values. We are taught to love and respect our elders. Also in Nepali society, children are their assets. Children must fulfill their parents' wishes and comfort them in their old age. Parents; as well

devote all their life to their children. They sacrifice their present for their children's future. Mark Liechty, in his book “Suitably Modern”, mentions that modern middle-class families are investing in children's education. This makes the children both the assets and retirement fund. This, however, is not a new phenomenon but this, significantly makes the parents dependable and controlling. This makes stable, lovable, yet sometimes complicated family relations. However, how choosing any subject of interest can be a family problem. Or is it the problem? Let's dig more into Ram's story to get more insight into it.

Ram said he was a bright student. He had done A-level science with a good score in math and physics. And his initial plan was to pursue physiotherapy. So when he breaks the news he wants to study arts instead, it comes as surprise to his family and friends. It was just not his parent who was shocked rather, *“my brothers living in UK, USA and friends question about physiotherapy which I had thought of reading before. They would question me, why arts? Why journalism? These questions are indirect hint not to read it. You know, I was a sponsor for my education. In that sense I was a little independent, had it not been the case I might have gone along with my parents' wish. And for my bachelor, I had paid it myself.”*

Ram has stressed that being a bright student and having a good score in math and physics was the reason that his decision to join Humanities and Social Science was opposed. And it was just not his parent but his friends and cousins who were also against it.

In this study, it is this phenomenon; why in the context of Nepal, why the student has to face criticism for opting for humanities or social science. This study is especially focused on knowing the educational journey of sociology students; however, incorporates similar stories from humanities and other social sciences as well.

### **1.3 Research Question**

Education, the source of knowledge, and a key to many opportunities are open to all. One may choose any stream of education faculty and become the expert in that. And in an educational journey, one is free, without any baggage, burden, or influences. It is often believed to be a free and rational choice. The government of Nepal has designed compulsory education still in grade ten, and then has feasible options for different faculty. Students may choose any subject of their interest or may even quit studying.

Students quitting education is one thing while choosing any subject/faculty is another. The area of interest of this study is the latter one; how they decide what they want to study. What are the variables that play in choosing the faculty? How much of it is a rational choice? And how much is influenced by structure?

In the case of Nepal, the branches of knowledge seem to be in hierarchical order and students seem to follow a certain pattern. Most of the students who pursue social science have either come from a different educational background or at least have had considered pursuing it. It is very rare to find a student, who from the beginning knew, would be pursuing social science. Hence, for these reasons, it is important to understand how students end up being in social science and humanities subjects in higher education. In such a context, my overall research objective is to explore and understand the education trajectories and journey of students who end up pursuing humanities and social science subjects in their higher education. The specific research questions are:

- How do students in Nepal's higher education system end up pursuing humanities and social sciences?
- What social factors shape their education trajectories as they transfer from non-social science to social sciences?
- What are their hopes and expectations from such a transfer?

However, humanities and social sciences have common phenomena; this study is specifically about the sociology faculty. Here, social science and sociology have been used synonymously and is advised to understand the concept in term of sociology, but not to limit only to it.

#### **1.4 Research Objective**

- To explore and understand the education trajectories and journey of students who end up pursuing humanities and social science subjects in their higher education.

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

We live with many biases and prejudices and when it comes to the education field it is not an exception. Like in all other systems education systems do have a hierarchy. Our educational journey or more specifically educational stem is one directional. It is in vertical ladder where one can move from pure science to non-pure science, but not vice-versa. This study takes the

opportunity to explore the educational system of our country through an individual story/lens. This study, listen to the story of sociology students, how and when they were introduced to it, and their experience so far. This study aims to give insight into our educational, social, and cultural system, through personal experience.

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

The study was carried out within a small sample. And on top of that, the samples were chosen at the researcher's convenience. The researcher's position and experience it have guided the research procedures. And this to some extend is the limitation of the study. Additionally, the researcher had planned to carry out key informant interviews with the college administration and some teachers. However, this as well could not be done due to 'corona viruses and the chaos going on with it.

### **1.7 Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter has presented the introduction that includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, research question, research objective, the significance of the study, organization of the study, and limitation of the study. The second chapter presented the literature review regarding the educational history of Nepal along with the socio-economical background of the people. The third chapter is a research methodology that includes research rationale, research design, nature and source of data, universe and sampling producers, tools of data collection, and data analysis. The fourth chapter is about findings. And finally, the fifth chapter presents the conclusion and discussion.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE OF REVIEW

This research aims to have insight into our education system and its influence on our personal preference of discipline; how and why we choose the specific subject (Sociology in this research context). Hence for the literature review history of education in Nepal, the socio-economic of Nepal is being studied.

### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

Individual choices, decisions, or taste to be a free choice; intact or indifferent to her/his surrounding is a traditional perspective. In contrast, many theories tend to define human action and decision, otherwise. Human action and behavior is shape by their surrounding or structured, or in contrast shape the surrounding or structured. Hence, human action or per se individual choice is a subject of interpretation and definition. To define and interpret these actions, many theories are formed. These theories sometimes go hand in hand while at others conflict with each other.

Structuralism perspective is a theory that defines the pattern behavior of the society. It is a broad theory attempting to define social relation and interaction. From a structural perspective, and social action or interaction (individual decision) has hidden rules and laws. As subject plus verb plus object is the structure of the sentence, our behavior and action has also structure.

The key component in understanding the structuralism perspective is the social structure and social institution. A social institution is any form of organization with a set of value systems, rules, and regulations. School, family, or even a nation or state is a kind of social institution. The social institution has essence and identity with it. Similarly, social structure is a set of value systems, rules, and regulations, in a larger and broader context. Social structure has vague boundaries that are often difficult to define. Religion or education is a kind of social structure. Simply, a social structure is a style. While Emile Durkheim was explaining suicide he was manifesting the structure of suicide.

Symbolic interactionism is yet another theory to define human action. While structuralism is about pattern and style, symbolic interactionism is about action, meaning, and interpretation. George Herbert Mead, an American philosopher and social theorist, father of symbolic interaction theory, argues that the mind grows in social worlds with social action; it is not



different from its social body and physiology. Any individual choices, decisions, or style reflect its society and vice-versa. Symbolic interactionism focuses on social action, its meaning, and interpretation. These meanings and interpretations are exchanged through social interaction and are changeable. Blumer conceptualized symbolic interactionism as “(1) people act towards things, including each other, based on the meaning they have for them; (2) these meaning are managed and transformed through social interaction with other; (3) these meanings are managed and transformed through an interpretative process that people use to make sense of and handle the objects that constitute their social world”(Snow 2001, p361).

Structuration is yet another theory that brings system and agency together. Anthony Giddens, British sociologist had forward this theory. The center concept of this theory is relationship between individual and society. Structuration defines social phenomenon as a mutually constructive duality rather than by product of only individual or society. Human agency reflects social structure in their action while at the same time produce and reproduce social structure. Hence, it is not the agency or the structure that form the social meaning, instead it is their interaction that define social meaning.

Pierre Bourdieu, French sociologist, in his book, *Distinction: Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, suggests that social, cultural, educational, or any sort of capital, distinguish the taste. The volume of capital one possessed determined whether s/he is the creator of the acceptor of taste. Taste is the reflector of culture, economic, history, and upbringing. Bourdieu call this habitus. Habitus is produced by social conditions, and taste is the cultural preference. Habitus is the social setting that is programmed in an individual mind. So, individual choice or individual taste is the product of the socio-cultural setting.

Moving forward with education choice, like other tastes, does education choice, distinguish social class? Is education choice an outcome of symbolic interaction or is it structured?

‘Dead Poets Society’ is a 1989 American teen drama film directed by Peter Weir, written by Tom Schulman, and Starring Robin Williams. In the film, the character Neil developed a passion for acting, inspired by his unorthodox English teacher, but could not stand his ground against his father, and thereby commit suicide. Neil’s father wanted him to be a medical student. Similarly, ‘Tamasha’ is a 2015 Indian romance film written and directed by Imtiaz Ali and produced by

Sajid Nadiadwala under, Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment. In the film, the free spirit character Ved was forced to do engineering and then MBA. He was tied to a routine job and his love and passion for writing and story-telling was a force to be suppressed. Because of this reason he, many times goes through a psychological breakdown, but luckily for him, he has a loving and caring girlfriend, who adores him for his free nature, encourages him to talk with his father. And the last scene, Ved was a successful director of the play.

Though the above presented are the scene of films, but they do resemble real life. Sometimes our so-called free choice may not be as free as they are perceived and we may have to struggle to get a real vocation. And this struggle, this journey is not easy, just by analyzing it we may unfold many stories and insightful perspectives.

## **2.2 Education and Power Structure**

*The understanding of power is the primary requirement for understanding culture. Power is immanent in all social relations and that all social relations are relations of power, whether in the family or the hierarchies of government and other social institutions (Nasrullah Mambrol 2016, p.195).* Likewise, education and educational institutions are not free from power relations. Indeed, in Michel Foucault's words, *"there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relation."* Hence, education being the knowledge itself and being the institution it has more power dynamic than we think.

*"Virtually everything a teacher does is affected directly or indirectly by the power structure. Older educational sociology textbooks confined themselves to the relationship between schools and their local community and the work of teachers within the local school bureaucracy as if this explained all the politics of education. It should be obvious, however, that state, regional, and national power centers have an interest in public education. Even more, the international setting affects the way the national power system views the function of public education (Berstein, 1990, p. 195)."* Hence it is safe to say that the educational opportunities and institutions available in a region or a nation as a whole have a power relation or even a political agenda in it.

*"...education- both informal and formal, public and private- is an integral part of the power system. It is to a large degree molded by those who have power over it, but education, in turn,*

*has the potential for molding the values and behavior of the powerful (Bernstein, 1990, p. 195)."* However, education being both a form and source of power, it is unpredictable to come to a conclusion, how power relation would go on. Yet for the same reason, it is equally fascinating to analyze how the power relation would work.

### **2.3 Socio-economic Status and its linkage in Educational Preference**

Like in all other spheres of life, as health and lifestyle, socio-economic status does have an impact on one's educational preference. It is because of different processes of socialization in different social classes. For example, a person from the elite class is observably different from the poor class. Their personality, dressing style, thinking pattern, priorities, and life choices varied distinctively. When it comes to education, P.W. Musgrave has termed it as 'social class learning'.

*"As might be expected social class learning leads to a differential ability to benefit from formal education. This is less so amongst really able children, but because more the case as one considers children of lower measure intelligence. Likewise, this differential tendency becomes of more importance the higher up the educational system one goes and is, therefore, more pronounced at university level than in the sixth form and eighteen than at sixteen years of age. This can be seen clearly from the following table. This refers to a large sample of students born in 1940-41 in England and Wales that was investigated by the Robbins Committee on Higher Education (Musgrave, 1969, p64)."*

Academic achievement of children at maintained grammar schools (percentages)

I.Q. at 11+	Father's Occupation	Degree Level Course	At least 2 'A' levels	At least 5 'O' levels
130 and over	A. Non-manual	37	43	73
	B. Manual	18	30	75
	A divided by B	2.06	1.43	0.97
115-129	A. Non-manual	17	23	56
	B. Manual	8	14	45
	A divided by B	2.12	1.64	1.24
100-114	A. Non-manual	6	9	37
	B. Manual	2	6	22
	A divided by B	3	1.50	1.68

(Higher Education, 1963, Appendix One, from Table 5, p.43)

This, in the case of Nepal, can be seen by observing the passing rate of the School Leaving Certificate (SLC), which is now replaced by SEE. In 2015, 28% of students from public schools passed the SLC in Nepal, while 93% passed the same exam from private schools (Karkee and Comfort, 2016). This 28% of students are from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

The recent video of #ramjiramkokatha (<https://youtu.be/ruFAKPyQNAw>), shows the layer of intersectional discrimination present in Nepal. Ramji Ram Chamar is a Dalit, untouchable with poor economic background. He faces many hindrances in his educational journey. Firstly, 'Chamar' attending school itself is taboo, secondary he attempted doing MBBS. His father was mocked saying his son cannot pursue MBBS, where high caste people and people with better economic conditions were not being able to do so. In Nepal, more than educational qualification one needs status to do certain courses. Similarly, certain courses are a symbol of status and prestige. Ramji Ram in the same interview reveals that he gives up his painting and singing interest because these careers are not as highly regarded as MBBS.

## **2.4 Educational History of Nepal**

Education in Nepal has a history of homeschooling and gurukuls. It was only in 1853 Jung Bahadur Rana established a formal school (Durbar School), intended only for the elite, i.e. Rana, besides this one school was set up for the training of lower-level government clerks. It was so because to become educated was associated with becoming 'conscious' (chetanshil) or politically aware and that would be dangerous for a Rana Tyranny. The opportunity of schooling was open to diverse populations only after the rise of democracy in 1951. Due to restriction of access, until 1951, in 1954 the literacy rate was only 3% and then enrollment rate was only 3.5 % of children of school-going age (Wood, 1987).

Nevertheless, Nepal's then-ruling system did work for the expansion of the public school facilities, the government established a series of educational commissions, boards, and committees to plan and implement a nationwide educational system. Education then was tied to discourses of economic and social development, modernization, and national identity.

Education then became a critical foundation of economic and social development. Universal access, especially to primary education, is among those essential preconditions for any nation's

modernization, and expanding that access has long been a priority of the Government (CERID/WEI 1984: foreword).

Universalization of the first level education is a prerequisite for enabling the rural populace to participate effectively in development activities as well as forging national identity and integration (CERID/WEI1984: i).

This effort at universal primary education resulted in a dramatic increase in basic literacy and schools. In the 1950s, only 8,500 students (less than 1% of the eligible population), were enrolled in primary schools; by 1989s, there were well over a million students enrolled in the first through fifth grades. The number of primary and secondary schools in the country also increased dramatically, from 332 in 1950 to 15,834 in 1989. Correspondingly, literacy rates increased during this same period from 5.3 percent in 1952/54 to an estimated 36 percent in 1989 (Skinner and Holland, 2009).

Likewise, modern higher education in Nepal does not have a long history. It started with the establishment of Trichandra College in 1918 during the Rana regime. The college followed the courses of Patna University of India and the teachers also came from India. The examinations were conducted and published by Patna University. After Trichandra College some other government colleges like Padma Kanya College, Patan College, and Durbar College were established. Later community colleges also came into existence in the Kathmandu valley as well as outside the valley. Some prominent community colleges were Nepal National College (now Shankar Dev Campus), and Amrit Science College in Kathmandu, Thakur Ram College in Birgunj, RR College in Janakpur, Mahendra Morang College in Biratnagar, and Tribhuvan College in Palpa. All these colleges followed the courses of Patna University. In 1948, to impart Sanskrit education the National Sanskrit College was established. It was affiliated with the Sanskrit University in Banaras, India, and offered Uttar Madhyama (Intermediate Level), Shastri (Bachelor's level), and Acharya (Master's Level) courses (Bhattarai, Khagendra 2014).

It was only in 1959 that Tribhuvan University was established in Kathmandu that designed the courses of study, conducted examinations, and published results. After the establishment of Tribhuvan University, both the government colleges and the community-managed colleges got

affiliated to T.U. The government colleges were fully funded by the government but community colleges were managed by communities with small financial support from the government.

The funding to all universities is channeled through the University Grants Commission (UGC) S(BPKIHS receives grants from the Ministry of Health). The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) is responsible for the education sector in Nepal. But BPKIHS, NAMS report to the Ministry of Health (MOH). Funding and monitoring of higher education is the responsibility of the University Grants Commission. Universities in Nepal enjoy significant autonomy. Academic programs of bachelor's degree and above are regarded as higher education in Nepal (Country Summary of Higher Education).

Higher education in Nepal starts with the objective as follows: To impart higher education to the people as per the need of the country; To preserve and develop the historical and cultural heritage of the nation; To promote social and economic justice; To alleviate poverty; To produce manpower competent enough in the global context; To accumulate, advance and disseminate knowledge; To encourage and promote research in the fields of arts, science, commerce as well as vocational education; To help the university students build their character through the medium of higher education.

At present, Nepal has fourteen universities. Nepal Sanskrit University was established in 1986; Kathmandu University was established in 1991; Purbanchal University was established in 1994, and Pokhara University came into existence in 1997; Lumbini Buddha University was established in Lumbini in 2005; Agriculture and Forestry University was established in 2010 by merging two constitute campus of Tribhuvan University; Far Western University was established in 2011; Mid-western University was established in 2009, and finally Nepal Open University, established in 2016. Two academies have been functioning like universities; they are B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Science at Dharan, and National Academy of Medical Science at Bir Hospital in Kathmandu. There are also many affiliated colleges to different universities, with about 600 campuses. Though until 1985, Tribhuvan University was the one and the only university in Nepal.

Despite having ten universities, Tribhuvan University bears more than 90% burden of higher education. About 253,889 students were enrolled in colleges in 2005/06, of which. 91% were on

TU. This is the biggest and oldest university that constituent 60 campuses and about 300 affiliated campuses. It has 182835 students, 5970 teachers, and 6997 administrative and support staff. The university has been geared towards the modernization of Nepalese society through higher education. The university has five technical institutes 1) Institute of Agriculture 2) Institute of Medicine 3) Institute of Engineering 4) Institute of Forestry 5) Institute of Science and Technology; four faculties

1) Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences 2) Faculty of Management 3) Faculty of Law 4) Faculty of Education; and four research centers 1) Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), 2) Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) 3) Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), 4) Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology (RECAST).

The existing organizational systems looking after the quality of higher education institutions in Nepal are; i) UGC; ii) universities/academies / partially decentralized institutions and programs; iii) six professional councils; and iv) professional societies. Recently, the quality assurance and accreditation council (QAAC) has been established in UGC to look at the issues of quality assurance and accreditation in the country. Nepal has also been preparing a strategic vision for the education sector, including higher education through national commissions. TU has developed its 20 years strategic vision in 2000. Other universities also have developed strategic plans (Country summary of Higher Education).

#### **2.4.1 List of Universities of Nepal**

- Agriculture and Forestry University in Rampur, Chitwan
- Far-western University in Kanchanpur
- Gandaki University in Tanahun
- Kathmandu University in Dhulikhel
- Khwopa University (proposed)
- Lumbini Bouddha University
- Madan Bhandari University of Science and Technology
- Manmohan Technical University in Budhiganga
- Mid-Western University in Birendranagar
- Nepal Open University in Lalitpur

- Nepal Sanskrit University
- Nepal University, Gairidhara (proposed)
- Pokhara University in Pokhara
- Purbanchal University in Biratnagar
- RajarshiJanak University in Janakpur
- Tribhuvan University
- University of Agriculture and Animal science



## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is qualitative research and is highly influenced by grounded theory. Additionally, the researcher's position and experience have played a vital role in data collection. Therefore, the research method for this study is auto-ethnography.

### **3.1 Rationale of Site Selection**

This study is focused on Sociology students; what are the guiding factors that lead them to Sociology; was it their conscious and intentional decision to choose sociology, or did they happen to fall on this by chance. Hence, the Sociology graduates were the interviewees of this study. As the researcher herself is a Sociology graduate, most of the interviewees were from her classmates and peers, and most were the students of the Central Department of Sociology Tribhuwan University. Besides, a few interviewees were from Ratna Rajya College, Tribhuwan University. The researcher believes that including students from both the Central Department of Sociology and Ratna Rajya College would be inclusive and bring a variety of students and their stories together.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The research objective is to unfold the educational journey of (Sociology) students. For this reason, it is necessary to know the twist and turns in ones' life. Additionally, the researcher herself has the first-hand experience of being (Sociology) student. Hence, the research design chosen for this study is auto-ethnography. An in-depth interview was carried out. The interview was open and the interviewee was allowed to speak their mind. The research questions were as simple as to explain their life journey in terms of education, and further questions were asked as per the answer guide.

### **3.3 Nature and Source of Data**

The unstructured, open-ended interview is the source of data for this study. Due to the pandemic of COVID-19, the data were collected via phone. For the same reason, the data sample was limited to only up to ten interviewees; however, sample scoping was done beforehand. For sample scoping, students from facilities like education, psychology, and English were also chosen, rather than from the Sociology department itself.

### **3.4 Unit of Analysis**

This study aims to explore the educational journey of sociology students. It is to explore how and why students pursue sociology for their higher education; to explore the turn and twist that comes in the way. So, the unit of analysis of this study is the university-level sociology students.

### **3.5 Universe and Sampling Procedures**

This study aims to analyze the subject preference of social science and humanities students, in higher education; their educational journey, and trajectories in general. Thus, every college-going student or fresh graduate of the social science and humanities stream falls under the universe. However, studying the preference of every student is difficult hence; the sample is limited to the Sociology department. As for sampling procedures, purposive sampling is done. The researcher has used her network to choose the sample; most of the samples are either her friends or friends of her friends.

### **3.6 Tools of Data Collection**

Interview was the primary tool of data collection. For this purpose a checklist was prepared, and questions were loosely framed, some follow-up questions were immediately made as the interview developed. The major questions asked were related to the respondents' educational journey; if anyone had suggested them to study social science or if anyone was against their decision to join social science; their level of satisfaction with sociology; if their assumptions about joining the subject had changed or remained same; and future plans after graduating from sociology.

The interviews started with the inquiry of educational journey and experience of school life, and ends at their assumption and expectation. However, the researcher was willing to observe the facial expression and the gesture of the interviewee, during the interview. But this could not be accomplished. The researcher only had the accessibility to the tone and the voice of the interviewee. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented face-to-face interviews, and a phone interview was done. Nonetheless, the interview was recorded and was later transcribed, with verbal consent.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

In this study, the main source of data was in-depth interviews. Those interviews were recorded, then transcribed, and then coded, and then finally interpreted. In analyzing these data, content analysis and narrative analysis are used.

Content analysis is a tool in qualitative research that helps the researcher to assign meaning to the content. The content analysis focuses on usages of terms, words, and language, and after coding, interpreted that content in a certain framework. It is an interpreted and naturalist approach. Here researcher observed, as well as narrating the story. To summarize, in content analysis, the researcher tries to unfold the theme of the interviewee's speech.

Narrative analysis is an approach to interpreting narration. Respondents/ interviewees give their life story in the form of story/ narration, and the researcher analysis that data. Hence, it makes the narrative analysis the two levels of analysis; first from a participant side and second from the researcher side.

Generally, in narrative analysis, the researcher ought to keep the participant's story intact, while in content analysis, the researcher assigns meaning. Though these two analyses are seemingly different, in this study, the researcher has combined them. As far as possible, the researcher has kept the participant's story intact and has assigned meaning only when it is necessary. Besides, participant narration was as well resonating with the researcher's framework.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDING

### FINDING

This study explores the educational journey/ trajectories of higher education, in the field of social science and humanities, and especially in the case of sociology, and the finding is as below:-

#### **Sociology, a hub for transfer students**

All the sociology students, the researcher has interviewed, agree that sociology is a theoretical subject and at times it is difficult to grasp. Most of them disclose that even after completing a Master's Degree, they only understand up to fifteen to twenty percent of Sociology. This was a reply to the question that is sociology an easy subject? And the answer was, no, it is not. However, surprisingly nine out of ten interviewees happened to be transfer students. Though the researcher has randomly selected interviewees from her group, she has little knowledge about their educational background. And it is only through interviews the researcher knew the interviewee being transfer students.

These students have different reasons to transfer, and one that stands out is sociology is easy to transfer. Any student from any faculty can join sociology. In most cases, it is not so. MBA has recently started receiving students from any background. However, sociology has been doing so forever. In Nepal's context, students with a science background can easily transfer to any subject, while the students from Education and Humanities faculties have limited choices. Nonetheless, Sociology is open to all.

Some of the reasons for students transferring to Sociology are; Realization of previously unaware interest; They developed better resistance towards family and peer influence; Poor performance in prior subjects; Lack of choices; Aspirations for a glamorous (I/NGOs) job; Sociology as a Trend; These are discussed in detail below:

#### **Realization of previously unaware interest**

Sita and Babita are two interviewee who join sociology with pure interest. Sita is in her late forties, has lots of life experience and a good education break. Sita was already a mature person when she restarted her education journey. She was free from peer pressure and parental expectation. So she freely and consciously joined sociology to understand society. On the other

hand Babita is in her mid-twenties. Her prior education was pure science, with an aim to be nurse. However, the failure in previous subject pushes her towards her interest. Babita's supportive husband and teacher encourage her decision whereas she has to convince her mom to it. Babita confessed that, had she not fail in pure science, she would not have discovered her interest in social science. Failing in her previous subject gives her ample time to think about her interest.

### **They developed better resistance towards family and peer influence**

*"You remember, when we were children, probably when we were in grade four or five, we would often be asked what our aim is; what we dream to be? And we are expected to answer, doctor or engineer or scientist; my answer was likely so. Then onward, my teacher and parents have seen me as a doctor or engineer, which might be because I was a bright student as well. Thus, when I join humanities, it comes as a surprise for my friends and family. Despite, wanting them to be happy, I have failed to live up to their expectation.*

Babita, who has joined sociology with pure interest has shared similar story. *"Till class six I study in a school with many sections. In total, we were one hundred and twelve students. There, due to my ignorance and lack of attention, I was weak in math. In class seven I change school, and we were seventeen in total. I get double attention, and my science and math improve. I even took optional math, and in SLC I get the distinction, luckily. My family said I should read science. You know I am a single-parent child, so I thought it might create an economic burden for my mother. My mom wanted me to enter the medical field, nursing to be specific. I was concerned about my two younger sisters. However, mom insisted, she would manage if I want. And I read science in eleven and twelve. Though, I fail in eleven physics. It took me five attempts to clear it. It was a long time and I felt doubtful. So, in my bachelor's, I pursue sociology and rural development. I was influenced by my school social teacher to pursue sociology. He would say, "We only talk but do not go for social science, if we want to change then we must read social science. You may or may not take a degree but please read the book, even by yourself. It is essential to know society and oneself." Besides, marrying a husband, from a sociological background also encourage me to join sociology in my master's. He would talk about social facts all the time. He said, "there is no single cause for anything, indeed it has series of social factor attached to it." It made me feel sociology is a most read subject."*

The story of both Ram and Babita shows that reading any subject is either living up or breaking the expectation of family, friends and teacher. It takes courage and confidence to resist this pressure.

### **Poor performance in prior subjects**

This mostly applied for students transferring from pure science. Jay and Babita had failed to do better in their previous faculty (pure science), and then transfer to sociology.

Jay said, *“Frankly, I have joined social science because I have failed pure science. At that time I was jeopardized with many different things. I had varied interest then, especially music and all. Eventually I failed pure science and started looking for a simple option. I came to know that Social Work is a field base study; camping and all, provide the opportunity to work on I/NGOs; so I join social work. Now sociology has caught my interest and, am pursuing it seriously.”*

Jay, as well has been teaching sociology in intermediate level for three years then. He added, “In my three year of teaching experience, I have only met one student who is genuinely interested in social science. To be specific she is interested in mass media and is extremely talented but because of her decision of joining social science she has lost some friends and has face criticism. You know, mostly students who fail math or get D grade in SEE exam study social science. Moreover, the type of students I find in this field are, either are one having no other alternative or the one who just need the degree and are preparing for something else, like preparing loksewa or the one who are self-dependent and couldn't give maximum time for their study. You know, the main purpose to study social science is because it required minimum time for exam preparation, like reading 2/3 days before the exam. And you know one more interesting thing, some people prefer doing MBA after pursuing social science, and even in social science itself, psychology and economy has more students than sociology.”

Similarly, Babita has joined +2 (pure) sciences, in a hope of becoming nurse. It was her mother wish to see her as a nurse. However, she failed and realized her interest in social science. Her school's social teacher and her husband inspire her to pursue social science. She said, “my social teacher would say sociology is a must read subject. He would insist sociology would widen our values and belief, and understanding the society. Later marrying a husband from sociology background encourage me join sociology.”

### **Lack of choices**

This is applied for students transferring from Education, and some faculty which have been close down due to lack of student, for example, Philosophy, and a few years back it was due to lack of

Master in Social Work. Mahinder transfer to sociology as the subject he was willing to read was no longer available. He was looking for a philosophy degree. Tribhuvan University does not have the philosophy and in Tri-Chandra, it was close because of a lack of students. *“I then inquire about option available; then sociology and anthropology, stand as good options. After visiting the respective department, I feel close to sociology because of my background in moral studies. In the moral study, we read society.”* He describes his joining sociology as accident, *“I had no plan of joining sociology, so I said it is accidental.”*

### **Aspirations for a glamorous (I/NGOs) job.**

The coordinator of the Sociology Department of Camping College, confirms that one of the main reasons that students transfer to Sociology is because of a ‘glamorous development sector job’, in her own words. She, in the course of the interview, reveals that 80% of her students are working on development sector jobs, either in I/NGO or government funding jobs.

Nepal’s development projects have been synonymous with foreign aid and I/NGOs’ programs. Nepal has been receiving foreign aid for more than 60 years through foreign Government; multilateral, and INGOs, collectively referred to as external developmental partners (EDPs) (Karkee and Comfort, 2016). This aid, in collaboration with government, local elites, and political parties, claim to work for development projects like health, education, and other infrastructure. Though, the effect of these development projects is the subject of investigation. However, this consequently has given rise to numerous NGOs and INGOs in the country. Nepal has a total of 39,759 NGOs and 189 INGOs as of record of 2014.

The rise in I/NGOs surely has created an employment opportunity. Additionally, the salary is handsome. It can be up to 20-fold higher than that of a government employee. Though, I/NGOs like any other business, have people working in different sectors, like finance, administration, public relation, service, and many more. However, Nepal's experience is mostly in social service. Both CNN heroes of Nepal, Pushpa Basnet and Anuradha Koirala are working for people. Pushpa Basnet was a student of Social Work, which falls under social science. So, no wonder students in Nepal think reading sociology would land them I/NGOs’ jobs. And on the positive side, they will as well know research.

In this study as well, most interviewees confess that attraction of NGO/INGOs jobs is one of the reasons for transferring to sociology. *“Subjects do indeed choose their education consistent with the labor market prospects they are likely to observe in the area where they live (Gambetta, 1987).”*

Shraddha who, has pursued an education in plus two and a bachelor's, has consciously decided to study sociology. She transfers from education so that she could work on I/NGOs if she ever dislike teaching. She said, *“I had study education to become teacher and I could do that after passing Bachelor, so in Master I opted sociology to increase my chances of getting jobs in projects (I/NGOs).”* So, is education a choice or accident, or a job hunt?

Similarly, Jay transfers from science because he was jeopardized, he no longer was interested in his previous faculty, and camping, fieldwork, and I/NGOs job attract him. Gita, though not interested in the job, her friend had pursued her in joining sociology because of development sector jobs. Likewise, Maya, Sanju, Shraddha and Yuvraj, transfer in the hope to get a better job. And Gita transfer to sociology in peer pressure.

### **Sociology as a Trend**

Like in fashion or food, the education sector as well, has a trend. In Nepal, a widespread belief is that students securing distinction in SLC; A/B grade in SEE as of now, is a good fit for science. Hence, students in +2 levels go for science and later transfer to other subjects. One of the interviewees, Yuvraj, who is currently doing psychology, has used the term following the trending for his pursuit of both science and sociology, *“I just follow friends/ trends in pursuing both science and sociology. I copied my friends' action and senior suggestion.”*

Just like Yuvraj, Gita has to join sociology in her peer influence. She at one point said, *“Leena, I still wonder why I choose sociology, instead of pursuing my previous subject.”* Gita has a passion for literature. She loves to write poems and songs, however, ends up doing sociology. Gambetta describes this as *‘supra-intentional causality’*.

In a similar context, Ram, who is an English student and had taught in school for five years has revealed that school categorizes the subject into major and minor subjects; the major being math and science, and the rest the minor. This consequent category is the talented and non-talented students. Talented students are expected to choose a certain subject. Undoubtedly, the prestige



factor comes with it. He said the school only forces us to focus on one thing; *“for example school only introduce apple as a fruit and advise us to aim only for it; it is similar in subject choice.”* Ram later reveals he has to move out of the family to transfer to humanities after doing A-level science. Further, he explains, his exposure to the social field and foreigner is an influencing factor for his shift to social science. Ram was an intelligent student and hence was sponsored by an NGO, where he gets to meet a foreigner and a chance to travel with them. Their lifestyle and perspective influence Ram to change the faculty, and his decision is opposed by his friends and families. “Why social science, why not physiotherapy?”, as he has previously planned was everybody’s question.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

*“The old requirements of a knightly style of life, the prerequisites for capacity to hold fief, is nowadays in Germany replace by the necessity of participating in its surviving remnants, the dueling fraternities of the universities which grant the patents of education; in the Anglo-Saxon countries the athletic and social clubs fulfill the same function (MAX WEBER 1968;1000; cited in Collins 1979).”* Certainly, power is now replaced by knowledge; by education. Yes, there is a difference between knowledge, education, wisdom, and conscience, but the most recognizable thing to get a pass in this society is via education. The education institute we attained, the faculty we pursue, the grade we get, everything has something to say about us. Education, in most seniors precisely defines our personality and potential.

This study is an attempt to understand this definition of “personality” and “potential”; whether the educational faculty line up with the myth or not, and how do the educational trajectories fit in the system. This study is an exploration to understand the educational trajectories and journey of students who ends up pursuing humanities and social science in their higher studies. And the research method used is interviews and auto-ethnography.

### **Summary and Discussion**

‘Educational Journey of Sociology Students’ is an attempt to understand our educational system from in micro vs macro perspective. There are many theories and interpretations on why education is important and how it works. However, we have few studies on the position of students in the education system. The education system is an established structure and the student is merely an agent, and it would be both interesting and fruitful to see the interaction between this structure and agency.

The objective of this study is to analyze why and how students prefer sociology as a subject in their higher education; what were the guiding factor and how do they fit in the larger social spectrum. Primary and secondary education is a compulsory education with few optional choices (and even in some schools, options are compulsory to impose, or are limited only to two subjects). However, once students clear SEE and go for higher education, the story is different. The higher the education is the multiple the varieties are. In this scenario, how students choose

and do they stick to the choice or they transit further in their journey is an interesting story. The studies of these stories even give insight into our social, cultural, and economic capital.

The research method used in this study is interviews and auto-ethnography. This study indeed is greatly influenced by the researcher's position. Research inquiry has started once the researcher, question her education journey. The researcher has transferred to social science from pure science, and along her journey, she met quite a several people doing so.

The researcher's journey to sociology is mostly from a push; she originally has a dream to be an engineer. However, her poor performance in pure science and later attraction from mythology and literature pull her to humanities. Finally, understandings a bit of the social world that inserts the inquisitive to understand the social system pulls her to sociology. Nonetheless, the researcher was as well encouraged to pursue social science by her well-wisher (both her family and teachers), for two reasons; one it is easy, and second, it opens up the opportunity to work in I/NGOs.

Therefore, this study was, as well trying to find whether sociology students find it easy or not and has they ever heard it to be easy. None of my respondents find sociology easy. In their point of view, it is more theoretical and vast, though some of them claim that they have heard the myth that sociology is easy. However, being a novice researcher, the researcher is incompetent to find the source of this myth. Nonetheless, most of the participants agree that I/NGOs' sector job is one of the attractive features of sociology. Most of them have at some point fantasized about having development sector jobs.

This study is limited only to sociology and even to that only ten students were thoroughly interviewed, though many more scooping was done. This makes the study exclusively close to the sociology field. Nevertheless, this highlights the fact that sociology is a transfer hub, and some even describe their education journey as accidental, which is an interesting finding, and worth digging more into.

Besides, few participants insisted that they studied sociology for knowledge. This make me wonder why sociology?

Defining and understanding an individual's intentional choice and contrasting it with accidental choice are a blur. Though most of the respondents have consciously chosen sociology, they

didn't have any specific goal/aim in that regard. They simply want to study; per se for knowledge. Or few have a vague vision of their perspective job scope, and most of them are related to development projects; I/NGOs.

The respondents have been very kind in sharing their valuable time and life experiences. Their stories sure are insightful to many things. Their stories to some extent clarify the researcher's hunch about why people join sociology, and at the same time added some confusion and additional question. Some interviewees replied, they study for the sake of knowledge, with all due respect to these respondents, the researcher wonder "why sociology?" There is so much faculty out there, but why did these respondents choose sociology to increase their knowledge?

Besides, self-education is one of the best ways to learn for knowledge. Despite, these people enrolled themselves in college programs, are concerned about marks and grades, and desire to get the certificate with flying colors. Yet, they reasoned, they join sociology for understanding.

Sita and Gita were two respondents who strongly say they study to seek knowledge. Both women are housemakers, a wife and a mother of two children. Sita is in her late-forties and Gita is in her mid-thirties. They both had a good educational break, and now their family is financially stable. They, before joining sociology have as well played the role of bread owner. Gita used to work in finance and Sita is still running her parlor.

Gita, in her interview, said, she re-start studying after the birth of her daughter. She said her neighbor was teaching his son to write an essay in English. This hit her, she needs to be educated to help her daughter, "*I need to be educated and knowledgeable even for my daughter seek. I will have to help her in her education.*" On the other hand, Sita, who had been a government school teacher, had the chance to continue her study after she fled to Kathmandu after Maoist insurgencies. Sita and Gita are both transfer students. Gita is interested in Nepali Literature and Sita comes from rural development and political science background. Sita said, unlike other subjects sociology gives insight into society and every social behavior. She further added, she studies sociology not for a job or anything but purely to understand social life. However, Gita was pursued by her friend to study sociology; she has been said sociology has more scope. So would it be wrong to say there is more than sociology is just for knowledge?

## Conclusion

This study is focused on the educational journey of university students (especially sociology), and a surprising finding is that sociology has been a second choice for most of the students. Sociology has a lot of transfer students from other backgrounds. These transfer students have intentionally chosen sociology for a different reason. However, they come in term with sociology only after different turns and twists. They encounter different challenges and opposition at the beginning. They sometimes have to convince themselves as well as others for their choice. They have to reason and justify their choice.

Diego Gambetta in his book “Where They Pushed or Did They Jump?”, state that “*educational decision is the result of three main processes: of what one can do, of what one wants to do and, indirectly, of the conditions that shape one’s preferences and intentionality* (Gambetta 1987). He as well explains compulsory education, types of high school, and selective procedure, and concludes that educational choice is not solely structured nor a rational choice. Indeed, educational choice is shaped by many things, structure, history, culture, politics, job scope, personal interest, and many more. It is casually shaped and constrained by the outside world we live in (Gambetta, 1987). To keep it simple it is a little pushed and a little pull.

Similarly, this study reveals that choosing the faculty is both constraints by institution, as well as is a rational choice. However, researchers still believe, Nepal education system needs to be more liberal and that society should be less judgmental about it; students’ characteristics and potential should not be judged as per their faculty choice or vice-versa.

However, Durkheim’s theory of social current suggests the raiding emotions that go beyond social facts. Indeed, social current is the collective emotion of the group that has a profound impact on an individual. This is a conscience collective. When we are in a concert we cheer, in a theater, we buy snacks despite being hungry or not. These are examples of social current. If some show is hype we at least watch one episode, and this is the power of the social current.

Social current in an educational setting is quite visible. Children in pre-school are sure of one thing and one style. If the teacher says ‘a’ is for ‘apple’, it is difficult to convince them ‘a’ is also for ‘airplane’. Similarly, in higher education we can see a certain trend and ranking in educational faculty; pure science holds the first place followed by management, and then

humanities and social science. In this study, three students are transferred to sociology from a science background, two from management, two from education, one from philosophy, while one has just changed the stem from political science to sociology, and only one was doing sociology from the beginning. These two students from education have joined education in the first place because it was the only option available in their region (Baglung and Gulmi) besides management.

In secondary level education, school categories subjects as major and minor, science and mathematics being the majors. They focus mainly on science and mathematics and provide extra classes for these. Some schools have classes from 6 AM to 6 PM for grades 9 and 10. They have a reputation to uphold and often suggest students choose optional math, environmental science, account, or computer science as per their grades. Consequently, these choices resulted in higher education decisions.

*Our school used to allow students to apply for Model United Nations in other countries where they could go and represent their school, have debates regarding international relations, and all that stuff. It was always a given that the smart kids will get to go there. I don't think average kids were encouraged to do so. If they did somehow did bring themselves to apply for it, it wouldn't be met with motivation and confidence- uplifting from teachers. The whole class would just look at it like it was some weird occurrence, something that was out of the ordinary and odd. Of course, no one said it like that but it was an unspoken and understood thing. I never attempted to even apply for sth like that. I always felt like that area was the territory of good students. I think in a sense I almost felt like I didn't deserve to be there or that the spot wasn't mine to ever claim.*

The above statement shared by Vindra, in a different context of sharing school experience, somewhat explores the context of social current in a school setting and thereby the educational system as a whole. It is mostly the understood culture that grades decide the faculty we choose. And this is the place where I find the problems.

Despite this, sociology has lots of female students, maybe up to sixty percentages; it would again be interesting research to examine the gender dimension in the sociology field. Maybe the myth

of sociology be an easy subject and the gender dimension it has, are correlated. These are further areas to research in the sociology field.

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