

Daughters of the Tharu

Gender, Ethnicity, Religion,
and the Education of Nepali Girls



Mary Ann Maslak

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DAUGHTERS OF THE THARU

**GENDER, ETHNICITY, RELIGION, AND
THE EDUCATION OF NEPALI GIRLS**

BY MARY ANN MASLAK

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FOR SALE IN NEPAL ONLY

This book is dedicated to my mother and father.

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Series Preface

This series of scholarly works in comparative and international education has grown well beyond the initial conception of a collection of reference books. Although retaining its original purpose of providing a resource to scholars, students, and a variety of other professionals who need to understand the role played by education in various societies or world regions, it also strives to provide accurate, relevant, and up-to-date information on a wide variety of selected educational issues, problems, and experiments within an international context.

Contributors to this series are well-known scholars who have devoted their professional lives to the study of their specializations. Without exception these men and women possess an intimate understanding of the subject of their research and writing. Without exception they have studied their subject not only in dusty archives, but have lived and traveled widely in their quest for knowledge. In short, they are “experts” in the best sense of that often overused word.

In our increasingly interdependent world, it is now widely understood that it is a matter of military, economic, and environmental survival that we understand better not only what makes other societies tick, but also how others, be they Japanese, Hungarian, South African, or Chilean, attempt to solve the same kinds of educational problems that we face in North America. As the late George Z. F. Bereday wrote more than three decades ago: “[E]ducation is a mirror held against the face of a people. Nations may put on blustering shows of strength to conceal public weakness, erect grand façades to conceal shabby backyards, and profess peace while secretly arming for conquest, but how they take care of their children tells unerringly who they are” (*Comparative Methods in Education*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, p. 5).

Perhaps equally important, however, is the valuable perspective that studying another education system (or its problems) provides us in understanding

our own system (or its problems). When we step beyond our own limited experience and our commonly held assumptions about schools and learning in order to look back at our system in contrast to another, we see it in a very different light. To learn, for example, how China or Belgium handles the education of a multilingual society; how the French provide for the funding of public education; or how the Japanese control access to their universities enables us to better understand that there are reasonable alternatives to our own familiar way of doing things. Not that we can borrow directly from other societies. Indeed, educational arrangements are inevitably a reflection of deeply embedded political, economic, and cultural factors that are unique to a particular society. But a conscious recognition that there are other ways of doing things can serve to open our minds and provoke our imaginations in ways that can result in new experiments or approaches that we may not have otherwise considered.

Since this series is intended to be a useful research tool, the editor and contributors welcome suggestions for future volumes, as well as ways in which this series can be improved.

Edward R. Beauchamp
University of Hawaii

Preface

This book was written with different audiences in mind, resulting in certain tensions within the text itself. First, despite its educational tone, it seeks to situate educational participation squarely in social theoretical and methodological spaces for an academic audience of professionals and students. By doing so, it seeks to address an interdisciplinary social scientific audience. It is oriented specifically towards scholars whose work encompasses interdisciplinary images and concepts, and who either utilize an interdisciplinary approach in their own work or seek to develop a concept map for how this can be accomplished. Second, the book was written for development agency specialists who, through their practical application in the field, recognize the importance of the integrated study of social theory and methods to explain phenomena that relate to the chances for girls' education. Third, this book will be useful to the advanced-level graduate student who is interested in a study in gender and education that is firmly grounded in a multidisciplinary approach to scholarly research. These audiences recognize the importance of resources that come from a variety of locations.

The documentary and archival resources for this study were collected from multiple sites. In addition to the sources found in various U.S. libraries, I conducted a thorough investigation of resources at the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development, Tribhuvan University Library and Education Department, and World Education INGO office in Nepal. After this extensive search for sources, I determined that English is the preferred language for these publications. This is not to say that I have not made a conscious effort to locate and read related material written in Nepali. The card catalog at both the University and Research Centre libraries retrieved few titles that were useful to this project. Complete citations are provided for each reference. First initials were used in cases where first names were not provided.

My journey to complete this book would not have been possible without the help of many people. Although space does not permit me to provide a comprehensive list of all individuals who helped me during this passage, I would like to mention a few who especially aided my initiation and completion of this project. My journey began at Penn State University under the direction of Dr. Ladi Semali and Dr. Jim Johnson. Their support encouraged me to pursue this topic, acquire the language skills at the University of Wisconsin that were necessary to conduct it, and travel to and live in western Nepal to accomplish it. Dr. Lydia Dambekalns, friend and colleague, organized early contacts in Nepal. Dr. Juhu Kim provided statistical assistance throughout the project. For help during the weeks and months in the field, I also want to thank: the people of Butawal; Professor Drone Rajaure at Tribhuvan University; my research assistants, Ms. Shashi Sharma and Mr. Satya Narayan Chaudhari; and Mr. Suresh Shakya and the staff of the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development, who all helped me to examine the case of Butawal (a pseudonym). More recently, I must thank Professor Edward Beauchamp, who supported my work for the International and Comparative Education Series. I also thank the reviewers of this manuscript for their insightful and helpful comments on this manuscript. Most immediately, I owe gratitude to the St. John's University administrators who granted research reductions in my teaching load to complete this manuscript and the Faculty Forum and S. J. U. colleagues who provided a venue to discuss various parts of this book. Finally, I want to thank my husband, On-cho Ng, who helped me throughout the entire process.

Introduction

The main purpose of this book is to identify and examine the cultural conditions and circumstances that influence the process of educational decision-making for girls in Nepal. This book positions individuals in the center of the social and cultural worlds, which nonetheless define them. Their voices—some powerful, influential, and imperious, others faint or even silenced—reveal the critical role of gender relations in girls' education. To the extent that the complex nexus of gender relations involves power dynamics, this work reveals how different forms of power—social, cultural, and economic—influence, if not govern, decision-making practices of parents. In particular, this study recognizes and studies the significant and substantial, yet often forgotten, voices of women. Situating women's lives within the context of their families, neighborhoods, region, and country, it explores the cultural and sociopolitical conditions that shape, mold, and dictate individual agency, which in turn determine the educational choices women make for their daughters. Specifically, our work identifies three principal conditions: gender, ethnicity, and religiosity. By exploring how ethnic identity, ethnic interaction, religious beliefs, and religious rituals function as interweaving sociocultural forces in the community, and how familial relations in the home are influenced by the power structures that subsume male and female (i.e., gender) roles, this book seeks to go beyond the existing educational participation literature, which has hitherto, to a large extent, focused on household economics and school-related issues. Our investigation reveals and analyzes the underlying and often hidden sociocultural factors embedded within gender relations, which figure prominently in girls' lives in general, and their educational opportunities in particular.

A book of this nature, specializing in Nepal, is important in a couple of ways. First, the book provides an in-depth exploration of educational participation in a Nepalese context. Nepal, regrettably, has been under-studied as

compared to its South Asian and Asian neighbors. The common problems afflicting Nepali girls in the educational process deserve focused examination. More specifically, this book contributes to our understanding of the Tharu, a distinct ethnic and religious community in Nepal. Only a small body of literature in English and French has been produced about them. This work fills this knowledge gap by conducting a qualitative (complemented by quantitative methodologies where appropriate) local study of the Tharus, focusing on the education of girls.

Second, it sheds light on the problem of development in general, of which education is a crucial and integral component. It offers a fresh perspective from which to view the critical factors involved in the decisions of educational participation for girls. It exposes how power—embedded within the gendered familial relations and ethnic and religious cultures, and manifested in community relations—influences educational decisions for girls. By doing so, it paints a broad and nuanced picture of the varied forces that influence and govern girls' chances of participation in education.

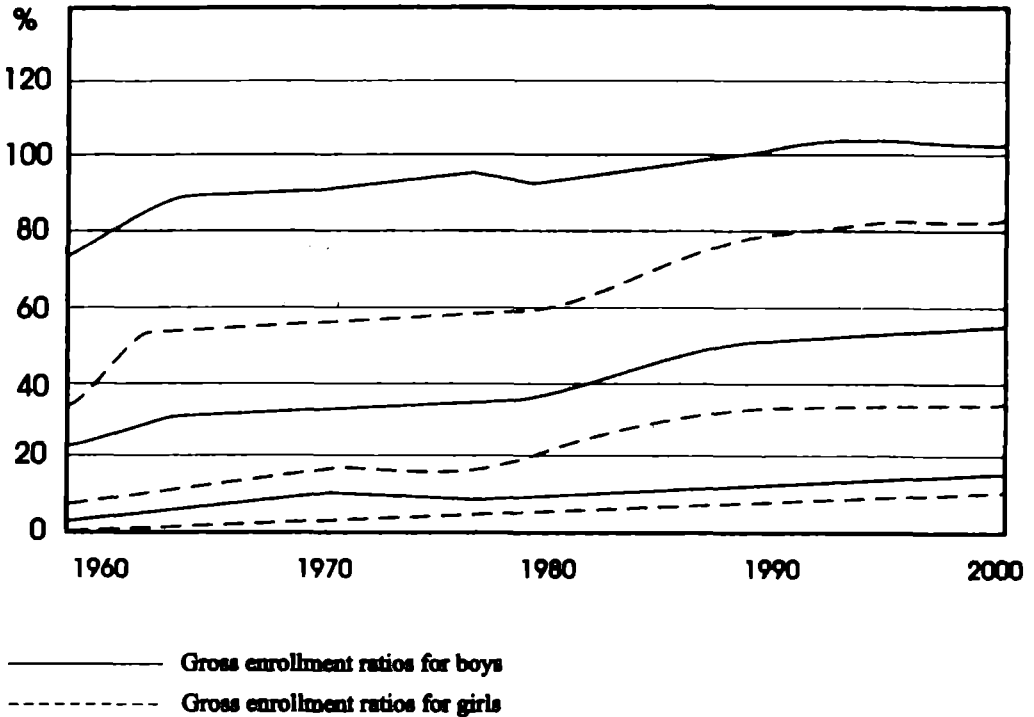
International Educational Initiatives for Girls in South Asia

Although a greater percentage of the world's school-age children are enrolled in school today than ever before, an alarming gender disparity exists. In the six to eleven years age group, eligible for what is usually considered primary or first-level education, the World Education Report 1995 reports that nearly a quarter (24.5 percent) of the world's girls are estimated to be out of school (85 million), compared to around one-sixth (16.4 percent) of the world's boys (60 million).

Although gross and net enrollment ratios have been notoriously unreliable as a means to gauge girls' school advancement, they do provide us with an approximation of the situation. An estimation of the disproportionate male and female gross enrollment ratio¹ can easily be observed in the data reported in the World Education Report.²

Graph 1 (next page) depicts approximate gross enrollment ratios for girls (broken lines) and boys (solid lines) at the university level (the first set of lines at the bottom of the line graph), high school level (the second set of lines in the middle of the line graph) and primary level (the third set of lines at the top of the line graph). Most relevant to this study, this top set of lines indicates that in 1960 girls enrolled in school at approximately 40%; compared to boys at just under 80%. In 2000, approximately 80% of girls were estimated enrolled in school, whereas an estimated 100% of boys were enrolled.³

Net enrollment ratios present an equally disturbing trend. Estimated net enrollment ratios⁴ for primary school-aged girls and boys residing in South Asia are some of the lowest of all regions of the world. South Asia also has one of the highest gender parity statistics in the world (See Table 1).

Graph 1: Gross Enrollment Ratio by Gender³**Table 1. Net Enrollment Ratios by Sex and Gender Parity Index by Region, 1990 and 1998⁵**

Region	1990			1998		
	Girls	Boys	Gender Parity Index	Girls	Boys	Gender Parity Index
World	76	84	0.91	80	87	0.93
More developed regions	97	97	1.00	98	97	1.01
Less developed regions	73	82	0.89	78	86	0.91
Countries in transition	91	91	1.00	96	96	1.00
Sub-Saharan Africa	50	59	0.84	54	66	0.82
Latin America/Caribbean	84	85	0.99	93	94	0.98
Central Asia	89	87	1.02	92	91	1.01
East Asia/Pacific	95	97	0.98	96	97	0.99
South & West Asia	59	75	0.78	67	79	0.85
Arab States/North Africa	65	82	0.79	71	80	0.89
Central & Eastern Europe	83	86	0.96	91	95	0.96

The trend over time does not represent a brighter picture. Table 2 shows that as girls get older, they do not tend to enroll in school.

Recently, strides have been made to more accurately measure school participation. School Life Expectancy (SLE)⁷ and School Survival Expectancy (SSE)⁸ are two of the most recent developments in the quest to better measure

Table 2. Estimated Net Enrollment Ratios for the Age Groups 6–11, 12–17, and 18–23 Years by Region, 1995⁶

	6–11		12–17		18–23	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Sub-Saharan Africa	47.4	55.2	35.3	46.0	4.9	9.7
Arab States	71.6	83.9	47.1	59.2	16.3	24.5
Latin American/Caribbean	87.5	88.5	67.4	68.4	26.3	26.1
Eastern Asia/Oceania	85.5	88.6	51.4	54.7	13.6	19.5
Southern Asia	65.6	84.3	32.2	50.5	6.6	12.4
Developed countries	91.7	92.3	88.5	87.1	42.7	40.8

educational participation. However, they cannot be effectively used in this study, for the data set for South Asia is woefully incomplete. Nonetheless, if we rely on the educational participation literature that also estimates out-of-school children, then we know that in South Asia, approximately 48 percent of children were considered to be out of school in 1990; approximately 35 percent were out of school in 1998. These out-of-school statistics are second only to Sub-Saharan Africa.

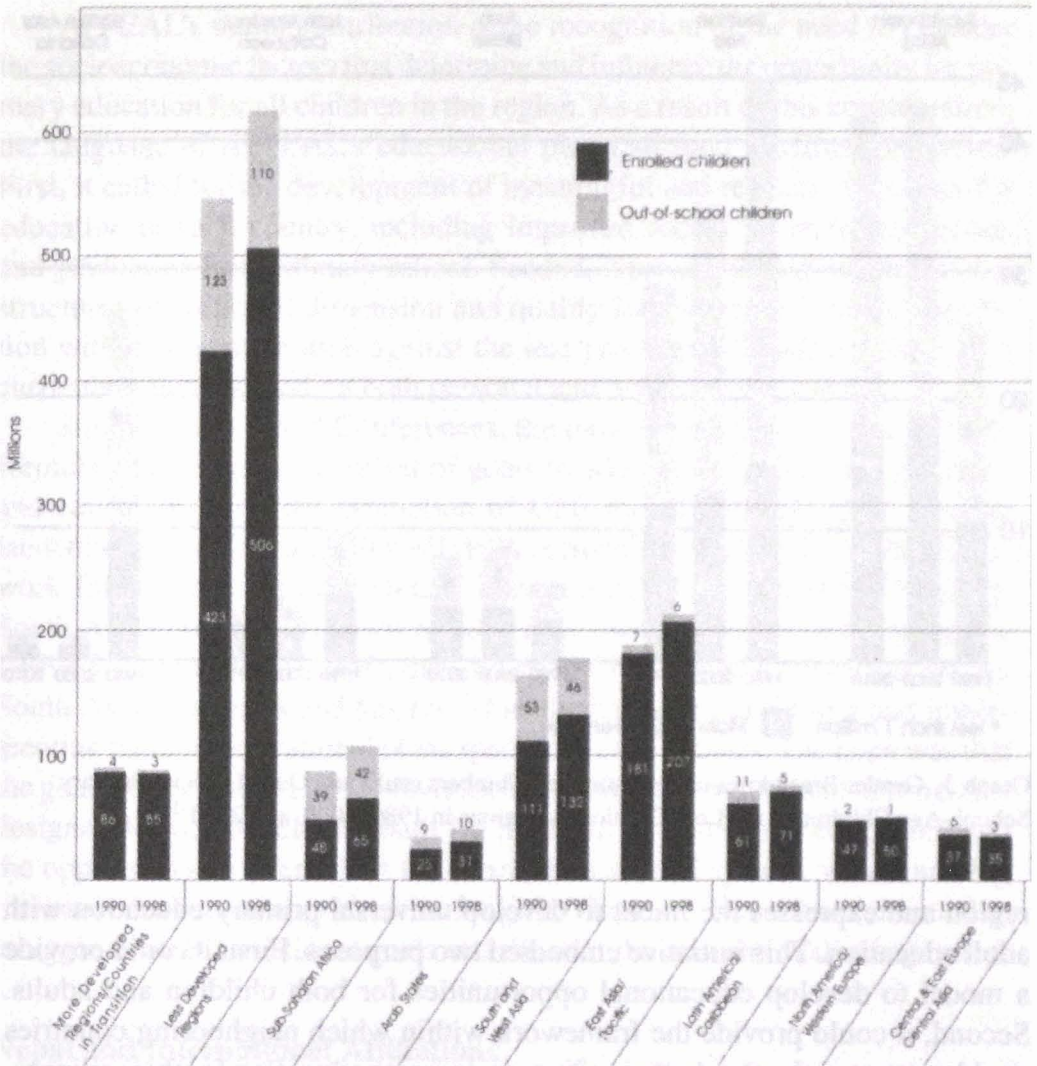
The scene is even more bleak for girls; in South Asia, more than one-third of the six- to eleven-year-old girls are suspected to be out of school.¹⁰ Graph 3 shows the alarming situation in South Asia.

For more than three decades, international policy campaigns have been launched utilizing development theorists' ideals and philosophies to address this serious situation. In particular, international conferences devoted to improving girls' participation in education in South Asia have proposed and advanced international and national frameworks for policies. These conferences have offered practical strategies to increase and improve educational opportunities for girls in South Asia, whose home countries have affirmed the severity of the situation.

A series of international and regional meetings have targeted the educational systems of low-income countries, including those in South Asia, whose governments have attempted, with varying degrees of initiative and success, to provide equitable and high-quality programs for children. The Regional Meeting of Representatives of Asia Member States on Primary and Compulsory Education in 1959 produced the Karachi Plan in the Needs of Asia in Primary Education report, which claimed

that every country of this region should provide a system of universal, compulsory and free primary education of seven years or more within a period of not more than twenty years (1960–1980).

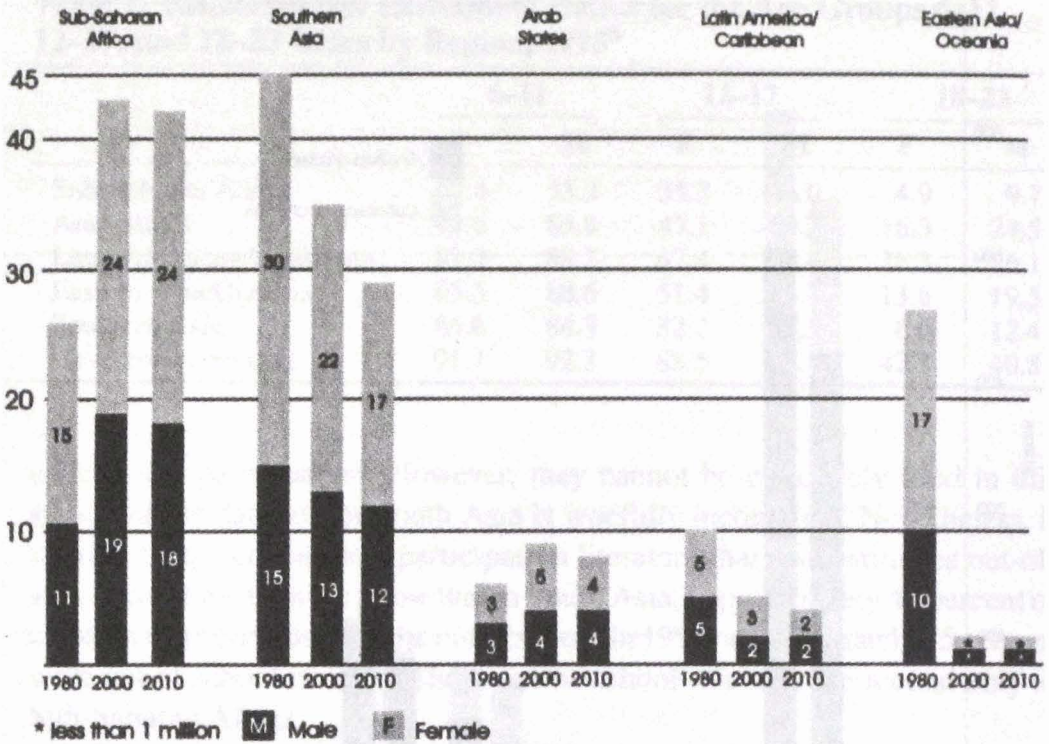
The World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy (Teheran, September 8–16, 1965) addressed education as an essential



Graph 2: Trends in Numbers of School-Aged Children in and out of School, 1990 and 1998⁹

component in the development process by integrating it with the economic and social initiatives supported by the local governments. This conference was followed by the Fifth Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Those Responsible for Economic Planning in Asia and the Pacific (MINEDAP V 1985). The participants in this conference sought to decrease the educational disparities within and between countries, increase universal primary education, promote out-of-school programs, and link formal education (the chronologically structured full-day academic program) with nonformal education (the part-time literacy program primarily designed for female out-of-school children and illiterate adults).

Article No. 9, which aimed to universalize primary education (among other things), attracted an overwhelming degree of attention.¹² This document supports existing educational policies and programs in and between each



Graph 3: Gender Breakdown of the Estimated Numbers (millions) Out-of-School Primary School-Age Children in the Less Developed Regions in 1980, 2000, and 2010¹¹

region and expresses the intent to develop universal primary education with adult education. This initiative embodied two purposes. First, it could provide a model to develop educational opportunities for both children and adults. Second, it could provide the framework within which neighboring countries could support each other in their efforts to promote education for their citizens. Based on the recommendations of the MINEDAP V, the General Conference proposed the establishment of regional programs for the universal provision and renewal of primary education and the eradication of illiteracy in Asia and the Pacific.

Building upon the work of the twenty-third General Conference of UNESCO in Sofia in 1985, which reaffirmed the commitment to literacy and the universalization of formal education,¹³ the Asia and the Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development Regional Review Meeting began to focus on the universalization of primary education (UPE) for girls. Participants from ten South Asian and Southeast Asian countries attended the 1985 meeting to discuss the status of girls' education. They deliberated on the access to and participation in literacy programs and the formulation of regional cooperative and operational schemes for increased enrollment and participation of girls in member countries' primary educational systems. As a result, by February 1987, UNESCO established and launched the Asia-Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL).

APPEAL's major contribution is the recognition of the need to consider the socioeconomic factors that determine and influence the opportunity for primary education for all children in the region. As a result of this consideration, the language of APPEAL's educational plan indicated modified objectives. First, it called for the development of meaningful and realistic objectives for education in each country, including improved access to, retention during, and graduation from primary school. Second, it provided for new educational structures of sufficient dimension and quality for the entire juvenile population without discrimination against the less privileged. Third, it developed a curriculum that focused on both personal and national development.

Similarly, the World Conferences, the most recent one in Dakar in 2000, formulated a comprehensive set of goals to address the problem of illiteracy and education. With the promotion of UPE for all children, there was the launching of the Education for All (EFA) campaign, established as the framework for "realistic and functional" international plans of action. Currently, South Asian countries do acknowledge their own difficulties and support the UPE/EFA document. In short, the EFA model has forged a consensus among South Asian countries and has served as the basis for developing and implementing national educational plans specific to each country. The hope was that the goals set and the strategies devised, including the development of programs designed for out-of-school youth (in the form of nonformal education) and the opportunity to re-enroll in the formal educational system, would notably increase educational opportunities for girls. However, Nepal has continued to struggle to meet its national goals and those of the international aid agencies.

Nepal and International Affiliations

The aforementioned international educational conferences, especially those since the 1970s, have significantly informed and shaped the Kingdom of Nepal's educational policies and programs.¹⁴ Actually, Nepal's own policies and programs have specifically targeted children's primary education since 1951. A document known as the National Education System Plan (NESP) was one of the first efforts to address and meet the educational needs of all children in the country. Echoing the goals of related international policy documents, its writers sought to promote equal educational access for all children, link education with production by providing vocational training, and improve education by supplying trained teachers and instructional materials.¹⁵ In the 1970s the educational officials reconsidered the appropriateness of the NESP. The Asia and the Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development (APEID), an eighteen-member group of states in Asia and Oceania that constitutes one arm of UNESCO and the UNDP, strongly supported a revision of the original 1951 plan and enacted a series of meetings that resulted in policy initiatives and programmatic suggestions.

APEID's first cycle of operation (1975–1977) to bring the plan to fruition was spearheaded by Nepal's National Development Group (NDG), which aimed to link the country's educational infrastructure (including the Institute of Education, the Curriculum Textbook Supervision Development Center, and the Science Equipment Center) with APEID. Although the document produced by the group attempted to connect the country's educational initiatives with those of international agencies, it failed to recognize the ethnically diverse nature of the country's infrastructure and the corresponding diverse needs of the population.

The first cycle, largely a development and planning session, yielded to the second cycle (1978–1981), which identified specific formal and nonformal educational practice initiatives.¹⁶ Actions at this stage reflected the cross-regional policies of APEID, which sought to develop awareness among all policy makers, practitioners, and recipients, and to encourage member states to strengthen individual countries' development in terms of implementing formal and nonformal educational programs (Kasaju and Pradhan 1980).¹⁷ The successes of member states' educational practices would lay the groundwork for a "new international economic order." However, these initiatives failed to differentiate the needs of girls and boys, varying ethnic groups and social classes, and urbanites and rural dwellers. But as a result of its association with APEID, Nepal created the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID). During the mid to late 1970s CERID played a central role in developing formal and nonformal educational models aimed at the juvenile population.

Committed to the mission of the series of World Conferences on Education for All, which promotes universal primary education for children by the year 2000, Nepal's Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) set goals and designed programs in both the formal and nonformal educational sectors to achieve the World Conference objectives. To assess the success of the policies promoting UPE, MOEC collected and analyzed national educational enrollment and attrition statistics. The five-year intervals of educational statistics provide one general overview of the status of education.

The educational statistical report, "Primary Education: Final Report, The Nepal Multiple Indicator Surveillance, Second Cycle April–June 1995," conducted by Nepal's National Planning Commission (NPC) in collaboration with UNICEF-Nepal, gives a brief yet revealing overview of enrollment goals by the NPC and UNICEF.¹⁸

Even given the traditionally unreliable enrollment statistics, which are often overinflated, this table shows the seemingly unrealistic optimism of both Nepal's NPC and UNICEF (See Table 3).

Nepal also generates enrollment statistics by Development Zone and ecological, or geographic, region. The kingdom differentiates five Development Zones by dividing the country along lines of latitude from east to west—the

Table 3. UNICEF and Nepal's National Planning Commission Education Goals for the 1990s¹⁹

Source	1990 Female Net Enrollment in Nepal	Goals for Nepal		
		1996	1998	2000/2001
NPC	54%	76%	85%	54%–100%
UNICEF	31%	65%	85%	31%–100%

Eastern, Central, Western, Midwestern, and Far Western zones. Lines of longitude distinguish the three geographical regions—the mountain region in the north, the hill region through the mid section of the country, and the Terai (or Tarai) region in the south. Enrollment information by Development Zone and geographical region is presented in Table 4. Note that the Net School Enrollment (current school attendance) involving six- to ten-year-old children depicts the current school enrollment.²⁰ Of the 13,238 children in the survey aged between six and ten years, 70% (weighted value) are currently attending school.²² The current school attendance (net enrollment) measured from the household data is the number of six- to ten-year-old children who, at the time of the survey, were considered by the household respondent (usually a parent) to be “going to school.”²³

Table 4 also indicates that only the Western Hill and Far Western Mountain development zones have met the 85% enrollment goals set by both the

Table 4. School Enrollment of Girls and Boys Aged 6–10 Years by Development Zone and Geographic Region

Development Zone and Geographic region	Net Enrollment in Girls Aged 6–10	Net Enrollment in Boys Aged 6–10	95% CI and Odds Ratio
Eastern—Mountains	77%	83%	1.45 (0.69–3.08)
Eastern—Hills	67%	80%	1.96 (1.43–2.69)
Eastern—Tarai	49%	72%	2.63 (2.12–3.26)
Central—Mountains	63%	76%	1.89 (1.12–3.19)
Central—Hills	71%	90%	3.72 (2.68–5.18)
Central—Tarai	37%	66%	3.28 (2.69–3.99)
Western—Mountains	60%	74%	1.88 (0.76–4.67)
Western—Hills	85%	93%	2.30 (1.66–3.20)
Western—Tarai	60%	84%	3.58 (2.56–5.00)
Midwestern—Mountains	18%	54%	5.49 (3.14–9.66)
Midwestern—Hills	34%	74%	5.47 (3.83–7.82)
Midwestern—Tarai	48%	70%	2.49 (1.76–3.53)
Far Western—Mountains ²¹	85%	100%	—
Far Western—Hills	27%	75%	8.20(5.09–13.24)
Far Western—Tarai	50%	76%	3.17(2.02–4.96)

Table 5. Repetition and Dropout among Girls and Boys Aged 6–10 Years by Development Zone and Geographic Region²⁴

Development Zone and Geographic Region	Repetition Rates		Net Dropout Rates	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Eastern—Mountains	32%	35%	1%	0
Eastern—Hills	21%	19%	5%	2%
Eastern—Tarai	22%	18%	8%	3%
Central—Mountains	8%	12%	2%	1%
Central—Hills	36%	31%	4%	1%
Central—Tarai	9%	9%	5%	4%
Western—Mountains	27%	22%	9%	5%
Western—Hills	31%	30%	2%	1%
Western—Tarai	35%	29%	2%	2%
Midwestern—Mountains	11%	15%	11%	5%
Midwestern—Hills	14%	23%	10%	2%
Midwestern—Tarai	33%	31%	0	0
Far Western—Mountains	21%	16%	3%	0
Far Western—Hills	9%	15%	6%	1%
Far Western—Tarai	20%	23%	3%	3%

NPC and UNICEF. These high enrollment rates have been attributed to long-term and intensive governmental programs that have targeted these areas; similar programs have not been implemented in other regions of the country. The Midwestern and Far Western Hills, as well as many of the Terai regions, demonstrate the lowest enrollment statistics for girls. As far as girls' enrollment statistics in the ecological zones are concerned, girls residing in the Terai ecological zone in the Midwestern region maintain one of the lowest enrollment rates of all girls in the kingdom. This area is largely inhabited by Tharus, who comprise 74% of the total population of this region.

It cannot be assumed that enrollment in an educational program guarantees graduation from the program. Problems of repetition and dropout, or attrition, plague children enrolled in school. Table 5 reveals this situation. Girls repeat grades more often than boys in more than half of the development zones distinguished by ecological region. Girls residing in the Western and Midwestern Development Zones repeat grades more often than girls in other regions of the country. The dropout statistics, because of their surprisingly low level, warrant attention. Upon careful examination, one recognizes that this study reports children to have dropped out only if there is *no* intention of *ever* returning to school in the future. In other words, the parent perceives the child to be enrolled in school, even if the child does not attend school. In the Midwestern Development Zone, girls have the highest dropout rates of all girls in the country.

Statistics of educational participation in school by ethnic group reveal another disturbing fact. Table 6 indicates that girls from the lowest caste,

Muslim, and indigenous families are the least likely to enroll in school. This table clearly depicts the situation of Tharu girls, who maintain the lowest primary school enrollment rates among all demographic groups in Nepal. Their 36% enrollment rate is far below the 85% target enrollment rates set by both UNICEF and Nepal's own National Planning Council. Table 7 indicates the ethnic groups most likely to drop out of school. Although these numbers do not appear alarmingly high, one must consider that few adults specifically acknowledge that a daughter has dropped out of school.

Table 6. Ethnicity of Head of Household and Initial School Enrollment in Girls Aged 6–10 Years²⁵

Ethnicity of Head of Household	Initial School Enrollment Number (% enrolled)
Brahmins	1072 (93)
Chhetri	1187 (70)
Newar	282 (87)
Gurung/Ghale	188 (65)
Magar	306 (68)
Rai/Limbu	315 (74)
Tamang/Sherpa	265 (58)
Muslim	246 (42)
Occupational	918 (45)
Tharu	554 (36)
Yadav	279 (39)
Other (Tarai)	649 (45)
Other (Hills)	224 (34)

Table 7. Ethnicity of Heads of Household and School Dropout among Girls Aged 6–10 Enrolled in Primary School²⁶

Ethnicity of Head of Household	Dropouts in Girls Aged 6–10 Enrolled in Primary School	
	Number	% Represented
Brahmins	933	2
Chhetri	776	3
Newar	219	1
Gurung/Ghale	118	8
Magar	193	3
Rai/Limbu	226	2
Tamang/Sherpa	141	6
Muslim	95	5
Occupational	380	7
Tharu	174	2
Yadav	105	22
Other (Tarai)	261	6
Other (Hills)	75	3

Despite subscription to the visions of the international agencies at world and regional conferences and their subsequent educational development plans that outline specific programs, Nepal has struggled to promote girls' participation in both formal government-sponsored schools and international and national non-government-sponsored nonformal literacy programs. In a word, and as Padma Mathema (1998, 223–224) suggests, the country's educational policy initiatives and program developments, implemented in conjunction with the international organizations, have simply not been accomplished in most regions of the country.

Upon careful analysis of educational participation data that were collected to track progress of UPE in Nepal, two striking and discouraging results emerged. First, Nepalese girls do not enroll in and graduate from educational programs at rates deemed acceptable by the EFA initiatives. Moreover, Nepal's Ministry of Education reports that the goals and objectives established by the Nepalese government and aligned with the international campaigns have not been attained.²⁷ Second, the Tharus, one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Nepal, have one of the lowest educational participation rates in the kingdom. Analyses of girls' educational participation rates (differentiated by ethnic group and Hindu caste hierarchies) show that Tharu girls consistently enroll in schools at lower rates than girls from other ethnic and Hindu groups. They also maintain one of the highest repetition rates in the country, and they drop out of school more often.

We assume that either an appropriate formal education or nonformal literacy program is one component of a development plan that will better the individual and the community, the society, and the country, and that international agencies and national government bodies have set realistic goals. Although theoreticians have provided ground-breaking explanations of the conditions that contribute to the educational participation of girls, and development specialists and academicians have designed, implemented, and evaluated projects and programs that attempt to increase girls' participation in education, the problem still exists. Why? What have we failed to identify that may help to explain this problem?

Investigating the Problem of Girls' Educational Participation in Nepal

Given the limited success of the international and national initiatives for girls in South Asia in general and in Nepal in particular, the problem of educational participation (defined here as the enrollment in school) has indeed captured the attention of local members of the Ministry of Education, scholars in academia, and development specialists in international agencies. However, as we struggle to reveal the circumstances and conditions that influence girls' educational participation in Nepal, two sets of questions seem not to have been adequately addressed.

First, what general factors influence girls' participation in school? Are these indicators applicable to the ethnic groups in Nepal, the Tharus in particular? To what extent have we examined the sociological factors that influence girls' educational participation? How do cultural conditions influence educational participation for girls? In particular, instead of investigating educational participation *by* ethnic and religious group, as has been done in the past, can we determine how precisely ethnicity and religiosity influence the educational participation of girls? Second, whose voices are heard when investigating educational participation? To what extent have we listened to the voices of women and girls themselves (instead of the imperious and ubiquitous voice of the "head of the household") to understand girls' educational participation? How can these voices offer an additional perspective as we cast our investigative gaze on the question of educational participation?

The present book, in an effort to answer these two sets of question, is organized into five parts, each of which address an aspect of the multifaceted problem of girls' participation in educational programs in Nepal. Part 1, comprising chapter 1, is a case study, focusing exclusively on experiences in one village in Nepal. This chapter is based on my fieldwork, which consisted of twelve months of actual residence on site, and reveals the complex and intricate process of educational decision-making for girls in Butawal (a pseudonym for a predominantly Tharu village in the Terai region of western Nepal).²⁷ It utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods to show the links and interactions between individuals (contributors to the decision-making process), the final decision makers, and the overarching structures of social, political, economic, and cultural institutions. This fieldwork assembled the crucial raw data and information on the everyday beliefs and practices of an ethnically diverse yet predominantly indigenous Tharu community. The data enable the examination of factors that influence and govern the educational decisions made for girls. My residence in the village, interaction with the villagers, data collection, and analyses made possible the "critical [and also experiential, I may add] engagement with the practices that continually produce and reproduce the "realities" of the social world." (Lugo and Maurer 2000, 25) The main portion of the chapter, a descriptive case study, recounts a series of qualitative in-depth interviews and quantitative survey questionnaires so as to delineate, investigate, and analyze the dynamic process of educational decision-making for the individual within this community.

Part 2, consisting of chapter 2, approaches the problem of girls' education in South Asia from the documentary, statistical, and archival angle. Here, we broaden the scope of this study beyond Nepal to include the South Asian region and provide a secondary analysis of South Asian countries' EFA policies promoting girls' participation in formal and nonformal education terms. It reviews, analyzes, and critiques these documents for their glaring neglect of

the inherent cultural conditions within the structural institutions that influence girls' educational participation.

Part 3, which includes chapters 3 and 4, features some theoretical and methodological approaches and perspectives that seem to be most fruitful and useful for our investigation of girls' education in Nepal and South Asia. Chapter 3 is an exegesis and application of the perspectives of relationism as an approach in social theory. Relationism accommodates multiple representations of knowledge and expands the epistemological foundation on which discourses of girls' education participation may be more firmly built. Thus, methodological relationism is probed here as both an epistemology and a strategy that effectively bridges the macro (the grand sweep of the social structure) and the micro (the individual in society). To the extent that relationism explains the "linkage between micro and macro and agency and structure," it asserts that a social phenomenon can only be fully understood by acknowledging and investigating the dynamic interpenetration between the macro-structural and micro-individual (Ritzer 1979).

Accordingly, this chapter identifies and untangles the relationship between the individual's agency and the intertwining social, cultural, economic, and political elements of the community, which give rise to the gendered voices of all the extended family members during the educational decision-making process. Specifically, it establishes the theoretical premise and methodological framework of relationism, wherein we may explicate the important roles of ethnic culture (i.e., the indigenous and caste values, attitudes, and perceptions) and religious culture (i.e., beliefs in supranatural forces and practice of sacred rituals), unraveling the relations between individual agency and structural constraints.

Chapter 4 surveys the Women in Development (WID), Gender and Development (GAD) and the feminist standpoint theory literature, and shows how the latter may be fruitfully used to shed light on the problem of girls' participation in education in Nepal and South Asia.²⁹ In recent years, development studies have been justifiably and harshly criticized for failing to critically examine women's roles in and contributions to girls' educational participation within the larger context of the social environment. In reaction to this animadversion, feminist critiques of development theories have drawn attention to the blatant oversight of the power structures that limit females' opportunities to reap benefits from development. Adopting what I call multi-perspectivity, this chapter aims to broaden the ways in which the Gender and Development literature may further our understanding of women in the development process, and uncover new perspectives that influence educational participation for girls. The use of Multi-Perspectivity as an epistemological and methodological tool helps explain how social, economic, and political power structures shape development in general and education in particular. We come to see how culturally specific forms of social inequality and division

relate to and interlock with other forms of power and social hierarchy (Kabeer 1994).

Part 4, consisting of chapters 5 and 6, focuses on two sociological categories—ethnicity and religiosity. In the welter of factors and conditions that appear to most influence the process of educational decision-making, these two categories, denoting identity, association, and behavior, apparently predominate. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the exact ways in which they figure and operate in decision-making. Indeed, in existing educational literature, their significance and importance have not been duly recognized. Chapter 5 is devoted to explicating ethnicity, that is, Tharu ethnicity, as a crucial factor in the educational decision-making process. We examine ethnicity as a social structure in terms of the Hindu caste system, which categorizes and differentiates people based on the Hindu principles of social hierarchy. But we also examine ethnicity as individual agency that is manifested and realized in terms of self-awareness, attitudes towards others, and interaction with others. In this way, we synthesize the modernist position that recognizes sociopolitical conditions and situational factors that create a hierarchy of power with the primordialist position of individual aspects of language, religion, and customs. Using this approach, chapter 5 examines how ethnic identity of one's own community, and ethnic interaction between and among members of the community, contribute to parents' decisions to enroll a daughter in school. It posits ethnicity as an integral component of both the individual (micro) and the social (macro), playing central roles in the process of educational participation.

Since ethnicity is inextricably intertwined with religiosity, chapter 6 ponders the role of religion, viewed as both an implicit ideology that provides the foundation of actions in social settings and an explicit collection of cultural symbols (Williams 1996). This chapter theoretically constructs the structural (macro) and subjective (micro) perspectives of religion, and empirically shows how religion is practiced by the Nepalese in general and the Tharus in particular. Specifically, it examines the connection between the macro-social structures of religious membership (both Hindu and Tharu) and the micro-social patterns of individual identification with, beliefs about, and attitudes toward religious practice and values. Religion is revealed to be an integral and inherent force in the life and experience of both Tharu men and women, and as such, it acts as a powerful cultural element that affects the decision-making process within families. The variations among Tharu women and men in this community, as well as the differences between the Tharu and Hindu religious orientations and practices, are notable. Exclusionary practices of religion, for instance, prevent, or at least discourage, women from engaging in meaningful and necessary decision-making practices. By disaggregating and dissecting the complexity of the religious culture, we uncover the religious layers of the cultural fabric that help us paint a more nuanced picture of the forces at work in the decision-making process.

Part 5 is the conclusion, which not only takes a backward glance by summarizing our findings, but also looks ahead by suggesting some future research that may further enrich our understanding of an endemic phenomenon, that is, the undereducation of girls common in poor countries such as Nepal.

This book, thus organized, picks apart the question of girls' educational participation by developing a variety of investigative angles and theoretical perspectives. It is empirically based on twelve months of fieldwork that produced the requisite data, which are further reinforced and complemented by other relevant documentary and statistical resources. It tackles the endemic phenomenon of the undereducation of girls poor countries such as Nepal. Its principal contentions, findings, and objectives may be summarized in the following manner. First, by employing a multiperspectival approach and methodology, the present work reveals that societal structures exert their inexorable impact on the political, economic, social, and cultural processes. At the same time, this study affirms and stresses the transformative leverage of the individual's attitudes, beliefs, and values. Examining both the commonly used economic indicators and the oft-neglected sociocultural elements of ethnicity, and religion, it offers a more complete view of the operative factors in the educational decision-making process as it relates to girls. Second, by exploring how ethnicity and religion, embedded within the power relations of gender and manifested in their gendered forms, operate in the educational decisions made for girls—instead of merely using them as criteria to show educational participation *by group*—this book sets the stage for future research. It argues for the need to do work that deals with the dynamics of ethnicity, and religiosity in the everyday lives of members of the household. As more local studies emerge to yield specific data on the centrality of gender, ethnicity, and religiosity, we may more confidently pinpoint the root determinants of girls' participation in formal and nonformal education, not only in Nepal but also in countries afflicted by similar problems.³⁰ Third, by developing new analytical approaches and foci, this book offers an interpretive paradigm that may help us conduct better studies of girls' education not only in Nepal and South Asia, but also in countries in which educational development remains an urgent concern. It is hoped that with enhanced knowledge and sound paradigms, better policies may be designed to effectively tackle the problem of girls' undereducation, thereby increasing enrollment, retention, and graduation.

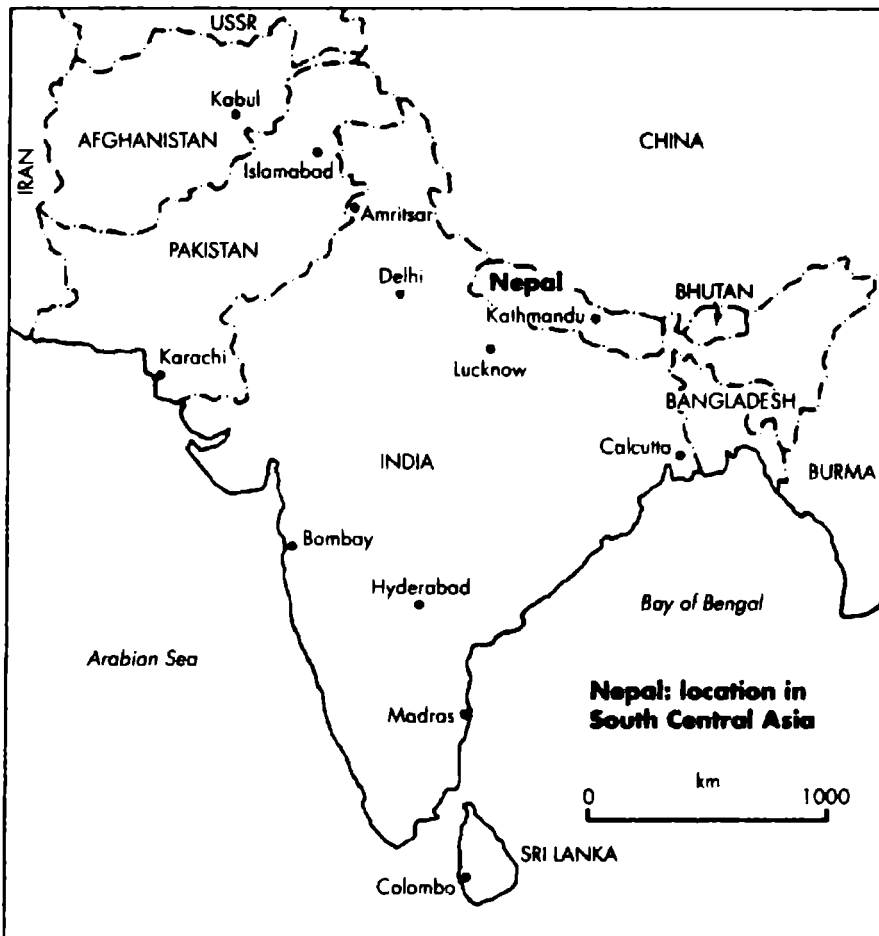
In sum, this book situates itself in what Patricia Broadfoot (2000, 370) calls the field of radical international and comparative education, which critically examines germane cultural features in a given context, drawing on an interdisciplinary approach to illuminate the complex and interrelated realities of our changing world. The intentional interdisciplinary (and indeed cross-paradigmatic and post-disciplinary) design addresses an underrepresented perspective in the international education literature. Thus the book can be read as a synthesis, drawing from a wide range of disciplinary approaches—education studies, feminist studies, and the social sciences. Each chapter crosses

discipline boundaries in ways that interrupt previously delimited departmental territories, making critical arguments about the subject of girls' educational participation while bringing in social and feminist thought. Thus, this work ultimately challenges the customary boundaries that have contained models of inquiry and delimited current educational participation research.

Before we may actually cast our investigative gaze on the problem of girls' educational participation in a Tharu community in Nepal, we need some historical knowledge and understanding of the subjects of our exploration.

Historical Background: The Tharus of Yesterday





Nepal, centrally located in South Asia, is home to many ethnic groups.³¹ The Tharu are one such group. Among the Tharus there are many subgroups, broadly distinguished by the territories they occupy and their cultural and linguistic differences. The Tharu have been categorized as an indigenous people³² by the Nepali government.³³ They generally reside in the Terai region of southern Nepal.









Map 4: Nepal: Location in South Central Asia (Sill and Kirkby 1991)

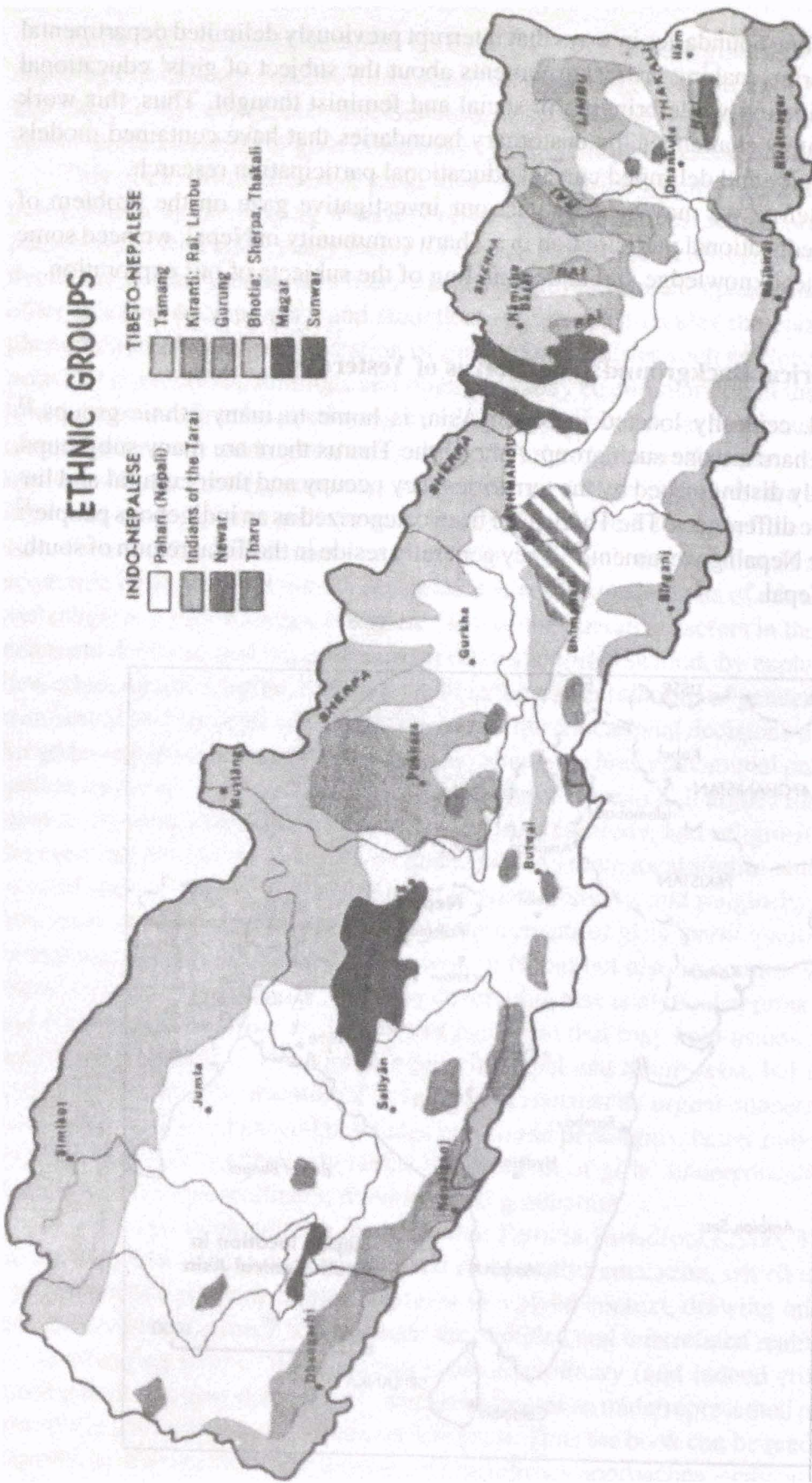
ETHNIC GROUPS

INDO-NEPALESE

-  Pahari (Nepali)
-  Indians of the Terai
-  Newar
-  Tharu

TIBETO-NEPALESE

-  Tamang
-  Kiranti: Rai, Limbu
-  Gurung
-  Bhotia: Sherpa, Thakali
-  Magar
-  Sunwar



Historical documents trace the early history of the Tharu to the eleventh century, when the Tharus were already located and identified within the Indian subcontinent.³⁵ In the fifteenth century, Sylvain Levi Thar-ru'i-brgyud ("the country of the Tharus") referred to the Khan dynasty of the Tharus who ruled from Kamtapur in what is today's Northern Bengal (Chatterjee 1951). In the sixteenth century, the Tibetan Buddhist historical Lama Taranath mentioned the Tharus, who then belonged to the kingdom of Camparna, as Tha-ru'i-brgvud. Early nineteenth century British explorers believed the Tharus originated in the Thar desert in Rajasthan, India. According to one legend, the Muslim invaders captured Rajputana, the ruler, and killed male members of the principalities. The royal women fled, taking servants as their new husbands. According to another account, the Tharus of Naini Tal and Kheri Districts had claimed Chittor as their original home (Risley 1891, 313). Then the Tharus were driven out of Chittor by the Mughal ruler, Akbar in 1567, and later lost their caste by eating fowls and drinking alcohol (Srivastava 1958, 14). Yet others believed the Tharus originated in the hills of Nepal.³⁶

Explorers and scholars have also speculated about the origin of the name Tharu. According to one account, one of the Kshatriya Rajas of the Plains who invaded the hill country was amazed at their drunken habits and used the word *Thar*, which means "liquor," and the term *Tharu*, or "liquor bibber," to describe them (Srivastava 1958, 14).³⁷ The word *Atharu* might also have been corrupted to become Tharu, derived from the group's supposed familiarity with incantations found in the Atharva Veda (Majumdar 1944). Another word, *athawaru* (an eighth-day serf), refers to the need to provide one day of free labor to a "lord," and so this word could also be the origin of Tharu, although this theory might be dismissed since the Tharus were not known for their ability to perform field labor (Srivastava 1958). Others point to the fact that the offspring of the Rajput women and their low-caste servants became known as Tharus. The word *Tharu* could be derived from the word *Thar*, the area in Rajasthan from which the ancestors supposedly came.³⁸ Some believe that the term Tharus simply means residents of the Terai, and that the word *thar* refers to "a man of the forest" (Srivastava 1958, 14). Still others speculate that the epithet *Tharu* is related to the group's migratory status. In this case, the word *Tharu* is thought to be a derivation of the word *thahre*, that is, "they halted" after the alleged flight into the forest (Srivastava 1958, 14). Some refer to *tarhua*, another derivation of the word *Tharu*, which describes the swampy setting in which the Tharu lived. *Thartharana* signifies the trembling or quaking during the Tharus' supposed trip from Hastinapur to the Terai after a fierce battle between the Rajputs and the Muslims (Crooke 1896, 13). One scholar traces the origin to the word *tharua*, which in a hill dialect means "paddler." The reference here is to the romantic life of the Tharus and the custom of marriage by capture in a boat (Knowles 1889).

It seems clear that although the Tharu consider themselves an indigenous population of Nepal, they did not originate from the current Hindu Kingdom.

Early nineteenth-century explorers and writers observed that the Tharu were continually migrating from the Gangetic plains of India into the Nepalese Terai.³⁸ There were several reasons for this migration. First, it appeared that the Tharu population required land for cultivation.³⁹ As the plains population moved closer, the Tharus retreated to the forest, preferring to keep their migratory villages in or on the perimeter of the forest areas (Atkinson 1884; Carnegie 1868; Nesfield 1885a). The second reason for the Tharus' move northward was to avoid British conservancy laws (Carnegie 1868, 10; Nesfield 1885a, 4). Other reasons may have been to escape indebtedness to money lenders and traders (Nevill 1904, 9), to avoid interference with the right to make their own liquor (Nevill 1905, 29) and to elude falling under the control of landowners and becoming slaves (Atkinson 1881, 386; Risley 1891, 330; Turner 1931, 605).

Just as the word *Tharu* has varied origins, so too it is difficult to fix the locations of the Tharus' places of residence. Nepal, positioned south of Tibet and north of India, is home to numerous subgroups or clans of Tharu who generally reside in the Terai region of southern Nepal and the Gangetic Plains of northern India. The Tharu are broadly divided into several groups which are distinguished by their territories, cultural features, and languages. Scholars differ on the number and their names. Christian McDonough (1984) recognizes the Rana, Dangaura, Kochila/Morangia, Chitwania, and Kathariya. B. S. Bisht (1994) distinguishes seven groups: Rana, Bukhusas, Garhaurha, Dhannara, Khunka, Jugiya, and Saunra. Others distinguish divisions within distinct regional locations, such as the Dangaura in the Dang District and the Deoshaura and Deokhuri in Bardia. These are the three groups represented in the village of Butawal, the subject of the present study.

Numerous works have been written about the Tharus of northern India and the outer and inner regions of Nepal's Terai. These works, published from the late nineteenth century to the present time, not only illuminate Tharu culture but also highlight the changes in research methodologies and perspectives over time. In British colonial times, the survey approach used for the compilation of Gazetteers of India in the "Tribes and Castes" series was designed by British explorers to India (Buchanan 1838; Carnegie 1868; Crooke 1896; Nesfield 1885a, 1885b; Turner 1931).⁴⁰

In the 1930s, ethnographic research techniques were developed, primarily by Indian scholars. These contributed a different methodological approach to studying the Tharus of India. D. N. Majumdar began to study the Rana Tharus in-depth. An array of later ethnographic research followed: V. K. Kochar's work on the Tharu joint families (1963) and S. Mathur's study of Rana marriage customs (1967) complemented H. D. Pradhan's series of articles (1935, 1937) on various aspects of Rana Tharu society, including economy, birth, marriage, and death customs. In addition C. T. Hu (1955, 1957) made a notable contribution to our understanding of demography and marriage rituals.

S. K. Srivastava's study of the Tharus in South Asia (1958) signifies a turning point in the study of Tharu culture. Although discredited for its incomplete coverage of the traditional culture and its transformation within a Hindu social system, his work, supported by earlier research, examines the dynamics of cultural change. It asks and examines sociological questions rather than relying solely on descriptive accounts.

The mid-twentieth century witnessed continued expansion of anthropological literature, which included works on the Tharus of Nepal. It was D. B. Bista, the premier Nepalese anthropologist, who published the first work on Nepal's Tharu community. Although Bista utilizes ethnographic methodology, his work is general in its coverage and lacks depth and details. Thanks to later literature, however, the picture of Nepal's Tharu is becoming fuller. A. W. MacDonald's research on Tharu festivals, Drone Rajaure's works on the Dangaura Tharu, the writings of K. Pyakuryal, Arjun Guneratne on the Chitwan Tharus, the edited collection by David N. Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, and John Whelpton's work (1997), and Christian McDonough's research on land ownership in the Tharu community (1984, 1996) have all broadened the field of study. Drone P. Rajaure's works (1977, 1980, 1981) are especially helpful to this study. His ethnographic work conducted in the Dang district is particularly useful to understanding the Tharus in Butawal, many of whom migrated from Dang.

In sum, by utilizing a multiperspective approach and methodology, the book reveals the importance of societal structures inherent within the political, economic, and social processes within a community. At the same time, it affirms the individual's place within the social structures, and stresses the transformative leverage of the individual's attitudes toward, beliefs about, and values of the larger overarching structures. It integrates commonly used economic indicators with the oft-neglected social and cultural elements associated with ethnicity and religion, permitting us to understand a more complete set of influences on the decision-making process. Knowledge of this interlocking web of factors also sheds light on how policies may be designed to help girls enroll in educational programs. By exploring the importance of ethnicity and religion as elements in the educational decisions made for girls, instead of using these factors to show educational participation *by* group, with their putative ethnic and religious identities, we set the stage for future research which may further enrich our understanding of an endemic phenomenon, that is, the undereducation of girls in many poor countries such as Nepal.

NOTES

1. UNESCO, in the World Education 1995 document, defines gross enrollment ratio as the ratio of enrollment at a given level to the total population in the official age group for that level, adjusted for differences between countries in their official age groups.

2. Similar statistics are reported by Mahbub ul Haq and Khadija Haq (1998). Primary enrollment ratios (net) for girls and boys, respectively, are quoted for India (76, 98), Pakistan (25, 36), Bangladesh (78, 89), Nepal (46, 80), Sri Lanka (100, 100), Bhutan (47,58), Maldives (100, 100), and overall South Asia (69, 88). Numerous other studies report similar statistics. For example, see Catriona Bass (1998).
3. UNESCO (1995), 33.
4. The net enrollment ratio defined by UNESCO in the World Education Report is the enrollment for the age group corresponding to the official school age of first-level education. All ratios are expressed as percentages.
5. UNESCO, Education for All Year 2000 Assessment. Statistical Document (UNESCO 2000, p. 33).
6. UNESCO (1995), 36. Percentage ratio is the number of enrolled students in each age group divided by the total population in the age group.
7. School life expectancy (SLE) defined by the UNESCO World Education document 1999 is "the total number of years of schooling which the child can expect to receive in the future, assuming that the probability of his or her being enrolled in school at any particular future age is equal to the current enrollment ratio for that age" (95).
8. School survival expectancy (SSE), according to the UNESCO World Education document 1995, "for a child of a certain age (the 'reference' age) is defined as the number of years of schooling which a child of that age *who is already in school* can expect to receive in the future, assuming that the probability of his or her being enrolled in school at any future age is equal to the ratio of the current enrolment ratio at that age to the highest current enrolment ratio at any age from the reference age onwards" (95).
9. UNESCO, Education for All Year 2000 Assessment. Statistical Document (2000, p. 30).
10. Gender disparities in South Asia also command our attention. J.S. Ahmad describes a UNESCO 1990 report which claims 15.5% of females, compared to 33.6% males in Afghanistan were enrolled in school. Enrollment rates of girls and boys respectively in Bangladesh were 44.7% and 58.9%. In Pakistan, 37.3% of girls compared to 63% of boys were enrolled in primary school. The case is not better in India, where 67.7% of girls were enrolled in school, compared to 91.9% of boys. Generally speaking, about 40% of all girls in this region were not enrolled in school, whereas only 16.5% of boys were not enrolled in school. See J. S. Ahmad (1999).
11. UNESCO, 1999.
12. The document is titled "Concerning a Major Regional Co-operation Programme for Universalization of Training Education and Eradication of Illiteracy in Asia and the Pacific."
13. See Prem Kasaju and G. S. Pradhan (1980).
14. For discussion of education in Nepal prior to the 1970s, see Dor Bahadur Bista (1991).
15. Universal Primary Education for Girls. Nepal, 1987. Bangkok: UNESCO.
16. The meeting called the Fourth Regional Consultation Meeting, was held in Bangkok in 1977.

17. Four pages of this chapter are missing from every copy of this edition of the *Education and Development* journals that I read while in the CERID office in Tripureshwar.
18. The report presented here is only one of many reports. Other international aid organizations produce their own statistics. These were not considered here, many are not affiliated with His Majesty's Government in Nepal.
19. Primary Education Final Report. Nepal Multiple Indicator Surveillance. Second Cycle: April–June 1995. Kathmandu: His Majesty's Government of Nepal. National Planning Commission, 1996.
20. Primary Education Final Report (1996). Nepal Multiple Indicator Surveillance Second Cycle: April–June 1995. Net enrollment as defined in the current school attendance as assessed by adult who completed the household questionnaire.
21. The Far Western Mountains eco-region is represented by Darchula District. Its location close to India's border may account for high percentage of children enrolled in school.
22. Primary Education Final Report (National Planning Commission, Secretariat, Kathmandu, Nepal, November 1996), 13. These data come from the Nepal Multiple Indicator Surveillance Second Cycle: April–June 1995.
23. Parents define enrollment as attendance in school at the time of the survey. The report specifically notes that it may not mean that their child was in school the day, the week, or even the month in which the survey was completed.
24. Primary Education Final Report (National Planning Commission, Secretariat, Kathmandu, Nepal, November 1996), 5 (25). These data come from the Nepal Multiple Indicator Surveillance Second Cycle: April–June 1995.
25. Primary Education Final Report (1996, 17). These data come from the Nepal Multiple Indicator Surveillance Second Cycle: April–June 1995.
26. Ibid (1996, 31).
27. See reports such as "The Chelibeti Programme: An Evaluative Study" (1992); "The Basic and Primary Education Master Plan, 1991–2001" (1999); "The Basic and Primary Education Program (PEP II) 1999–2004" (1999).
28. I conducted research in this village of Butawal (a pseudonym) during May and June 1997; August 1998–January 1999; December 1999–January 2000 and December 2000–January 2001.
29. To this point in time, application of the feminist standpoint theory has largely remained in the feminist studies area. This author is unaware of its use in the educational literature during research for this book.
30. See Gerald Postiglione (1999) for China and minority education, for example.
31. M. Sill and J. Kirkby (1991, 35).
32. The International Labour Organization Convention (No. 169) Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (ILO Convention 1989) defines indigenous peoples as "peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present boundaries, and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions." See Fernand De Varennes (1996).

33. There are numerous older works that detail the different Tharu ethnic groups that have resided in Nepal. For example, Christian McDonough (1984) who provides a comprehensive historical account of early British explorers to the Terai region who observed and wrote on the Tharu. One of the earliest writers about the Tharus was William Crooke (1896). Crooke initiated the differentiation of groups of Tharus. The Rana Tharu live mainly in the Far Western districts of the Nepal Tarai (Kanchanpur and Kailali districts) and in Nainital and Kheri (Lakhimpur-Kheri) districts of Uttar Pradesh, India. The Dangaura live for the most part in Dang district in Nepal but can also be found in the Bardiya, Banke, and Far Western districts of Kailali and Kanchanpur as well as in the Kheri, Gonda, and Bahraich districts of India. The Kochila/Morangia occupy the eastern region of Nepal in the districts of Morang and Sunsari. There are other Tharu who call themselves Kochila in Siraha, Udayapur, and Saptari districts. They can be distinguished from the Kochila/Morangia Tharu by dress, customs and language. Chitwania Tharu live in Chitwan and Nawalparasi districts in the central and western districts respectively. Finally, the Kathariya Tharu reside in the Kailali district of Nepal but can also be found in Kheri (Lakhimpur-Kheri), Bahraich, Gonda, and Gorakpur districts in India and Midwestern districts. Christian McDonough (1984, 1996) recognizes the Rana, Dangaura, Kochila/Morangia, Chitwania, and Kathariya. Dor Bahadur Bista (1967) distinguishes the Pradhan and the Apradhan. Pradhans constitute six different divisions and are considered superior in social status to the Apradhans. Apradhans are subdivided into 26 different groups in the overall number of Tharu groups to 32. B. S. Bisht (1994) distinguishes seven groups: Rana, Bukhusas, Garhaurha, Dhannara, Khunka, Jugiya, and Saunra. Edward Sachau, (1964) cites the works by the eleventh-century Muslim historian Alberuni, who referred to the Tharus on the Indian subcontinent. For studies in French, see Gisèle Krauskopff (1985, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1989a, 1989b, 1990) and Ram Dayal Rakesh (1995).
34. Central Intelligence Agency. U.S. government, 1980.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 201. An eleventh-century Muslim historian Alberuni, referred to the Tharus when discussing the Indian subcontinent. He wrote, "Farther on the country to the right is called Tilwat, the inhabitants Tharu, people of very black color and flat-nose like the Turks."
36. See F. Hamilton Buchanan (1838), John C. Nesfield (1885a, 1885b) and Patrick Carnegie (1868). S. K. Srivastava (1958) claims Allauddin (1303 A. D.), Bahadur Shah (1553 A. D.) or Akbar (1567 A. D.) could have driven out the Tharus.
37. William Crooke (1896) also advocated that the name Tharu comes from a "wine bibber." Crooke does not provide explanation of the term.
38. Several scholars refer to this information. See Drone P. Rajaure (1977) and Patrick Carnegie (1868).
39. In many of the original documents used in this section, the authors use initials for their first names, instead of their complete first names.
40. See E. T. Atkinson (1884), Patrick Carnegie (1868), Oudh Gazetteer (1877–78), and John C. Nesfield (1885) for more on this.

The Case of a Nepali Village: A Point of Entry¹ to the Problem of Girls' Educational Participation

Introduction

In 1975, participants in the United Nations World Conference defined development in terms of its broadest objective: "to bring about sustained improvement in the well-being of the individual and of society and to bestow benefits to all" (Papanek 1977, 14). While the objective of effecting the betterment of society and the situation of individuals may be taken for granted, the actual realization of development is a complex process. Education, one component of the process, provides a breadth of knowledge and depth of skills for those engaged in projects or work that contribute to higher standards of living. Indeed, the government and nongovernmental organizations do accept responsibility to provide appropriate and accessible formal education and nonformal educational opportunities.

However, in general, women and girls do not participate in education at rates deemed acceptable by international, national, and local government agencies. Almost invariably, their rates of participation are lower than those of men and boys. In the global arena, girls in South Asia participate in education at roughly the same rates as those living in many other regions of the world at a comparable stage of development. Within countries, girls residing in urban areas tend to enroll and remain in school at higher rates than girls living in rural areas. In South Asia, girls are less likely to enroll in and graduate from school than boys of the same age. In particular, girls in Nepal maintain one of the lowest educational participation rates in the South Asian region and in the world. And locally, the Tharus, an ethnic group indigenous to Nepal, have one of the lowest educational participation rates in the country.

How can we investigate this perplexing problem of undereducation for girls in Nepal and South Asia? The development literature generally recognizes the household as a critical link between society's structural elements

and individual decisions on personal welfare (Singerman and Hoodfar 1996). Although the household—an intricately woven web of relationships, bound by long-term commitments on the part of individuals related by birth or by marriage, within which a hierarchy of power reigns over the processes of economic and social life—has been identified as the primary decision-making body that determines the probability of a child's enrollment and retention in an educational program (Ojoko 1993; Upadhyia 1996), much of the educational development research has systematically neglected the examination of the household and family structures for girls (Kasaju 1980).

Household decision-making within the context of development theory has been seen as a collective bargaining exercise, yet one in which we hear unequal representations of powerful and subordinate voices (Brohman 1996). Amartya Sen (1990) has suggested an analytic tool for studying the household, namely the cooperative conflict model, that categorizes the ways in which decisions are made. The cooperation and conflict contexts categorize gendered relations which may vary by form, content, and arena. If members of the household engage in collaborative discussion and resolve an issue amicably, that is, if all members receive their own desired outcome, power plays a minimal role. However, if conflicts arise, outcomes are related to the level and type of power one person imposes on the others in the household. As a result, an individual in a dominant position may make choices that dramatically limit opportunities and options for other individuals.² However, we unduly limit our investigation if we merely pursue and focus on the study of the dominant voice in the decision-making process. As Clem Tisdell, Roy Kartik, and Regmi Gopal (2001) contend, gender relationships in countries such as Nepal are a culturally determined factor that must be considered when determining the status of the woman in the household. In other words, models like Sen's may have limited explanatory power to explain the ways in which decisions are made in the household, because women's roles in that process are not thoroughly examined.

Since members of a household make decisions related to a daughter's educational participation, studying the interaction of the nuclear family members in the context of political, economic, social, and cultural conditions and circumstances is an effective way to understand how educational decisions are made.³ The purpose of this case study is to examine the process of educational decision-making for women and men in the Tharu community. Several questions guide this inquiry. Who are the decision makers? If there are several players in the decision-making process, how do gender relations influence the process?⁴ And within what pre-existing social and cultural structures are these gender relations rooted?⁵ How do these structures affect decision-making practices? And what role does power play in this process?

This chapter, containing the results of my fieldwork,⁶ and complemented by insights from pertinent literature, takes the Tharu case as a point of entry

to, and plexus for, understanding the educational decision-making process by delineating, investigating, and analyzing the dynamic process for girls in this community. The chapter begins with the section "The Tharus of Today: The Regional Setting," which provides a general description of my research site and its surroundings. The second section, "The Tharus of Today: A Thick Ethnographic Description," provides a description of Butawal. Third, the "Collecting Survey Questionnaire Data" section describes the general survey questionnaires that provided basic information about the research site. "Twenty Years of Literature and Its Links to the Case Study," the fourth segment, reports and analyzes the results of a survey questionnaire in Butawal, while situating these results in the literature that examines known indicators of educational participation, upon which this survey was developed in the first place. The fifth segment, "Collecting Qualitative Interview Data: The Educational Decision-Making Process," enriches our understanding of girls' educational participation by describing the educational decision-making process for Tharu families in Butawal. Here, this process is shown to be a tripartite one, composed of three sequential stages:

In short, this case study of households in Butawal, a culturally diverse yet predominately Tharu village in the Midwestern region of the Terai (Tarai), based on multiple field visits and methodological techniques, examines the conditions and circumstances that influence the gendered, social relations of women and men, mothers and fathers, who participate in such decision making for girls.⁷ Gender relations here refer to the ideologies and practices formulated by the social structures of kinship, class, religion, and caste, which effectuate power hierarchies of women and men within the household and between households in a village. It attempts to lay bare the power hierarchies inherent in the cultural and social conditions, circumstances, expectations, and practices that have a direct bearing on the decisions made for Tharu daughters.

The Tharus of Today—The Regional Setting

The 993,388 Tharus generally reside in the country's southern most area. According to the 1991 census, the Tharu comprise 5.32% of the country's population. If we restrict our attention to the country between the Nepalese districts of Kanchanpur in the West and Kapilvasta to the east, we can distinguish roughly between the Rana, Kathariya, Kochila, Mahotani, Deokhura, and Dangaura groups. Today, the Banke district is home to predominately Dangaura, Deokhuri, and Deoshaura Tharu, whom I study.

The Terai region, consisting of the outer Terai and the Inner Terai, both inhabited by the Tharu, is a low-lying, fertile, and flat land of southern Nepal. The long, broad valleys at the base of the outer foothills of the Himalayas serve as the northern boundary of the Terai. The area slopes southward to the Nepalese-Indian border at the southernmost area of the country. This southern

area is slightly warmer but shares many of the characteristics of the rest of the Terai.⁸ This southern section of the Terai is of special interest to me because of the Tharu populations that reside there. A smaller number of Dangaura Tharu, whose original homeland is believed to be the Dang valley, migrated into the Banke and Bardia districts to escape exploitation by the Brahmin and Chettri landlords in the villages.⁹ The Deoshaura and Deokhuri are believed to have migrated into Banke district from the eastern regions of the Terai in order to find suitable farming land.

The Terai's very hot and wet summer months, with daytime temperatures ranging from approximately eighty to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, yield to cooler winters, with daytime temperatures ranging from approximately sixty degrees to eighty degrees Fahrenheit. Year-round evening temperatures hover between thirty-five and sixty degrees Fahrenheit. The fertile alluvium land supports many crops, including rice, sugar cane, wheat, legumes, paddy, and lentils.

I chose this region in general, and the village of Butawal in particular, because I wanted a location at the demographic intersection of the Tharu, high-, middle-, and low-caste Hindus, and Muslims in the Midwestern District of Nepal, where girls' educational participation rates are some of the lowest in the country, and where, to my knowledge, no other studies have taken place. Butawal, the small Nepalese village in which I lived, claims a high enrollment rate for Tharu girls. In this village, there live Brahmin, Thakuri, Kami, Damai, and Bika Hindus, as well as the 124 aboriginal Tharu residents in thirty-seven households.¹⁰

The Tharus of Today: A Thick Ethnographic Description

During my first days in the field, I introduce myself to all members of the community and write notes to capture my initial impressions of my neighbors and setting. My day begins around 5:45 A.M. when, during the earliest morning hours, sounds of water pumped into narrow mouthed, wide-based aluminum or copper containers echo through the village. Before daylight, women gather at one of the two village water pumps to brush their teeth and collect water for the day's tea and food preparation. Ash from the kitchen fires provides a toothpaste-like rub, and an index finger or small, leafy branch serves as a toothbrush. Men follow the women to perform this daily ablution. Between 6:00 and 6:30 A.M. wage and agricultural workers depart for the city and fields respectively. Plows resting on men's shoulders and oxen being herded to the fields are a common sight at 6:30 A.M. each morning. At the same time, several adolescent Tharu girls report to work (for food) at Brahmin households at the village.¹¹

Women prepare the morning meal of curried vegetables, dahl, and rice between 9:00 and 9:30 A.M. Between 9:30 and 9:45 A.M., after delivering the

morning meal to the fields¹² or eating it in the home,¹³ bands of boys and girls in sky blue shirts, matched with either navy blue trousers or skirts, balance their schoolbooks on their heads and walk to the village school located near the main road.¹⁴

After the morning dishes are washed, women perform housecleaning tasks, including sweeping floors, usually with a child tightly wrapped and strapped to the mother's back by a long, narrow cotton, woolen, or polyester shawl. Upon the completion of this work, women who do not go out into the fields sit in the multipurpose room and pop kernels of corn from dried cobs, which will later be eaten as an afternoon snack in wealthier families or ground for corn flour to be used for *roti* (bread) in poorer families. Some weave baskets or visit neighbors, depending on the season and the amount of work that needs to be done.¹⁵

Those skilled in trade work, including members of the Damai and Kami families, who work as tailors and blacksmiths respectively, also contribute to the colorful life in this village. These families maintain small shops. The tailor shop, located in the second story loft of the family's home, and the blacksmith shop, a short five-minute walk from the family's home, provide access for those needing services and contribute to the diverse cultural composition of the village. The constant sounds of humming, foot-driven sewing machines and the clanging of hot metals form the background din of a busy community in which people socialize.¹⁶

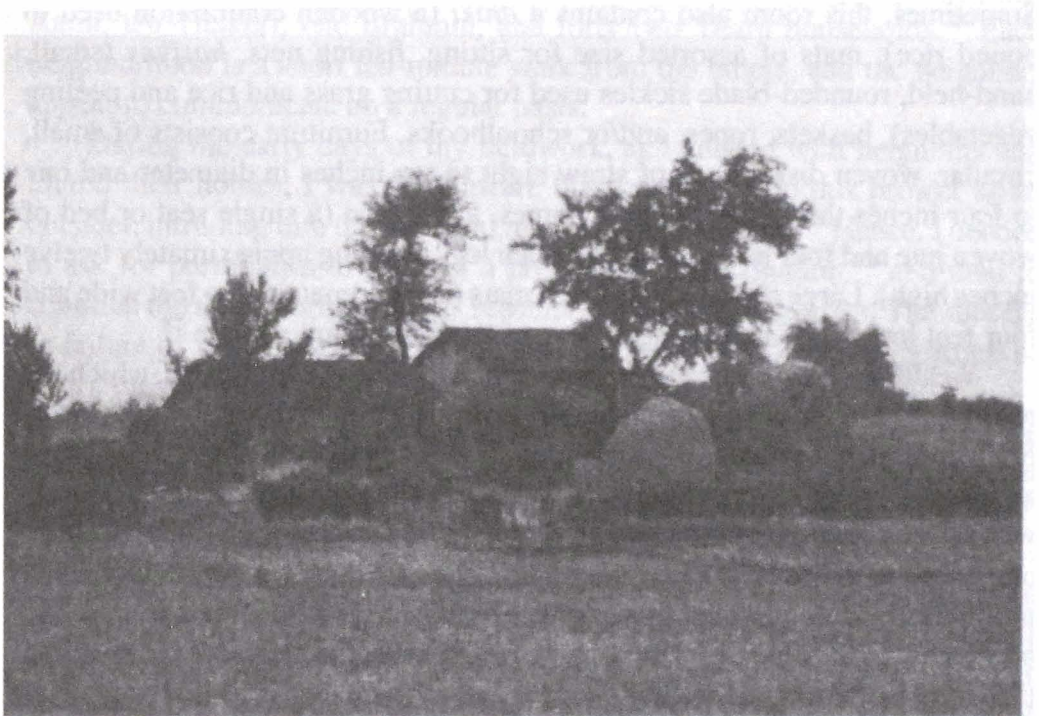


Photo 1: Two of the Tharu homes in Butawal, December, 1999.

All residents either live in single- or double-story homes. Single-story smaller homes have thatched roofs that provide additional ventilation from the smoke created by the cooking fires. The smaller homes, most of which are topped with squash vines, are constructed of mud-packed walls and supported by bamboo frames. The typical Tharu home in the neighborhood is measured in *haat* (a measurement approximately from the tip of the index finger to the elbow). The smaller home is roughly 406.8 square feet in area and sparsely furnished. When I visit, I walk through an earthen-packed flat area at the front of the home to approach the home's small doorway, usually about four feet wide and five feet five inches tall, with dual-panel wooden doors. Small decorative windows, approximately one foot by two feet, at the front of the home and a door and window at the back of the home are sometimes decorated with strands of dried marigolds. Sometimes I am greeted by the woman or man I am interviewing (depending on the time of the day); other times I directly make my way into the multipurpose sitting room situated at the front of the house. During our informal conversations, women peel and cut vegetables for the morning and evening meals, men and women smoke bulbar wooden pipes with sweet smelling tobacco, and children, amused by my struggle with Nepali and Tharu, play at my feet or occasionally work on homework assignments.¹⁷

A small depression in the floor of the multipurpose room (similar to those in the kitchen), measuring approximately twelve inches in diameter, contains a fire for warmth during the chilly fall and winter mornings and evenings. Sometimes, this room also contains a *dhiki* (a wooden contraption used to pound rice), mats of assorted size for sitting, fishing nets, *hasiyas* (small, hand-held, rounded-blade sickles used for cutting grass and rice and peeling vegetables), baskets, ropes, and/or schoolbooks. Furniture consists of small, circular, woven disks made of straw eight to ten inches in diameter and one to four inches thick, and in some homes, a *machiya* (a single seat or bed of woven jute and four hand-carved wooden legs standing approximately twelve inches high). Large rectangular woven mats (approximately two feet wide and four feet long) provide seating for my research assistant and me.¹⁸

Wealthier Tharus live in one of the five two-story Tharu homes, which are palatial in comparison to the smaller homes. These homes are constructed of brick or the same earthen materials used in the construction of smaller homes, and they have a front porch which extends the length of the home.¹⁹ Large windows on each side of the home provide good views of the village. At least one set of stairs leads to the second floor. The first floor contains a kitchen, a multipurpose room, and a deity room. The second floor contains two to five bedrooms. Size is not the only distinguishing aspect of the larger homes; the tile roof also differentiates these homes from the smaller ones. Two styles of tiles, one cut like a half-moon and the other cut like a shingle, also set the smaller homes apart from the larger homes.

During my walks throughout the village, I found that drawing a map helped me locate neighborhoods, households, farms, the local government primary and secondary school, and common meeting places in Butawal. My sketches and maps, which were updated with each visit, show that 70 percent of the Tharu families (a 40 percent increase from 1998) raise and own pigs that reside in sheds constructed of timber with a leafy twig covering. These pig sties are located approximately thirty feet from the entrance to the house. Troughs used for feeding are made of hand-carved large tree trunks measuring twelve to eighteen inches in diameter and three to five feet in length, depending on the number of animals feeding from it. Pigs provide food for some Tharu families and also generate income. Goats kept on the front porch or in the courtyard area of the home and tied to a nearby tree or animal shed provide meat for the wealthier Brahmin families. Brahmin and Tharu families also sell these animals as livestock for a profit.

Butawal has three distinct neighborhoods that are largely organized by residents' landholdings. Although the village has continued to change since the beginning of the field work, the village in 1997 consisted of four Thakuri and two Brahmin families and one Tharu family, who all reside in one neighborhood on the eastern side of the main road. They own and farm land in that area. A second neighborhood, composed of ten Thakuri families, is located on the immediate western side of the road in the vicinity of the village government primary and secondary school. The third and largest neighborhood of Butawal is located farther west of the main road and is home to two Bika, four Kami, ten Thakuri, one Brahmin, and forty-two Tharu households.²⁰ Each neighborhood is a short ten-minute walk from the others, and the neighbors appear to communicate on a regular basis.

During the early days of my fieldwork, as I chatted with neighbors and toured their homes, I was fully aware that I entered into this project as an outsider, intruding into the lives and minds of the residents.²¹ Hence, I needed to ask for permission to conduct a preliminary investigation,²² and then to continue the study during various seasons in the upcoming years. The success or failure of my project, I quickly learned, rested in the hands of a group of Tharu men, the village *khul* (leaders).

I was invited to present my research plan for review and approval during the fourth night of my initial stay in Butawal. I was told by my host, a local Brahmin resident, to report to Mr. Chaudhari's²³ home after the evening meal. I prepared a simple presentation explaining why I wanted to do this study, and what would happen with the study after I finished. Upon arrival at the meeting, I quickly realized that "major" decisions such as this one must first be approved by the community of men. This first experience was an encounter with what Dorothy Smith (1987, 3) refers to as the "relations of ruling," that is, "complex or [and] organized practices . . . that interpenetrate the multiple sites of power." Women were neither invited to nor welcome at this meeting.

After lengthy discussion²⁴ and (much to my relief) approval of the study, a night of dancing, playing musical instruments, singing Tharu and Nepali folk songs, and drinking *raksi* (the local liquor) ensued.²⁵

My brief introduction to all the residents of the village and the approval of my study at the village assembly were only the first steps into the lives of this village and its residents. Feminist researchers draw attention to the need for researchers to be aware of and disclose their *own* histories, values, and assumptions—their personal baggage, as it were. This consciousness and divulgence expose our own biases and increase our awareness of privileged positions of power. It also helped to develop personal, trusting fieldwork relationships with the residents of Butawal in order to create an environment that encourages all community members to actively participate in my project.²⁶

Women of this village appeared significantly more reluctant to participate in the study than men.²⁷ In an attempt to develop their trust in me, I spent many days visiting their homes and sharing my photographs and stories from home with them.²⁸ Our initial conversations provided the opportunity for us to share stories about our own lives in varied daily contexts, which I believe, helped the women (and men) to see me as a woman, wife, and student. Moreover, these conversations, and my attempts to make sense of them, enriched my field notes that sought to capture not only men's voices, which have been adopted as a universal basis of knowledge (Bloom 1997), but also to record and analyze women's voices separately and in light of gender relations.

Many of these initial and introductory conversations with the Tharu women began with comments about our clothing and jewelry. Tharus are readily distinguishable by their attire and ornaments. The Dangaura Tharu women wear a single piece of cotton cloth, a *lahanga*, which they fold once or twice in front, and a short-sleeved blouse called a *cholo*. The Deoshaura Tharu women wear full skirts, sewn with long horizontal strips of colorfully printed cotton fabric from India, gathered at the waist and flowing to mid calf, which expose their intricately tattooed calves and feet. A tightly fitted, six-button, short-sleeved cotton midriff bodice with a scooped neck reveals their tattooed forearms and hands. Multicolored, loom-woven shawls covering the head, neck, shoulders, and upper body during the early morning and later evening hours provide an added layer of warmth.

Numerous pieces of jewelry adorn Tharu women. A necklace indicates married status. (Men do not wear a piece of jewelry indicating marital status.) Some Tharu women choose to wear a *tikka*, a small red dot made of a sticky-backed felt, at the center of their forehead between their eyes.²⁹ Most wear large gold hoop earrings. They pierce the left side of the nose with various sized earrings, ranging from a tiny wooden peg to a piece of gold jewelry that measures approximately one half inch in width. During the daytime, their hair is pulled back and twisted into a tightly wrapped small bun in the back of the head or simply singly braided down their back. Most females wear colorful

glass bangles on each wrist. Shoes are not commonly worn. Each morning, the Tharu and Brahmin women (depending on the home in which I was living) would jokingly check my appearance, making sure I wore a necklace, tikka, and *chura* (glass bracelets) in order to properly greet my neighbors.³⁰

Although region of origin for women can be distinguished by dress, one cannot distinguish men by the same means. The men wear either shorts or long trousers and Western-style T-shirts. Jackets and scarves adorn the head and neck during the early morning hours. Many men wear a *topi*, a small brimless hat approximately five inches in height. Traditional Tharu male dress, worn only by the oldest man in the village, consists of a V-neck T-shirt top sewn from white cotton cloth, and a single strip of white cotton cloth looped up between the legs and wound around the lower abdomen. The young boys in the village wear shorts, T-shirts, lightweight jackets, and flip-flops.

The topics of my conversations with the village residents progressed from attire to work. Women and men in Butawal seem to work constantly, the vast majority of their tasks being agricultural.³¹ During the farming cycle, 90 percent of the females, and 84 percent of the males work on unregistered land (land they farm for their own benefit but do not own) or work as indentured servants on a landlord's land. A very small percentage of Tharu families work their own registered land. Chores such as field preparation (plowing, fertilizing), sowing, harvesting, and storing each consume months of work for each seasonal crop of paddy, maize, wheat, rice, mustard, and potatoes.

May and June, by far, are the slowest months of the agricultural year, largely due to temperatures that usually exceed one hundred degrees, and the onset of the monsoon rains. These days are spent repairing oxen harnesses and making jute string. In September and early October, adults and children harvest rice. Bent at the waist, one hand grasping a cluster of rice stalks, the other holding a small, rounded sickle, women and men cut the plant approximately four inches from the ground. After tossing the cut rice into a small pile, the workers systematically move across the parallel rows. Gathering cut piles of rice, they bundle it into larger piles, tie it with a piece of rice stalk, and carry the piles to the large cleared space in adjacent parts of the field.³²

During the later part of October and through November, the farmers scatter the cut rice in the cleared field in a circle approximately twenty feet in diameter. Four oxen, roped shoulder-to-shoulder, thrash the rice, usually goaded by a young boy with a lightweight stick. After approximately one hour of thrashing, the rice is separated from the hull. Women and men separate the plant, scoop the rice into large burlap bags, and stack the remaining straw into high mounds approximately twenty feet high and fifteen feet in diameter. During this part of the year, young boys (both school-going and non-school-going) and men sleep in the cleared fields to protect their investment from thieves. Later in the growing season, the Tharus in this village grow several kinds of cereals, oil-seeds, and vegetables, some of which are sold in the

southern border town of Nepalganj for cash to buy essential items such as salt, cloth, and candles.

In November and December, young women and girls bundle the remaining rice stalks into large clusters approximately ten feet high and five feet wide that rest on bamboo poles. They toss the bundles over their shoulders and, with their faces barely visible, carry the bundles to their homes, or, in most cases, carry them to the homes of the owners whose farms they work. The bundles of rice stalks are used as feed for water buffalo and for household mat construction.

In January, field preparation for winter crops consumes the farmers' days. Women clear the field of stones; men use oxen to plow the fields. After the workers return from the fields, a typical conversation between Brahmin, Thakuri, and Tharu families includes the discussion of types of crops, the previous year's harvest, and the rain schedule, which determines the success of the next crop.

The second and final meal preparation begins at 5:30 P.M. Upon completion of work in the field, the farmers return to the village and, by 7:00 P.M., eat with the family. The wage laborers also return to the village at that time. After the evening meal, dishes stacked in a corner of the kitchen wait to be washed until daylight provides adequate light for proper cleaning. Throughout the remainder of the evening, candles (or a small kerosene lamp in the Brahmin home)³³ light the village, illuminating the courtyards or multipurpose rooms for conversation, usually with a drink in hand, until bedtime at approximately 9:00 P.M. A *machiya* furnishes the courtyard areas of the homes and provides a rather uncomfortable space to sit during these conversations.³⁴ Our evening conversations usually revolved around current events in the village, my stay in Kathmandu to renew a visa, or travels to America.

Collecting Survey Questionnaire Data

After time spent getting to know people's names, sharing photos and stories, and visiting their homes and farms in the area, I met with each individual in their own home to complete the survey questionnaire, the same one used by Shrestha and his team.³⁵ The residents' responses to this initial survey questionnaire not only provided me with another opportunity to become familiar with those in the village without asking intrusive or difficult questions but also helped me to gather basic demographic information (related to the child, the household, and the school) that I would use in statistical analyses to reveal the extent to which child-related, household-related, and school-related variables affect girls' participation in local government school.³⁶

When I entered a household to collect this demographic survey data in Butawal, typically the woman in the home, usually a young mother, declined initially to answer the questions, stating that she did not know the answers.³⁷

After a brief conversation, and encouragement from my research assistant and me, she agreed to attempt to answer our questions. The first section of the questionnaire consists of household-related questions. I recorded the district and ward and assigned the house a household number.³⁸ Next, I recorded the names, ages, marital status, occupation, and level of formal and nonformal education of each adult member of the household.³⁹ In Butawal, three female and eighteen male Tharu residents had reportedly attended grades one through three in primary school, and no females and twelve males had reportedly attended class four through six in primary school. Two female and ten male Tharus had reportedly attended grades seven through ten of secondary school. Twelve Tharu women, but no Tharu men, had reportedly attended a non-formal education literacy class that was held in the village in 1995 and again in 1996. The vast majority, however, seventy Tharu women and forty-two Tharu men, reported that they had neither attended primary school nor nonformal education classes.

The survey instrument also helped me to collect household-related occupational information. The residents of Butawal, living in a predominantly agrarian community, represent a varied economic picture. In Butawal, one Tharu male works in business, one Tharu male is employed by the service industry, eight Tharu males work for wages, and the remainder of working age males—the majority—work in agriculture. Similarly, one Tharu female works in service, five work for wages, and fifty-five work in farming. The majority of those from other ethnic groups also engage in farming as the main source of income for families. The exceptions are the Kami and Damai families, who are employed as metal workers and tailors, respectively.

Annual reported income is one indicator of family wealth, and is another question in the survey questionnaire. With regard to earned income, neither the Brahmin families nor the Damai families would disclose an annual income figure. The Tharu and Thakuri families, on average, report an annual income of approximately US \$118 and US \$403 respectively. Finally, the Kami families report an annual income of approximately US \$105.⁴⁰

The last part of the household-related section of the survey questionnaire includes an “Attitude toward Education” scale.⁴¹ Residents were asked if they agree with, disagree with, or have no opinion of each of the twenty statements. In Butawal, Tharu female and male scores, seven and eight respectively, paled in comparison to the other residents’ scores of sixteen for females and seven for males. The higher the score, the more positive the attitude toward education.

The survey instrument also recorded information related to the school and contributed to my understanding of its relationship to the families in the village.⁴² In Butawal, the village governmental school is a short walk from each of the three neighborhoods. The headmaster and the six male teachers appear to be a committed group of individuals who have an average of seven years of teaching experience. In interviews held with the group, and on

an individual basis, they shared their belief that because of their Tharu and Thakuri ethnicity, they could serve as role models for the children under their care. Mr. Chaudhari, a young Tharu teacher approximately twenty-six years old, stated,

These children need to see a Tharu can be in a professional position. They need to see that we can get good jobs if we can read and write. Yes, there are problems with the job, but I can make a living. This is an important job for our village and for the children in our village. Others need to see that Tharus can do this work.

With the help of the local residents, a third building was constructed during the interval between my first and second visit to the village. The first and oldest building is constructed of an earthen material and tin roof. It contains three classrooms which accommodate approximately fifty children in each room. Small windows for ventilation hardly provide enough fresh air in the room for a comfortable environment. A piece of black slate provides a writing space, but pieces of chalk are in short supply. Boards positioned across the room's floor provide a place for the primary school-age children to place their textbooks. The second building and the newly built third building, housing the upper primary school- and secondary school-age students respectively, are constructed of a cement-like substance, with tin roofs. Although the lower school does not have furniture in any of its four classrooms, long benches and tables squeezed into the upper school classrooms provide seats and writing space for the older students.

The school day, depending on the day of the week and month of the year, typically commences at approximately 9:30 A.M. and breaks at 11:30 A.M. The afternoon session begins at 1:00 and ends at approximately 3:00 P.M. Since the school lacks food service water, and toilet facilities, the break allows time for the children to tend to personal matters.

This descriptive account of the field site provides an initial in-depth, personal, and independent portrayal of the village and its residents, revealing the background of the conditions and circumstances that influence educational decisions for girls in this community. Moreover, it sets the stage for an examination of the educational participation literature within the context of a specific location, which, to this point in time, has received relatively little attention in the scholarly literature.

Twenty Years of Literature and Its Links to Our Case Study

The initial data collected during daily participant observation in the field during the summer of 1997, the survey questionnaire answers collected in 1998, and a review of the pertinent literature together provide a body of information

which, upon analysis, yields two common categories of potential indicators of girls' educational participation. First, there are household-related variables which include, but are not limited to, the parents' level of education, their ability to pay for education, their attitudes toward it and their social and religious values for their daughters.⁴³ Second, there are school-related variables which include, but are not limited to, the distance to school, number and gender of teachers, curriculum, and school facilities.⁴⁴ Therefore, the literature germane and related to our case study may be examined in terms of these categories.⁴⁵

The first household-related variable that influences a girl's participation in education appears to be the degree of parents' education. Nelly Stromquist (1989), among others, notes that girls' enrollment in school correlates rather neatly with parents' educational achievements. The rate is higher if parents have a high degree of education, or are in a position that normally requires a high degree of education.⁴⁶ One limitation of these studies is that they focus on higher education, such as the correlation between mother's education level and the daughter's university-level education. In the case of Nepal, where most parents have yet to obtain a primary school education, this literature obviously does little to further our understanding of the relationship between parents' education level and primary school educational attainment for girls. More pertinent to the case of Nepal are the studies by Susan Cochrane, Kalpana Mehra, and Ibrahimaha Osheba (1986). Their studies of the Middle East that deal with primary and secondary school-age children find that the higher the educational attainment of parents, the higher the educational attainment of the daughters in their families. Classic studies investigating cases in Latin America, such as the works of Barbara Wolfe and Jere Behrman (1984) and Elizabeth King and Rosemary Bellew (1989), also suggest parents' education is positively correlated to educational participation of children. In yet another study, Menno Pradhan (1998) finds that in Indonesia, higher parents' education significantly reduces the probability of nonenrollment and delayed enrollment for children aged thirteen to eighteen, with a more significant effect for boys than girls.

Several other studies examine parents' education vis-à-vis daughters' schooling in Nepal. Meena Acharya (1994), for instance, aggregates information from the 1981 and 1991 census material, information from *Asmita* (a feminist, Nepali-language magazine), Tribhuvan University dissertations, and United Nations publications to produce comparative tables. Her secondary statistical analysis provides a view of Nepalese women's literacy rates from ages ten and up. She does not address children in the six to ten year age group. Shizu Upadhyia (1996), reviewing Acharya's work, notes that socioeconomic variables in general, and patriarchy in particular, contribute to female literacy, but does not elaborate. Although her work offers new ideas with regard to patriarchy, it falls short in specifically describing how she arrived at this conclusion. A more recent USAID report (1998) details how attainment of skills

Table 1. Butawal Adults' Educational Level by Ethnic Group and Gender

Educational Level Completed	Ethnic Group			
	Tharus		Other Ethnic Groups	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Primary School Class 1–3	3	18	1	4
Primary School Class 4–6	—	12	5	7
Primary School Class 7–10	2	10	5	10
Nonformal Education				
Literacy Class	12	—	3	—
Neither Primary School nor Nonformal Education	70	42	14	6
Total N	87	82	28	27

and knowledge through literacy and income-generating courses for Nepali mothers lead to higher levels of educational attainment for their children. Similarly, Robert A. Levine, Sarah E. LeVine, and Beatrice Schnell (2001) propose that schooling leads to social change by imparting skills and fostering other individual changes. The authors find that women's decision-making process will be enhanced through their acquisition of aspirations, identities, skills, and models of learning that are learned in the formal educational setting. This study has implications for girls' education because women who are formally educated may be more inclined to send their own daughters to school, although the authors do not put forth this view.

Table 1 represents the Butawal adults' educational level by ethnic group and gender. In Butawal, I do find a positive correlation between the degree of parents' education and their daughters' enrollment and retention in school. Girls from families with formally educated parents are more likely to enroll and remain in school than girls from families without a formal education.

Another type of education for a parent that may influence educational attainment is the microcredit program. Although fewer studies have investigated this correlation, Sharon Benoliel's recent study (1997) explains that effective microcredit programs for women support increases in educational attainment among children, although the overall increase accrued to boys rather than girls. This study, although limited in the ways in which it probes the problem of undereducation for girls, provides a level of descriptive analysis that informs our discussion of girls' education.

A second household-related variable in the investigation of girls' education appears to be economics. In an early study, K. S. Ahmed and M. Y. Hasan (1984) elucidate that both monetary income and landholding positively correlated with the degree of education for daughters in Pakistan. In Latin America, Jandhyala Tilak (1999) explains that family income directly influenced the

level of education a daughter received, with high-income families choosing to educate their daughters more than poorer families. In another recent study, family income is shown to have significantly influenced a girl's participation in Papua New Guinea (Geissinger 1997). Similarly, earlier studies in Malaysia (Safilios-Rothschild 1979; de Tray 1979) and Indonesia (Chernichovsky and Meesook 1985) also reveal that there is a positive relationship between family income and girls' enrollment in school. Lynn Ilon and Peter Moock (1991) also note that economics-related household variables (use value of durable goods in the household; monthly household expenditures; direct school costs), as well as the educational level of both the father and the mother, were positive indicators of girls' enrollment in the case of Peru.

Others point to the relationship between economics and educational participation in a more general sense with reference to poverty. For example, Audrey Smock (1981), in her comparative study of low-income countries around the world, attributes girls' low continuation rates and inability to pay for schooling to poverty, which is also the cause of low motivation to attend school and poor performance while in school. Similarly, Frank Dall (1985) regards poverty, family's cultural constraints, and school-related factors, to be significant indicators of girls' educational participation in Southeast and South Asia. David Post (2001) also examines family and regional poverty, coupled with the position of girls within the sibship relationship, as contributing factors to school retention and drop-out rates for primary school girls, using multinomial logistic regression. Post predisposes his argument based on one well-established perspective on girls' education and gender differences. He pointedly states, "Future access to schooling will continue to be determined by gender" (p. 471). He notes that both the policies developed by national and state authorities govern educational opportunities for girls. In addition, the "domestic economy and the division of labor it replicates are beyond the reach of even the best-intentioned policies. Women's traditional work and domestic roles create pressures on girls to leave school earlier than boys" (p. 472).

Although Post's secondary data analyses focus our attention on two very important issues, namely, the regional circumstances and household situations of educational options, and the individual difficulties of what is assumed as women's and girls' work, in-depth investigation might challenge the adequacy of these commonly used indicators of girls' educational participation. Some studies have suggested that poverty needs to be viewed as a stratum in a multilayered social system. For instance, Ratna Ghosh and Abdulaziz Talbani (1996) report that social class is the most significant factor in determining the level of education for girls in India. We also see other studies that examine the economics of educational decision making in terms of opportunity costs and the child's gender. Jim Ackers, James Migoli, and Juliana Nzomo (2001) remark that girls' and boys' opportunity cost was a significant indicator of enrollment in school in Kenya. Girls were able to provide work in the household;

therefore, the costs of enrolling a girl child were high. Similarly, the World Bank publication draws on secondary data analyses from the National Sample Survey Forty-Second Round (1986–87) in India, as well as other governmental studies, to identify household factors (girls' domestic work and school expenses) as the primary factors contributing to the nonenrollment of girls in school.

Other inquiries identify the relationship between gender and opportunities for school. H. K. Nkinyangi (1980) finds that in the case of Kenya, parents invested financial resources in sons' education before daughters' education but does not elaborate the exact reasons for this preference. Likewise, Colette Houeto's earlier work (1982) in Benin reveals that parents residing in rural areas were much more willing to pay school fees for boys than for girls, for both primary and secondary schooling. More relevant to our case study, Jacqueline Ashby's work (1985) in Nepal examines the logic and outcomes of farm households' educational decisions by considering parents' attitudes, household economics and children's household work-related responsibilities. In this study, she contrasts the perspective of the "new household economics" model with Nepalese farmers' subjective perceptions of the value of schooling.⁴⁷ Ashby remarks that farmers' subjective perceptions of the value of schooling discriminated among children within the family with respect to gender and age. First, she asserts that society required educated males in the work force. Given this situation, boys needed a formal education in order to acquire jobs (that might or might not require literacy proficiency). Second, Ashby claims that children were an economic resource of the household when they provided agricultural labor or monetary earnings. When a child was sent to school, a household incurred the direct expenses of schooling and the opportunity costs of lost labor and earnings.⁴⁸ Third, birth order was important, in that additional children were usually cared for by older female children in the family, a fact that hindered the older children's own schooling. Furthermore, the older girls might have to perform farm labor for the family, thereby also decreasing the chances for these girls' enrollment in school (Pradhan 1998).

The findings of these various studies resonate with those yielded by our own case study. Indeed, the economics of the decision to enroll a girl in school is evident in Butawal. Parents who value a daughter's worth in terms of work-related output in three or more household-related tasks tend to keep the child out of school more often than parents who report that the child engages in one or two household chores.⁴⁹ During harvest seasons, primary school-aged girls, more often than secondary school-aged girls, are kept from school in order to work at home and in the field.

In Butawal, there is a notable difference between the high-income families of the Brahmin and Thakuri and the low-income ones of the Tharu, Kami, and Damai.⁵⁰ Although the Tharu families reported their disappointment in their financial status, only two parents, of all those residing in the village,

suggested that this was the primary reason for not enrolling their daughter in the village school. This finding contradicts the earlier studies. It may indicate that Tharu families either have the financial resources to enroll a daughter in school, or are able to obtain the required sum. In cases where Tharu girls do not enroll in school, it may be related to household work. In Butawal, Tharu parents do not require boys to do housework. However, they do expect girls to engage in it on a regular basis. Girls care for younger siblings and the family's goats, collect firewood for cooking fires, clean the home, and help to prepare meals for the family. Tharu women often claim that girls do not have time to go to school, because their work responsibilities at home are performed during school hours.⁵¹

Thus, the economics behind the decision to enroll girls is obviously a gendered one. Therefore, gender roles and the function of the household are issues that require attention, if we are to develop a genuine understanding of the factors at work in educational participation. In many studies, they have garnered due attention. Already, in the 1980s, a host of works brought to light the importance of the issue of gender. The comparative works of Mary Jean Bowman and C. A. Anderson (1980) on the Third World in general demonstrated that the time involved in learning traditional skills in the household, which was related to birth order, diminished the time that a child could spend in school. Parental expectations of the gendered roles in field labor and household work affected girls' enrollment in and completion of school cycles. More specifically, studying the situation in Papua New Guinea, Lyn Yeoman (1985) highlights the need on the part of women and girls to work, which has bred the acceptable practice of withdrawing girls from school in order to employ their skills in work-related activities. Similar findings (Nayana 1985; Yeoman 1985) affirm this relationship. In yet another piece, Paul Kirrui (1982) notes that girls in Kenya were expected to perform household-related work, such as caring for younger siblings and cooking meals. As a result, they enrolled in school less often than girls who do not assume these household-related roles.

More recent studies have developed the earlier findings. Melissa Binder's study of Mexico (1998) suggests that traditionally perceived gender roles and birth order significantly affect a girl's chances to enroll in school. Likewise, Neera Kuckreja Sohoni (1995) and Julia Cleves Mosse (1993) note the gender disparity favoring boys in their analysis of South Asian education and South American education respectively. These studies indicate that gender roles as perceived by parents do play a substantive and significant role in the decision to keep a girl out of school.

It should be pointed out that the pragmatic necessity of daughters' household work is directly linked to parents' values of education. Thus, there is a considerable body of literature dealing with the perceptions of and attitudes toward education. Gail P. Kelly (1992), Lynn Yates (1993), and Lyn Yeoman

(1985, 1987), for example, examine the parents' perceptions and their effects on the likelihood of education for a daughter. They note that if the parents perceived that education was an unobtainable realization, then, in fact, it was. Helen Geissinger (1997) notes that girls in Papua New Guinea were disadvantaged by parents' traditional perceptions of schooling for girls, apart from an array of other factors: the rural location in which they lived, the selectivity of schools that favored males in the system, the lack of female role models that reinforced the benefits of education, and the economic system that could no longer offer extra pay to Grade Ten graduates who worked in the villages. In a recent study, Swarna Jayaweera (1999) finds that among South Asian and South East Asian parents, the perception of education's potential value for daughters is crucial. Most parents did not think it was important to provide education for daughters who were expected to marry and serve in roles of mother and wife. Two points should be made here. First, it appears that there is a positive correlation between parents' attitudes toward education and girls' enrollment. Second, the reasons for parents' attitudes toward education vary considerably. Therefore, the suggestion that parental attitude is predictive for all population may be misleading and should be used with caution.

In the case of Nepal, Hanna Papanek's ethnographic study (1985) in the rural part of the country seeks to probe parents' perceptions and attitudes. She suggests in her work the need to understand the roles both women and men play in the decision-making process, and how social and cultural influences may promote educational opportunities for some children but not others. Although this suggestion was made almost twenty years ago, to my knowledge no studies have specifically tackled these elements in the decision-making process regarding girls' education. While the studies mentioned above do demonstrate that parents' perceptions of educational value and attitudes toward schooling for daughters play a role in the chances for girls' education, they do not investigate and reveal how these perceptions and attitudes stem inherently from a community's social structure. Our case study does exactly that. We aim to show that these perceptions and attitudes are deeply rooted as cultural norms in Butawal, intrinsically connected to the issues of gender, ethnicity, and religion. Suffice it to point out here that in Butawal, Tharu parents' attitudes toward education differ from those of parents from other ethnic groups.⁵² The results of both survey questionnaires and interview data show that Brahmin and Thakuri women, followed by Brahmin and Thakuri men, have the most favorable attitude toward education. Tharu women who regularly socialize with Thakuri women have higher attitude scores (as assessed by the survey questionnaire in Shrestha's instrument) than women who neither socialize with high-caste women nor name those women as their friends. The same is not the case for Tharu men, however.

The point to drive home is that our case study shows clearly that larger cultural norms must be studied in order to understand the choices made for

girls' education. Indeed, quite a few studies have been done in this direction. Jim Ackers and his colleagues (2001), studying the data of the Central Bureau of Statistics, arrived at the claim that "traditional cultural values" inhibited enrollment in school in Nairobi and other parts of Kenya, although he does not quite provide substantive qualitative explanation of such a phenomenon. In SOWN, a local Nepalese study and report (1994), Shtrii Shakti (a Nepali non-government organization) examines the changes of the status of females in Nepal from 1981 to 1993. It suggests that even though attitudes toward the education of girls have shifted as cultural and social expectations of girls have changed, the reality is that girls have still not graduated from primary and secondary schools in rates deemed desirable. But this investigation again fails to situate the expectations in the larger context of social structures and cultural traditions. Other works on Nepal, such as those by John Gray (1995), Meena (1994), and Debra Skinner and Dorothy Holland (1996), take a qualitative approach to exploring how culture influences individuals' perceptions of social roles. While they provide information about the link between the social system and individual agency, they do not specifically examine the roles of parents in the educational decision-making process.

Some works, however, have begun to explore girls' education in terms of the overarching value system of a community. For instance, the future educational goals of a daughter, as defined and perceived by parents, may be seen as manifestations of the encompassing social and cultural norms. In some cases, parents' perceptions of their daughter's traditional gender role as a future wife limit the likelihood for schooling. M. Bingham (1992), in her general study of the interrelationship between gender and education in a global context, points to several reasons for the priority of a male child's education over a female child's in "underdeveloped" nations:

The young woman will marry "out" of the family, and therefore, her financial benefits would not aid her parental family; the only education really needed by the woman are the domestic and agricultural skills taught at home; girls are less intelligent and able than boys and, therefore, educational resources are wasted on them; girls need to be sheltered from the moral temptations arising from male teachers, coeducation or even having the skills to correspond beyond their restrictive family circle; dowry and bride price considerations mean that early marriage is necessary in finding the proper husband. (pp. 55-58)

We may cite other examples. Ratna Ghosh and Abdulaziz Talbani (1996), drawing upon A. C. Smock's early work (1981), find that it was many parents' belief that girls who would marry would not need education, since the performance of their responsibilities as a future wife and mother required no formal education as such. Marital status of older girls also influences their chances for education. In Ethiopia, those who are betrothed, married, or

divorced have less of a chance at education than the young women not considered for marriage (Biazen and Junge 1996).⁵³ Similarly, a host of studies, such as those by Paul Kirrui (1982), A. S. Seetharamu and M. D. Ushadevi (1985), and Lyn Yeoman (1987), have shown that many factors, including a female's marriage eligibility and purity prior to the marriage, dowry costs for the wedding, and responsibilities after the marriage, negatively affect the enrollment rate and length of completion of a primary school education for girls. In the majority of cases, they found that a girl's future marriage limits present educational opportunities for her.

In Butawal, we see the interpenetration of larger gendered societal values and narrower choices concerning the education of girls. In lengthy and numerous interviews, women and men reveal the importance of marriage in the lives of their daughters, and the ways in which education relates to this stage of life, albeit not in the ways one might expect. Two young mothers claimed that boys expected to marry a literate young woman. This finding is substantively meaningful because it contradicts the findings of many of the studies of the 1980s and early 1990s. However, this finding does not actually suggest progressive thinking on the mothers' part, but rather a change in the ways in which she conceptualizes the factors that will influence her daughter's future as a wife. In this case, education, like financial and material wealth (dowry), is simply considered to be yet another condition necessary to marry a daughter. In other words, education itself is not valued for its potential to improve the life of a daughter, but rather to ensure a socially acceptable and financially sound marital arrangement, one in which the girl will assume the submissive role as wife and the daughter-in-law in a new household.

All in all, given what we know about the situation in Butawal, we may justifiably argue that many of the previous studies of parents' views of education for daughters fall short. First, parents' attitudes toward education may influence girls' educational chances. However, many of the studies mentioned above do not differentiate *whose* attitudes were measured and how ethnicity contributed to these social and cultural traditions. We can assume that investigators recorded males' opinions, since male knowledge has been consistently valued more than women's knowledge. If men's attitudes were those measured and reported, these studies fail to investigate women's voices and their contributions (or lack thereof) to the decision-making process. In addition, attitudes toward education also vary by ethnic group, and yet the works do not probe how ethnicity and ethnic identity figure in the decision-making process. Furthermore, these studies fail to adequately explore how culture influences parents' educational decisions made for daughters, especially the cultural factor of religion.

Rightly, religion has been identified as a household-related social and cultural variable that limits girls' chances for schooling (Brown 2000). Typical studies examine the correlation between religious affiliation and educational

participation. Gail Kelly (1984) remarks, for instance, that the practice of Islam sometimes limited educational opportunities for girls. Audrey Smock (1981) studied religious and secular education in colonized countries, finding that Western presence in South Asia significantly influenced the educational programs and opportunities for women. C. Robertson (1985) and Mary Jean Bowman and Caroline Anderson (1980) also correlate religious affiliation with rates of enrollment and attrition. Their findings, similar to others before them, simply related reported religious affiliation with educational participation.

In light of the conclusions of this literature, religion is undoubtedly an important variable. Therefore, in our case study of Butawal, the survey questionnaire specifically asked about participants' religious affiliation. Each male participant readily offered his affiliation as either Tharu, Buddhist, or Hindu. However, when asked why and how their respective affiliation with one religion differed from another, not one person could offer a definitive explanation. Although they explained that their religious beliefs and rituals defined their affiliation, the explanations offered by those who identified themselves as Hindu did not significantly differ from those who identified themselves as Tharu or Buddhist.⁵⁴ This reveals the fact that in literal sectarian terms, the categorization of religious affiliation is simplistic and inadequate. Our findings from the Butawal study suggest that when we are correlating the religious variable and educational attainment, we should not only examine individuals' claim of religious affiliation, be it Tharu religion, Buddhism, or Hinduism, but we must also probe how religious world views, beliefs, and practices of rituals *actually* constitute themselves as cultural and social forces that are brought to bear on educational decision-making.

Studies that simply correlate declared religious affiliation and educational participation do not explain *how* ethnic and religious culture contributes to educational participation. Specifically, these studies fail to present an analysis of the agency of religious understanding and religious worship in the decisions to enroll and keep a girl in school. Twenty years ago, Nepal's Ministry of Education and Culture and its subdivision, the Centre for Educational Research Innovation and Development led by Prem Kasaju (1982), began to identify the effects of parents' religious prejudices on the popularization of females' education. This very general and brief research report, coupled with the results of an earlier seminar on Education for Rural Development in December 1979, emphasized the need to investigate the religious influence in female educational participants. Unfortunately, to date, we have failed to adequately investigate this dimension of the social environment. Two examples of recent studies that address this perspective are the work of Mark S. Brown and of Carl L. Bankston and Min Zhou. Brown (2000), while recognizing the correlation, follows previous educational participation studies and thereby short-changes the discussion by simply stating statistics of religious affiliation and

education in the South Asian population. Bankston and Zhou (1995) reveal that religious affiliation contributed to ethnic identification, which, in turn, promoted positive adaptation of immigrant adolescents to American society by increasing their likelihood of excelling in school. These studies provide background information but do little to further our understanding of how ethnic and religious culture affects educational decisions for girls.

A cultural element closely aligned with religion is ethnicity. Some scholars do address ethnicity.⁵⁵ Elizabeth King and Anne Hill's classic work (1993) does provide bountiful information on women's education, but it lacks any comprehensive and rigorous definition of the notion of ethnicity. While finding ethnicity to be a significant indicator of girls' enrollment in school, the authors take the notion of ethnicity for granted, without unpacking its meaning and components. Such is also case of the study of education, ethnicity, and gender in Israel and South Africa by Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, Mokubung Nkomo, and Stephen Samuel Smith (2001). Although this study finds a direct correlation between ethnicity and education, it falls short in describing and explaining how ethnicity contributes to this achievement. Similarly, Sharon Stash and Emily Hannum (2001) note that although girls enrolled in school at rates lower than similarly aged boys, they progressed through primary education at the same rate as boys. Moreover, they find that caste affected both entry into and completion of primary school. Unfortunately, their work does little to extend what the general literature, and the Nepalese and UNESCO reports (which they neglected to mention) have already found.

Our study of Butawal seeks to remedy such shortcomings by pursuing qualitative investigations of both ethnicity and religiosity, the importance of which will be discussed in detail in later chapters. Here, it is useful to state that our study revealed several significant facts. First, Tharu women, more often than Tharu men, interact with women from other ethnic groups in the village. These Tharu women express opinions about education that are also prevalent in the voices of Brahmin and Thakuri women. The Tharu women's interaction in the social setting of the high-caste community may have contributed to their perceptions of education for their daughters. Second, religious belief in this Tharu community is closely associated with family harmony. However, Tharu women are largely excluded from learning about religion and practicing religious ritual. Male family members consult a *bhagabon* (god) when the family cannot reach a unanimous decision. Given that women are conditioned to believe that they do not need to learn about religious ideology in the Tharu community and do not need to practice it, they are excluded from a part of the decision-making process, which includes decisions concerning a daughter's educational choices (see following section for details).⁵⁶

Apart from household-related variables, which we now know must involve larger cultural elements such as gender, ethnicity, and religion, there

are school-related variables, representing the second set of factors that influence the educational decisions made for girls. The body of literature on these variables, which include distance to school, facilities, and materials and curriculum, reveals an inconsistent picture of their effect on girls' educational participation. Nelly Stromquist's historical review of the literature (1987) provides abstracts of empirical studies between 1969 and 1985 that focused on school-related determinants. Susan Cochrane, Kalpana Mehra, and Ibrahimaha Osheba (1986), and Priscilla Basson (1981) claim that distance to school prohibited girls from attending school. They contend that distance to school affected girls more than it did boys but fail to specifically identify why distance was more of an obstacle to girls' education. Other studies have suggested that single-sex schools, at times, had a difficult time recruiting female teaching staff (Chamie 1983). However, in countries with gender-segregated schools, the presence of female teachers appeared to increase female student enrollment (Shah 1986). In another school-related issue, Jim Ackers, James Migoli, and Juliana Nzomo (2001) point to the absence of toilet facilities as a limit to girls' participation in school in Kenya. Salahuddin Khan (1993) argues that physical facilities in general directly affected the enrollment of girls in primary schools in Pakistan.

Schools and their available resources also appeared to play a role in the number of girls in Nepali schools. Govinda Prasad Joshi and Jean Anderson (1994) uncovered biases against females in Nepalese schools and textbooks, which ultimately led to fewer girls in school. Gajendra Shrestha and Sri Lamichhane (1983) notes the presence of a library to be a moderately positive influence on the enrollment of both girls and boys in Nepal. However, libraries are few and far between. While they are no doubt important in promoting sound educational practices, their presence is hardly the norm for rural as well as many urban public schools throughout low-income countries.

Again, our study of Butawal seeks to shed some light on the school-related variables. Interestingly and significantly enough, parents in Butawal do not identify school-related variables as influential in their decision to enroll a daughter in school. This may be due to several conditions. First, there is a government-approved school in the village. It is a short walk from all the children's homes. Given this fact, travel time is not a factor, nor is unfamiliar terrain. Moreover, few Tharu parents are literate. Most cannot read their children's textbooks, and, based on my observations while in their homes and analyses of interview data, they rarely engage in school-related topics of conversation with their children. Third, there is a sizable scholarship fund for students who cannot afford the school uniform that is required. The headmaster reports that an annual collection taken immediately after the rice harvest usually yields enough money to purchase school uniforms for the ten neediest

children in the village. The others appear to be financially able to cover the cost of the uniform for their children.⁵⁷ In addition, parents report dissatisfaction with neither the lack of female teachers nor the absence of proper toilet facilities.⁵⁸

So far, this much appears to be clear. First, we have revealed that there are two sets of variables important to our understanding of girls' participation in education. Of the two variables, household variables seem to be more important in determining educational participation. However, existing literature has not really provided a comprehensive evaluation of the variables within the household category, particularly gender, ethnicity, and religion. Second, the popular use of quantitative methodologies has severely limited the questions that we ask and ways we answer the research questions. It is our hope that our focused qualitative study of a Nepali community, complemented where appropriate by quantitative analyses, will provide a more complete picture of the factors affecting girls' education in South Asia.

What follows is an examination of the decision-making process itself. It reveals the important household variables, in particular religiosity and ethnicity. Moreover, the decision-making process is a tripartite one. It consists of three distinct segments. By presenting the process as a complex phenomenon, we are able to clearly identify how these variables come into play in different stages in the decision-making process.

Collecting Qualitative Interview Data: The Educational Decision-Making Process

In the last twenty years, qualitative research has been influenced by concepts emanating from a host of philosophic orientations and persuasions: postmodernism, poststructuralism, feminism, and postcolonial theory. They have helped to further our appreciation of the complexities of cultural and sociological phenomena, and have carved out interpretive spaces in many different kinds of qualitative research. Indeed, our investigation here, situated at the seams of a variety of disciplines—educational studies, gender studies, anthropology, and sociology—is necessarily conducted in a multiplicitous set of discursive and interpretive spaces.⁵⁹

After collecting data from my initial visit to the field in 1997, a literature review, subsequent and extended conversations with scholars at Tribhuvan University who have conducted sociological and anthropological research in Nepal, and a pilot test in central Nepal approximately eight hours' drive from the research site, I decided that the best way to examine the decision-making process was to examine it in three distinct segments.⁶⁰ "Initiating the discussion" of enrollment in school (or continuation through a grade and into the next grade), the "consultation" during the process, and the "final decision," make up a complex, negotiated, tripartite process whereby and

wherein women and men assume different roles and wield different elements of power related to those roles. Here, we describe the specific components of the decision-making process evidently at work in Butawal.⁶¹

Phase One: Initiating the Discussion of Enrollment in School

During the visits to the household, I interviewed women separate from men, for I found that women were more willing to talk without a male family member seated next to them. I conducted some interviews during the mid-morning hours and others during the late afternoon or early evening. The residents suggested a time and place for these interviews. During these interviews, I asked a series of questions. "Who initiated the decision to send a daughter/son/ both to school? How did you start to think about this issue?" The answers were strikingly one-sided. The only woman who claimed she actually initiated the decision was a woman whose husband did not live in the village but worked in central Nepal. In another case, a male Tharu farmer, a widower who attained his SLC (School Leaving Certificate, equivalent to a Western tenth grade education) and was the most highly formally educated individual in the village, stated:

I have friends who send their children to school. We talk about the positive and negative consequences of sending our children to school. There are negative consequences, like work done in the home, but this [education] will help our children.

A poorer male Tharu farmer with daughters and sons attending school said:

I see other children going to school. That's why I thought to send my children to school. We all live in this village. I know that other families send their sons and daughters to school. It is important for them.

Similarly, one father with daughters and sons attending school said, "I see other children going to school. That's why I thought to send my children to school." Yet another Tharu father commented:

I see others going to school. I know it's a good thing. They need to be able to read and to write. They can learn this in school. If they know these things, they can get a good job later.

One Tharu grandfather opined, "The times have changed. If we don't study [our life] will be useless. That's what I think. If we don't study, other people can tease us." I asked for the source of the ridicule and he responded, "Anyone. The big people. They all can tease us." (The man described the "big people" as Brahmins and Thakuris who live in the village.)

The notion of “big people” also arose during other conversations with men. One grandfather remarked:

This is a period of cleverness. . . . If everyone is not educated they can feel inferior. Big people send their children to school. . . . Brahmins, Thakuris. They know. We should also send our children to school.

His wife chimed in, “It’s according to the time. It’s happening now. I look around; I see things. The situation calls for children to go to school.”

I usually interviewed young and middle-aged Tharu men while in the field. During a rest period, a small group of three or four individuals sat on a stack of rice and they too shared their own opinions of who initiated the decision-making process. One young man with one daughter and one son in school told me:

People with education can get a job. I think my son and daughter might have a service [professional position] if they too are educated. I was not educated and look at what I do. This is not a good life. When we have a good season, we harvest a good crop, but there is little money even when we sell it in the market. I want my son and my daughter to have a better life. An education will let them get it.

Another male Tharu farmer, Mr. Chaudhari, had this to say:

I decided that my daughter should go to school. I decided by myself. I know about education. It helps you get a good job. I have been a farmer all my life. When I was a small boy, I had to pick the ground for stones. We all cleared the land to make sure that the crops that we planted would have a good space to grow. Then we would wait for the crops to grow. If it was a good season, we would have a good crop. If we did not have a good season, we did not have anything. After the crops, we harvested the vegetables. We get very little exchange for our work. It is enough to feed my family, but that is not enough. If my daughter has an education, she does not have to do this kind of work.

Mr. Tharu, the father of a young daughter, offered his opinions:

Our ancestors didn’t study. But this is a new time. This is a new place [referring to the family’s move from the Dang District to the Banke District]. In order for our child to have opportunities, we must educate her.

My conversations with women in the field on the topic of education elicited other thoughts. Mrs. Chaudhari declared, “I don’t raise the issue of

education. That is a man's responsibility. That is a matter that is outside of the home." Mrs. Tharu, her neighbor, agreed:

No, I do not talk about this in the home. I do not raise the question. My daughters have work to do in the home. They work in the morning and in the afternoon. They do not have time to go to school.

In addition to the Tharus, I also asked these same questions of non-Tharu residents in the village. One late afternoon I spoke to Mr. Lamichhane, the local school board president, who, unlike most of the Tharus, declined my request to tape-record the interview but spoke at length in response to my questions. On that sunny afternoon, I asked him about the school's enrollment. Mr. Lamichhane a high-caste Hindu, asserted:

We know how many children attend school. We know the name and number of boys and the number of girls by class. We also keep a register of the children by ethnic group. We have Brahmin, Thakuri, Magar, Tharu, Kami, Damai, and others enrolled at the school. . . . Many children walk to school together. Before it was not like this. Now we have Tharu children and Thakuri children who are friends.

He continued, "I have been the school board president for the previous five years. . . . During that time we have seen the number of Tharu girls increase." When I asked the cause of this, he replied, ". . . It's more than just more girls living in the village. I think it's because the Tharu parents see other parents sending children to school. That's my opinion."

When asked about the decision-making process in his home, he responded:

Most of us live in an extended family situation. For example, my mother has a say in everything that we decide in our Brahmin house. Maybe others in household decide also. . . . I don't know exactly what happens in a Tharu house, but we talk to each other. They [the Tharu] visit our house and we go there for meetings. We see each other every day and talk to each other.

The families who did not raise the enrollment question for their daughters also had reasons for their decision. A father approximately twenty-five years of age told me he believed that education was not necessary, given that the daughter had a job in the household and did not need another one. Another Tharu man, slightly older, said that his ancestors did not study, and he could not find a reason to send his daughters to school. (However, he did send his sons to school.) Another man told me that he had no money to send his daughter to school, although he too sent his son to school.

Specifically asking women their opinion of this part of the process revealed a striking result. Generally speaking, women of childbearing age reported they did not raise the issue of their daughters' education within their families. These mothers pointed to two kinds of decisions: "decisions for inside the home" and "decisions for outside the home." Since schooling is considered a decision that lies outside of the domain of the home, they do not concern themselves during this part of the process. For example, Mrs. Chaudhari said:

I ask him about some things. Things like food and cloth and clothes for the children. We go to the market and I tell him what I need to buy. I decide on these things. Schooling is not a decision that I think about. I take care of the home and not the outside matters.

Other women overtly claimed that the daughter did not need to attend school because they had household work responsibilities. Being at school would prevent them from having the time to complete such tasks. Another woman, Mrs. Chaudhari, explained:

My daughter does not need to go to school. Why should she? She has work here to do. Every morning she washes the dishes and then she must go to get firewood so that I can cook. She takes care of our two goats. They need to eat. How will they eat if she does not get the sticks and leaves for them?

Mrs. Tharu, a widow, had one teenage daughter and one teenage son. The daughter, *bahini* (younger sister), worked as a servant in the home of one Brahmin family. When asked about education for her daughter, Mrs. Tharu said:

I only work in the fields for a short time each day. This [work] does not get us a lot of money. If she [daughter] works in the Lamichhanes' home, she can get two good meals every day. Her work there is not too difficult. This is what she must do. I do not like it, but what choice do we have?

By examining this first phase of the decision-making process, we see two important facts emerge. First, Tharu females do not raise the question of their daughters' educational participation. Their lack of involvement in this part of the decision-making process appears to be related to their culturally conditioned roles as individuals whose opinions should be limited to certain topics and their beliefs that women and girls must assume traditional roles as housekeeper. Their lack of participation may also be due to a feeling of powerlessness to raise an issue that is traditionally outside the realm of their presumed responsibility. This fact also corroborates the findings of

Clem Tisdell, Kartik Roy, and Gopal Regmi (2001), who, in their investigation of the situation in rural India, contend that although women often controlled household purchases (and money), this control of the purse strings did not give them the power to be heard when it came to the decisions for a daughter's future. We may thus conclude that the issue of education, while often initiated in the home, is nonetheless controlled by males. This is so because of the unequal gender status forged by existing cultural and social circumstances and conditions. Second, Tharus in this community appear to correlate power and privilege with membership in a high-caste Hindu family, which is a matter of ethnic perception and self-perception. Brahmins and Thakuris, "big people," command a certain respect in this village simply because of their caste standing.⁶² The high status associated with their ethnic identity in this hierarchy appears to influence the ways in which Tharus relate to them. Indeed, the roles of gender and ethnicity in the educational decision process will be explored in great depth in chapters four and five. There, we will situate our findings from the Butawal case in the empirical and theoretical literature on gender and ethnicity.

Phase Two: Consulting Others

Seventy-six percent of the males who answered the question, "Who was consulted during the decision-making process?" revealed that their wives actively contribute to the process.⁶³ These men also reported to have discussions with their family members. Women, on the other hand, had a different perception of this phase of the decision-making process. The reason is that once again, they compartmentalized the world into two domains, the inner and the outer. When asked to explain the decision-making process in general, women consistently referred to the two distinct worlds which dictated a division of labor, as it were, among men and women. Every woman commented on the difference between "decisions made for inside the home" and "decisions made for outside the home." The prevailing self-perception on the women's part was that they were simply not players in educational decisions. A mother who enrolled her daughter in school shared this sentiment with me: "Matters relating to the house I say, matters relating to outside the house he decides. School is an outside matter. This house is an inside matter." They tended to view their input as minimal. For example, when I asked another young mother with primary school-aged children about the decision-making process in her family, she responded:

Matters relating to the house I say; matters relating to outside the house he [my husband] decides. I decide things like the household work, eating, drinking [raksi], farm animals, how many should be kept... whenever we go to the bazaar to buy something, I choose and then he buys.

With regard to the educational decision-making process, other women offered their perceptions of the discussion phase. Mrs. Chaudhari remarked:

First we sent them to nonformal education.⁶⁴ When they know [graduated], my husband said let's send them to school. I told him that there would be work at home, who would help? He said during the day everyone goes to school. Don't ask them to work. Anyhow, we are able to complete the work.

This story was commonly told by women in the village. Another young Tharu woman shared her thoughts:

... My husband raised the issue to send our children to school. He said that if the kids want to study they could. He asked me about it with our young child. When I asked if would we send her [to school], he said if you want to you can. ... I think that the daughter shouldn't go to school. We have a lot of goats. Who would take them to grange? Last year we should have enrolled her. ... I know this because our neighbors enrolled their daughters, but we have a lot of goats. I didn't enroll her name. This year, she asked her father to go to school. I see her friends caring for the goats and going to school. He said why don't you send her. Me and my husband talked about it and then I said, in that case, I would take the goats to grange.

Mrs. Chaudhari, a young mother, explained matters this way:

The word decision means that we look around, we talk to people, we talk to family. ... We live in a small village. We see people everyday. We speak to people—the family, other Tharu families, and big people: Thakuri, Brahmins, big people.

The immediate and extended families are not the only places where discussions take place. Tharus use the words “big people” numerous times throughout interviews. Tharu women, more often than Tharu men, socialize with individuals from other ethnic groups, and they discuss the education of their children. For example, women chat with women from other ethnic groups (Thakuri, Bika, Damai, and Brahmin) on a daily basis at the water pump, in the farms, and while visiting the village tailor. Women and men use the words “wiser person,” “experienced person,” and “powerful person” to describe the hill people, or Brahmins, and Thakuris. They also use the words “powerful person” and “big person” referring to a *bhagabon* or *duota* (spirit).⁶⁵ Bhunti Chaudhari said, “We learn from our neighbor regarding the importance of education to children. However we do not want to learn from Kami [low caste]; rather, we want to learn from Bahun [Brahmin high caste], Thakuri.”⁶⁶

These words also appeared in another context. When there is a dispute within the household, it is important to reach a “consensus” or an “agreement,”

as the Tharus in this village repeatedly told me. A middle-aged Tharu woman shared with me that the following is what happens when there is disagreement within the family:

When a problem is out of mind, you ask yourself, "What should we do?" You are thinking a lot, but you still cannot decide. What would you do? I have to ask a more powerful person than me. A great person, a big person. Then we have to get an opinion from him. If I cannot make a decision, then I must ask the more intelligent person what we should do.

Here, she is in fact talking about the concept of space and the power structures that are inherent within that space, issues that have been examined in theoretical terms by both Nora R  thzel (2000) and H. Lef  bvre (1991). They identify the contexts of space that create opportunities for discussion. In the empirical case of Butawal, examples of such space can be found in the Tharu women's socialization with their high-caste Hindu neighbors. Their interaction creates a social space wherein meaningful and sometimes empowering discussions take place. However, other situations involve relations of resistance, which in effect limit discussions, such as the domestic ones where women are simply expected to be silent, as pointed out earlier.

In Butawal, consulting respected community members in the decision-making process is very much complemented by consultation with the spirits; hence the central role of religion in the process. To illuminate the consultative role of religion, I asked all the residents of the village if and why they respected the *bhagabon*. Women claimed that by and large, they respected the *bhagabon* only during adolescence. They neither worshipped a *bhagabon* nor *duota* at any other time in the life. They reported that the Tharu men in the village assumed that responsibility. The men, on the other hand, claimed that the worship of the spirits "helps us make the right decision. . . . The decision to decide as a family. Not an educational decision, the help to decide."⁶⁷ The gods' role in this process is to help the male family members to make a unanimous decision amongst themselves. It is also important to note that while gods are considered a protector of health and home and thus worshipped by the men, they are neither considered directly related to education (as in the case of the Hindu religion and the goddess Saraswati), nor are they influential in the lives of women.

Of the two *guruwas* (village priests or shamans), one was especially helpful.⁶⁸ He described his duties and responsibilities and also offered his interpretations of the degree of religiosity of the male and female members of the village, which confirmed the statements made by the Tharu women and men in the village. He remarked:

. . . Women do not worship, have little interest in this, and do not participate in the manufacture, craft of forming the *duotas* from clay, worshipping the

duotas or learning about what they represent. Men take this cultural heritage very seriously. *Duota* rooms are located here in the Tharu homes.⁶⁹

What can we make of this second phase of decision-making? According to Naila Kabeer (1994),¹ decision making is a resolution of “potentially conflicting preferences” by players with unequal power. In the Butawal community, the individual voices of men are powerful, while women’s voices amount to only passive agreement. As Kabeer describes, the powerful exert pressure directly and indirectly and coerce the less powerful into agreement. The woman’s contribution is mitigated as part of a process based within the social system and circumscribed by the union of cultural expectations, institutional constraints, and the needs of the household (McNicol 1980; Fricke 1995). In the words of Naila Kabeer, the conflict dimension of the household is certainly a process of negotiation between unequals:

Despite their roots in methodological individualism, bargaining models have the potential for accommodating the idea of gender asymmetry as the product of structural rather than purely individual inequalities in power, privilege and resources. (1994, 112)

As shown in our case, the discussion phase represents not only an unequal division of power among the household members, but also the inability to bargain for a favorable outcome.

During conversations with residents of the village, most families said that all the family members have a voice, but when the specific conversations were recorded and analyzed, the data revealed two striking findings. First, women, in many cases, do not support the decision to send a daughter to school. Their opposition to the formal education of their daughters is apparently a function of the mothers’ perceptions of gender roles, which are rooted in tradition and explain their lack of enthusiasm for their daughters’ participation in education. Some Tharu women realistically and genuinely believe that girls, expected to care for the house and the family, do not need to attend school to perform these jobs. Moreover, these jobs severely limit the time that they might have to attend school. Other Tharu women do believe that daughters should attend school. It appears that when husbands share this viewpoint Tharu women verbally agree with the spouse. When Tharu fathers are not supportive of a daughter’s education, the mother remains silent. Second, women do not represent an equal voice in the discussion of enrolling a daughter in school or allowing her to continue in school. This lesser voice accorded Tharu women in the decision-making process stems from their insistence on the appropriateness of remaining silent in a matter such as the educational participation of a daughter, which is viewed as a decision for “outside the home.” The women told me that since they did not concern themselves with these decisions, or they were not in a position to do so, they did not have the responsibility or obligation to raise the issue.

This insistence on passivity seems to contradict evidence of women's presumed power, however limited, in the domestic realm. The first involves the household responsibilities of daughters and mothers. Girls typically perform some kind of work related to the household. It may be caring for younger siblings, tending to goats, preparing meals, or cleaning the home. If a girl attends school, these household-related chores, which are considered "inside the home" responsibilities of the mother, cannot be completed by the daughter. One would expect that since these chores relate to the functioning of the household, the mother would have the dominant voice in the decision to send the daughters to school or not. Yet this is not the case. When the decision to attend school is made, the mother usually accepts and assumes the girl's work responsibilities.

The second example of the contradiction between women's passivity and their power, admittedly limited, is revealed in the case where the mother wants the child to attend school but faces the father's disagreement. In this situation, the mother's voice is heard—a demonstration of some access to power—but it often does not change the outcome of the decision. Here, she ultimately plays a passive role of opposition but accepts the decision without persistently voicing her opinion.

In both of these situations, the woman is not aware of her ultimate, subservient status, for this state of affairs is very much assimilated into the religious culture of Butawal. In the scenario where a Tharu woman wants the daughter to attend school in face of the father's objection, the male Tharu family members will consult a *bhagabon*. But the problem for the women is that while religion does loom large in the decision-making process, it is a domain from which they are excluded. Therefore, any meaningful investigation of Butawal and Tharu educational practice and attitude must involve an understanding of the community's religiosity. How should we describe and study this religiosity? Rhys Williams (1996, 3) provides some clues. He shares that

the study of religion should not be limited to the study of beliefs and value commitments but rather include its cultural objectives and its actions . . . "that are mobilized, interpreted, and manipulated in a variety of institutional settings for a variety of purposes."

He elaborates:

On the one hand, culture (or religion) is a set of explicit symbols that are available to actors for manipulation. On the other hand, culture (or religion) is implicit, forming an important part of the worldview that is the backdrop of action within any social setting. (p. 3)

In the case of Butawal, religiosity can be said to be multidimensional, if we follow Williams's way of thinking. For one thing, it is not merely that men

believe and worship, but that this religious activity and affiliation limit and exclude women. In other words, in the institutional setting of the Tharu in Nepal, religion both reflects and embodies gender relations.

This crucial nexus between religion and society is explained by Lester Kurtz (1995) in terms of both structural and subjective perspectives. Suffice it to say here that according to Kurtz, the “structural perspective” explores patterns and relations among cultural elements. Its central task is the identification of structures (including orderly relations and rules, boundaries, categories, and elements of behavior) that give culture coherence and identity. Such theoretical pondering may be applied to Butawal, where we do witness gender, ethnic, and religious boundaries and responsibilities, as well as actual behaviors related to each of these dimensions of the social religious life in the community. Kurtz’s notion of the “subjective perspective” emphasizes individual beliefs and attitudes, opinions, and values. In Butawal, we may identify a distinct separation between the opinions and values of Tharu men and those of Tharu women. Tharu women are largely excluded from the consultation process. In other words, traditional Tharu religious ritual practiced by males limits Tharu women’s facility and ability to express their opinions, especially the dissenting ones, vis-à-vis the male family members who control the practice. Sarah White (1992), speaking of the case of Bangladesh, reminds us that religion and religious identity have not been adequately addressed. She suggests that we must scrutinize religion in the context of both gender and class in order to understand it. Indeed, looking at the consulting segment of the decision-making process in Butawal, we find that the cultural expectations and institutional demands of the household—namely, gender, ethnicity, and religion—join forces to form a confluence of conditions in which a hierarchically ordered tradition dictates the actions and agency of the individuals.⁷⁰ The hierarchical nature of the Tharu household is evident in the third and final stage of the educational decision-making process—arriving at the final decision.

Phase Three: Making the Final Decision

When I asked, “Who made the final decision to send your daughter/son/both to school?”⁷¹ 60 percent of the residents in this village told me that the male head of the household alone made the decision to enroll or not to enroll a girl in the village’s primary school; with one exception, the others did not yet have a response at all.⁷² The responses of women and men did not differ considerably. Gulpi, a Tharu mother of three, said, “He makes the final decision. We discuss it, though. My children don’t need to go to school, and that is what he decided.” Parnati, a twenty-five-year-old mother of two, emphatically declared, “Our males most of the time dominate us, and do not

honor our ideas.” Lachhi, another mother with two daughters, noted, “While enrolling daughters, our husbands ask us. Even if we refuse, our husbands will still enroll daughters, because they are keen to educate them.” Other Tharu women articulated the need for and their support of their daughters’ education. Mrs. Chaudhari opined:

Yes, my daughters and sons go to school. We know that people who go to school get good jobs. They can make money. They have a good life. And my daughter cannot find a good husband without getting good education. Tharu boys know that girls should be educated. They want an educated girl.

Similarly, Sita Rani, the mother of a school-aged girl, told me:

I have four children. Older girl works as laborer. Second daughter [Sampatti] takes care of the home. Son is studying in class III and youngest child [boy] is only of three years age. We till others’ land. Youngest girl child wants to go to school but cannot, as she has to take the cattle for grazing. I made effort for Sampatti to go to school, but her father never agreed. I am very tempted to send Sampatti to school, because I am impressed by others who send their girls to school. However, we [my husband and myself] both discuss the matter and come in agreement. We normally agree, but when I do not agree I have to comply [with] whatever my husband wants.⁷³

These statements not only capture the patriarchal character of the Tharu household, and the hierarchical nature of gender relations within it, but they also show the extent to which social reasoning is gendered.⁷⁴ The final call is the man’s.

Now, the vast majority of educational participation studies have limited their investigation to this phase of the process. While this final act clarifies who makes the ultimate decision, it does little to help us understand *how* the decision is made, and how gender relations play a significant role in what decision is made. Our study, in contrast, focuses on not only the last phase on the decision-making process, but also the first and second phases, which helps us paint a more nuanced and complete picture. In the case of Butawal, we observe that the power structures inherent in the household reinforce the passive roles that women, as mothers and spouses, are expected to play. We notice that at times, women are opposed to their daughters’ participation in the process and correspondingly voice their opinion. However, it is never the case that a woman’s opinion holds more weight than the man’s.⁷⁵ If both the mother and father do not want the girl to attend school, the child will not. If the mother does not want the child to attend school, but the father does, the child will be enrolled anyway. Finally, if the mother wants the child to attend school and the father objects (which is a rare case), then the child will not go

to school. In other words, in all cases, the woman never makes a final decision, nor does she actually sway the preference of the male members of the family.

While these empirical facts and observations from field work provide the crucial raw material for us to paint a more complex picture of the decision-making process concerning girls, the act of portrayal itself must also be done by referring to the works of scholars (most of whom are not in the field of educational studies) who have addressed issues related to power dynamics and gender inequality. For instance, Ali Rattansi (1998) has drawn our attention to the inequity and discrimination that exist in the social representations and associations in our diverse experiences. The Tharu women, as mothers, spouses, and daughters—their “social representations”—interact with their menfolk and socialize with their high-caste neighbors—their “social associations”—and in the process, they encounter discrimination and assume a subservient status. By conducting this case study of a Tharu community in Nepal, armed with field work data and interpretive apparatuses from relevant literature, we critically investigate the factors that contribute to educational participation for girls, while exposing the sociocultural forces that perpetuate women’s subjugation. In so doing, we create a new point of entry into the field of educational studies, since the gendered power relations rooted in social patriarchy have gone largely unnoticed in the educational participation literature.⁷⁶ In addition, we show the relevance of ethnicity and religion—how they figure prominently as household variables. The following chapters, one by one, unravel the multifaceted factors at work in the educational decision-making process as it relates to the daughters of the Tharu, girls whose future may well hinge on the choices that their parents make on their behalf.

NOTES

1. Dorothy Smith argues for the “case” as the point of entry into the larger social and economic processes. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2001 American Educational Research Association Conference.
2. For an exposition of Amartya Sen’s model, see Bina Agarwal (1994). Also see John Brohman (1996). Brohman recognizes that the household represents activities at the social macro level the family micro level, and the interaction between the two levels. He notes that even when this unit is examined, we usually probe the stability of the unit rather than individual human rights of family members. Hanna Papanek (1990) also recognizes the need to examine power structures in the household.
3. Hanna Papanek (1990) argues that the general study of household dynamics deserves special attention because the present culture of socialization indirectly supports inequality.
4. Dorothy Smith’s work (1987) on institutional ethnography highlights the importance of exploring the process of “actual practices” in order to understand social relations.

5. Steven M. Parish (1996) states that we have a working understanding of the cultural ideology of caste, but we understand less about how “caste life is experienced and evaluated by social actors.”
6. I resided in the village during summer 1997 and August 1998–January 1999 for dissertation study. I also conducted field work December 1999–January 2000 and December 2000–January 2001.
7. I explained educational participation to the residents as enrollment in primary school.
8. For works on the Tharus, see Christian McDonough (1996) and (1984).
9. I conducted the pilot tests for the dissertation in the Dang district in 1997. During this time, I lived with Dangaura Tharu. I also lived with a Brahmin family with a history as landowners who kept Danguara Tharu to work in the fields, care for their children, and serve as servants in their home.
10. There are an estimated 1,194,224 Tharus living in Nepal today (1991 Census). Several scholars’ anthropological works have broadened our understanding of various Tharu groups. See: S. K. Srivastava (1958) and L. R. Singh (1965) for the Tharus of Northern Province of India, and Dor Bahadur Bista (1967), Drone P. Rajaure (1977, 1980, 1981), Christian McDonough (1984, 1996), Harald O. Skar (1999) and Ram Dayal Rakesh (1994) and Upali Arjun Guneratne (1994) for studies of the Tharus in Nepal. For recent anthropological articles related to the Tharus, see the *Himalayan Research Bulletin*, (XIX, 2, 1999). Dangaura, Deoshaura, and Deokhuri Tharu reside in Butawal. Some families identified themselves as one of these groups; other families simply identified themselves as Tharu.
11. The remaining adults between the ages of 20–25 worked as wage workers and laborers at nearby construction sites in the neighboring small town half-hour jeep ride from the village. Several other young men work as truck drivers at these construction companies. A few individuals work for wages in nearby farms owned by wealthy residents.
12. Lentils or dahl are usually associated with the traditional meal in Nepal, and families in this village ate it on a regular basis. Nutritious vegetable and meat side dishes were not a common part of the meal.
13. The first meal of the day in the various homes where I first lived was an occasion for understanding the fundamental social and economic unit of Tharu society. The Tharu live in large extended families composed of senior parents, their married sons, and the sons’ wives and offspring. The household thus comprises several nuclear families within an extended family. An important feature of Tharu society is the hierarchical relationship among the family members. The father, and after his death, the elder son, is the household chief. He commands overall leadership of the house, being in charge of the family’s budget and serving as the family representative at the village assembly.
14. Seventy-two percent of the Tharu girls and sixty-one percent of the Tharu boys are enrolled and attend school in this village.
15. During the sweltering summer months, men usually repair or rebuild animal sheds and plowing equipment, make jute, construct cots, repair nets, plow kitchen gardens, or occasionally care for young children during their

interviews. Women weave mats and baskets during this time. The heat is so oppressive that work is limited to the early morning and early evening hours.

16. There were more formal occasions in which residents of Butawal joined to celebrate an occasion. The Bika family invited Tharus, Brahmins, and Thakuris to a daughter's wedding. Dance performances were planned a day in advance. They offered the opportunity to engage in fun (stories and jokes were told; dances were performed). Most of the village attended these evening performances; however, Tharus comprised the majority of the crowd. This is reasonable, since they constitute the majority of Butawal's population.
17. It took quite a long time for the residents of the village to see me as a long-term resident in their community. For the first six weeks, children followed me from place to place while walking around the village and wanted to eat with me when I returned home during the day and evening meals. I spent as much time with them as possible, but I must admit that this process was extremely exhausting in the early weeks of the field work.
18. Given that Tharu women (who spoke no Nepali) would not speak to me with a male translator at my side, I invited one female translator to serve in this capacity and one male translator to speak with the men (who use Nepali on a regular basis). Two research assistants also provided a cross-check of translations from the tape-recorded interview data. During conversations in the residents' homes, my research assistants continually made sure that I understood the conversation, albeit admittedly subjective.
19. This is usually used as a storage space for kindling and a home for goats or other small creatures looking for cover from the teaming rain during the monsoon season or searing sun during the summer.
20. Sixty percent of the population in this village consider themselves either Deokhuri or Danguara Tharus. Six percent are Deoshaura Tharu; eighteen percent are Thakuril; six percent are Kami; five percent are Bika; four percent are Brahmin; and one percent are Damai.
21. I lived with both Brahmin and Tharu families during my field trips. It was expected that I would accept the initial invitation of the Brahmin family. Later, the Brahmin family arranged for me to stay in the home of a Tharu family. My research assistants, one female and one male, both of whom are fluent in English, Nepali, and Tharu, also lived in the Brahmin family. My residence in the Tharu family was very brief, for space in the Tharu home did not provide an adequate setting in which to work. My acceptance into the homes of both families in the village was a slow process that was constantly being negotiated. I believe that the transition was fairly successful, for I continued to reside with the same families on repeated visits.
22. This occurred during the summer of 1997.
23. All surnames in this case study are the actual surnames of the participants. Given the common use of names by caste, anonymity is easily upheld.
24. Some residents didn't understand why I wanted to speak with them, to understand the Tharu perspective of education in this community. A discussion ensued about the royal history of the Tharus, and the stories that were never

recorded. Some felt that my work, albeit in English, could and would document their ideas, feelings, and beliefs about education in this community. Still others, jaded by the international development projects around the region, asked what financial compensation they would gain from their participation. After I explained that university students are not in the position to offer compensation, they agreed to allow me to pay only the families of the homes in which I lived. The reality of my position helped them, and me, to realize that I was not “an invisible, anonymous voice of authority” but rather “a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interest” (Harding 1991, 9).

25. Men, dressed as women, performed several folk dances. During other evenings, larger dance concerts, held in the courtyard of one home, also provided a venue for men and women to sing, tell stories and jokes, and dance.
26. My research assistants are fluent in English, Nepali and Tharu, and I spent time prior to our entry into the field, and then on an almost daily basis, learning about each other, and our purposes for being in the field. This process required considerable time and effort but was necessary in order for us to develop a professional working relationship.
27. All adults reported their surnames as either “Tharu” or “Chaudhari.” Given this, I do not always refer to the participants by surname.
28. The women, after seeing my photos and hearing my stories of friends and family, questioned why I chose to visit the village without my husband. They found it difficult to believe that I did not need my husband’s permission to leave home to do this work. I told them that I had, in fact, made many solo trips to other countries before I married, and by myself since my marriage. I do not believe that they truly accepted my independence and interest in scholarship, but rather perceived this as an odd, and possibly even irresponsible, facet of my personality.
29. This is not a Tharu custom but a Hindu practice. The women who wear *tikkas* express their affinity for the Hindu religion, social status in the community.
30. When we weren’t discussing Nepalese and American fashion, I often engaged in wood gathering, leaf gathering, and kitchen-garden farming with the women in the village.
31. Eight percent of the Tharu females and thirteen percent of the Tharu males work for wages. One percent of the women and men serve in the military.
32. During this time, the workers, in order to accomplish as much work as possible during the day, do not return to their homes to eat the mid-morning meal. The young mothers who stay in the home during the day prepare the curried vegetable and rice meal and deliver it to their family members who work in the fields.
33. Only Brahmin and Thakuri families own kerosene lamps. The Tharus use candles during the evening hours.
34. Oddly, though, by 10:00 each evening this same cot seemed very comfortable when used as a bed for my tired body.
35. I decided to use this questionnaire because it was not only the best instrument to measure the educational participation variables hypothesized to influence

girls' participation in school, but also because it was created for use in Nepal. See Gajendra Man Shrestha et al. (1986), who published the article that resulted from their work in the field. For the original study, see Gajendra Man Shrestha et al. (1984). Also, see Mary Ann Maslak (1999) for in-depth review of this team's works through 1999.

36. Shrestha and his team conducted interviews with the "heads of household" in which the children were living (N = 2,310) to gather household-related information, and principals and other responsible officials of neighboring schools (where children attended or would attend if they had been in school) to collect school information (N not provided). Child-related, household-related and school-related variables guide this study. The set of child-related variables includes three categories: (1) gender; (2) child helping, another dichotomous variable, that indicates whether a child performs regular household duties; and (3) child earning, a third dichotomous variable signifies the son or daughter's outside earnings. The set of household-related variables include: (1) the predominant language spoken in the home; the "household heads" attitude toward education; the years of school the adult household residents completed respectively; household occupational status (agriculture, businesses, cottage industry, labor, professional service, and nonprofessional service), and household economic status (per capita income, child earners, child ratio, and livestock wealth). The set of school-related variables include (1) teacher characteristics (qualified teachers, trained teachers, experienced teachers, Nepali teachers, teacher ethnicity, female teachers, and student-teacher ratios), and (2) school facilities (expenditure per student, library, school building quality, space, curricular materials, and physical education). Shrestha and his associates concluded gender was the most powerful individual predictor of education, followed by father's education and distance to school, and suggested that gender disparities in school participation involved both household-related and school-related variables. These variables, however, more accurately for predict attendance of secondary school-age girls than that of primary school-age girls.
37. This dynamic contributed to my initial perceptions of the Tharu home as what Caldwell calls the "patriarchy-patriliny-patrilocality type." This type of household is found in northern African and extends to the northern plains of India. It emphasizes the dominant male as the provider for women and children. See Naila Kabeer (1994) for more on this.
38. I kept the household number section so that I could identify each household during repeat visits.
39. Given that no one kept birth records, all ages were estimates. Age does not seem to be an important statistic to the Tharu.
40. The Tharu family incomes were supplemented, in most cases, by the animals they breed. I compared the reported monetary figures to the types and size of dwellings in which they lived, as well as the sheds and areas for animals in order to rank economic wealth. After analyzing all reported financial resources, I concluded that Tharus still earn significantly less than their Thakuri and probably Brahmin neighbors.

41. Stacy Leigh Pigg (1996) writes on attitudes in Nepal.
42. The headmaster and teachers also provided a means to cross-check attendance and graduation data.
43. The literature mentions that social and religious values influence the educational participation of girls but fails to explain the reasoning and provide direct evidence of it.
44. Nelly Stromquist differentiates "family-related" variables, those related to the educational demand, from "school-related" variables, those associated with educational supply.
45. One study in Nepal relates to this discussion and should be mentioned, but it fails to provide specific information. Shavitri Singh (1995) provides a compilation of standard secondary data sources including government reports and census surveys. This paper offers an overview of national statistics in chart form and a brief description but offers no analysis of the data. While this information helps us to depict the overall picture of educational participation in Nepal, it does little to further our understanding of the variables that influence the decision-making practices of women and men in the family.
46. Several articles cited by Nelly Stromquist are A. Doris Henries (1974), J. Henry Korson (1970), and Ernesto Schiefelbein and Joseph Farrell (1980).
47. The key feature of the new household economics model is that preference for the amount of schooling is considered within an economic decision-making framework in which the family takes into account the costs and returns of additional schooling to the household. The empirical framework assumes that at a given point in time there is a total investment in schooling that the household can afford, even though this total may be allocated in different proportions among children within a family. The framework focuses on the variation among households and the differences among individual children.
48. Additional children decrease the amount of schooling accumulated by the household because the household's resources must be divided more times.
49. Hours engaged in each chore were not measured. This information was extrapolated from conversations with adults.
50. This difference can be seen in the size of the homes, quality and quantity of food, and clothes of the residents.
51. This point will be analyzed in detail later in the chapter.
52. The Attitudes toward Education instrument, part of Shrestha's survey, was developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In this case study, the instruments' findings were used to cross-check the qualitative data.
53. Ambesu Biazen and B. Junge (1996) call for a critical analysis of the initiative to promote education as a strategy to reduce fertility among women.
54. One example of this is the names of the gods and goddesses that the Tharu men told me they worshipped. These gods and goddess are found in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Tharu religions.
55. This issue has been studied in a variety of contexts. One important work that reveals the ways in which school-going children understand ethnicity and development in Nepal is by Debra Skinner and Dorothy Holland (1996).

56. This point will be examined in more detail in chapter 6.
57. As part of government policy, books and pencils are to be given to the primary school-age schoolgoers. In reality, parents pay for notebooks and pencils for their children.
58. The lack of bathroom facilities at the school may not be problematic because the Tharu do not have toilet facilities inside or outside of their homes.
59. For discussions on space, see Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (1994), Patricia Ann Lather (1991), and Gail Currie and Celia Rothenberg (2001).
60. I conducted numerous personal interviews with Drone Rajaure and Suresh Shakya at Tribhuvan University and the Centre for Educational Innovation and Research respectively during each of my visits to Nepal.
61. Participatory research guided my qualitative inquiries. See Jeremy Holland and James Blackburn (1998). In addition, I used James Spradley's data analysis procedures (1979) to formulate my interpretations of the data. Three types of analysis—domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis—were used to draw conclusions. Domain analysis began with the first interview and the initial question: "What are your reasons for enrolling your daughter in the village's primary school?" Answers to this question resulted in lists of words or phrases. The participants responded with terms such as "like everyone." According to Spradley, this list represents terms that are more salient, important, or familiar to the informant than other terms; therefore, these listed terms became the domains of questioning as well as analysis. Questions in the subsequent interviews were built upon the domains identified in the first interviews. For example, in the second interview I asked, "Can you give me examples of *everyone*?" In the third interview, I explored the differences between domains. Examples like "Why are the low-caste Kamis not considered "everyone" even though they too live in the village?" This comparison were then organized into categories, the product of a taxonomic analysis. An example of such a taxonomic analysis would be as follows: "everyone" includes high-caste Brahmins and Thakuris as well as other Tharus in the village, but does not include the low-caste Kami and Damai. The third procedure was componential analysis. Here, relationships between categories were sought. I compared the category of "everyone" to the category of "gender." As a result of this analysis, three themes were pursued for this study: (1) reasons given by mothers; (2) reasons given by fathers; (3) the product of the "discussion" in which both the mother and the father talked about the issue. The componential analysis also revealed an underlying construct of four levels at which the decision to send a daughter to school was supported or rejected.
62. The Tharus also used the words "experienced," "wiser," and "powerful" when referencing their higher-caste neighbors.
63. The degree to which they were consulted, however, varied between families. The actual conversation, tape-recorded and transcribed, indicated at times a verbally active conversation with the mother of the family and in other families simply a nod. In other words, in the case of the latter, there was not an open

dialogue, but rather a position put forth by the male member of the household and the female's agreement with that opinion.

64. Nonformal education classes in Butawal consist of evening literacy classes.
65. This Tharu village has a single building, a *than* (a small platform for worship) for Bhumsen, the village deity. Many Tharus also have a deity room in their homes.
66. Focus group interview January 4, 2001, in Butawal.
67. Mr. Chaudhari. Focus group interview with two other male family members. October 4, 1998.
68. The other *guruwa*, who lives in the center of the village, is rarely sober. Although we tried to talk with him, this problem prevented coherent conversation and valid responses.
69. The *guruwa* drew a floor plan of the Tharu home on the dusty earthen floor in his courtyard where we spoke. He located the *duota* room on the front right side of the home. During my visits to these homes, I only found five homes with an actual *duota* room. They were located in the front right side of the home. The others, who did not have a room designated for this purpose had a small temple constructed of timber supports and grass roof that housed the small earthen figures in the family's courtyard.
70. See the following works for more on this idea: Geoffrey McNicoll (1980) and Thomas E. Fricke (1995). In addition, Bradley Levinson, Douglas Foley, and Dorothy Holland (1996) draws on history, power, and wider social structure throughout this book as contexts for cultural practices and their influence on schooling for children in Nepal, Taiwan, Ecuador, Mexico, Bolivia, France, and the United States.
71. These questions had been refined as you see them here after several conversations with Dr. Drone Rajaure, Tribhuvan University.
72. Those who did respond to this question replied that the male made the final decision. The woman whose husband did not live at home stated that she decided to send her daughter to school. Almost half of the residents did not answer this question for various reasons, including they were still deciding, or the children were too small and a decision had yet to be made.
73. Individual interview January 4, 2002.
74. The concept of space and the power structures that are inherent within that space have been examined by both Nora R  thzel (2000) and H. Lef  bvre (1991).
75. Swarna Jayaweera (1999) notes that education increases a woman's credibility as a household decision-maker.
76. The anthropology of education literature is an exception to this statement. See Douglas A. Foley, Bradley A. Levinson, Janise Hurtig (2000/2001).

A Critical Analysis of International Educational Policy for Girls' Education in South Asia

Introduction

The term *policy* is an elusive concept. In the ideological sense, the concept refers to an official position that addresses a current set of issues. In the practical sense, policy refers to an official statement that is generated by various departments, which takes multiple forms and is implemented to varying degrees. In some countries, educational policy is generated by a national governing body and expressed in a written constitution that is universally adopted and applied to all regions of the country. In other countries, the policy is developed by the state but allows for considerable freedom to develop specific objectives for individual areas of the country that are created by divisions of the central government (such as a ministry) (Stromquist 1997).

Policy formation is an important subject of study, for it shapes and fosters educational opportunities provided by a government. Traditional analyses have attempted to utilize an apolitical, objective, and neutral method to examine and assess policies. This “value free” approach, as it were, appeals to the dominant liberal optimism of educators and policy makers. However, in reality, this method is grounded in a narrow, falsely objective premise that masks its latent biases while disregarding the complex conditions and circumstances that influence educational participation. Educational policies specifically designed to address gender inequities have adopted this same narrow and supposedly objective approach, which has proven ineffective to date—largely because it has not dealt with the ways in which the subjective and inherently complex societal and cultural forces contribute to and influence the education for girls (Marshall 2000).

For more than three decades, international policy campaigns, in conjunction with national governments, have been launched to address girls' low educational participation in the global and local contexts. Policies established

by international conference delegations are used in conjunction with those of governmental offices and their divisions to set national and regional goals and objectives, according to which international funding is determined (Stromquist 1997). This is of particular significance for education in poor countries, such as those in South Asia, that rely on external funding to implement educational programs.

Despite the subscription to the visions of educational policies crafted by international agencies at world and regional conferences, and to subsequent country development plans that outline specific educational programs, most South Asian countries such as Nepal have struggled in the promotion of girls' educational participation. In a word, Nepal's educational policy initiatives and program developments, developed in concert with the international organizations, have simply not been accomplished in most regions of the country (Mathema 1998).

If we assume that realistic goals have been set by international agencies and national governing bodies, why does the problem of undereducation of girls still exist? This chapter seeks to further our understanding of the Education for All (EFA) policy and the ways in which it has failed to address the source of the problem, by offering a comparative critical discourse analysis. This analysis addresses a series of questions: By what means and for what purposes are these policies created? What particular perspectives, be they social, political, cultural, or economic, are included and excluded? What is the main philosophy espoused? What specific goals and objectives are outlined? In answering these questions the chapter does several things. It describes the powerful influence of the international community in shaping policy; reveals the standardized form that this policy takes for each of the countries in South Asia; illuminates the biased and narrow perspective of the international community in each of the country's policies; and draws attention to the lack of discussion of cultural and social values that are inherent and critical in the workaday world of delivery education.

By critically examining educational policy, we provide a descriptive and discriminating account of South Asian educational policy that reveals what is said and uncovers and lays bare what is not said, as the policy relates to girls. We also reveal contradictions in the educational policy that endorses education for one sex (girls) in particular, but fails to comprehensively consider the ways in which girls' status (gender) influence the policy's chances for success. Finally, we discuss the expected failure of these policies, highlighting their inattention to social and cultural conditions, conditions that may promote or impede educational participation for girls. In so doing, we propose an alternative interpretation that suggests reasons why some national policies have been more successful than others in achieving the goals for girls' education.

The chapter begins by providing a brief overview of the most recent international conferences, and the narrow and poorly conceived attention they

paid to girls' education. Next, given the identified problems inherent in the approach prescribed by the international conferences, it argues for a comparative critical policy study. Last, the chapter reviews EFA's domestic educational policy for each of the six South Asian countries—Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal. It highlights the documents' contents and pinpoints the omissions, revealing how lofty language embedded in national policy that is meant to be universal and to bridge regional boundaries actually has little to do with the local realities, as far as educational opportunities for girls are concerned.

Conferences as the Context: International and National Policies and Girls' Education

A brief review of the South Asian region's conferences devoted to the advancement of girls' education shows how girls' education has been conceived and received in the past forty years. As long ago as 1959, the *Regional Meeting of Representatives of Asia Member States on Primary and Compulsory Education* produced the Karachi Plan. The plan claims

that every country of this region should provide a system of universal, compulsory and free primary education of seven years or more within a period of not more than twenty years (1960–1980). (*The Needs of Asia in Primary Education*)

In the 1960s, the *World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy* (Teheran, September 8–16, 1965) addressed education as an essential component in the development process by integrating it with the economic and social initiatives supported by the local governments. This conference was followed by the *Fifth Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Those Responsible for Economic Planning in Asia and the Pacific* (MINEDAP V, 1985). The participants in this conference sought to decrease the educational disparities within and between countries, increase universal primary education, promote out-of-school programs, and link formal education (the chronologically structured full-day academic program) with nonformal education (the part-time literacy program primarily designed for female out-of-school children and illiterate adults). One particular component of the conference's report was Article No. 9, the main thrust of which was the universalization of primary education. This document supported existing educational policies and programs in and between regions, aiming to develop universal primary education and adult education (*Regional Conference of Ministers 1985*). This initiative had two purposes. First, it set up a model to develop educational opportunities for both children and adults. Second, it offered a framework within which neighboring countries could support

each other in their promotion of education for their citizens. Based on the recommendations of the MINEDAP V, the General Conference proposed the establishment of regional programs for universal provision and renewal of primary education, together with the eradication of illiteracy in Asia and the Pacific.

The Asia and the Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development (APEID) Regional Review Meeting focused its effort on the universalization of primary education (UPE) for girls. Participants from ten South Asian and Southeast Asian countries attended the meeting to discuss the status of girls' education. They deliberated on the access to and participation in literacy programs and the formulation of regional cooperative and operational schemes for increased enrollment and participation of girls in the primary educational systems of the member countries. As a result, by February 1987 UNESCO established and launched the Asia-Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL).

The APPEAL policy claimed to recognize the importance of "socio-economic" factors that determined and influenced the availability of primary education for all children in the region. The educational objective, however, did little to address the ways in which economic and social conditions influence girls' education, as demonstrated in the three objectives. First, it called for the development of meaningful and realistic objectives for education in each country, including improved access to, retention during, and graduation from primary school.¹ Second, it proposed for new educational structures of sufficient dimension and quality for the entire juvenile population. Third, it developed a curriculum which focused on both personal and national development. None of these objectives clearly addressed either social or economic causes of low enrollment.

Having endorsed and adopted the structure of Article 9 from the earlier Fifth Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Those Responsible for Economic Planning in Asia and the Pacific, representatives from South Asian countries participated in the World Conference in Jomtien Thailand (1990). This conference formulated a set of goals to address the problem of illiteracy and education by promoting UPE. Already familiar to the South Asian nations, the concept of UPE was supported, although to varying degrees, as was the EFA campaign that served as the framework for "realistic and functional" international plans of action. In short, the EFA model forged a consensus among South Asian countries and served as the basis for developing and implementing national educational plans specific to each country.²

Although it is inappropriate to develop grand hypotheses about the circumstances and consequences of the regional meetings from this brief review, this much seems clear. The international and regional meetings were attended by a majority of high-ranking male governmental officers. They were the ones who met to plan, design, and formulate an international educational policy that

intended to improve the state of education for all children in South Asia. They developed the documents defining policies. What can we learn about the ways in which the documents address the concerns with children in the countries in South Asia—in particular, how they address the problems of girls' education? Or did they fail to address this issue?

The Educational Policies of the EFA: A Comparative Evaluation

“The Education for All 2000 Assessment: Statistical Report,” and its accompanying country reports defines the educational policy to allow each country to achieve the goals set at the Jomtien meeting.³ These documents are the subjects of our comparative exercise. But what is comparison in this context? First, T. Neville Postlethwaite suggests to us that to compare

means to examine two or more entities by putting them side by side and looking for similarities and differences between or among them. In the field of education, this can apply both to comparisons between and within systems of education. (1999, 25)

Comparative policy studies that examine internationally consistent data sources between countries permit two important paths of inquiry. First, they support the questioning of the most basic and assumed frameworks within which educational systems are formulated and organized and within which they function. Specifically, comparative policy analysis of this nature utilizes a body of descriptive and explanatory data to reveal that policy frameworks not only reflect popular thought (which may or may not be oppressive to girls), but may also guide the formation of future plans for the country. Moreover, comparative policy analysis contributes to the development of more sophisticated frameworks in which to categorize, compare, and analyze countries' approaches to educational policy. Second, comparative policy studies invite the examination of the ways in which, and extent to which, domestic policy is (or is not) related to international policy. The use of a critical discourse perspective offers answers to questions that are not traditionally asked in conventional forms of policy analysis.

For more than three decades, Ministers of Education and country representatives of South Asia, together with international agency specialists from UNESCO and the World Bank, have developed educational policies aiming to address the problem of girls low participation in school.⁴ The World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand, attended by national and international representatives, formulated goals to promote education for all children by the year 2000.⁵ The document outlined several areas of concern: (1) early children care and education; (2) universal and basic education; (3) basic learning and skills programs; (4) learning achievement; (5) education

of women and girls and the elimination of gender disparities; (6) literacy and continuing education; and (7) life skills and values; and (8) education for peace and global understanding. Germane to our investigation are these two items: universal basic education, and the education of girls and elimination of gender disparities.

For the purpose of our inquiry, elementary education refers to formal schooling that caters to children aged six through fourteen. In most countries, it is composed of two cycles: primary education, lasting five years, and upper primary education (or middle school), covering three years. The EFA educational policies for each of the five South Asian countries focus on four particular groups of information: enrollment, internal efficiency, survival rates, and coefficient of efficiency. Each are addressed in the individual country reports.

Two types of enrollment ratios are used in EFA policy. First, gross enrollment ratio represents the number of children enrolled in primary education, regardless of age, and is expressed as a percentage of the eligible primary school-age population. Gross enrollment statistics disclose the system's capacity to serve the primary school-age population. Second, the net enrollment ratio is the number of children of primary school age who are enrolled in primary education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population. This shows the proportion of primary school-age children who are enrolled in and out of school.⁶

Internal efficiency (IE) is the second piece of information that informs this policy. IE refers to the dynamic changes in enrollment status. It deals with promotion to a subsequent grade, repetition of a grade, dropout from a grade, and graduation.

The survival rate (to grade five in the case of primary education) is the third type of information. It measures the percentage of a cohort of pupils enrolled in the first grade of primary education in a given school year who eventually reach grade five. Its purpose is to assess the extent to which the system retains pupils through grade five.

The coefficient of efficiency, the final type of data in the documents, refers to

the ideal (optimal) number of pupil-years required (i.e. in the absence of repetition and drop-out) to produce a number of graduates from a given pupil cohort in primary education, expressed as a percentage of the actual number of pupil years spent to produce the same number of graduates. . . . (Education for All 2000 Assessment, 36–37)

The goal of efficiency is 100 percent; that is, all students progress and complete the school cycle.

Table 1 provides a compilation of statistics from the 2000 EFA country documents. These documents, the final reports generated at the most recent

Table 1. EFA Country Report Summary

Country	GER		NER		IE	Survival Rate		Coefficient of Efficiency	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys		Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Sri Lanka	No gender data available, but the country reports 99.8% enrollment rates for children in this age category				No data available	96.5%	96.2%	No gender data available	
Afghanistan	5%	53%	GER and NER combined 29% reported		No data available	48.8% reported		35.6%	54.3%
India	81.5%	98.5%	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available
Bangladesh	94.5%	98.4%	82.9%	80%	No data available	66.7%	69.1%	76.9%	74.6%
Pakistan	46.6%	No data available	41%	61%	No data available	44%	No data available	65%	No data available
Nepal	117.36%	141.69%	59.9%	78.9%	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available

meeting that was held in Dakar, Senegal, are a compilation of data that originate from various sources. The country's team determines and subsequently reports the data from the variety of sources, which include but are not limited to national education ministries, regional education offices, and international aid organizations such as the World Bank. It should also be noted that although a standard definition for each category is provided in the EFA document, the individual data sources, in several cases, report a different definition. In addition, we must note that these statistics are general depictions of the gender differences for each country. These data do not report the differences for girls in urban and rural regions of each country, for example. Although there are recognizable differences in the data sources, we are able to grasp a general snapshot from these data for the countries in South Asia.

Net enrollment is expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group. The objective of universal primary education implies the realization of a net enrollment ratio equal to 100 percent (Education for All 2000 Assessment). According to these data, Sri Lanka, the darling of the EFA policy, is the champion among her regional partners, even though gender statistics are not noted. Although Bangladesh reports that the percentage of girls enrolling in school is greater than the percentage of boys, the rates are still below the target. The enrollment situation is even more serious for both Pakistan and Nepal. Girls in Nepal and Pakistan fail to enroll at rates deemed acceptable by their national educational plans. The survival rates for girls in Bangladesh and Pakistan reveal other problems. Although these girls do go to school, they drop out at alarming rates prior to the grade five level. Nepal does not report these statistics in this document, but we know from other sources that a similar situation occurs in the kingdom. The coefficient of efficiency data is too incomplete to allow for comparisons. Similarly, the Internal Efficiency statistic is not calculated in any of the individual country reports. Although the EFA governing body notes the importance of this statistic, the country reports do not or cannot, calculate this number. A brief glance at each country's EFA report adds depth and nuance to the foregoing statistical picture.

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

The educational system in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, an island nation at the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent, which has an area of 65,610 square kilometers, serve a population of approximately eighteen million people (1995 census). Approximately 72 percent of the population live in rural areas, 3.6 percent live in the plantation sector, and the remainder live in urban areas (http://www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/sri_lanka/rapport_1.html). The system accommodates a diverse demographic population. According to the Report, Sinhalese constitute the majority, representing approximately 74 percent of the population; Sri Lankan Tamils account

for approximately 13 percent, while the Moors comprise 8 percent. In terms of religion, approximately 69 percent of the population identify themselves as Buddhist, 15 percent as Hindu, 8 percent as Muslim, and 8 percent as Christian.⁷

The educational system that serves this population is under the direction of Sri Lanka's Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). The ministry oversees the Presidential Task Force (PTF). This task force appointed the National Education Commission (NEC) to develop ten objectives to support EFA's goal for universal primary education. The NEC (1997) recommended the following objectives: provide local schools; offer free meals, uniforms, and textbooks that will promote attendance; pass the Compulsory Education Regulation of 1997; loosen requirements for admission by accepting all types of birth certificates; encourage student-centered classrooms; create attractive learning materials; improve pedagogy; enhance schools' physical plant; monitor student progress continuously (implement the School Based Assessment Programme); and expect achievement of minimum set of competencies (Essential Learning Continuum for each subject) (http://www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/sri_lanka/rapport_1.html).

Since 1990, MEHE has taken further measures to achieve the goals of the 1990 initiative by regulating, controlling, and monitoring compulsory schooling with the establishment of village-level committees that promote participation in primary education (http://www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/sri_lanka/rapport_1.html). Although the EFA plan does not outline specific dimensions of this initiative, it is one of two (the other being India) policies that recognize the importance of the local community, plan for its involvement, and expect participation.

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Although initiatives calling for free and compulsory primary schooling for Afgani children date from 1935, and have been echoed in the country's constitution of 1964, educational policies have not been standardized, and those that are in place have been under the directive of international nongovernment organizations, not the national government. For example, CARE planned to initiate a girls' educational programs in Afghanistan through their regional office in Karachi, Pakistan. This lack of formal and standardized education in Afghanistan is, in part, due to the unstable political situation in the country.

Since war began in 1978, Afghanistan has not maintained a universally recognized national government. Given this situation, the governmental educational policies and programs prior to 2002 were precariously held in the hands of the Taliban, the ruling party. Moreover, during the last decade, approximately one third of the country's estimated 26,813,057 population

(CIA 2001) of this geographically diverse country of mountains and valleys, forests and deserts fled the country in search of a safe place to live. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2002, many Afghan refugees have returned to the country. International educational policies will seek to provide the structure for future educational opportunities for children.

The Afghanistan 2000 EFA country report reviews the state of education in the country based on data that were collected from twenty-five international NGOs and aid agencies that supported basic education in twenty-two of the twenty-nine Afghan provinces. There are numerous limitations in this report. First, because of the war, no national authority could provide country-wide data. Second, incomplete data sets failed to provide a valid assessment and conception of the state of education in the country.

Given these difficulties, the 2000 EFA document assumes a different design. This document compares the progress of education in the country today with the state of education since the Russian invasion in 1978. The report notes that the total number of primary schools increased during the EFA 2000 decade, and the number of agency-supported schools decreased. Educational facilities are more evenly distributed throughout the country. Closure of girls' schools by the Taliban has, however, lowered the proportion of female students considerably. The report notes that girls' schools represent only 14.9 percent of the total number of schools, the majority of which are supported by various international agencies. The gross enrollment ratio for boys has increased in the decade and declined for girls, who represent only 7.2 percent of the school enrollments. This represents a steady decline during the EFA period.

India

India, centrally located in South Asia and bordered by Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China, Nepal, and Pakistan, encompasses 3,287,263 square kilometers of thirty-two states and seven union territories. Its population of 1,029,991,145 (census 2000) is the largest of all South Asian countries. The census reports that Indo-Aryan peoples constitute 72 percent of the population; Dravidians, Mongoloid and other people constitute 3 percent. In terms of religious affiliation, the document reports that approximately 81 percent of the population identify themselves as Hindus and 12 percent identify themselves as Muslims. The remaining 7 percent identify themselves as Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, or Parsi.

The population is guided by the National Policy on Education, which was initiated in 1982 and updated in 1992. Supported by the Central Advisory Board of Education, this document, complemented by the government's Eighth and Ninth Five-Year Plans (1992–1997 and 1997–2002), provides a framework that structures the country's educational plan. One component of

the plan, elementary education, has been a national goal since 1950. Today, educational policy supports the Directive Principles of the constitution of India plan for free and compulsory elementary education for all children up to the age of fourteen years. But problems are revealed in the policy's differentiation of the sexes in proclaiming the goal of universal access and retention. By stating that universal access refers to the need to include all girls and disabled children in primary classes, it categorizes girls by their deficiency. Moreover, the policy makes provisions for "non-formal education for school drop-outs, working children and girls who cannot attend formal schools." This statement specifically differentiates girls by associating them with working children, which certainly includes boys, but it does not explicitly make such a distinction for boys, and ignores the ways in which the gender of a girl influences her chances for schooling in a family with both sons and daughters.

The country has made significant progress in terms of providing access to basic education. Recent surveys show that more than 95 percent of the population has access to primary education within a distance of one kilometer. Overall enrollment figures have also shown a significant increase in educational participation.

These country documents contribute to the country's EFA report, which is a summary of three documents: the EFA Indicators, the State of the Art Review (Synthesis) on Learning Achievements, and the State of the Art Review on Learning Conditions. India's EFA country report, in addition to supplying information on enrollment, retention, and graduation, as with many of the other country reports, also emphasizes the need for "Community Participation." This facet is considered the foundation on which the entire EFA initiative is to be based (http://www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/india/rapport_2_2_1.html). Unlike the Sri Lankan policy, which simply states this objective, the India report provides school mapping and micro planning strategies to increase enrollment in school and collect information to improve the schooling experience for children (http://www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/india/rapport_2_2_1.html).⁸

Specific mention of girls' education is made in the "Policy Directions for the Future" section that recommends that women and girls, castes and indigenous groups, among others, receive special attention in *future* policies that address their undereducation. As in the case of Sri Lankan policy, females are a differentiated group that requires special considerations, instead of being included in the category that encompasses all children. Emphasis is placed on enrollment by sex. In addition, this document, published in 1990, considered girls' education an issue for the future that did not require attention in 1990. It appears that the pressure applied by the international committee led to the mention of girls, albeit in terms of the future, for such a concern was not even mentioned in the national governmental policy before that time.

People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bangladesh, occupying an area of 116,252 square kilometers, lies in the northeastern part of South Asia, with India on its northeastern border and Myanmar on its southeastern border. The population of the country is estimated to be 128.1 million (http://www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/bangladesh/rapport_2_1.html). It is a country with a Muslim Bengali majority and Muslim Punjabi minority. Muslims constitute 88 percent of the population; 12 percent are Hindus; .6 percent are Buddhists; and .3 percent are Christians (http://www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/bangladesh/rapport_2_1.html).

In response to the commitments of the World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, Bangladesh designed the National Plan of Action (NPA) which was prepared with the guidance of a National Committee chaired by the Prime Minister. With regard to universal access to and completion of primary education according to EFA, Bangladesh formulated two targets: increase in gross enrollment of children of age group six to ten years in primary schools to 95 percent by the year 2000, and increase in completion rate of primary schooling to 70 percent by the year 2000. Strategies that address these targets include: enacting a law that calls for compulsory primary education (1990); introducing compulsory primary education in sixty-eight *thanas*, or districts (1992), which was extended to the remainder of the country (1993); assisting poor parents of school-going children (six to ten) under the Food for Education (FFE) programme; and educating through satellite schools, community school, and primary schools sponsored by nongovernment organizations.

As with the case of the other South Asian nations, Bangladesh pays close attention to enrollment by setting attendance goals and offering facilities and lunches in the local setting. In addition, the policy refers to community support, although the terms are not like those of Sri Lanka and India. Bangladesh calls for community response, not involvement. The Bangladeshi document simply states, "development of primary education and reduction of illiteracy hinge on positive response from the community, which can best be administered through local government supervision and management" (http://www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/bangladesh/rapport_2_1.html], 25). Here, the power to enforce policies is envisioned as the use of regional government directors to oversee the execution of the policies by the locals.

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Pakistan, a country that occupies 796,095 square kilometers and comprises four provinces—Punjab, Sindh, North West Frontier Province (NWFP), and Balochistan—has received unprecedented attention from the international

educational community.⁹ The educational system has sought to address the needs of its 130.58 million people (http://www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/pakistan/rapport_1.html). Although almost half the population resides in Punjab, Baluchistan, the largest province with 43 percent of the country's area, has been the recipient of major educational initiatives for girls.

The country, which inherited its educational system from the British in 1947 when it became independent,¹⁰ maintains a constitution that guarantees females two fundamental rights: equality for all citizens under the law and equality between the sexes (Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women, 1984). These constitutional civil liberties are reflected in the National Education Policy 1998–2010, a document that encompasses seventeen components.¹¹ Three segments are especially pertinent to our discussion. First is the attention to Islamic education. The document clearly states that

Pakistan has a unique position on the map of the world. We are not a country founded on its territorial, linguistic, ethnic, or racial identity. The only justification for our existence is our total commitment to Islam as our sole identity. (p. 9)

Pakistani educational policy demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between state and society and is one of the only policies in South Asia to consider religion as an essential factor in the education of children.

The second section, especially pertinent to our inquiry, deals with elementary education. It states: "Education and empowerment of girls and women are key factors contributing to social development. . . . Unfortunately, girls and women have less than an equal opportunity to participate in education" (National Education Policy 1998). Given that Pakistani females have equal representation under the law, it is a notable fact that girls neither have equal educational opportunities nor participate in primary education at the same ratio as boys. Policy, in this case, has certainly not addressed fundamental issues that perpetuate the gender inequality that permeates Pakistani society today.

The third section, "Innovative Programs," claims:

Despite Islamic injunctions which make the acquisition of knowledge obligatory for the Muslims, unfortunately our educational status as a nation is disappointing. . . . Lack of awareness of the importance of education, poverty among the masses and many other reasons have been identified as the contributing factors to this dismal state. (p. 117)

This document, unlike the other countries' EFA policy, attributes the educational crisis to attitudes toward education, as well as the direct and indirect costs of schooling. It does not address the reasons why attitudes toward education are so unfavorable, or why parents give priority to the income earned

by children over earned knowledge in the classroom. The National Education Policy (1998–2010) also “seeks to invest in a literate populace,” (194) yet the policy neither differentiates the amount of funding provided for single-sex education nor specifies additional funding that will be available to meet the needs of girls’ education. Finally, as in the Bangladeshi policy, Section 15.9.1 of the Pakistani document puts the responsibility (and the control) of the attainment of educational goals on an administrative official. It states,

At the village level, the chairman of the School Management Committee, who will be an elected person, shall constantly review educational development in the area of his/her jurisdiction and ensure implementation of key policy provisions. (p. 124)

Although this statement appears to address the problems of education at the local level, it places educational choices and responsibilities not on the residents, but rather on the administrative heavyweight whose job it is to enforce the policy.

The Kingdom of Nepal

Nepal has a total population of 21,843,068 (http://www2.unesco.org/efa/wef/countryreports/nepal/rapport_1.html). Bound on the east, west, and south by India and on the north by China, Nepal is divided into three longitudinal strips of land: the flat Terai along the southern belt, the low-lying mountains and valleys in the center section of the country, and the high Himalayas in the northern belt. About 8 percent of the population live in the mountain region, 47 percent in the Terai, and the remaining 45 percent in the hill belt (Statistical Pocket Book 1996).

As with most of the other South Asian countries, attention to earlier international conferences was echoed in the national policies that either served to provide background for the recent EFA policy or contributed to the current document. For example, the National Education System born in 1971, devised the clear statements of education policy for the country. The plan was designed to counteract the present exclusionary system of education by revolutionizing it into one based on egalitarian principles. The plan aimed to democratize education for all of the country’s population of school-age children by building and staffing education facilities throughout the country, especially in remote and rural areas, and encouraging children to enroll in the schools.

The country’s fifth national development plan (1975–1980), was directly related to and based on the rhetoric of the series of Education for All development plans, which were devised in the meetings held in Karachi and Sofia. Nepal’s plan called for the extension of free primary education, the establishment of residential schools, the qualitative growth of education, and equal balance of educational opportunities in each region of the country. The

celebration of International Women Year, held in Nepal in 1975, may have provided an impetus to address females' issues, for by the time that the sixth development plan (1980–1985) was promulgated, a chapter was devoted to the enhancement of women's participation in development. Among the many major objectives of this plan are: improve existing facilities; raise educational standards; reduce wastage (caused by dropouts); establish new facilities, with priority given to primary education and nonformal education; and develop special programs for "educationally backward areas" and women (35).

The nation's seventh development plan (1985–1990) recognized the dramatic increase in primary school enrollment and made provisions for a rapidly expanding educational system by providing additional primary schools and encouraging local communities to maintain the physical plants. The plan also called for girls' increased participation by hiring female teachers and endorsing the policy for privatization where leadership and resources were available.

The kingdom's eighth plan (1992–1997) expanded the educational system further by instituting nonformal educational programs that offered out-of-school children (ages six to fourteen) programs such as Chelibeti and Shishya Sadan. Both programs used a curriculum that focused on national and local issues. The Basic and Primary Education Master Plan, a part of the 1992–1997 document, serves to organize the policy and outline strategies for achievement the goals and objectives set forth by the National Education Systems Plans. The Basic and Primary Education Master Plan (1991–2001) was prepared for the new government and provides a comprehensive set of policy options of the Basic and Primary Education Subsector. The Master Plan seeks to improve the quality of basic and primary education through a variety of moves: curriculum and textbook development and dissemination; teacher training; improved and continued student assessment; development of regional resource centers; and enhancement of the physical plant facilities of schools.

The most recent Basic and Primary Education Master Plan document (1997–2002) set specific objectives most pertinent to the issues of universal primary education for children of Nepal, which include analyses of the present status of Nepal's educational system, development of policies and strategies to guide the education sector in the upcoming five-year period, and to publish projections of student enrollment, teacher supply and demand, achievement levels, and literacy rates.

These documents support the major goals of EFA by specifying the objectives as follows: to expand early childhood programs and development activities; to offer universal access to primary education; to improve learning achievements; to reduce the adult illiteracy rate and gender disparity in education; to expand basic education and life skills for youths and adults; and to provide media mobilization for increased acquisition of the knowledge skills and values required for better living and sustainable development. However,

as in the case of the other country policies, Nepal's EFA country document follows the institutional rhetoric of its regional neighbors by drawing attention to the need to expand programs, enroll children in programs, and heighten achievement that will contribute to national prosperity.

In sum, the South Asian country EFA policies have shared a common rhetoric and vision that encourage and reinforce conventional approaches and guidelines. They state enrollment and retention statistics, promote new programs, and seek to increase participation in existing programs. Although this information is important, that which is *not* contained in the documents may help to further our understanding of the policies' shortcomings.

Critical Policy Analysis and Educational Policy in South Asia

Based on a sounder sociology, critical policy analysis aims to better social conditions through critical reflection on preexisting policy and exploration of alternative courses of action that may further countries' goals, objectives, and initiatives. Whereas classic social reproduction theory, such as that proposed by Althusser, operated exclusively at the level of systematic analysis, hence reducing agents to passive, interrelated "subjects," hermeneutic and humanistic sociologies have focused on the social action of individuals and groups (social integration). The methodological consequence of linking systematic and social action analysis in critical theories has been the focus on the agency-structure dialectic in analyzing processes of social and cultural reproduction. Through critical policy analysis, we rethink existing policy approaches from both the agency and structure perspectives. This examination will not only identify biases and limitations but also offer insight into the ways in which comparative analysis aids our understanding of policy and ways to improve it.

This analysis begins with three criticisms of the EFA policy. First, despite the EFA policy statements that reflect the need to increase female participation in education, they are inattentive to the complex interrelationships among societal structures and thus fail to represent the multifaceted problem of girls' undereducation deeply embedded in these societies. Fiona Leach (2000) argues that the very policies developed by donor agencies and development banks that seek to increase girls' participation in school are the same policies that fail to obtain their goal of reducing gender disparities in society. Leach does recognize the problems concerned with community administration of schools, but she neglects to consider the dynamics of the households and decision-making practices that should be included in the policy. For example, the policies do not account for the ways in which tradition structures communities, especially when the tradition does not support the education of girls. That leads me to ask how does gender in a family, village, or community function as a sociocultural unit, and what roles does gender play in these arenas?

What expectations does it maintain for its members? For example, the EFA policies ignore (or perhaps avoid) the need to examine how girlhood fits into a gendered notion of childhood, thus limiting a girl's chances for participation in a system that the government supposedly offers her. The policies' constant reference to girls nevertheless misses the interconnected and complex role that gender plays in the success of educational participation for girls (and for boys) in the local community. With regard to parents, how does gender contribute to the decisions made to educate a child? The documents' simple statements of educational goals by sex (for boys and for girls) do not capture the complex inner workings of religious, cultural, and economic social elements of parents' lives that influence girls' chances for education. In other words, the policies do not address the differentiated gendered roles that parents play in the decision-making places. Second, the EFA documents neglect to mention the ways local language complicates the nations' educational systems and thus may impede chances for girls' enrollment. Third, the political situations, such as the case of war in Sri Lanka, the potential war now brewing along the Indian/Pakistani border in Kashmir, and the current unstable state in Afghanistan do not receive attention. The EFA policies fail to consider how the physical boundaries drawn by politics influence the chances for girls to enroll in some of the world's most volatile areas. Fourth, the ethnic complexities that exist in all of these culturally diverse nations do not receive mention in the EFA policies, even though we know that girls from some ethnic groups enroll in school at higher rates than girls from other ethnic groups in each of the countries.¹² How is ethnicity perceived, and how does it contribute to individuals' expectations for educational (and life) chances? Pakistan provides the most specific policy language that reflects the cultural and religious foundations of the countries in the region by proclaiming Islam as the guiding structure of society and the educational system. Yet the EFA report only notes the discrepancy between male and female rates of educational participation (as do the other nations), failing to examine the relationship between Islam and education. Fifth, a simple mandate such as an EFA document does not ensure that funds are distributed for their intended use. Improprieties within the local, regional, and national settings prohibit a portion of funding from ever reaching its intended source.

Although there are social, cultural, political, and economic challenges to ensure girls' enrollment and continuation in school, one structural element in the EFA that should receive acclaim is that of community participation in the educational process. In the case of Sri Lanka and India, the importance of community participation to support education is duly emphasized. There are practical concerns. First, what happens in communities that do not support education for all? Do they have community activists assigned to the region? And, if so, how well would these representatives be received? Second, the

way in which community participation is encouraged should be scrutinized. How is community involvement promoted? Is it imposed from above by the government, or is a grassroots effort based on parental support for children's education?

Therefore, the issue of agency, the individual, is a legitimate and important fact of educational policy but it is seldom addressed. Several questions arise. First, who are the policy makers? Do they represent a cross-section of the country? Do they represent all voices and languages of the country, even the most unpopular ones? Second, how are parents, the decision-makers, represented in the policy that directly affects their families and futures of their children? Finally, how are children represented? A sound discourse on educational involvement of policy makers, parents and children must be based on a historical understanding of the social, religious, cultural, economic, and political dynamics within a country in order to be fully aware of the ways in which the structural socio-cultural-political elements influence the individual agency of those writing and implementing policy and making the decisions for girls.

So far, this much appears to be clear. An analysis of the country-specific goals reveals attention to general enrollment and retention goals in each country. While acknowledging that girls' education is a concern, and hence specifying that girls' education is an important component in the goal to educate all children, the EFA policy assumes all girls have the same chances for schooling. For example, educational policy in all the countries examined here assumes that a girl from a poor family will enroll in school as readily as a girl from a wealthy family. It assumes that a girl from a family that resides in a rural area will enroll and remain in school at the same rates as a girl in an urban area. The policies also assume that girls from a low-caste family, or from a minority ethnic group will attend school at rates as girl from a high-caste family.¹³

Moreover, the policies do not address particular conditions that may affect girls' educational participation. Although the policies differentiate between girls' and boys' participation in school, they do not provide specific objectives that address the particular circumstances and conditions of gender and how it influences girls' chances for an equal educational opportunity. For example, as with India's policy, the Pakistani document recognizes the importance of compulsory education, but assumes that the parents of girls and boys will honor the government's call, regardless of the preconceived social and cultural expectations for children.

Educational policies in Nepal, like those in the South Asian countries, although specifically designed to address gender inequities, have adopted a narrow and simplistic approach. As a result, they have made marginal progress to date, largely because they have not addressed the inherent conditions,

circumstances, and situations that contribute to the gendered nature of society. Specifically, the policy has ignored the cultural factors and existing social conditions that influence girls (Marshall 2000).

Therefore, to the extent that any educational policy formulation requires due recognition of the sociological and cultural conditions that act as factors governing girls' education, we need to develop a conceptual framework whereby the macro and micro elemental causes of girls' low educational participation will be accommodated and reflected. The scholarly literature reviewed has no doubt shown the various ways we may meaningfully examine and analyze those causes. However, these studies pertain to different regions and countries, and as pointed out above, they are piecemeal in the sense that they do not often comprehensively take into account the nexus between the structure and agency, the macro and the micro. In short, these studies, although valuable in very many ways, do not provide an analytical template according to which more appropriate educational policies could be forged with regard to the education of girls in emerging countries, such as the South Asian ones. It is my contention that social theory may provide a way through which we can construct such a template.

Conclusion

A critical policy analysis reveals two major points. First, national educational policy has mimicked international educational guidelines and created a document with a very narrow vision that limits our understanding of the context within which its recommendations have to function. In so doing, we reveal the serious inadequacies of educational policy as it currently stands. Second, its analysis uncovers the need to pursue a wider angle and deeper perspective in our conception of educational policy, so that the fundamental elements of social life are incorporated as an integral part of the equation that structures these documents.

By using critical discourse analysis as a means to problematize the undereducation of girls, we may elude the conventional and ineffective ways in which international educational policy, such as EFA, has been designed, developed, planned, and written. Instead, our analysis paves the way for the conception of a more egalitarian, representative system that acknowledges and grapples with the complex elements of social, cultural, religious, economic, and political structures that shape the gendered world in which we live. We will acknowledge the importance of the power embedded in family and community settings, and the presence of international nongovernmental organizations and governmental agencies. Both of them strongly influence the process of developing gender-equal educational policy. Last but not least, this new approach to policy development deciphers and interrogates the spoken

rhetoric, present policy, and existing social structures that contribute to sound and effective educational policy.

NOTES

1. The document fails to reveal the extent to which local authorities were invited to participate in policy formation.
2. It is important to note that the assemblage consisted of governmental officials and international aid organization officers. There have been other conferences and meetings that have addressed the plight of women and girls in South Asia, including the role that education plays in the process of human development. An example of a regional conference is the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Year of the Girl Child (1990) and the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child (1991–2000).
3. These findings were presented at the Dakar Senegal meeting in April of 2000.
4. There have been other regional meetings that were held in conjunction with and after the World Conference on Education for All. These conferences provided opportunities for follow-up.
5. "The Education for All 2000 Assessment: Statistical Report," and its accompanying country reports, were presented at the most recent World Conference on Education for All held in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000.
6. The objective of universal primary education implies the realization of a net enrollment ratio equal to 100 percent.
7. I use the term *identify themselves* because these statistics originate from the question on the census that asks for this classification.
8. The document provides a photo of what appears to be an actual school map that indicates an example of this program utilized in one Indian village.
9. Initially, Pakistan's two regions, East Pakistan and West Pakistan, were separated from each other by 1,600 kilometers of Indian territory. In December 1971, East Pakistan, after nine months of bloody civil war, declared itself an independent country, Bangladesh. Pakistan now consists of four provinces (the Punjab, Sind, the North West Frontier Province, and Baluchistan), the federal capital Islamabad, and federally administered areas. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has conducted an extensive educational campaign and program for girls in Baluchistan during the last five years.
10. For a concise background on the history of education in Pakistan, see Kowsar P. Chowdhury (1996).
11. The components of the document include introduction; aims and objectives; Islamic education; literacy and nonformal education; elementary education; secondary education; teacher education and training of managers; technical and vocational education; higher education; information technology in education; library and documentation services; physical education and sports; private sector in education; innovative programmes; implementation, monitoring, and evaluation; and financial outlay and tables. The Social Action Programme II

(1998–2002) and the Pakistan 2010 program have also been developed during this time but will not be discussed at length here due to space constraints.

12. See chapter 1 for the example in Nepal.
13. We know, however, that this is an unrealistic expectation. For example, Nepal's Multiple Indicator Surveillance Second Cycle: April–June 1995 report clearly shows that the Brahmins, Chhetris, and Newars (Nepal's high-ranking castes) maintain an 82 percent initial enrollment rate for girls, whereas the girls from occupational, or low-caste, families maintain a 45 percent enrollment rate.

Methodological Relationism and the Integrated Sociological Paradigm: Concepts that Contribute to Understanding Girls' Educational Participation in Nepal¹

The field of international and comparative education has utilized multidisciplinary traditions for more than one hundred years. As early as 1900, M. Sadler (1979) recognized the importance of the social and cultural factors that relate to education. Later, I. L. Kandel (1933) and N. Hans (1959) cited their belief that educational studies should be firmly grounded in both philosophical and historical writings. These works provided not only complex frameworks within which to grapple with issues related to education, but also questions related to how we integrate multiple perspectives to better understand education. For example, James Coleman (1987, 154), in regard to the field of education, laments that

a central intellectual problem in the discipline is the movement from the individual level, where observations are made, to the system level. . . . This has been called the "micro-to-macro problem" and it is a problem that is pervasive in the social sciences generally.²

Although Coleman implies the need to use a multidisciplinary approach to educational study and makes an astute comment about the need to examine the shift between the micro and the macro, his perception of the problem seems limited. The basic relationship he presents between observations at the individual level and a simplistic, implied systemic level is problematic. First, his narrow interpretation of the micro and macro does not allow for observations that can be made at *both* levels. Second, his account does not address the ways in which individuals, and their dynamic relationships, relate to both the individual level and the systemic level and other possible levels. Third, it fails to consider the organizational structure of and inherent messages sent by social systems. The complex social system, the individuals and their relationships in it, and the shift or movement from one dimension to another

requires careful examination. Educational research, to a large extent, has not considered the individual, the relationships between people, the social system, and the movement between these components.

Even though, as Alan Barcan (1993, 43) claims, the field of sociology of education highlights the primacy of sociology to supply theoretical and methodological bases for the examination of educational issues, too few have dedicated study to the interdisciplinary nature of social thought and educational participation. A major flaw in many research efforts is to dismiss, or, worse, ignore the pertinent information and constructive ideas from complementary disciplines. Especially in educational research, few devote extensive consideration to empirical findings and theoretical frameworks from other social scientific investigation, even though the need for interdisciplinary studies has been identified by early and contemporary researchers.³ The use of social theory may well strengthen international educational studies by linking objective and subjective perspectives with macroscopic and microscopic parameters.

Thus, this chapter, by way of incorporating insights from social theory, reveals and unravels the multifaceted social and cultural forces at work in the educational decision-making process. We show how individuals and structures interpenetrate. We illustrate the complex interaction between the acts and world views of individuals on the one hand, and the structural institutions on the other hand. It is in this cauldron of structural organizations and institutions and individuals' actions and interaction within the structural parameters of the environment that we uncover, examine, and analyze how decisions concerning the educational enrollment of Tharu girls are actually forged. Specifically, this chapter redefines and broadens the knowledge base of educational participation literature by utilizing social theory's methodological relationism, specifically the Integrated Sociological Paradigm (Ritzer 1975a, 7), which accommodates multiple representations of knowledge and expands the epistemological foundation on which discourses of educational participation may be more firmly built.

Our investigation consists of two paths. First, there is a brief historical and substantive overview of the development of methodological relationism that positions its importance and relevance to educational research. Methodological relationism is shown to be an effective epistemology that bridges the macro (the grand sweep of the social structure) and the micro (the individual in society) to the extent that it explains the dynamic interrelationship between the macro-maintenance system and micro-individual elements. Second, the concept of methodological relationism is applied to the empirical case of girls' educational participation in Nepal, in terms of the Integrated Sociological Paradigm, which calls for the identification of both the subjective and objective dimensions of the macro-structural and the micro-individual fundamental characteristics.⁴

Methodological Relationism and Its Epistemological Efficacy for Educational Research

The debate between macroscopic (structure) and microscopic (agency) theories has dominated discussions of twentieth-century American and European sociological thought and inadvertently influenced educational research.⁵ Macro theories argue that social structures and institutions influence and even condition individual and societal functions.⁶ This approach argues that social structures are the precipitating force that elicits social phenomena. Elements of the social structure include but are not limited to social hierarchy, demographic structure, and world systems. Micro theories emphasize individual actions, symbols, awareness, and the subjective construction of reality that explains social phenomena.⁷ The micro approach asserts the primacy of the individual, who, through interaction with others and the environment, causes the specific phenomenon. Both approaches, when couched in extreme terms, however, fail to adequately explain sociological phenomena. The macro model ignores the importance of history and the process of social change. It also fails to consider the influence the individual wields in the forging of the social system. The micro paradigm discounts the importance of social institutional and organizational parameters that shape the social structures in which people inextricably live and work. In other words, the one-sided adherence to either the macro-structural perspective (i.e., the social facts paradigm), or the micro-individual perspective (i.e., the social definition and social behavior paradigms) means the inability to depict comprehensively not only the existing variables but also their interactions, which account for sociological phenomenon.⁸

The failures of the micro and macro debates provided the impetus to link the two levels of social analysis.⁹ Methodological relationism, which espouses a connection between the micro (agency) and macro (structural) elements, is a complex and comprehensive alternative to theory that integrates the two perspectives of sociological thought so as to better understand individuals and society (Ritzer and Gindoff 1994). The purpose of methodological relationism is to identify, comprehend, and explain existing phenomena, as well as predict future occurrences based on the information extrapolated from past experiences. It asserts that a social phenomenon can only be fully apprehended by investigating the dynamic conditions, circumstances, and situations of the players in a particular situation, focusing on the interaction between the macro-structural and micro-individual levels.¹⁰

Methodological relationism consists of two basic tenets. First, there is the existence of both individuals and wholes. "Individuals" include members of the population, who, to varying degrees, recognize the persistent pattern of expectations and relations in a social system.¹¹ The "wholes" are the systems in which organizations and institutions function. Second, neither the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of the individual nor the workings of the society

can be explained without analyzing the inherent relationships between them. In other words, methodological relationism posits that neither individuals nor wholes alone adequately explain a social phenomenon, since the phenomena are formed by the relationships between individuals, governed by the social-structural elements of the community. In short, methodological relationism is an epistemological framework in which notions of macro (or structure) and micro (or agency) are conceptualized both independently and in relation to each other.

Indeed, the landmark works of Robert Merton (1975), Hugh Mehan and Houston Wood (1975), and Arthur W. Staats (1976) all emphasize the need to examine both social structural and individual aspects of social systems.¹² Especially influential is George Ritzer (1975, 1979), who developed the Integrated Sociological Paradigm. Largely influenced by the work of Abraham Edel (1959), this paradigm is a schematic representation of the intersection of two continua—the microscopic/macrosopic and the subjective/objective dimensions.¹³

Ritzer suggests that the model's micro/macro and subjective/objective quadrants and their interrelationship reveal four major levels of social analysis.¹⁴ The Macro-Objective quadrant simply identifies maintenance systems, such as organizations and institutions, that define the society's structural parameters. The Macro-Subjective quadrant includes representations that constitute structural constraints and opportunities. It also includes inherent values and norms that are represented by the institutions. The Micro-Subjective level reflects individuals' perceptions of, attitudes toward, beliefs about, and valuations of the Macro-Objective structural parameters. Finally, the Micro-Objective section deals with the patterns of observable action and interaction between individuals and the organizations and institutions.

Examples found in each quadrant offer a glimpse of those especially pertinent to educational decision making:

Macro-Objective: the government; the Ministry of Education; the regional education offices; the school system; the village school; the governmental laws that support nationalism; occupation defined by membership in the caste system; the historical documentation of the caste system's organization that is inclusive of all social groups, irrespective of religious affiliation; a national curriculum that was designed by the ruling high-caste Hindu parties who serve in governmental positions; gender.

Macro-Subjective: the values inherent in a government that supports Hinduization and Nepalization; the values inherent in a school system that requires Nepali as a national language, ignoring instruction in indigenous and local languages and endorsement of the national curriculum that neglects to represent the diverse population in the kingdom; power structures inherent within relationships that involve gender.

Macro-Objective Micro-Subjective
 Depicts the relationships between the maintenance systems that define the society's structural parameters and the individuals' beliefs about, attitudes toward, and perceptions of those systems

Macro-Objective Macro-Subjective
 Discloses the relationship between the maintenance systems and their representations that constitute structural constraints and opportunities for individuals

Macro-Subjective Micro-Objective
 Exposes the relationship between representations and the actions and interactions of the individual in each maintenance system

Macro-Objective
 The maintenance systems - organizations and institutions - that define the society's structural parameters

Macro-Subjective
 The representations that constitute the structural constraints and opportunities

Macro-Objective Micro-Objective
 Illustrates the relationship between the maintenance systems and those systems' actions

Macro-Subjective Micro-Subjective
 Conveys the relationship between the representations that constitute structural constraints and opportunities and the individuals' perceptions of, beliefs about, and attitudes toward those representations

Micro-Objective
 The actions and interactions of those engaged in the phenomenon

Micro-Subjective
 The attitudes toward, perceptions of and beliefs about the social construction of reality

Macro-Subjective Micro-Objective
 Exposes the relationship between maintenance systems' representations and the actions and interactions of the individual

Micro-Objective Macro-Subjective
 Reveals the connection between the actual behaviors exhibited by individuals and their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of influential organizations and/or institutions in the maintenance system

Macro-Objective Micro-Subjective
 Depicts the relationship between the maintenance systems that define the society's structural parameters and the individuals' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of those maintenance systems

Figure 1: The Integrated Sociological Paradigm.

Source: George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992, p. 544.

Micro-Subjective: individuals' perceptions of, beliefs about, and attitudes toward the government and its policies, the school system, the cultural system that silently endorses the caste system and its philosophy and practices, and gender roles.

Micro-Objective: individuals' behaviors related to government and schooling; people's social interaction behavior patterns; individuals' decisions about matters related to schooling; behaviors between men and women in the home and in the community.

The dialectical relationship between the quadrants plays an equally important role in the use of the model.¹⁵ The Macro-Objective/Macro-Subjective element depicts the relationship between the maintenance systems and their representations that constitute both constraints and opportunities for the individuals. The Macro-Subjective/Micro-Objective describes the relationship between systems' representations and the behaviors, actions, and interactions of the individual(s). The Macro-Subjective/Micro-Subjective category reveals the relationship between the representations that constitute structural constraints and opportunities and the individuals' perceptions of, beliefs about, and attitudes toward those elements. The Macro-Objective/Micro-Subjective distinguishes the relationship between the actual societal maintenance systems that define the society and individuals' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs toward those maintenance systems. The Micro-Objective/Micro-Subjective element represents the connection between the actual behaviors exhibited by the individual and his or her beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions surrounding the pertinent maintenance systems. The Macro-Objective/Micro-Objective category exemplifies the relationship between the societal maintenance system(s) and the actions of individuals as they relate to that system(s). These relationships include both the ways in which maintenance systems affect the patterns of intimate interpersonal interaction or communication, and the way in which individuals influence the maintenance systems (House 1990).

Specifically, the Integrated Sociological Paradigm provides us with an analytic tool to relate to girls' education in the western Tharu community. Applying the concept of methodological relationism together with the Integrated Sociological Paradigm, we may explain the ways in which the subjective and objective perspectives of the micro and macro influence educational decisions made on behalf of girls in Nepal.

The Integrated Sociological Paradigm in Action: The Case of Nepal

A host of works in South and East Asia have indicated precisely the need for an integrated approach to laying bare the numerous and complex dimensions of society as they relate to individuals. For example, Bradley Levinson, Douglas Foley and Dorothy Holland (1996, 34) suggest "historical process by definition constitutes cultural forms [characteristics of the individual] and structural features [institutional and organizational elements] of society and

must be a central aspect of any present-centered analysis.” Similarly, John Gray (1995),¹⁶ in his ethnographic study of the household in the Nepal, emphasizes the need to understand the individual and social elements in the household that influence the daily processes of the family. Kyong-dong Kim (1985), in his research on Korea, claims that while it is erroneous to completely oppose the assumption that individual attributes help explain social change, the neglect of “structural features and institutional arrangements that could either encourage or repress certain sets of attitudinal, cognitive, and motivational orientations of the individual” seriously faults endeavors to further this understanding. Specifically, Kim proposes that while psychological attributes form the core of the individual, individuals’ decisions are influenced by structures that are embedded within Asian society. In addition, D. M. Brandau and J. Collins (1994) endorse the employment of cultural and structural dimensions to understand behavior in their educational anthropological work.

Although relatively few in number, these scholars’ observations have driven home the critically important point that neither micro nor macro social elements can completely explain sociological phenomena. However, their works have fallen short of declaring the need for a new paradigm in educational participation research.¹⁷ They do not offer a satisfactory model and explanatory scheme for us to understand the complex nature of the sociological phenomena. To address their shortcoming and transcend them to arrive at a systematic analysis, I call the Integrated Sociological Paradigm into service. By identifying the intricate linkages between the subjective and objective dimensions of the macro social maintenance systems and the particular micro individual agencies, we may uncover the inherent and systemic factors at work in the educational decision-making process for Tharu girls. We will come to see how discussion is a social cauldron, wherein individuals participate and maneuver in socially inflected ways within conversations. Through analysis, we will also learn how the educational decisions for girls are forged by the matrices constructed of interactions between individuals and the related structural components of family, community, region, and nation.

Macro-Objective Dimension in Nepal

The Macro-Objective element identifies the maintenance systems, namely the organizations and institutions that define the society’s structural parameters. The Nepalization movement, occupational differentiation, and the family provide three of the most influential types of macro-objective structures for educational decision-making.

Nepalization is an ideology and a policy imposed by the government that has aimed at forging a common culture and a tight sense of national unity.¹⁸ As K. Pyakuryal noted,

[Nepalization] has become the aim of the government [which is largely comprised of high-caste Hindus]...to integrate different ethnic groups

towards a common goal of national development. Nepal aspires to achieve a common culture which could be the binding force, and attempts to create a socio-economic environment which could motivate everyone to achieve the national goals of development. (1982, 70)

Thus, Nepalization refers to both a method to identify a set of principles, beliefs, and ideas that first and foremost endorse Hindu philosophy and ideology, and the effort to establish it. Moreover, it promotes assimilation to a high-caste culture by mandating the use of Nepali as the language of instruction in the national school system.¹⁹ With Nepalization, the government has given a clear message to the citizens of Nepal: that is, the country's indigenous population and languages, as well as the existence and practice of various local religions (in other words, non-Hindu ones) are not as important as the hegemonic Hindu ideologies and practices.²⁰

Another maintenance system that seems particularly important to educational decision-making for girls is occupation differentiation.²¹ Originating in the Hindu caste system, people in Nepal are categorized by a traditional occupation, which is in turn associated with a surname that identifies their status in the caste system.²² The caste system is regarded as a legitimate (albeit unfair and illegal) hierarchical ordering because it is supported by individuals' deeply entrenched social beliefs of intergroup relations, which supposedly reflect the natural order of humanity (van Knippenberg 1989).

Macro-Subjective Dimension in Nepal

The Macro-Subjective quadrant depicts representations of the structural constraints and opportunities associated with maintenance systems. The conceptualization and implementation of Nepalization, which insidiously affirms the importance of Nepali as the national language, promotes Hinduism as the national religion, and rigidifies the caste system as a social structure, has serious consequences for all of Nepal's residents.²³ The Nepalization process is highly subjective and value-laden, and it hardly masks the ulterior motive of asserting and enhancing the existing hierarchy in favor of the high-caste Hindu elite. For instance, the adoption of the national language sends a clear message that the language of the high caste is superior to all other languages. Through the language of instruction, social identity is reinforced in the public schools. Such indoctrination through linguistic dominance certainly affects the Tharu women in Butawal, who do not speak Nepali. Many Tharu parents believe that if their children attend school, they will lose the language, and, with it, their culture.²⁴ Apart from language, caste presents another structural constraint. Individuals' hierarchical positioning in the caste system prescribes and governs socially acceptable and appropriate practices. High-caste Hindu family members—in Butawal, the Thakuris and Brahmins hold this position—benefit from their caste status in two ways. First, by virtue of their elevated caste status, together with the fact that they wield enormous economic power

in their community, many of these people are landowners and landlords. Second, they command much respect from the Tharu, who, by dint of customs and traditions defined by the caste system, subscribe quite faithfully to the existing social hierarchy. Such “subjective” conception of one’s role in the presence of caste’s “macro”-structural system figures prominently in the process of educational decision-making for the Tharus. The Tharus associate education with the high caste. Moreover, some Tharus place value on education (and their decisions to educate daughters) because their high-caste neighbors have adopted this philosophy and subsequent action.

Micro-Objective Dimension in Nepal

Actions of and interaction between individuals, as well as the pattern of these behaviors, are categorized in the Micro-Objective dimension of the model. The individuals’ identification with ethnicity is one example of a micro-objective element in Butawal. To borrow the definition of Thomas Eriksen (1993, 6), ethnicity refers to “relationships between groups whose members consider themselves distinctive, and these groups may be ranked hierarchically within a society.” This perceived distinctiveness relates to the individual or the micro, and can be identified in terms of behaviors, or the objective. At the individual level, ethnic interaction—the socializing of people from similar and different ethnic groups—refers to the actions of the individual, and the pattern of social interactions of individuals, families, and neighbors, as an ethnic network or an ethnic members’ set (Eriksen 1993).²⁵ Within such a network, based on principles of ethnic categorization, enduring interpersonal ties are created between members of the same category, while rules of interaction are engendered, organized, and observed to deal with contact between strangers.

A content analysis of observational data exposes that social patterns of behavior in Butawal are predicated on the entrenched notions of ethnicity. In turn, the social interactions between the Tharu and their Hindu neighbors (the high-caste Brahmins and Thakuris, and the low-caste Bikas, Kami, and Damai) have direct impact on the farmers’ perception of education. To explain this linkage, let us begin with a very brief description of the communal activities during my stay in the village. Tharus worked with Brahmins and Thakuris in the fields surrounding the village, although not on an equal basis. The Tharus were paid for their labor; the Thakuris and Brahmins owned the fields. The Tharu men, despite their low-caste status, interacted with the high-caste Brahmins during the day and talked with high-caste Brahmins during the evening hours. Conversations in courtyards focused on preparing the farm fields, planting seeds, the growing season, and the harvest. Tharu women, on the other hand, discussed with Brahmins matters related to the children and the care of the home. Conversations at the tailor’s home and the blacksmith’s shop also appeared to provide Tharus with the opportunity to share conversations with those from a higher caste. These interactions seemed

to have a direct impact on the ways Tharus perceived the value of education and their daughters' participation in the local school. Mrs. Tharu said, "I talk with Mrs. Lamichhanne. She wants to send her boys to school so that they can be successful. Mrs. Bahadur [Thakuri] sends her daughter to school so that she can learn to read and write. This is important. I also want to send my sons and daughters."²⁶ The Tharus who socialized with high-caste neighbors with daughters in school were more likely to send their own daughter to school than those who did not socialize with high-caste neighbors. However, socializing with low-caste neighbors who sent their daughter to school did not yield the same consequence. For example, even when the Tharu women spoke with the Kami and Damai women about schooling, those conversations did not appear to influence Tharu women's opinions of education, whereas those with the high-caste apparently did.

The pattern of interaction suggests that there is a direct influence of high-caste families' educational decisions with regard to their attitudes toward the education of daughters, perceptions about schooling for their daughters, and valuation of and beliefs about education for their girls for some Tharu women. This conclusion was corroborated by the analysis of the ethnicity survey I conducted, which uncovered the influence of the high-caste Hindus (who sent their own daughters to school) on the Tharus who socialized with them. In the privacy of the Tharu home, mothers and fathers (and sometimes grandfathers and uncles) raised the question of education for daughters. The Tharus who focused on their ethnic identification as Tharus seemed to relate ethnicity to educational advancement, pointing to the case of the high-caste Hindus who were educated and chose to send their own daughters to school. Moreover, the Tharu who engaged in conversations with the high caste also seemed to believe education was good for their own daughters more often than the Tharus who did not socialize with the high-caste village neighbors.²⁷

As the case study (chapter 1) indicates, some Tharu women endorsed the idea of their daughters' education, but other Tharu women either did not raise the issue of their daughters' educational participation or spoke against their daughters' participation in the village school. In some cases where a Tharu mother disagreed with the decision to send a daughter to school, she had not conversed with the high-caste Brahmins who sent their daughters to school.²⁸

Just as ethnic identity (the identification of self as Tharu), and ethnic interaction (the degree to which and frequency with which the Tharu socialize with those of different castes residing in the village) appear to play a role in the educational decision-making process, so does religion. Religiosity, another dimension of the micro-objective quadrant, refers to the ways in which and extent to which an individual experiences religion. The religious actions of men and women in the village, in terms of religious ritual, as well as the pattern of these behaviors, also relate to the case of educational decision-making in Butawal.²⁹ Although this was not the case in all Tharu families in Butawal,

the role of religion appeared to play a significant role in some families' homes and their decisions for daughters' education.

In Butawal, many of the Tharu men worship deities on a regular basis. Tharus believe that the universe is peopled by several kinds of spirits. Spirits can be either benevolent or malevolent. The benevolent ones are approached with ritual performances, prayers, and offerings in order to assure a happy and peaceful life. Benevolent spirits which have proven helpful to particular people are represented in their courtyard shrine or the deity room in the home. The malevolent spirits must be checked, either by pleasing them with offerings or by controlling them through spells, ritual threats, or other magic.

Men in Butawal expressed devotion to Hindu and Buddhist gods Sīta who is an epitome of unquestioning surrender and sacrifice, Saraswatī (Goddess of learning), Durgā (Goddess of protection and power), and Kalī (Goddess of power). They also worshipped the Hindu gods Rama and Krishna.³⁰ The Tharus also worship gods specifically known to the Tharu. Kalika, the goddess who presides over life and death and who wields supreme power in the universe, and Bhara (medicine man), who looks to Kalika as the special patroness of his magical arts and seeks her blessings by reciting mantras, are also popular deities among the Tharu. Another deity revered by the Tharus is Bhairava or Mahadeo, who is worshipped as the god of reproduction and not the god of destruction as among the Hindus.

Tharu men from three families appeared to worship the gods on a regular basis. They stated that they regularly visited the deity room to pray for something or to seek the god's advice. On other occasions, I visited the home when the male member of the family was in the deity room apparently praying to the gods represented at the altar, which is a clay structure approximately three feet long and two feet deep that sits on the floor.³¹ The action of religious ritual amongst the men in these Tharu families represents the micro-objective quadrant for individuals' actions can be witnessed and counted.

Tharu women experienced religious practice differently. The women repeatedly told me that they do not participate in religious ritual; however, I learned that they participate at the onset of adolescence (prior to marriage) and during the festival times, when they are called upon to prepare food offerings for the gods. This simple observation, would appear to mean little in the grand scheme of things. If one probes the "micro-subjective" element of religion in the Tharus' lives, however, we find it extremely important to decision-making in the Tharu household.

Micro-Subjective Dimension in Nepal

Religiosity, or how a Tharu individual identifies with the supernatural "other" to obtain a desired outcome, constitutes an important dimension in the social life and decision making of the family. Tharu women believe in religion and

the gods and spirits that represent it. Tharu men also pledge support for, as well as actively praying to, the gods and spirits. This identification with religion is reflected in specific actions. In the case when the male and female members of the family cannot come to a conclusion, religious ritual is sometimes used to help the “family”—i.e., adult males—make a decision. In this case, Tharu men pray to the gods for advice; Tharu women do not participate in this religious ritual. The exclusion from the consultation with gods has taught Tharu women that they do not need to participate in the religious experience. It can also be interpreted as their prohibition from voicing their opinion, which might have been in support of or in opposition to the problem under discussion. The fact that women are excluded from this ritual hammers home a clear message—men’s voices (in the form of the religious ritual) are more important and play a superior role in the decision-making process. This ritual has also been used in cases when the family could not reach consensus regarding the enrollment of the daughter in the village’s school. After the men met, and, reportedly conferred with the god, the outcome, in each case, favored the opinion of the male family member. In other words, in this case, women are expected to support men’s roles in prayer to the gods by maintaining the deity room in the household and the deity temple in the courtyard, but are not expected to use it themselves. Being conditioned to assume the role of caretaker instead of practitioner, Tharu women learn that they do not possess control over an outcome that is related to religious ritual. Rather, they are expected to support men’s role (and power) in this process. Tharu men draw on supernatural intervention to support their opinion, whereas Tharu women do not have this option available to them.

The Intersection of the Quadrants: Engendering Power Structures

As we have seen, the Integrated Social Paradigm may be fruitfully applied in the case of Nepal with special reference to the education of Tharu girls. The relationships between the macro and micro and the objective and subjective determine how the individual, interacting with and influenced by a gendered environment, makes educational decisions for daughters. Based on our findings so far, we may further probe the ways in which the relationships between macro/micro and subjective/objective create interlocking power structures by using the empirical data I gathered in Butawal.³²

Steven Luke’s notions of power (1974) are especially pertinent to this discussion of voice within the stratified social structures. Power is not only that which can be observed in the form of individualistic behavior. Power includes socially constructed and culturally patterned bias that is evident in the behavior of groups and the practices of institutions. Power structures in this sense, deeply embedded within traditionally accepted roles and processes, may either go unrecognized or be denied to exist. In such a situation, individuals

either deny existing conditions or believe that “fate” or “individual misfortune” rather than “social injustice” are the cause of inferior status or subordinate position. Second, the power exhibited during is determined by a preset political agenda. Power in this view no longer rests only in the ability of some actors to initiate, decide, and veto decisions, but also in their ability to confine decision-making to safe issues. It suggests that power lies in the ability to exclude options, whether through the process of social forces and institutional practices or through individuals’ decisions. Third, it asserts that power, whether overt or covert, is observable, and that latent conflict may constitute a facet of power. It also emphasizes the subjective nature of issues that, unlike objective behaviors, cannot be measured through observation. In this case, power may suppress not only the decision-making agenda, but also from the consciousness of the various parties involved.

Gender, ethnicity, and religion, as forms and expressions of power, encapsulate individuals in a particular sociocultural environment which often conditions and delimits educational decision-making as far as girls are concerned. In fact, we need to highlight the social phenomena and elements of gender, ethnicity, and religion as *social power* in order to appreciate their pervasiveness and persuasiveness. This fundamental fact is not clearly articulated in the Integrated Sociological Paradigm. My discourse here thus complements and amplifies the existing framework that assists our understanding of educational undertakings.

Gender, Ethnicity, and Power

We position gender as the *vinculum*, the common denominator, that serves as a structural framework in any society.³³ As feminist theory has reminded us, we must not use gender as a category of analysis, an independent variable that we can conveniently remove from a particular context. Gender (as a macro structure) and individuals’ identification with it (micro perspective) cannot be adequately understood, or even perceived, except as one element of the complex interrelationships with other systems of identification and hierarchy. In other words, we seek to uncover the relationship between the structural components in a society and the ways in which individuals, in the context of their gendered relationships, relate to those institutions. The investigative and critical analysis of the social, political, cultural, and economic locations of relationships between women and men uncover the interrelationships (Mohanty 1991). The challenge of ideating gender in this way, as a vehicle to understand locations of relationships, resides in a fundamental reconceptualization of our categories of analysis so that differences can be historically specified, socially contextualized, personally situated, and understood as part of larger political and social processes and systems. Thus, the kinds of daily life activities socially assigned to different genders or classes or races within local social

systems can provide illuminating possibilities for observing and explaining systemic relations between “what one does” and “what one can know.”

The power of gender permeates the daily lives of the Tharu. Clearly, Tharu women and men assume roles defined by the gendered space inside and outside the home. These roles support clearly differentiated responsibilities for women and for men. Tharu women appear to have some control over what takes place in the home; Tharu men appear to have control over matters outside the home. Educational decisions are considered “outside the home” decisions. Although it is clear that the practical problem caused by sending a daughter to school is the reduction of human power to do house-related work, and the mother is the person who generally makes the “inside the home” decisions, in fact the father makes the final decision to send (or not to send) a daughter to school. If the Tharu mother truly maintained the power to determine matters for “inside the home,” she would be the one to make the decision on behalf of the daughter. In my study of Butawal, I found only one case where a Tharu women decided if her daughter should attend school. In this case, her family included an adult son, an adolescent-age daughter, and herself. Her husband lived in central Nepal. Obviously, she made the decision because of the absence of the normal superior authority, her husband.

The gender issue intersects with ethnicity, in that Tharu women do consult with their counterparts in the upper caste. Thus, a certain social fellowship based on gender seems to have existed. In Butawal, ethnic-cum-caste relationships between high-caste Hindus (both Brahmins and Thakuris) and the indigenous Tharus do occur, even though both sides acknowledge the ethnic divide. One day, late in the afternoon, Mrs. Tharu, a middle-aged woman with two children, came to the high-caste Lamichaane house with a letter from her husband. Since she could not read the note, she asked Mrs. Lamichaane to read it for her. (In this case, the letter was from her husband, who said that he had found another wife in Kathmandu and would not return home.) Mrs. Tharu asked for Mrs. Lamichanne’s advice. Although this incident does not directly pertain to the issue of making decisions on schooling, it does show another example of a way in which such interaction is a social medium through which the Tharu acquire information and ideas which may have bearings on their lives.³⁴

Indeed, as we have shown, interactions like this one between the Tharus and the upper caste do appear to influence the Tharus’ perceptions of girls’ education. The Tharus who sent children to school socialized with members of the high-caste Hindu groups (including Brahmins and Thakuris) more frequently than did Tharus who did not send girls to school. This is evident in both the participant observations of my residence in the village and the survey data analyses. Tharu women regularly visited the homes of the Brahmin women (and several of the Thakuri women). On the other hand, Tharu men did not seem to intermingle with Hindu men in the same social way. Their contacts were mostly or almost exclusively work-related. For instance, Tharu men work alongside Brahmin and Thakuri men in the fields, since the Brahmin own their

own land, and the Tharus work mostly on Brahmins' land. But the fields are adjacent to each other; hence the close contact, because of their close physical proximity. In addition, during several seasons the Tharus help the Brahmin with harvests, during which time they converse. Male Tharus who converse with the low-caste Hindus in the village (the blacksmith and the tailor) whose daughters went to school never indicate that they want to do the same. Our Multi-Ethnic Survey Questionnaire (Phinney 1992) data analysis, as indicated earlier, revealed that those who interact with people from high castes are more inclined to send their daughters to school than those who do not. In-depth interview data substantiated this interpretation. Interviews revealed that Tharus believed that emulating the behaviors of the high-caste Hindus would raise their own social rank. They appeared to believe that a Tharu who adopted high-caste Hindu practices and became more like the high-caste Hindu (by getting a formal education or wearing a *tikka* on the forehead or a sari on the body, for instance neither of which are common among Tharu women), is able to reach a higher status.

In the context of ethnicity and gender, individuals' ingrained attitudes toward education very much determined parents' decisions. For example, generally speaking, Tharu men who knew Nepali had higher attitude-toward-education scores than Tharu women, who do not speak Nepali and who tend to believe that the use of the language in school would diminish the daughters' ties to the Tharu language and culture. Some Tharu women believed that it was *because* of their Tharu heritage that Tharu women did not receive a formal education, and that their own daughters would not (and, in some cases, should not) receive a formal education in the village school. Other Tharu women wanted to adopt high-caste Brahmin and Thakuri habits (including dress and jewelry), and believed that education would provide their daughters with opportunities that they themselves did not have. These Tharu women supported their daughter's formal education.³⁵ Such are the intriguing ways in which gender and ethnicity intersect, forming a sort of tangible social power that is often brought to bear on education.

Gender, Religion, and Power

Such power—and again, this social phenomenon is gendered—is also much propelled by the ways in which religion is conceptualized (subjective dimension) and practiced (objective dimension). Tharu women and men assume varying religious roles in the village. Women are the caretakers of the small household temples, both inside and outside of the Tharus' homes. They maintain the deity room in the household and keep the outside temple area clear of debris that falls from courtyard trees. The Tharu men use these sites very differently. Men worship the deities in the deity room and at the outside temple. Although not all Tharu men in the village worship, the different access to religion among women and men is worth mentioning.

The differentiation of religious caretaker on the one hand, and religious practitioner on the other, is evidence of how gender determines religious power. Tharu women and men accept unequal roles (i.e., power differential) in religious participation based on gender. Women worship the gods only once in their lifetime, at the ceremony celebrating passage to adolescence. For the rest of their lives, they serve the gods, the spirits, *and* their husbands during religious festivals by preparing the offerings to the icons and the special meals that accompany the celebrations, not to mention the daily maintenance of the deity room and outdoor shrine. Men, on the other hand, experience religious ritual and live their religious life quite differently. Men not only participate in the festivals on special days, but they also pray to gods throughout the year when blessings are desired. Since they are the only ones who are socialized to ask for divine intervention, males in the community are imbued with a form of power that is denied to women. For example, during one of my stays, several families resorted to religious ritual and supplication as a way to make a final decision. In these cases, the women in the families offer their opinions regarding their daughter's education, but they are not invited to participate in the religious ritual, hence depriving them of the power based on religiosity. One woman did express to me their disgruntlement (micro-subjective) that only men have the right to engage in such practices, yet the social maintenance system (macro-objective) is such that their voices are perforce silenced. Other Tharu women submit to fate and tradition, about which they could do little—again, evidence of the relation between agency and structure.

Conclusion: Power Structures and Education

Methodological relationism in general, and the Integrated Sociological Paradigm in particular, illustrate the inexorable existence and convergence of the micro (individual agency) and macro (social structuring). Applying their theoretical insights, we came to the conclusion that in studying girls' participation, we must identify the larger social elements (gender, ethnicity, and ethnic interaction, and religion and religiosity) that create power structures (caste, social hierarchy, sexual segregation), which in turn circumscribe individual action regarding educational decisions for daughters. Given this integrated and holistic approach, we are in a better position to ask fruitful questions about the situation of girls' education in Nepal.

What are the chances that a Tharu Nepali girl will enroll and stay in school? For the answer to this question, we must look beyond the immediate family to the macro factors. There are numerous layers in the social-individual world in which the Tharu parents and children live. Each layer, as it were, constitutes a factor influencing the chances for girls' education. The most obvious structural system in the discussion of educational policy is the educational system itself, with its stated policies. It is shaped by Education for

All, a document of policies and philosophies that was devised and supported by international agency development specialists and governmental officials. The document laudably calls for every child's participation in the educational system. Precisely because it fails to recognize, acknowledge, and come to grips with the host of microscopic and macroscopic elements that make up the complex world of Nepali culture, understood in the broad anthropological sense, its policies could not be effectively disseminated at the local level, where they flounder. Such educational policy does not recognize the local community and its school(s) as a structural element. The schools in the local villages, towns, and cities could have provided the most suitable sites for the promotion of the EFA policy. Yet in the first place, they are not given due attention in the document promulgated at the international level. In the second, there has not been any comprehensive understanding of the welter of factors that contribute to the success or failure of educational endeavor. Consequently, in Nepal, we see one-sided and top-down educational policies organized by Hindus who naturally support the government's ideological and political mission to nationalize the country according to Hindu and Nepali guidelines. This translates into a curriculum based on the national language (Nepali), dictated by development agencies ignoring those macro and micro elements constantly at work. Such ideologically and politically charged policy does not accommodate the interests of the adults who will make the decision to enroll and retain children in school, thereby limiting the chances that some children will benefit from its service. In particular, we see how girls' education is adversely affected and hampered when an educational policy is not properly underpinned by a sound philosophy based on a comprehensive and integrated understanding of Nepal's society and individuals.

In short, it is only through coming to grips with the multivalent and multivocal context that we may critically and usefully rethink specific educational policies. Understanding why individuals act the way they do in terms of the relevant conditions and factors of social structures, we also come to understand what a government may practically and effectively offer its citizens. In a broad way, we unpack and unravel the persistent and vexing problem of girls' education using empirical data from a Nepali village. Concepts and frameworks proffered by previous research into my own holistic conception of educational policy as a cultural and social project reveals the influence of gender, ethnicity, and religiosity, independently and as a confluence of forces on parental decisions about a Tharu daughter's educational future.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the 2002 American Educational Research Association conference.
2. Patricia Madoo Lengermann and Jill Niebrugger-Brantley (1990) take this notion one step further by suggesting the need to focus on the apparent separation

- between micro experience and macro structures, and trying to illuminate the points of interface in their review of feminist thought.
3. As early as 1981, Roger R. Woock noted the need for the development of an integrated social foundation and framework that would provide a stronger base for developments in comparative and international education. Woock's work also revisits the structural functionalism and positivist foundations that have provided useful but incomplete theories and methods (such as survey methods) to understand the field. Most recently, Patricia Broadfoot (2000) calls for a study of comparative and international education issues that utilizes an integrated perspective.
 4. It should be noted that this paradigm should reflect both the ideas of the participant and the ideas of the researcher. Additional information about the special significance of women's voices is explored and examined in chapter 4.
 5. The agency/structure debate in Europe espouses similar qualities of the micro/macro debate in the United States. Agency generally refers to the micro level, individual human actors; however, it can also refer to collectives that act. For example, note Anthony Giddens's structuration theory (1979, 1982, 1984) and Margaret S. Archer's interest in morphogenesis (1982), as well as her later concern for the linkage between culture and agency. T. R. Burns and H. Flam's power and structure (1986), P. Abrams's historical structuring (1982), and Pierre Bourdieu's habits and field (1977, 1989) are examples of European models that emphasize the importance and existence of both agency and structure. European sociologists use structure to mean large-scale social structures; however, they also refer to structures such as those involved in human interaction. Some adopt one specific structure as central, such as relations of social domination found in political institutions and organizations, while others focus on an array of social structures such as bureaucracy, the polity, the economy, and religion.
 6. Macro-extreme theories include structural functionalism, conflict theory, and some varieties of new Marxian theory (especially economic determinism and structural Marxist theory). Most forms of structuralism dominate this body of work. Social structural functionalism has its roots in the work of Comte, Spencer, and Durkheim and their interest in organicism, societal needs, and, more pointedly, structures and functions. The other major alternative to structural functionalism was conflict theory. In his seminal work, Ralph Dahrendorf (1959) focused on conflict and coercion rather than normative constraint as a source of social change. Neo-Marxist sociological theory integrates the subjective perspective into the basic tenets of the structurally based theory. These works include economic determinism, Hegelian Marxism, critical theory, structural Marxism, neo-Marxian economic sociology, and historically oriented Marxism, including Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory.
 7. Symbolic interactions, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and exchange theory typified the micro-extreme position. H. Blumer (1969), George Homans (1974), and Harold Garfinkel (1967) have worked from this perspective.
 8. I would also argue that this approach, both the micro and the macro, originates from the Western, and usually male, perspective. In chapter 4, I argue that

identification of that which contributes to a social phenomenon must come from the research participant, especially women, since their voice has been absent from much of past literature. The discussion of these oppositional theories and their interpretations has also occurred in Europe.

9. See Abraham Edel (1959), Alford and Friedland (1985), Wiley (1988), and Ritzer and Gindoff (1994).
10. Chapter 4 extends this chapter to specifically reveal the ways in which feminist standpoint perspective, based on the notions of feminist standpoint theory, complements the methodological relationism framework and, in so doing, offers a more complete framework from which to understand the phenomenon.
11. This definition is based on the work of James House (1990).
12. Later, James House (1991, 50) grappled with "individual behavior and social organization as joint functions of properties of the individual and of the social situation" (48–49) in an effort to "understand, explain, and predict consequential real-life phenomena and problems."
13. It should be noted, as Ritzer does in his work, that levels are differentiated for the purpose of analysis.
14. Ritzer provides an extensive review of the literature that relates to and grounds this work on the integrated sociological paradigm. See George Ritzer (1991) for details. It should be noted that Ritzer's works are more apt to give examples of elements that fit into each of the quadrants. I expanded his definition of each quadrant based on the reading of integrated sociological theory and their relationship to my case study in Nepal.
15. George Ritzer (1990) notes this important relationship, but does little to develop the concept in his works. The concept of external plurality refers to the co-existence of various social dimensions in a particular society. Andre Drooger (1995) also refers to the micro/macro relationships with regard to religion. He claims that these facets work with each other on a more or less equal basis as dependent cultural institutions and spheres of influence. The concept of internal plurality, on the other hand, refers to the diversity of beliefs and practices within the external pluralities of the same social system.
16. John N. Gray refers to the individual elements as "culture" and the social elements as "structural."
17. Alan Barcan (1993, 43) claims that "the sociology of education suggests the primacy of sociology in providing a theoretical and methodological base of the examination of educational developments."
18. Fredrick Gaige (1975) is credited for coining this term.
19. Street demonstrations have been a regular but infrequent show of public action and reaction to civil issues in Nepal. Most recently (May and June 2000 and December 2000) street protesters argued the need for indigenous language in schools. Some Tibetan schools teach Tibetan and Nepali. English is another common language taught in the school system but is not the language of instruction used in the public school system.
20. There has been a history of regular but inconsequential demonstrations by members from other language and ethnic groups, particularly in the Terai. The

Nepali census (2000) indicates the presence of twenty-four ethnic groups and sixteen religions.

21. Politicians employed this traditional conceptualization of the caste system in Nepal with the Muluki Ain legal code of 1854, which officially operated until 1963. Although considered illegal after that date (an objective action), the country silently retains the use of the Muluki Ain, which divides the people into five major hierarchically ranked groupings or levels. The top four of these are the four Varna (categories) described by Manu, the Hindu Lawgiver, and include the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Shudras, under which numerous headings are ordered.
22. See chapter 5 for a historical explanation of occupational differentiation according to the caste system.
23. André Beteille (1965, 46) defines caste as “a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, heredity membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system.”
24. This assertion is more predominant in the voices of Tharu women regarding their daughters than Tharu men.
25. This also applies to the case of gendered relationships in the family and in a community. Social theorists Shahnaz Khan, Minh-Ha Trinh, Paul Gilroy, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Stuart Hall suggest that notions of “original” culture and identity have given way to the notion that individuals’ daily interactions (micro-objective) contribute to and develop their expressions of culture, which relates to the micro-subjective dimension.
26. Interview data, January 3, 2001.
27. It should be noted that fathers and mothers (men and women) did not have equal opportunities to voice their opinion during this process. This issue will be discussed at length in other sections of the chapter and other chapters.
28. We could make a stronger case if we found that mothers shared an equal voice in the educational decision-making process and had a say in the final decision to enroll a daughter in school. This was not the case in Butawal, but the repeated instances of ethnic interaction, and its consequences, warranted inquiry.
29. In certain Tharu families, repeated references to the deity room, the courtyard shrine, and the village shrine warranted investigation.
30. A legitimate and valuable question to investigate is the ways in which and extent to which indigenous religious and ethnic beliefs and traditions have influenced Buddhist and Hindu religions.
31. During my fieldwork, other men told me that they visited Mr. Tharu, the village’s guru. I visited Mr. Tharu on several occasions. He farmed on a regular basis when he was not intoxicated, but he stated that he also offered advice to men who visited him. I believe that the *guruwa* was intoxicated when I visited him more often than he was sober. Also, I never witnessed an individual who stopped by his home for a religious consultation, as he claimed. His home is located on the main path into the village. I walked by his house regularly on my way to the fields.

32. Joan Alway (1995) addresses the need for sociology to include feminist thought but does not provide a pragmatic method to accomplish this.
33. Kathleen Weiler (1998, 347) claims, "Gender needs to be made a major category of analysis in historical research."
34. Although Mrs. Tharu did not offer this idea, I wonder if this experience influenced decisions that she would make to educate her own daughter. In this case, the upper caste women serve the same role for Tharu women that the duct as serve for some Tharu men. Although both identify these influential forces, only Tharu men have the power to use that force to obtain their objective.
35. These conclusions were based on data analysis during my fieldwork from 1997 to 2002.

Feminist Thought and Its Application to Girls' Education in Nepal¹

Feminist thought helps us better understand the working of the social world because it expands our perspectives and horizons of our world by including and recognizing women as crucial players. Feminist scholarship brings women's voice into our conversation about reality and life, thereby disrupting the conventional masculine order of things by exploring the multiple and complex pathways of knowledge. Moreover, it develops a women-centered approach to knowledge, which not only listens to the voices of women, but also tunes in to those of men. Specifically, for our purposes, feminist thought offers us a praxis-oriented approach to understanding women's roles. That is, it actively ferrets out and probes the problems of education by duly focusing on women, with a view to practically ameliorating their conditions on a practical level—in other words, providing better access to education.

This chapter not only contributes to feminist thought, but it also enhances and complements feminist studies in two ways. First, by unveiling the ways women have been identified as mere *objects* in both the Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) literature, we illuminate the failure of such literature and scholarship to capture women's perceptions of critical issues, such as education. Recognizing the limitations of the study of women as objects, we offer Multi-Perspectivity (MP) as an epistemology and methodology that positions women as the *subject* in research. In doing so, we show how women's concerns and problems can be better understood by situating them in a context that exposes the unique and particular factors that pertain to women as they lead their lives in their social circles. As we lay bare these concerns, problems, and factors, we come to see how women actually contribute to the educational decision-making process for her daughters. First, a brief review of WID and GAD literature is in order, acknowledging their contributions while also noting their shortcomings.

Women in Development (WID) Approach

WID literature emerged in response to policymakers' one-sided depiction of women as housewives, mothers, and at-risk producers (Jaquette and Staudt 1988). It attributes women's inferior status and social position to their exclusion from public spaces, largely a result of their limited employment opportunities (Harcourt 1994). Informed by the modernization theory, which aims at creating a checklist of supposedly value-free ingredients crucial to development, WID literature stresses the paramount importance of women's participation in the economic marketplace to enhance their status in society. In other words, women's advancement, or development, will be achieved primarily by their access to a wider range of occupations, which will eventually bring them positions with decision-making power (Upadhyaya 1996).

In WID thought, there are three generally recognized foci that encapsulate and address the causes of women's oppression—welfare, antipoverty, and equity.² Caroline Moser (1993), a leading figure in the development literature, elaborates on these perspectives with her five categories of WID literature: the welfare approach (1950–1970); the equity approach (1975–1985);³ the antipoverty approach (1970s and beyond);⁴ efficiency;⁵ and empowerment (1975 onwards).⁶

WID literature is based on the feminist theories of the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, Sarah Grimke, Harriet Taylor, and John Stuart Mill. They all made the central argument that women's unequal status and social position could be attributed to their exclusion from the public sphere, largely due to the socially sanctioned division of labor between the sexes. Therefore, they advocate the transformation of the sexual division of labor and the overturning of the norms of masculinity to achieve equal economic opportunities. Such moves are believed to be the keys to raising the status of women. Today, liberal feminists, guided by economic imperatives, promote the accessible availability of diverse occupations for women (Young 1993).

Other works belonging to the category of the WID literature are built upon Marxist feminist theories.⁷ Based on the tenets of classic Marxism, which identifies capitalism as the source of class inequity, these Marxist feminists lay blame on the assumptions and operation of capitalist society as the principal cause of women's oppression. The very nature of the economic order, which favors males in a superior position, places women in an inferior position. In particular, Marxist feminism concentrates on how women perform domestic labor at no financial gain and explains how women are excluded from economic endeavors that generate power (Hartmann 1979; Walby 1990).

An offshoot of the Marxist group is the socialist feminist perspective. Whereas the Marxists believe that women's exclusion from the market economy eliminates altogether the possibility of fitting them into the class

categories of either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, socialist feminists see an analogy between women and the proletariat, and therefore the need for women to recognize their own oppressed condition as wage or nonwage earners (Donovan 1998). For example, Heidi Hartmann considers the wage differential a central contributor to women's subjugation. "Family wage," paid to the male, is often viewed as money that is equally shared and used by both adult members of the family. But simply using, or spending, a husband's earnings, without access to individual earning potential neither provides women with power nor access to it (Donovan 1998). Still, the socialist feminists premise their arguments primarily on economic grounds.

By contrast, dependency feminism begins its discourse by analyzing women's domestic labor as a subsidy to the process of capital accumulation, but it then challenges the boundaries of traditional Marxist analysis. Not only do dependency feminists locate women primarily in the private economic sphere and therefore deem it as irrelevant to the workings of capital (Kabeer 1994), but they also link the economic order with social order to explain women's oppression. In particular, they attribute the perpetuation of women's oppression to patriarchal domination, which is both the cause and result of the economic world order that deprives women of power. Thus, from the domain of economic clout, they move into the realm of social values and practices that consolidate a hierarchically ordered world in which women have far fewer opportunities of any sort at all. Such a "world" exists in the context of a household, and then extends outward to community, state, and society at large.

In sum, WID literature prevalent during the 1970s explains women's oppression and their low status in terms of the economic inequity in the marketplace, and then the social inequity in the household as a cause of their inferiority.⁸ Methodologically, WID analyzes the situation and phenomena of women's subjugation coolly and optimistically, envisioning ending women's oppression simply by ending their exclusion from public life. WID naively asserts the central notion that entry into the public sphere would reduce and maybe even eliminate women's artificially induced inferiority.

Although WID's tenets were useful in guiding the early investigations of women's subordination, there are five major deficiencies in this approach to the study of women's contribution to the development process, in which education is considered a key element.⁹ First, WID literature never really questions the liberal economic theory that underpins the rhetoric and practice of economic development (Tinker 1990). WID literature accepts the fact that in a liberal economic system, unequal portions of work and responsibility in general are taken for granted. Women's status can indeed be enhanced, but they will simply do what men have done. There is not keen appreciation that the system may be altered and improved in such a way that questions the society's basic assumptions. For example, the WID approach cannot quite

adequately explain and represent the case of the Tharu family whose husband and wife work daily side by side in the field, but whose reimbursement for the crops that are harvested is paid directly to the male. In other words, the woman *does* work in the public economic sphere, but she is not rewarded accordingly in a public way. Nor does WID consider Mrs. Tharu's contribution as an earner in the marketplace who weaves and sells colorful vegetable baskets during the sweltering months when farming does not require work in the fields. In a nutshell, WID literature neither analyzes how a woman's extra work and her income contribute to the family purse, nor the ways in which her income affects the family unit economically or psychologically. Second, the WID approach generally traces the inception of women's oppression to the onset of capitalism. Not only does this claim seem to be a forced argument designed to fit a preconceived notion defined by parameters of a market-based capitalist economy, but it ignores the fact that women's subordination can be readily discerned in noncapitalist societies. Third, by centering on women without considering them in conjunction with the existing historic and cultural factors at work in society, WID literature gives short shrift to the burden of history and the persistent cultural forces that have created divisions among women (Young 1993). It ignores the fact that not all women may achieve power according to one model of progress. For instance, in Nepal, a Tharu woman, a member of an ethnic group that is associated with the lower caste, is in quite a different situation from a Christian woman with a socially distinguished family background. In other words, WID tends to extol exceptional women as the models for advancement, those who have gained social recognition in the public sphere regardless of family history, economic status, social origin, and religious affiliation. Fourth, original Marxist thought, upon which a significant portion of WID literature is based, was not developed as a means of exploring gender divisions; it overtly emphasized the political economy.¹⁰ Therefore, it leaves unanswered questions regarding women's roles in the marketplace, roles that can be understood only in terms other than economic materialism and determinism (Koczberski 1998). For example, it neither accounts for the ways in which family members negotiate roles and responsibilities nor portrays the ways in which power, or the lack thereof, influences strategies that are available to family members. Fifth, WID does not offer concrete strategies for introducing women into the public sphere and for providing nonconventional forms of employment. This lack of planning strategy for women is evident in the consecutive five-year development plans in Nepal. Women were not mentioned specifically in the plans until 1980, even though WID literature, which influenced development work and strategic plans, had first been produced ten years earlier.

In conclusion, WID literature depicts women as oppressed individuals whose own situation is identified by the universally accepted notion of hierarchy in a liberal economic system that determines status. In this sense,

women are viewed as mere objects in the process of advancement. Analysis of this body of literature has revealed that its narrow lens has restricted and distorted our understanding of the causes of women's systemically inferior status. Nonetheless, capitalizing on the results of early work done in the field, scholars have been able to reconceptualize the problem in terms of gender, aiming to get to the root causes of women's oppression.

What is gender and why is it central in our inquiry? Naila Kabeer (1994) describes gender as a process in which a biological, categorical distinction of self shifts to a socially prescribed gendered category of self defined in terms of masculinity and femininity. Kabeer thus views gender as an interactive dimension of all "institutional locations" and "organizational relations" that influence the individual identities, present practices, and future opportunities of women and men in very specific ways. In this sense, gender depicts the individual who becomes woman (or man) by dint of her/his existence in the intertwined relationship with the socially predetermined conditions, circumstances, and situations that create opportunities and constraints. Gender is biology (sex) writ socially large. The label "woman" is not merely a biological fact but a social construct animated by social values and norms. Lorraine Code (1993, 20), to cite another example, emphasizes the importance of social structures in her notion of gender:

Gender is not an enclosed category, for it is always interwoven with such other social political-historical locations as class, race, and ethnicity, to mention only a few. It is experienced differently, and it plays differently into structures of power and dominance at its diverse intersections with other specificity.

This emphasis on gender has led to the growth of the interpretative framework of "Gender and Development" (GAD).

Gender and Development (GAD)

The GAD movement embraces a comprehensive definition of gender by taking a macroscopic perspective of society as the primary force that shapes women's status.¹¹ Carolyn Moser (1993) proffers the definition that GAD is a "holistic . . . conceptualization and analysis" that requires a ". . . fundamental re-examination of social structures and institutions toward a rethinking by hierarchical gender relations" (Young 1993, 135).¹² Three tenets are dominant in this literature.¹³

First, GAD literature endorses a holistic conceptualization and analysis of the problems women face in order to explain women's unequal status (Moser 1993). Amplifying the issues of welfare, antipoverty, and equity promoted in WID, GAD formulates a macroscopic framework, whose main thrust is to

comprehend the main features of social organization, economic and political life that shape a particular community.¹⁴ Second, it assumes that gender relates to culturally specific forms of social inequality, inherent within particular social and cultural institutions. In this sense, gender is

a category of analysis [that] cannot be abstracted from a particular context while other factors are held stable. . . . Gender identity cannot be adequately understood—or even *perceived*—except as a component of complex inter-relationships with other systems of identification and hierarchy. (Alcoff and Potter 1993, 3)¹⁵

Unlike WID, which views women as a “pure or solitary influence” (Alcoff and Potter 1993, 3), GAD recognizes that hierarchically structured *gender relations* evolve and function in experiences that are created and perpetuated in the social order. In other words, gender relations are social relations that “mediate the ways in which individuals experience structural forces.”¹⁶

Third, this body of literature identifies the particular social-structural categories (e.g., caste, class, race and, to a lesser extent, religion) and examines the ways in which the imbalances of rights and obligations in these areas create and perpetuate power and privilege. GAD acknowledges that women play specific roles in their homes and communities. The roles in which women engage contribute to relationships that are often determined along gender lines (and divisions) and understood in terms of relations. Achieved relations are those established on the basis of a person’s involvement in economic and social life. In this sense, GAD literature generally views women as active participants rather than passive recipients in their lives. But it does not assume that women always recognize various forms of inequality (Visvanathan, Duggan, Nisonoff, and Wiegiersma 1997; Heward 1999).

Although GAD scholarship provides a different and helpful perspective from which to analyze women’s position in society, it too is not without problems. First, theoretical positions that ground much of the GAD literature do lead to partial and distorted representation of knowledge producers. The reason is that GAD still often relies on male-dominated and male-oriented history to provide the empirical basis for its theories. Therefore, it often gives a partial and biased depiction of knowledge producers. Knowledge production can be thought of in two ways. In the first way, western European and American theories that have been developed by men are often used as the foundation for GAD studies. In the second way, the vast majority of survey questionnaires data offered by participants in the field are usually the voices of men. Women’s voices are rarely reported.

Second, and to an alarming extent, the GAD literature has failed to explore, examine, and report the marginalized voice, that is, the woman’s voice.¹⁷ For example, very often, we survey the “head of the household” for *his*

opinions regarding his daughters' education. My experiences in Nepal demonstrate that this may be the case in many field settings, where only the male voice is heard. In Butawal, men welcomed me into their homes. They were eager to share their opinions of life in the village and the factors that influenced his family's decision to enroll a daughter in school. Women in Butawal, however, met my interest with skepticism. They had never been asked their opinion by a foreigner. After multiple visits to each home, many conversations in the fields, at the water pumps, and at the homes of the tailor and the Brahmin landowner where the women sometimes gathered to chat, the Tharu women began to feel comfortable enough to share their stories with me.¹⁸ I believe there are three reasons for their hesitance to talk. The first reason is that they did not believe that I actually wanted their opinion.¹⁹ The second reason is that they needed time to ensure that I truly valued their opinion. The third reason is that we needed time to develop a sense of trust between myself, my two research assistants, and the women.²⁰ These three reasons provide ample motive to overlook women's voices.²¹ Given this difficulty of talking to women, we can easily see why women's knowledge is seldom used as a *generating force* that leads and guides our studies of the causes of women's oppression.²²

Third, GAD literature often puts forth Western notions of cultural, economic, and political circumstances (caste, class, race, and religion) that shape women's oppression (Jeffrey 1998; Stromquist 1999). While caste, class, race, and religion (or others) *may* indeed be sources of women's oppression, it is not only unfair but also ethnocentric to impose our (personal) interpretations of these social structural influences as causes of women's oppression. Western scholars often defend this position by stating that women may not be aware of their subordination within these social structures, unless we provide the "proper" interpretations and expose their egregiousness.

The WID and GAD literature do provide an important yet ultimately inadequate and incomplete depictions of the role of women's voice. Notably, these works have not fully credited woman's voice as a legitimate knowledge source, have not given her a properly defined, culturally specific space in which to explore oppression and power to make sense of her situation; nor have they suggested tangible strategies to change it. Moreover, these works have not provided a methodology with which to listen to women's voices, so that we may analyze them in isolation from, and in combination with, male voices. We must caution against furthering our own cultural and ideological interests by asserting the factors that *we* believe influence women, instead of creating a culturally sensitive space within which women *themselves* can arrive at their own understanding of the situations that shape their lives. By building on the findings of the WID and GAD literature while noting their pitfalls, we can enrich the existing literature on women's oppression. The recognition of individual voices and of the gendered and culturally defined relations in

which they are used will enable us to explore how societal conditions affect people's present positions and future life changes. Such exploration may yield strategies for making changes for a better future.

Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST)

Since both WID and the GAD literatures have not gone far enough in investigating women's lives, a paradigm shift seems necessary. Feminists have called for a contemporary philosophy and new paradigm that challenges the masculine theoretical order. Such a philosophy must not only recognize the traditionally situated knowledge of the male but also create opportunities for interrogation of knowledge by including women, whose socially assigned inferiority and culturally constructed subordination have hitherto ensured their exclusion. The conventional notions of objectivity, which are not that objective because of their male-centeredness, are questioned.²³

Specifically, we may summon and appeal to Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) to challenge the traditional literature.²⁴ This theory is inspired by but also transcends the work of Georg Hegel. Hegel (1994) contested the ideological foundation of his time by claiming that in order to develop a complete understanding of the master-slave (oppressor-oppressed) relationship, the oppressed voice must be examined from the standpoint of the slave.²⁵ FST begins with this Hegelian conceptualization of knowledge that places the oppressed voice at the center of the investigation. FST further makes three assumptions. The first is that critical social science demonstrates how the coercive elements that define the superior-inferior social relationship (the master-slave dialectic) result in the distorted self-understanding of oppressed social actors, who come to believe in the legitimacy of their own subordination and innate status as inferior humans.²⁶ FST, as propounded by Sandra Harding (1996, 148–49), suggests understanding elements and categories of stratification

of those at the bottom of such hierarchies can provide starting points for everyone's research and scholarship, not just knowledge production by or about the socially disadvantaged.

The second assumption is that men's powerful position within political and social institutions has created a world view in which women are ignored as knowledge producers. The third assumption is that inherent social relations of class, gender, race, or imperialism situate us in locations from which to examine social relations (Harding 1997).

These three assumptions form the groundwork of an alternate sociology that begins with "insiders' knowledge," as Dorothy Smith puts it. This knowledge is highly personal knowledge of one's own lived experience. It is not a social science in the traditional sense, in that it is not about uncovering

suppressed “objective” facts or creating new “value-neutral” ones. Rather, it is “a sociology whose main point is to make visible and to analyze the culturally and socially constructed phenomena forced by men, which traditional sociology mystifies as natural” (Longino 1993, 203).

Although FST has expanded the investigative horizons and filled the gaps in the WID and GAD literature, there are three fundamental problems in its basic tenets and assumptions. The first problem is the endemic problem of theory itself. The word *theory* has become a source of criticism, especially with reference to gender. Minh-Ha Trinh (1998) voices her dissatisfaction with the concept. She criticizes theory when it ignores its inherent conditional nature, fails to take risks, and functions only as an organizational investigation. The subtext here is that FST, unless applied in a culturally sensitive fashion, is devoid of explanatory power. Stevie Jackson and Jackie Jones (1998) also point to the problem of theory degenerating into a kind of “administrative inquisition,” or traditional ideology, in that many of our theoretical assumptions are basically rehearsals and compilations of Western scholarship. *Theory* may thus merely be the creation of essentialized ideological parameters, according to which white males have assumed a central role.

The second problem is that many FST theorists attempt to altogether eliminate male-centric biases by claiming that “starting off research from women’s lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women’s lives but also of men’s lives and of the whole social order” (Harding 1993, 56).²⁷ This approach is problematic for two reasons. First, by purporting that women’s knowledge yields a more valid depiction of reality, we essentialize women’s knowledge in the same way that traditional Western scholarship essentializes the knowledge of men. Lopsided privileging of one voice is as problematic as total ignorance of another voice. Second, the starting point of this narrow epistemology limits our notions of the germination of knowledge. Women’s knowledge must be heard, but if it is done at the expense of all other voices, we cannot expect to realistically portray women’s lives, which are, after all, embedded in social situations that inevitably include men.

The third problem that besets FST is that although it justifiably assumes race, ethnicity, class, gender, and religion stratify society, it also assumes that women naturally see those stratifications in relation to themselves. This *may* be the case, but FST does not really interrogate the idea of such self-conception on the part of women through careful examination. Often, FST poses as a putatively authoritative outsider who insists on the oppressive nature of certain structural agents. In other words, as with WID and GAD, FST is at times caught up in its own ideological superiority, ensnared by its own convictions, thereby failing to empathetically understand women’s positions.

WID and GAD literature and FST are diverse approaches to studying the ways in which social structures and institutions produce experiences that cause women’s subordination. Given their merits but also their demerits, we may

develop a synthetic approach, which synoptically captures the multivocality and polysemicality of any given community, wherein the language of women and men and their enveloping sociocultural macro-world are taken into account. In other words, we are adopting an approach which we may call "Multi-perspectivity" (MP), which is both an epistemology (a position or grounds for knowledge) and a methodology (an instrument that transmits knowledge and a tool to collect, sort and analyze that knowledge). MP as both epistemology and methodology expands the limits of traditional feminist thought to accommodate the unrepresented, the unspoken, and the underprivileged—that is, *all* the voices in a particular situation, and the relationships between them.

Multiperspectivity (MP): A Synthetic Alternative

MP paves the way for the reinterpretation of studies of the past and designs a new way of understanding how individuals operate in the complex social surroundings and social network, with particular regard to the problem of educational decisions for girls. Let us examine the two dimensions of MP—the theoretical one of epistemology and the practical one of methodology.

MP as an Epistemology

First and foremost, MP as an epistemology affirms women's views as a legitimate ground of knowledge, regarding women's voice in all social conversations as an essential source of information. Second, feminist theorists have used the term epistemology to refer to women's "ways of knowing," "women's experiences," or simply "women's knowledge" (Alcoff and Potter 1993). In this sense, MP as epistemology challenges the traditional ideologies that have largely been spoken and communicated by men. It opens new ways to think about the perplexing and stubborn problems such as girls' low educational participation. In other words, voice in this sense provides the conceptual space in which to disrupt and analyze traditional theories by calling into question "legitimate knowledge" as it is conceived traditionally, and validating the socially situated lives and experiences of women (Britzman 1991, 12). In turn, epistemology, or the study of knowing, can help to explain individual belief. Mary Hawkesworth (1999) contends that we need to offer an alternative conception of ideology and sociology of knowledge. MP does precisely this. MP epistemology creates a free space for women to experiment by recognizing the power of their own language.

Multi-Perspectivity as a Methodology

In a practical way, MP offers a methodology which accomplishes two goals. First, it requires and prescribes careful listening to female expression as knowledge production. Then, the heard voices are examined and analyzed in the

context of conversations and dialogues that include the voices of men, inherent in which are the power structures.²⁸ Voice in MP refers to dialogues between the research participants and the researcher *and* those among the participants. Such a voice is valued as unique self-expression. Methodologically, MP starts with women's voice, from which we develop knowledge. By drawing heavily on the lived experience of women (individual agency), it invites (and encourages, which is often necessary) the marginalized to create the questions, and the answers. By inviting their voice, we reveal the space in which contestation and struggle are common competitors in the context of the family and the community. Voice in this sense promotes participation in the social world by recognizing women's voice as a fundamental imperative of a critical democracy (Giroux 1991; Britzman 1991).

Second, MP purposefully hears women's voice with reference to the other voices in the conversation. It investigates what is, and what is not, said, given the fact that women are invariably positioned in homes and community settings that are gendered. Traditions, customs, values, and mores (macro-subjective elements) combine to mold women's speech, and it is in this sense that women's speech is gendered. By examining their voice outside of and then inside of the gendered relationships, we actually observe, record, and analyze how women's voice may shift from one context to another.

Third, MP as a methodology imbues power to women in a political sense, namely that their voice is taken for granted as a legitimate, and, in fact, central, one, which may or may not stand in opposition to other voices. In other words, voice in this practical sense is a concrete channel through which women may articulate and communicate ideas in the face of oppression (Britzman 1991). In sum, as a methodology, MP instrumentally recognizes voice as a tool to capture women's voices, and serves also as a political conduit through which women may assert power and thus create change.

Multiperspectivity, Voice, and Language

MP as epistemology and methodology makes two contributions to feminist thought. First, by acknowledging women's voice, we also recognize the knowledge constructed and produced by women. The ultimate goal is to stimulate a self-sustaining process wherein women are assumed to be knowledge receivers and knowledge producers. Second, by valuing women's positions, we develop a female-centered approach to knowledge recognition that may lead us down new paths toward a praxis-oriented approach that advances women. MP fits squarely within a field of works that sees scholarship as political, in that it seeks to understand and then to overcome the dominant/subordinate relations that create and perpetuate power structures in human relations, with their social, cultural and economic outcomes. Insofar as MP is predicated on the importance of hearing voice, the concept of language figures prominently.

Catherine Walsh (1991, 4) states that

language can serve as a battleground for different epistemological and ideological interests. In the antagonisms and oppositions presented through and within language . . . historically specific voices can be seen to merge, shift and clash. Embedded in these competing voices are differentially lived and understood experiences and meanings which, in part, were produced, mediated, and legitimated by and through the relations, discussions, and practices of domination and subordination.

MP stresses the need for qualitative inquiry to untangle the individual voice from the din of the multitude, that is, the complex aggregate of familial and community gender relations and their interrelationships. It does so by asserting the importance of women's lived experiences, specific to particular social settings, that are articulated through language. This voice, articulated through the use of local language, is rooted in the speakers' shared experiences with others in their community (Walsh 1991, 4).

The concept of the primacy of voice articulated through language is not a new one. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel (1976) suggested that rather than starting with the imagination or concepts, we should begin with real people and their lives. Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy (1975) also treats conversation or dialogue as a central element in achieving understanding. Conversations, situated in their local settings, among particular individuals, and during a given period of time, serve as the basis for this understanding (Abu-Lughod 1999; Smith 1999). Let us examine more deeply the genetic relationship between voice and knowledge.

Voice

To begin with, voice, to quote Catherine Walsh,

is never singular or unitary but reflects a connection of individuals to realities that are sometimes multiple and often contradictory. As such, the voice or voices of individuals frequently reveal much about the conditions and relations that position and surround them. (1991, 4)²⁹

MP's epistemology and methodology presumes that three types of knowledge emanate from voice—Foundational Knowledge, Constructed Knowledge, and Utilized Knowledge. Foundational Knowledge refers to the prior knowledge of the subject(s) and the researcher before their encounter. Constructed Knowledge is generated as a result of the dialogue between the participant(s) and the researcher, informed and stimulated by their lived experiences. Utilized Knowledge refers to that which is put into political motion as advocacy for women's advancement. These forms of knowledge can be concretely illustrated by what transpired during my stay in Butawal.

Foundational Knowledge

Women in the southern Nepali community were at first quite fearful of and then puzzled by my interest in their knowledge of their lives and their roles in the educational decision-making process.³⁰ They believed that they were capable of receiving and even reproducing knowledge from those in their community who they believed possessed superior ideas³¹ but that they but were incapable of creating their own knowledge. The process of realizing that they possessed knowledge, and that this knowledge could add to our understanding of educational participation for their daughters, required several steps. According to bell hooks (1989, 1994), “coming to voice” is the movement from silence. She in fact claims that the art of moving from silence to speech is a revolutionary gesture in which one assumes a primacy in discourse, writing and action. Speech, the next step in articulating Foundational Knowledge, is the tool with which woman represents herself and her ideas in conversation. Henry Giroux (1991, 66), referring to university students, but with direct implications for our understanding of Tharu women, claims:

Voice refers to the principles of dialogue as they are enunciated and enacted within particular social settings. The concept of voice represents the unique instances of self-expression through which students affirm their own class, culture, racial and gender identities. A student voice is necessarily shaped by personal history and distinctive lived engagement with the surrounding culture. . . . The category of voice, then, refers to that means at our disposal—the discourses available to use—to make us understood and listened to, and to define ourselves as active participants in the world.³²

By speaking, Tharu women define themselves as active participants in their world, informed by what they *know*. A process of “conscientization” thus occurs, which is “the process in which men [women], not as recipients [objects], but as knowing subjects achieve a deepening awareness of both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality” (Freire 1985, 93). Ascribed relations and achieved relations form the bedrock of the conscientization process. Ascribed relations describe one’s position in the family’s network; achieved relations develop from a person’s involvement in the economic, social, and political life. In talking with me about specific issues I raised, they demonstrated whatever knowledge they possessed of their sociocultural reality. Their prior knowledge now contextualized in the surrounding complex social world, is discovered.

*Constructed Knowledge*³³

The foundational knowledge, which the women subjects already possesses, may produce further knowing. Constructed Knowledge is the creation of new ideas that emerge through the vocalization of perceptions, attitudes, and values

that are embedded in complex interrelationships of location. bell hooks (1994, 16) reminds us that “only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless—our being defined and interpreted by others.” MP asserts that research participants are subjects, who, within the matrices of location and identity, are very much capable of constructing new knowledge.³⁴ With regard to location, Tharu women are variously situated in the home, in the village, and in the community, where during work and in conversations with other women (high, middle and low caste Hindu women, other Tharu women, and myself), they establish their space. With regard to identity, Tharu women have specific ideas of who they are. They are uneducated (in the formal sense), they are mothers and wives, they are household servants, they are keepers of the household money. In this intersection of location and identity, Tharu women may begin to construct new knowledge in the sense that they begin to ask questions and seek new awareness of themselves and their environment. It is a site that recognizes and values opposing and differing ideas and experiences, an inclusive space in which to voice and question gendered lives. That is, MP, in asserting the primacy of women’s voice and hence knowledge, promotes a critical consciousness that develops as language through voice that is articulated and processed. By creating opportunities for participation and identification, MP moves beyond the set boundaries of academic rhetoric and widens the investigative scope to include women’s voice, leading to constructed knowledge.

That knowledge is contracted owes much to the fact that voice invites “particular ways of knowing,” as Deborah Britzman (1991, 22–23) informs us:

Each of our images of what constitutes knowing, and hence knowledge, is part of what structures one’s subjectivity: what is valued as truth or discarded as fiction, how one defines her relations to the world and to others, what is believed about power and powerlessness, when one takes interpretive risks, feels the right to make interpretation and theorizes about experience, what is taken for granted in familiar and unfamiliar situation, and how one understands . . . [it] tells individuals, which accounts (views of knowing) count and likewise which accounts do not count. Knowledge, then is not so much about immutable truths as it is about historical products of certain practices.

The Tharu women—through their realization of everyday practices and the ways in which those practices are similar to and different from others (including my own)—create new knowledge. For example, they not only made associations between their lack of formal education and their lives, but also talked about the consequences of education for their neighbors and for myself.³⁵ They spoke of the “powerful” and “big” people as those with an education (and high Hindu ranking). One stifling summer day when it was impossible to trek out into the fields to conduct interviews, I went to the tailor to have a new set

of clothes made for myself. As was usually the case, the tailor measured me, and then we sat down and talked for a short while. Inevitably, others would walk up the hill to his home, and joined in the conversation. Surya, a Tharu woman, was among the group. Upon seeing the children walking to school for the morning session that began at 10:00, Surya stated, "I want the girl [my daughter] to enroll in school. All the big people are sending their children to school. I want to send my girl to school too. It will be good for her. Her life will be better after that." This is a clear example of constructed knowledge.

This Constructed Knowledge, therefore, is recognizable new understanding based on practical experiences. It must be acknowledged that a woman's understanding of a situation is not always articulated, depending on the location. While women have constructed new knowledge, their opinions, which are based on that knowledge, are not necessarily voiced. This brings us to the important question of the utility and functionality of this constructed knowledge. In other words, the understanding of women as critical thinkers who make decisions is one thing; it is quite another to actually see them "think and organize collectively against their oppressors" (Mohanty 1991, 29). How does knowledge become praxis?

Utilized Knowledge

Henry Giroux (1991, 225) is correct in contending that "language is a requisite for empowerment." He continues, voice ultimately concerns "how people become either agents in the process of making history or how they function as subjects under the weight of oppression and exploitation." To put it simply, knowledge voiced via language should be implemented and realized. Utilized Knowledge, then, in the MP, is the employment of voice, and the power it commands, to promote social change. It creates, as Deborah Britzman (1991, 11) claims, "a space for women to act in their world." The ultimate goal of MP as Utilized Knowledge is to stimulate a self-sustaining process that ascertains representation of women informers, actors, knowers, and producers of knowledge.

By examining the voices of women, we uncover knowledge bases that may not have been recognized as legitimate sources of information. They are not, in Sandra Harding's words, "incompatible knowledge positions," but rather distinctly different knowledge positions that interact with each other on hierarchical levels. Situating this knowledge within the context of the social structures of men's knowledge (traditionally considered the dominant knowledge), we become more aware of the contradictions, disagreements, challenges, inconsistencies, and conflicts, as well as the concurrence and conformities that the power gender relations generate and allow. Utilized Knowledge is the new questioning of the social and intellectual worlds as they exist, with a view to effecting changes.

Utilized Knowledge on the part of women, in the context of household decision-making, results in the presence of opposing views that may, but will not necessarily, contribute to an open discussion. Nevertheless, it creates a space in which women articulate their understanding of the situation (their knowledge). In a family setting that considers it a legitimate part of the decision-making processes, such knowledge can be implemented. In this case, in voicing their knowledge, women also manifest their power. In sharing their ideas, women create a site of struggle and contestation, wherein women's expressed purpose is to improve their own lives and those of their children. In other words, Utilized Knowledge questions ways in which gender relations between the sexes, and the dynamics created by divisions and power structures within social, cultural, economic, and political structures, form power differentials that perpetuate oppression.

My research does indicate that there are changes in women's position in Nepal.³⁶ For example, on my most recent visit to the village, three Tharu women—a middle-aged woman with three children, a young mother with a baby, and a young mother with two girls in the village school—enthusiastically greeted me upon my arrival. They invited me into their home and told me that they wanted to share some exciting news. First, they told me that they went to a village meeting in which school matters were discussed. These regularly scheduled evening meetings, up until this time, were attended only by men.³⁷ They told me that they knew about education. They also asked me if I wanted any more information from them about life in the village since I previously visited. Their interest in articulating voice is significant for three reasons. First, these women were the same women who were very skeptical about talking with me during my early days in the village. Second, they felt comfortable talking about their lives and wanted to share the latest news with me. Third, they appeared to be more confident about voicing their ideas about education in their community. For example, they had attended a village meeting, which up to that point in time had been limited to men.

In sum, Utilized Knowledge produces a site of critical consciousness, where underrepresented voices create an integrative process of "conscientization" by utilizing language to reveal their knowledge, which in turn, promotes a sense of hope, sustenance, and advancement for women.

Conclusion

What is the value of MP as an epistemology and a methodology with regard to the educational decision-making process for daughters? First, conventional epistemology as that in WID, GAD, and FST has ignored the inherently biased values embedded within many research questions that have been posed. By recognizing that all questions are situated within a preconceived set of historical, cultural, and social values (including those about education), we recognize

the hegemonic and culturally prejudiced positions from which we begin our queries. MP eludes this distortion by inviting the marginalized to create questions and suggest answers through which we gain knowledge of the individuals' positions and opinions. Second, by examining the voices of women in the intimate relation to others, we offer a new foundation for knowledge which has not been recognized as a legitimate source of information. Given that much of the literature in educational research examines the voices of men, and assumes that men's voices are the same as women's, the combination of the voices in the context of the social structures permits us to more fully understand the ambiguities, discrepancies, variances, contradiction, and conflicts that power relations engender. Third, MP supports the notion that there is not a universal knowledge base. This perspective acknowledges the historical relativism of male knowledge, and indeed the sociological relativism of all knowledge, including women's.

A fundamental goal of feminist theory is (and ought to be) to analyze gender relations—how gender relations are constituted and experienced, and how we think or, equally important, do not think about them. As Jane Flax (1990, 40) tells us, gender relations are found and constituted by elements in every aspect of human experience. She remarks, "In turn, the experience of gender relations for any person, and the structure of gender as a social category, are shaped by the interactions between gender and other social relations such as class and race." Indeed, MP, by introducing and highlighting women's voice, sharpens our understanding of the question of gender in several ways. First, it explores multiple and complex pathways of social interaction through a provocative account, or re-counting, of reality by emphasizing gender dynamics. MP, stressing the values of voice, complements the central thesis held by many feminist theorists, such as Sandra Harding, Elizabeth Grosz, and Seyla Benhabib. They have expressed the need to go beyond the crisis of reason and conventional notions of objectivity to question the assigned inferiority and subordination imposed on women. Second, while it develops a women-centered approach to knowledge recognition, MP embraces and critically evaluates opinions of all players in the social system. Through analysis of the language used by all players, MP proffers explanations for the often unequal relationships between women and men. Through this multiperspectival approach, MP explains and exposes the power differentials created by gendered relationships. Third, MP, with its explication of the nexus between voice and knowledge, especially Utilized Knowledge, provides a foundation for a collaborative praxis-oriented approach to advance the interests of women. By creating opportunities for identity and participation investment, MP moves beyond the traditionally prescribed and conventionally accepted boundaries of academic theories, pragmatically suggesting strategies for the transformation and progress for women. In a word, MP is, in the end, a political act that calls for action in an environment in which women's

voice may often fall on deaf ears, as in the case of the Tharu community in Nepal.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the 2001 American Educational Research Association conference in Seattle, Washington.
2. See Mayra Buvinic for description of each.
3. This approach is based on the assumption that women have not benefited from economic growth. Given this, the approach sought to include women in employment tracks and marketplace opportunities as well as in their reproductive roles. This conscious effort to include women in the economic sphere also addressed gender inequity, in terms of woman's unequal status in the work force (Buvinic 1983, 15).
4. The antipoverty approach sought to promote women's "productivity" in their assumed position.
5. The efficiency approach, which is associated with the IMF structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, purports women's economic contributions yields more effective and efficient development. (Moser 1993, 69–70).
6. Moser (1993), describes the empowerment approach as one that advances women as powerful innovators who, through their self-reliance, create change that promote development.
7. Categorization of schools of feminist thought serves specific purposes. This practice helps the beginning undergraduate and graduate student identify chronological phases and ideological similarities and differences. However, these categorizations become increasingly more difficult (and unnecessary) as one analyzes scholars' works that have been published over a decade or more of history. Readers written or edited by authors such as Maggie Humm (1992), Josephine Donovan (1998), Linda Nicholson (1997), Ülku Ü. Bates, Florence L. Denmark, Virginia Held, Dorothy O. Helly, Shirley Hune, Susan H. Lees, Sarah B. Pomeroy, Carolyn M. Somerville, and Sue Rosenberg Zalk (1995), and Lynda Stone (1994) provide discussion of numerous categories of feminist thought, including, for example, Marxist feminism. It should also be noted, however, that since then, the categorization of any school of feminism that inherently identifies a single cause for women's oppression has been criticized.
8. For articles that examine the WID movement with regard to women's education in the governmental sector of nations, see Nelly P. Stromquist (1998).
9. I assume that educational level contributes to the development of an area by providing greater opportunities for those who graduate from the formal educational system.
10. Another movement, the Women and Development or WAD approach, is rooted in Marxist thought. It espouses a direct correlation between economics and women's status in the community.
11. Macro-extreme theories include structural functionalism, conflict theory, and some varieties of new Marxian theory (especially economic determinism and

structural Marxist theory). Most forms of structuralism dominate this body of work. Social structural functionalism has its roots in the work of Comte, Spencer, and Durkheim and their interest in organicism, societal needs, and, more pointedly, structures and functions. The other major alternative to structural functionalism was conflict theory. In his seminal work, Ralph Dahrendorf (1959) focused on conflict and coercion rather than normative constraint as a source of social change. Neo-Marxist sociological theory integrates the subjective perspective into the basic tenets of the structurally based theory. These works include economic determinism, Hegelian Marxism, critical theory, structural Marxism, neo-Marxian economic sociology, and historically oriented Marxism, including Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory.

12. Other authors note the importance of gender as the study of both women and men. See Ann Sherry (2000) and Terry Threadgold (2000).
13. Radical, socialist, and Marxist schools of feminist theory have provided the theoretical constructs upon which much of the GAD literature is based. Radical feminism claims that women's oppression lies within the locking jaws of the patriarchal social system. In other words, it recognizes sexual politics as the primary focal point of contestation. Radical feminist theory emerged from the late 1960s and early 1970s ex—"movement women" who demonstrated against the theories, organizational structures, and personal styles of the male "New Left." Socialist feminism claims patriarchy and class—in the forms of production, reproduction, socialization, and sexuality—contribute to women's oppression. Socialist feminists generally assume an analogy between women and the proletariat.
14. Aili Mari Tripp (2000) asserts that women within the gender schema do not exist in a vacuum but that rather their gender is intertwined with class, race, and economy, all of which relate to the issues and conditions of domination and oppression. Nupur Chaudhuri (1992, 222) also mentions this point regarding the Muslim population. She states, "The status and role of Muslim women in the Indian subcontinent are best understood by analyzing the socioeconomic strata to which these women belong and the political and economic status of the Muslim community itself in the context of wider social, cultural, and economic conditions of the entire India society."
15. Krishna Sen and Maila Stivens (1998) also discuss gender as mutually constituted with other dimensions, most notably class, ethnicity, religion, and nationality.
16. This idea is in opposition to the Women in Development literature that places women, in isolation from familial and social relations, at the center of inquiry to understand their oppression. Specifically, see Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (1993) for more on this.
17. It should be noted that "second wave feminism" seeks to describe and explain women. It grapples with the concept of authentic knowledge.
18. In some cases, the women shared information and stories with me after the third or fourth visit to their home. In other cases, the Tharu women shared their stories at the end of my third month in the field.

19. They constantly asked why I wanted to talk to them. They directed me to their husband.
20. As noted previously, I employed one female and one male research assistant to support my fieldwork. They assisted in the interviews and with the translations. Both spoke Tharu, Nepal, and English.
21. See Stephen Devereux and John Hoddinott (1993) for an informative book on fieldwork in emerging countries.
22. Survey questionnaires used in the WID and GAD literature are frequently designed for the "head of household" as the participant. Given that women are not considered the head of household in most low-income countries, this severely limits her participation, even if she does feel the freedom to offer her opinion. In addition, by limiting a study to a preconceived set of closed-ended questions, we reduce the possibility that we will identify other influences, and we limit the opportunity to explore it.
23. It should be noted that male-centeredness represents the voice of the high-status male researcher or male research participant. We do not usually differentiate status amongst males in the research process, but this warrants our attention.
24. Catherine V. Scott (1995) briefly examines FST in the context of the Gender and Development ideologies.
25. Hegel argued that in order to understand the relations between these two roles, one needs to examine the voices of the marginalized or the oppressed.
26. See Thomas E. Wartenberg (1990) for more on this.
27. Nancy Hartsock (1983, 246) makes a similar statement. She claims that "articulation of a feminist standpoint based on women's relational self-definition and activity exposes the world men have constructed... as both partial and perverse."
28. This is based, in part, on the Foucauldian perspective of power that exists within both the institutional structural conceptualizations of social spaces and the multiple levels of household conversations and interactions. Mary Field Belenky et al. (1986) writes on this as well.
29. Other feminist scholars have also discussed voice. See Jean Davison (1988), Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith Coe (1991), and Sherna B. Gluck and Daphne Patai (1991).
30. Ashatiya, a sixty-year-old grandmother who resides in Butawal, told me, "I was a little afraid the first time that you would ask me difficult questions, but this time I was not afraid at all."
31. The Tharus told me that they consulted the Brahmins and Thakuris for their knowledge about farming and health care.
32. Peter Chua, Kum-Kum Bhavnani, and John Foran (2000) also discuss the need to highlight culture as a link to understanding women and development.
33. I acknowledge the influence of Deborah Britzman's work here.
34. Location in this sense is more than a cartographic space; it is a lived environment. Notions of place and positionality are often found in the global feminism literature. See Alison Jagger (2000) and Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas (1999). Michael Singer (1999, 48) argues that the issue of location has not been adequately examined in anthropology. He states "anthropology simply

assigns the women living within the same physical environment to the same culture, often without scrutiny of *their* sense of identity and values, and indeed even when it is explicitly recognized that this sense diverges sharply from that of the men. In many cultures, women live within their own structural forms and derive their normative sense from them. The international community, following anthropology, has tended to ignore such lines of separation even when the separation reaches the level of segregation. . . . In general, it is an oversimplification to assume that an individual's culture consists of one identifiable group."

35. The consequence of education for their female neighbors was the ability to read and to write a letter. They also commented on the confidence that literacy seemed to provide. With regard to my education, they noted my ability to go out on my own, travel to a new place, and have a job outside of the community in which I lived.
36. Changes in women's status is also captured in Meena Acharya's update (1994) of her 1979 publication (based on the 1971 census) that draws on the 1981 and 1991 censuses. Incorporating *Asmita* (a feminist, Nepali-language magazine), and using Tribhuvan University dissertations, South Asian statistics for comparative purposes, and the United Nation's statistics, Acharya aggregates secondary data to provide comparative tables. Her secondary data analysis provides a review of Nepal's women's literacy rates for ages and up. Shizu Upadhyia (1996) also discusses changes in women's status by revealing a "consistent picture" (p. 448) that reflects "gradual changes in women's condition."
37. During my visits to Butawal, the school expanded from a primary school to one that offered classes in both primary and secondary grades. The most recent renovation was to add toilets to the site.

Ethnicity and Its Influence on the Educational Decision-Making Process

During the third week of my initial visit to Butawal, several Tharu men in the village came to the house to ask about my purpose for visiting Butawal, a place few foreigners ever visited.¹ I briefly discussed my project, and Mr. Tharu told me that a meeting with the residents of Butawal would be arranged in the near future. Three days later, after the evening meal ended at the usual 9:00 P.M., I was summoned to the home of Mr. Tharu, the village leader. Upon entering his home, I found approximately thirty Tharu men, all sitting on the floor of the candlelit front room.²

During the first part of the meeting, I presented an abbreviated plan for my research. I shared my research questions with the assembly of men and how I wanted to collect the information to try to answer my questions. After patiently listening to my summary, one young man, Mr. Tharu, asked in Nepali, “Why should we allow you to come here and record our stories?” As I was formulating my answer, another older man, approximately sixty years of age spoke. He said,

I know that there is an old story that says that a Tharu was the first King of Nepal. But we don't have a written record of this fact. So, no one believes that the Tharu was the first royalty of the kingdom. Now, she can write our stories. Then people will know. People will know about our life. It's important and they should know it.

The room was silent for a second. I didn't know what to do, so I remained silent and looked around the room. Then, Mr. Tharu, the same farmer with whom I had a lengthy conversation in the sweltering summer heat the day before simply stated, “I agree. We should tell our stories. She should write them down.” After a brief discussion by the men in the room, they reached a consensus to allow me to stay in the village to conduct the study. Finally, the

elder Mr. Tharu seemed to confirm their discussion by stating, “Yes, she can write it down. Then we will have a record.”³

This experience prompted my first queries about ethnicity, for the men gathered conveyed the impression that they and their community shared a distinct story of origin. They conducted themselves as a unique community with a separate history. Several questions came to the fore. Why didn’t the other members of the village receive invitations? Why was the reference to the Tharu king? Could it be related to the way the Tharu perceive their ethnicity? More germane to my purposes, how does it influence their life and the decisions that they make for their daughters? It occurred to me that their self-perception and their definition of their culture must have found manifestations in various facets of life, including the issue of education of children. Hence the need to explore the significance of ethnicity.

Ethnicity has indeed been a popular category in the investigation of education, used in measuring educational participation. Although studies have investigated educational participation *by ethnic group*,⁴ how precisely does ethnicity actually influence adults’ educational decisions for girls? In other words, many studies have simply taken for granted the importance of ethnicity without exploring its dynamics. For example, how does ethnicity, that is, one’s self-awareness and self-identity, attitudes toward other groups, and behavior in terms of interactions with ethnic groups, actually influence the Tharus’ educational decision-making practices? How does ethnicity express itself in gendered terms, so that it means different things to women and men?

Since ethnicity has generally been treated in a very generic way, here, we seek to offer an analytically rigorous and descriptively rich picture of ethnicity, using the concrete example of the Tharus in Nepal.⁵ We will show how ethnicity figures in the demographic make-up of the village of Butawal and what its practical influence was there. Let us begin with a brief overview of the two traditional and opposing views of ethnicity—primordialist (a micro perspective) and modernist (a macro perspective). We shall position early classic ideas in the field of educational research in the frames of reference offered by these two theories. We shall then provide our own definition that transcends and ameliorates the earlier ones. One central argument here is that short of understanding the influence of ethnicity, we cannot quite account for all the paramount forces and factors at work in this educational decision-making process.

Primordialist and Modernist Theories of Ethnicity

The primordialist position in anthropology was explicated in a seminal essay by Clifford Geertz, who drew on concepts initially formulated by Edward Shils. In the Geertzian sense, ethnicity refers to group identification based on common agents of geographic region, kinship group, physical similarities, blood type, local language, religious affiliation, and custom that are viewed as

individuals' natural associations expressing a common culture. Later works by Harold Isaacs (1975), John A. Armstrong (1982), Walker Connor (1978), Anthony D. Smith (1987), and Pierre L. Van den Berghe (1981) further elaborate the primordialist perspective of ethnicity, which supports the notion that the ethnic group, through its identification with social interactions, upholds a moral code. Ethnicity identifies individuals in terms of social groups that form the foundations for the household, marriages, and resource distribution such as inheritance. Ethnicity also prescribes the obligations and responsibilities of individual members of the group (Thompson 1989).

Primordialism has been subjected to a fair amount of criticism. First, primordialism's ethnicity is based on natural elements or "cultural givens," (Smith 1981, 66) which may include but are not limited to physical characteristics, kinship groups, and cultural traditions. This perspective does not account for the shifts in these cultural components between people and over time, such as language (Levine 1987). Second, the primordialist perspective of ethnicity fails to recognize and account for the integrative social structures such as class and caste, and the ways in which these structural elements affect ethnic groups and individuals' ethnic identity. Third, primordialism fails to explain conflict within and between ethnic groups, particularly when ethnic groups are separated by class.

Even though critical study of primordialism has revealed its limitations and inadequacies, the educational participation literature has largely subscribed to its conventional philosophy of ethnicity. For example, the majority of comparative and international studies of educational participation has used the category of ethnicity as an independent variable that categorizes people by physical characteristics based on geographic residence. Both reports and research studies have identified rates of enrollment, dropout, and graduation by ethnicity in order to compare and contrast ethnic groups.

An alternative to primordialism, the modernist viewpoint (also referred to as instrumentalism or circumstantialism) views ethnicity as historically contingent, primarily shaped by economic and social structures. In other words, ethnic groups are interest groups that emerge as people vie for control of important resources and positions (Kipp 1996, 20; Jiobu 1988). It views ethnicity as a social, political, and cultural embodiment that differentiates one group from another group. Whereas the primordialist view of ethnicity is naturally grounded and static, modernism's version is socially constructed and shifts as patterns of behavior and power change.⁶ Modernists view ethnic identity as the association with and adoption of shared and collective cultural and political structures of the social system as a result of interaction with cultural others (Salamone 1985), categorized by the dominant society (Green 1981), and political mobilization (Rothschild 1981; Wallerstein 1973).

Nonetheless, the modernist approach also has been criticized. First, this perspective of ethnicity unduly plays down the importance of the individual as a critical component of ethnicity and ethnic identity. Second, it fails to

recognize the importance that social organizations, such as the family unit, play in the development of the ethnic group association.

The educational participation research has also used the modernist approach to ethnicity, albeit on a limited scale. Ethnographic studies in the field of the anthropology of education examine the structural dimension of ethnicity and the way in which it shifts and changes over time. For example, studies such as those by Stacy Leigh Pigg (1996), and Deborah Skinner and Dorothy Holland (1996) examine the ways in which ethnicity is rooted in the Nepali community. Their studies examine the ways in which ethnicity has changed over time, and the villagers' perceptions of ethnicity.

In sum, two predominant and contrasting modes of analysis characterize two different approaches to the study of ethnicity. On the one hand, primordialists believe that ethnicity is natural, generated from birth, perpetuated by the continual growth of families.⁷ On the other hand, modernists believe ethnicity to be historically contingent, shaped by the material and social forces of the time. Whereas the primordialist perspective focuses on the relative weight of the individual's fixed, biological predispositions, the modernist view seizes upon the fluid cultural, political, and social situational factors in the community (Smith 1981, 66).⁸ Neither theory provides a comprehensive explanation of ethnicity that considers the ways in which power is inveterated through the individuals' interactions with, and exclusion from, the structural forces that differentiate and divide people into groups. Moreover, neither theory takes into account gender, nor do they explain how identification with ethnicity may be experienced differently for women and men. In view of the inadequacies of the two dominant theories of ethnicity in the sociological sense, and how they have been applied to the study of educational participation, we proffer a better definition. We define ethnicity as a differentiation of group membership in terms of physical characteristics, language, religion, and customs—while affirming the fact that these attributes are formed by the political and social conditions as well as situational factors, which, in turn, create a hierarchy of power. Ethnicity in this sense relates to the politics of collective boundaries, dividing the world into “us” and “them,” which creates an uneven playing field of contest, struggle, and negotiation. Ethnicity can encourage and maintain the boundaries by perpetuating its advantages via access to local, state, and civil social powers.

What Is Ethnicity in Nepal?

Ethnicity as Structure

First and foremost, ethnicity in Nepal can be viewed as a social structure that categorizes and divides people into finite groups. As a holistic concept, ethnicity is a structural tool that identifies categories or groups of individuals. The structure of ethnicity is deeply embedded in Nepali society. Its present

structure is largely derived from past experiences, especially the extensive and deliberate process of nation building in the nineteenth century, when Nepal attempted to reinforce the symbiotic relationship between Hindu religion and the Nepalese state by formally institutionalizing caste as part of the state polity. Disguised under the Panchayat regime's rhetoric of "national integration," King Jayashiti Malla promulgated the Muluki Ain Legal Code of 1854,⁹ which implemented and endorsed the caste system in Nepal in an attempt to politically unify Nepal's heterogeneous society into an organized single structure (Bista 1991). Thus, caste is an integral part of the Nepali notion of ethnicity.¹⁰ André Beteille (1965, 46) defines caste as

a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system.¹¹

We may adopt this as one working definition of caste in Nepal. The government policy placed all groups living in Nepal into a social universe of five broad categories, that is, castes, arranged in a vertical order, differentiated from yet economically interdependent on one another (see Table 1 and Appendix 1)

Every Nepali was assigned membership in one of five hierarchically positioned social levels or categories.¹² The top category, the wearers of the sacred cord, consists of Brahmins, Thakuris, Chhetris, and Newars. (Note that Brahmins and Thakuris live in Butawal.) The next category, the Matwalis or alcohol-consuming castes, consist of the "nonenslaveable" group of Magars, Gurungs, Sunwars, and some Newar castes. The Magars, Gurungs, and Sunwars are ethnic groups in Nepal who practice Buddhism. The third category comprises of the "enslaveable" group (Masinya Matwali), which includes the ethnic groups of Bhote (Tibetans), Chepang, and Tharu, and the low-caste Hindu Kumal (potters), Haya, and Gharti (descendants of freed

Table 1. The Caste Groups of the Muluki Ain

1. "Wearers of the holy cord" (<i>tāgādhāri</i>)	} caste category I: pure castes (<i>cokho jāt</i>) or "water-acceptable castes" (<i>pāni calnyā jāt</i>)
2. "Non-enslavable Alcohol-Drinkers" (<i>namāsinyā mātawāli</i>)	
3. "Enslavable Alcohol-Drinkers" (<i>māsinyā mātawāli</i>)	
4. impure, but touchable castes (<i>pāni nacialnyā choi chito hālnunaparnyā</i>)	} caste category II: impure castes or "water-unacceptable castes" (<i>pāni nacialnyā jāt</i>)
5. impure and untouchable castes (<i>pāni nacialnyā choi chito hālnuparnyā</i>)	

Source: András Hofer (1979). *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A Study of the Muluki Ain of 1854*. (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner).

slaves). According to this ranking, the Tharus were ranked below those from whom water was acceptable (*cokho jāt, pāni calnyā jāt*) and above the groups from whom water was unacceptable (*pāni nachalnyā jāt*). The fourth category, consisting of the “impure” but “touchable” castes, include the Kasai (butchers), Kusle (Newar musicians), Dhobi (washermen), Kulu (Newar tanners), as well as Muslims and Europeans. The fifth category refers to the “untouchable” castes that embodies low-caste Hindus such as the Kami (blacksmiths), Sarki (tanners and shoemakers), Kadara (offspring of Kami and Sarki parents), Damai (tailors), Gaine (minstrels), Badi (musicians), Pore (skinners and fishermen), and Cyame (Newar scavengers). Noteworthy for our purpose is that Kami and Damai families reside in Butawal.¹³

Position in this system was determined largely by the ruling group of high-caste Hindus who categorized others’ membership in the system in accordance with their elite, Hindu ideas of purity and pollution. These past values and these beliefs in caste persist today. Specifically, in Nepal, caste groups are characterized by (1) a common traditional occupation and/or (2) a claim to a common origin, and (3) understanding of pollution that prohibits certain behaviors by members of certain castes.

Although the Muluki Ain Legal Code defining caste was deemed unconstitutional and considered illegal with introduction of the new code of 1963, which stated that all Nepalese citizens are equal before the law, caste and religion-based domination continues to play a central and leading role in Nepalese society.¹⁴ In Butawal, for instance, the caste system is supported by individuals’ deeply entrenched social beliefs of intergroup relations that supposedly reflect the natural order of humanity. The sentiment of André Beteille (1965, 45–51) seems to depict contemporary opinions of the residents. He wrote:

In Hindu society, caste division plays a part both in actual social interactions and in the ideal scheme of values. Members of different castes are, up to a point, expected to behave differently and to have different values and ideals. These differences are sanctioned by Hindu religion. Formerly, birth in a particular caste fixed not only one’s ritual status, but, by and large, also one’s economic and political positions.

The Nepalization initiative, whose goal is to promote unity at the expense of mitigating caste differences, has been a high priority of the Nepali government since the early 1980s. K. Pyakuryal (1982, 70) gives a succinct description of the Initiative’s main objectives:

It has become the aim of the government to integrate different ethnic groups towards a common goal of national development. Nepal aspires to achieve a common culture which could be the binding force, and attempts to create a

socio-economic environment which could motivate everyone to achieve the national goals of development.

Indeed, a recent movement by indigenous groups, including the Tharu, has challenged both Hindu dominance and caste prominence. These indigenous people in effect are mounting a new movement that redefines ethnicity as structure in Nepal. Indigenousness can be identified as an authentic structure that presents an inverse ranking of people in the kingdom.

Who are the indigenous people in Nepal? Indigenous refers to people who possess their own distinct and original lingual and cultural traditions and whose religious faith is based on ancient animism (worship of ancestors, land, seasons, and nature). They are the existing descendants of the peoples whose ancestors were the first settlers or principal inhabitants in any part of the land within the territory of modern state of Nepal. Like other indigenous populations, the Tharu have been displaced from their own land during the last four centuries, particularly during the expansion and establishment of modern Hindu nation state. This displacement is coupled with a historical subjugation in the state's political power structure because of their nondominant culture, language, and religion.

In anthropological terms, the Nepali ethnic structure of both the Hindu caste system and the indigenous group is by and large governed by the commonly accepted criteria of group identity. The case of Nepal can be viewed from a number of characteristics. Collective name can be determined by a Hindu's place in the hierarchical order of the caste system. The indigenous Tharu are identified by this surname. Each group also shares a common myth of descent and a shared history. Stemming from this sense of solidarity is a distinctive culture shared by a group that resides in a specific territory (Smith 1986; Eriksen 1993). In a general way, then, ethnic group refers to any group of people who call themselves such and who perceive themselves sharing common attributes. Tamotsu Shibutani and Kan Kwan (1965, 11) offer a similar definition of ethnic group, seen as "those who conceive of themselves as alike by virtue of their common ancestry, real or fictitious, and who are so regarded by others." Although the term ethnic group conjures ideas of collectivity, this does not exclude relationships between groups. Thomas Eriksen (1993, 9) also points to the significant fact that ethnicity also "suggests contact and interrelationship," to the extent that identity can only be defined in relation to others. In Nepal, Hindus interact, to varying degrees, with other groups of ethnic minorities. In Butawal, the indigenous Tharus conduct business with neighbors from both high and low castes. For example, Tharu women engage in regular conversations with Brahmin and Thakuri acquaintances and friends. Thus, in a variety of ways, we see how ethnicity functions as an organizing principle of society. It yields structure in which different groups are assigned

places in the social system. Ethnicity as structure has direct implications for ethnicity as agency.

Ethnicity as Individual Agency: Self-Awareness, Attitudes toward Others and Interaction with Others

Ethnicity as individual agency can be studied on a variety of levels and in a variety of ways. First, individuals identify with and relate to their own ethnicity. This fluid process is a dynamic component of one's life. For instance, children learn about culture and parents teach language. These attributes provide the foundation to learn about others' ethnicity. Second, and related, one's learning contributes to the formation of attitudes toward others. Positive attitudes toward others enhance the dynamic process of socialization and provide opportunities to learn about others from different ethnic groups. For example, the Tharu residents of Butawal experience social settings in which they interact with high-, middle-, and low-caste Hindus. In addition, ethnicity can, but does not have to, construct structural constraints that restrict individual agency. We know that in Nepali society, Hindu caste does have the potential to separate and divide. Given the multidimensional nature of ethnicity, three areas warrant separate investigation—one's ethnic self-awareness and self-identity, one's attitudes toward other ethnic groups, and one's ethnic behavior in terms of interactions with other ethnic groups.

First, ethnic self-awareness differentiates one group from another. It refers to the individuals' recognition of their belonging to a specific group that is different from others. It involves knowledge about ethnic groups and their characteristics, history, customs, and behaviors. It also includes the identification with a group that is differentiated from others by symbolic markers (including cultural character, biological differences, or territorial residences). Ethnic identity refers to the individual's attachment, based on perceived value and emotional significance of certain beliefs and values which are distinct from those of other groups (Tajfel 1981).¹⁵ As such, it is in response to the processes of cultural, political, and economic transformation over time that ethnic identity has the potential to evolve. Ethnic identity in this sense is a form of social identity whose content is infinitely malleable and changeable; it emerges in the context of specific social and historical circumstances.

How do the foregoing theoretical and ideologized depictions of ethnic self-awareness find expression in the Tharu world? Tharu ethnic identity first and foremost rests on a sense of belonging strongly defined by kinship. This sense is not just a biological assertion of relatedness, but comes from understanding a conceptual order built on presumptions of patrilineally distinct clans and asymmetrical marital exchanges. But biological affiliation based on blood ties is not the only foundation of Tharu ethnic self-identity. Their perception of such an association is verbalized constantly so as to remain real. The Tharus often refer to their own distinct culture. Their identity is reinforced by

the distinct differentiation of Brahmin, Thakuri, Kami, and Damai families, and the affiliation of these families different kinds of work. The Brahmins and Thakuris in Butawal are either landowners or landlords. The Kami family manages a blacksmith shop for the locals and also takes on projects outside of the village. The Damai family provides tailoring services in a similar fashion to those inside and outside the community.¹⁶

Although the Tharus maintain a sense of ethnic identity, their identity is continually influenced by the environment in which they live. The Tharu women identify themselves as part of an ethnically diverse community. Mangari, a young mother in the company of her neighbors, told me,

The Dangaura Tharu women wear white saris and colorful blouses, traditionally. They have the same set of clothing before and after marriage. However, when they have children, they have a white blouse a bit different in design than what they used to wear earlier. This tradition is vanishing; only one or two old women can be seen wearing such outfits. Now everyone puts on blouses like Bahun [Brahmin], Chhetri, with a colorful sari or skirt for girls.¹⁷

Mangari articulates the shift in the way Tharu ethnic identity is formulated, and the influence of the high-caste Hindu women on Tharu women's choice of clothing. Ethnic identification also appeared to have an influence on the educational decision-making practices of the Tharu. Analysis of the ethnicity survey conducted in Butawal revealed that Tharus whose daughters were enrolled in school showed higher scores in their ethnicity measurement than Tharus who did not enroll their children in school.¹⁸ A t-test using enrollment information (1 = yes, 0 = no) and the cultural indicators (i.e., attitude, ethnicity, and religion) as independent and dependent variables respectively revealed a statistically significant difference only in the ethnicity scores. Tharus who enrolled daughters in school showed higher ethnicity scores than Tharus who did not enroll their daughter in the village's primary school.

However, an analysis by gender revealed different outcomes and statistically significant findings.

Table 2. Indicators of Children's Enrollment in School

	Enrolled	Not Enrolled	t
Attitude	11.46	10.83	n.s.
Ethnicity ¹⁹	97.50	93.36	p < .05
Religion	126.20	121.63	n.s.

n.s.: not significant

Source: Survey data from Butawal, 1998. Attitude survey (Shrestha and Lamichhane et al. 1983); ethnicity survey (Phinney 1992); religion survey (Basabe, Shin, and Lanzaco 1967).

Table 3. Indicators of Enrollment in School by Gender

	Female	Male	t
Attitude	14.30	7.98	$p < .05$
Ethnicity	87.10	103.76	$p < .05$
Religion	124.73	123.10	n.s.

Source: Survey data from Butawal, 1998. Attitude survey (Shrestha and Lamichhane et al. 1983); ethnicity survey (Phinney 1992); religion survey (Basabe, Shin, and Lanzaco 1967).

Given the outcome of this analysis, I wondered if the Tharu may have different understandings about the cultural indicators (i.e., attitude, ethnicity, and religion). For this purpose, a logistic regression was run. Variables included attitude, ethnicity, religion, gender \times ethnicity and the interaction of gender and attitude (gender \times attitude). The results indicate that ethnicity is a statistically significant indicator of girls' enrollment in school.¹⁹

Based on the results of t-test and logistic regression, I think ethnicity may be an important factor determining the Tharu people's decision-making about their girls' enrollment in school. Although statistical significance of the gender \times ethnicity category would have strengthened this analysis, we can note that one's affiliation with "Tharu-ness" and interaction with the high caste did appear to influence a decision to enroll a daughter in school. Moreover, unlike much of the educational participation literature, this study did not find individuals' attitudes toward education to be a significant indicator of the decision. Both of these findings were consistent with the qualitative data analysis.

In sum, by virtue of the Tharus' sense of their own ethnic identity, formed, in part, by comparing themselves with others in the village, they develop a sense of how the community is organized and how life might be lived. Second, attitudes toward others are derived from one's individual agency to recognize self in terms of "others" and to develop viewpoints about the others. Such attitudes are often the result of, as Steven Fenton puts it, "differential access

Table 4. Logistic Regression Analysis of Girls' Enrollment as a Function of Indicators and Gender

Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	p
Attitudes toward education	-.117	.153	.588	.443
Ethnicity	.096	.048	3.943	.047
Religion	.010	.022	.204	.651
Gender \times ethnicity	.008	.024	.106	.744
Gender \times attitudes	.130	.193	.454	.500
Constant	-10.360	5.015	4.267	.039

Source: Survey data from Butawal, 1998. Attitude survey (Shrestha and Lamichhane et al. 1983); ethnicity survey (Phinney 1992); religion survey (Basabe, Shin, and Lanzaco 1967).

to political power” (Fenton 1999, 21, 23). As different ethnic constituencies jostle for advantageous positions in a community, ethnic and racial ideologies emerge. These ideologies formalize and encapsulate differing ethnic attitudes amongst members of the groups. These attitudes, in the form of ethnic ideologies could well be used to legitimize social hierarchies. This process of legitimization is agency propelled by ethnic perceptions of the others. Moreover, it is related to other criteria of hierarchization (Eriksen 1993; Ragsdale 1989). For instance, a high-caste Hindu maintains his or her privileged position in the hierarchy not simply because of religiously and traditionally prescribed roles but also because of elevated economic positions as landlords and landowners. In any event, agency, or the shift in the understanding of ethnicity, occurs when the individual applies understanding about self in terms of other people. To put it more concretely, a Tharu, for example, no matter how secure about identity as a Tharu, must reevaluate his or her self-worth while considering the values of the people outside of the Tharu ethnic group.

Third, interaction with others is based on both self-identification and attitudes toward others in the social hierarchy. Ethnic membership no doubt includes certain accepted and required ways of behavior toward people from other ethnic groups. Such ways reinforce one’s sense of ethnic identity and in turn strengthen the ethnic category. Ethnic behavior, that is, socialized and culturally defined actions toward others, may sometimes emphasize mutual dependence and association, when such behavior is directed towards members of one’s own group. At other times, ethnic behavior stresses competition, establishing oneself as independent and distinct, as is often the case when it comes to dealing with outsiders. Moreover, how we have contact with others, as well as how often, also falls within the domain of ethnic behavior (Eriksen 1993). Often ethnic behavior is socially discriminating. As Linnekin and Poyer claim, the individual often asserts, to some degree, hierarchical relationships as opposed to egalitarianism, while demonstrating some type of communication with the “other.” The actual behaviors of an ethnic group are highly dependent on the group’s perceptions, values, and attitudes. Moreover, the amount and kind of contact an individual has with members of other groups also determines the nature of ethnic behavior. Ethnic behavior is what Steve Fenton (1999) calls “social transactions.” It is mobilized so that ethnicity is enlivened and given substance. In such transitions, an ethnic group’s ancestry, culture, and language are appealed to no matter whether these elements are actual or imagined. Thus, ethnic behavior constitutes agency.

In a diverse village like Butawal, the status relationship within an ethnic group, and that between groups of different castes, is directly related to the particular corpus of beliefs concerning ethnic purity and pollution. These beliefs in turn prescribe and govern behavior. The residents are keenly aware of how their ethnic ways influence their lives. More significantly, they also

recognize the potential ways in which the adoption of customs and ideas may influence their own lives (Stevenson 1954, 46). Thus, although tradition and convention prescribe certain ethnic behavior, ethnic interaction carries with it tremendous potential to influence the lives of all in the community. While caste rules are certainly socially constricting, a Tharu will seek advice from a high-caste Hindu, and such interaction can be transformative. As previously noted, a Tharu is more likely to send a girl to school after consultation with a socially more powerful and dominant Hindu.²⁰ As Don Handelman (1977) suggests, people do routinely interact with one another with due regard to notions of their ethnic membership set. In the process, a special network emerges. While it is based on principles of ethnic categorization, there are enduring interpersonal ties between members of the same category, which, in turn, serve to organize contacts between neighbors. Such contacts sometimes encourage changes in ethnic values. Asturni and Parwati told me during an interview,

We have one son and one daughter. We want him to study up to grade ten. Speaking truly, I was not very interested in sending daughters to school, but our Brahmin neighbor lets the children go to school, so I let her go.²¹

As object lesson is that this socialization process of ethnic interaction in Butawal does contribute to a reformulation of the values of an ethnic group. Traditionally sanctioned behavior, perceptions, values, and attitudes of an ethnic group define the membership and attributes of the groups, guiding one's active participation inside and outside the group (Grosby 1996).²² Indeed, the Tharus in Butawal see themselves as sharing a historical past and maintaining a cultural focus. Yet Tharu women, in interacting with other groups, appeared to develop an interest in the other groups. Specifically, the Tharu women became attracted to high-caste culture, more often than Tharu men. Thus Tharu women adopted high-caste women's dress (wearing a sari and adorning their forehead with a *tikka*) and believe this custom is superior to Tharu custom. The Tharu women, and, to a lesser extent, men, seemed to be "learning" through their interactions with their high-caste neighbors. In addition, they engaged in conversations with them. The Tharu discussed home matters, including their children's lives with the members of the upper-caste community. They discussed goals for their children, which included a formal education. These findings contradict Satya Chand's work (1991, 212) on the Tharus, which notes a widespread disinterest in education among Tharus. He believes that in areas where there is little contact with outside world, the Tharus are particularly disinterested in education. Chand neglects to examine the social structures (including but not limited to interethnic relationships) in the communities he studies. By examining the Tharus interaction with people from other ethnic groups in the village and at work, we found that their relationships influence their lives. In this case, the Tharu "learn" the importance of education from their high-caste neighbors. In other words, Brahmins and Thakuris who place

a high value on schooling might be a factor encouraging Tharus to follow that ideology and practice. In short, Chand fails to deal with the role of ethnicity and its agency in the educational decision-making process. We have shown that if ethnicity is not given proper attention, we may not develop a comprehensive picture of the factors at work in parental decisions covering girls' education.²³

We have so far examined ethnicity as a structure that forms and organizes social and cultural forces. We have also seen how ethnicity is a site of action. While ethnicity posits structure, it also generates and permits agency. The important issue in this discussion of the role of ethnicity, is its intimate relation with power. In particular, we are referring to the ways in which a dominant or hegemonic ethnicity may impose its values on other ethnic groups, which, in this case, is a demonstration of ethnicity as a force in education.

Ethnicity and Power

Power in terms of ethnicity, and its influence on educational decision-making, can be examined from both the perspectives of structure and individual agency.²⁴ Two examples from Butawal demonstrate this point. First, the case study's quantitative and qualitative data clearly show that Tharu women who interacted with high-caste Brahmin and Thakuri women recognized the ways in which their power in the high-caste household earned them a voice in the educational decision-making process for daughters. In turn, the Tharu women, by adopting customs such as Hindu dress and relating to the potential for high-caste status, attempted to employ those characteristics in their own households. Second, the most successful achievement of state policy that endorsed cultural unification was the spread of Nepali as a national language. The development of a modern educational system has facilitated this process, but not without opposition from members of the other language groups, particularly in the Terai, where it was initially seen as an attempt to impose hill culture on the plains people (Gaije 1975). In other words, ethnicity, through education, expresses itself as power, as seen in a social structure imposed by the ruling elite in which the dominant Hindu ethnicity provides the main principles of organizing the social system. This education movement, powered by hegemonic ethnic concerns, is spearheaded by the Ministry of Education, which determines the language of instruction and the curriculum. Nepali, the national language, and the language of the Hindu population, is designated as the language of instruction. In a clear way, the relationship between the indigenous groups (such as the Tharus) and ethnicity is one characterized by subjugation. For example, the Tharu women in Butawal, who do not speak the national language well, are compelled either to use the language of the high caste as best as possible in order to be able to express their interests or to maintain an inferior status because they lack the skills to speak the dominant language as native speakers.²⁵ In either case, they are taught that their specific ethnic identity is naturally subordinate (Eriksen 1993).

Conclusion

A social phenomenon such as educational decision-making is embedded in social, political, and economic structures. In turn, these structures dictate the way ethnicity is expressed and the social importance it assumes in the process. At the same time, ethnicity as an element of individual consciousness and action is agency. It figures prominently in the Tharus' perceptions of education. The village of Butawal, its school, and the diverse population of people who interact with each other appear to influence the Tharus' notions of education and their interest in sending their own children to school. For instance, it appears that the Tharus were influenced by the high-caste Hindus who sent daughters to school, and to a lesser extent by the low-caste Hindus who also sent daughters to school. The Tharus' association between high-caste status and education appears to be an influencing factor in their shift from daughters working at home to daughters learning in school. The Tharus are aware of their ethnic group's culture and what it has meant for them as a group. Their perceptions of themselves as "Tharu" are changing to include the self as an educated person who utilizes literacy skills to the benefit of the self and the family. Attitudes toward "Tharu-ness" now include education as an important element of daily life, and the Tharus have begun to enroll daughters on a regular basis. This shift, is, at least in part, due to the interaction that the Tharus have with other members of the community. We believe that caste status, especially high-caste status, may be an influential element in the educational decision-making process, for the Tharus respect Brahmin and Thakuri ideas of education more than the opinions of the low-caste members of the community who also send their daughters to the local school. Individual ethnicity in this sense—identification with, perceptions of, and interactions among—people of different groups appear to provide another dimension into the complex and mult textured social structure that contributes to educational choices that are made for young girls.

Appendix 1. The Specific Caste Hierarchy of the Muluki Ain

1. caste group of the "Wearers of the holy cord" (*tāgādhāri*)
 - Upādhyaya Brāhman
 - Rajput (Thakuri) ("warrior")
 - Jaisi Brāhman
 - Chetri (Ksatri) ("warrior")
 - Dew Bhāju (Newār Brahmins) E
 - Indian Brahmin
 - ascetic sects (Sannyāsi, etc.)
 - "lower" Jaisi
 - various Newār castes * E

2. caste group of the “Nonenslavable Alcohol-Drinkers” (*namāsinyā matwāli*)
Magar * E
Guruṅ * E
Sunuwār * E
some other Newār castes * E
3. caste group of the “Enslavable Alcohol-Drinkers” (*māsinya matwāli*)
Bhote * E (“Tibetanids” and some “Tibetanoids”)
Cepāṅ * E
Kumāl * (potters)
Hāyu * E
Thāru * E
Gharti * (descendants of freed slaves)
4. impure, but “touchable” castes (*pāni nacalnyā choi chito hālnunaparnyā*)
Kasāi (Newār butchers) E
Kusle (Newār musicians) E
Hindu Dhobi (Newār washermen) E
Kulu (Newār tanners) E
Musulmān *
Mlecch * (European)
5. untouchable castes (*pāni nacalnyā choi chito hālnuparnyā*)
Kāmi (blacksmiths) and Sārki (tanners, shoemakers)
Kadārā (stemming from unions between Kāmi and Sārki)
Damāi (tailors and musicians)
Gāine (minstrels)
Bādi (musicians)
Pore (Newār skinnners and fisherman) E
Cyāme (Newār scavengers) E

* = the position (status) of the caste within the caste group is not precisely determined

E = ethnic group

Source: András Höfer (1979). *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A Study of the Muluki Ain of 1854*.

NOTES

1. I was advised to wait until the Tharu men approached me, instead of initiating a village meeting to ask permission to conduct the study.
2. It is important to note that Brahmin, Thakuri, Bika, Kami, and Damai families also live in Butawal. Mr. Sharma, a Brahmin who owned the house in which I made my initial residence, was also invited to the meeting.
3. Maslak (1999). Field notes May 1997.
4. Refer to chapter 1 for a review of the literature.
5. For the most part, the study of ethnicity in the educational participation literature has been limited to its use as an independent variable in quantitative studies.

6. For in-depth examination of the modernist theory of ethnicity, see Leo Despres (1975, 1982), Thomas Hyland Eriksen (1993), Eugene Roosens (1989), Ernest Gellner (1983), Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (1975), Pierre Bourgois (1988), Joan Vincent (1974), F. A. Salamone (1985), and J. O'Brien (1986).
7. Important proponents of the view include John A. Armstrong (1982), Walter Connor (1978), Edward Shils (1957), Anthony D. Smith (1986), and Pierre L. Van den Berghe (1981).
8. For other discussions on this dichotomy, see Chandra Jayawardena (1980), Judith Nagata (1981), and R. Norton (1983).
9. The document's proper name is *Sri Panch Surendra Birkram Shah Dev Ka Kalma Baneko Muluki Ain* (Legal Code enacted during the reign of King Surendra Birkram Shah), 1853–1963.
10. Religion is also inherently linked to caste and should not be dismissed as an unimportant part of this notion. For more on religion, see chapter 6.
11. Scholars have noted the problematic nature of the term "caste." Some believe that it originated from Portuguese and Spanish terms, probably connoting purity of blood or racial purity. The Portuguese and subsequent British colonists imposed the concept of ranked groups on South Asian populations to delineate race. Subsequently, eighteenth and nineteenth century scholars translated the Sanskrit term "varna," the set of ranked categories mentioned in the Rig-Veda, the ancient Aryan text sacred to Hindus, as "color," suggesting that caste emerged from an early system of racial classification based upon skin color. See András Höfer (1979) and André Beteille (1965) for classic works on caste in South Asia.
12. See G. M. Gurung (1994) and S. R. Sharma (1989) for more on this.
13. At the local level, the reality of caste is far more complex. Within any given area, there are innumerable small, local caste groups called *jatis*. Mutual rank between these groups is vague, arguable, and alterable (M. N. Srinivas et al. 1959, 138). For the purpose of this discussion, it is important to note that the caste system varies from region to region and that there is mobility within the system.
14. Mary DesChene (1997), among others, claims caste and ethnic membership remain particularly important in determining one's attainment of education (and wealth) and consequently one's overall societal ranking in contemporary Nepal.
15. Other definitions are also evident in the literature. Stella Ting-Toomey (1981), Raymond Teske and Bardin H. Nelson (1973), and David Tzurriel and M. M. Klein (1977) emphasize feelings of belonging and commitment; C. White and P. Burke (1987) study the sense of shared values and attitude; Thomas Y. Pardham and Janet Helms (1981) examine attitudes toward one's group.
16. The Tharus' primary occupation is farming.
17. Focus group interview, January 5, 2001.
18. However, when ethnicity, coupled with religion and attitudes toward education, were entered into a logistic regression model, none of them was significant.
19. Ethnicity was measured with the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Jean Phinney 1992). Phinney identifies three subscales—Ethnic Identity Scale, Ethnic Identity Achievement, and Ethnic Behaviors Separate reliability

coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) were calculated for the Ethnic Identity scale and the Ethnic Identity Achievement scale. Overall reliability of the fourteen-item Ethnic Identity Scale yielded .81 for the high school sample and .90 for the college sample. Reliability scores for the seven-item Ethnic Identity Achievement sub-scale were .69 and .80 respectively for the two groups. No coefficients were given for the third subscale, Ethnic Behavior, because reliability cannot be calculated with only two items.

20. Agency and structure are discussed by numerous authors. For example, Minh-Ha Trinh (1989), Paul Gilroy (1992), Gayatri Spivak (1993), Shahnaz Khan (1998), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Stuart Hall (1992) have argued for understanding and expressing ethnicity away from the notions of authentic and original culture. Rather, they claim, individuals' daily interactions constitute their cultural expressions.
21. Interview, January 5, 2001.
22. Steven Grosby dismisses the use of the term "social interaction"; he claims that individuals interact with each other based on historically evolving patterns of belief and action.
23. Arjun Guneratne (1998) recognizes Tharus' attitude toward education and the movement toward schooling for children.
24. As previously mentioned, ethnicity is used as a factor that differentiates educational participation by group but is seldom examined for the ways in which it contributes to the educational decision-making process in countries that do not have mandatory enrollment laws.
25. Tharu is widely spoken by all adults in the village.

Religion and Religious Ritual: Their Implications for Girls' Education

In Nepal, religion, a system of ritualized beliefs in powers that are obeyed and worshipped, is inherently related to the ethnic cultural structure of caste, the hierarchical social system based on Hindu religious principles. Given that we must investigate the social settings in which decisions for girls' schooling are made, and that Hindu religious principles are inextricably tied to the local Tharu religious structure, the intersection of ethnic and religious cultures requires investigation. In particular, we must examine the local Tharu religious culture, including its tenets, site of worship, mode of participation, and ritualistic practice. We will reveal the ways it embodies and actualizes traditional authority in the village social system and influences the educational decision-making process for families. While recognizing the structural functions of religion, we also highlight individual agency by providing empirical data on and observation of how Tharu women and men participate in the process of religion. Such portrayal and analysis of individual/micro behavior is crucial to a better understanding of religious identity, that is, individuals' association with religion as a means of self-definition. Suffice it to say at this point that Tharu religiosity is gender-based—that of the Tharu men differs from that of Tharu women. The former possess and wield power by virtue of their privileged position in the practice of religious rituals. By disaggregating and dissecting religious world views and practices, where we see the intermingling of caste, ethnicity, and gender, we show how religion operates as an important and complex factor in the process of educational decision making in the Butawal community. This chapter begins by providing a brief review of both macroscopic and microscopic perspective of religion. Next, we look at the macro structures of religion in Nepal. Third, we turn to our main concern: religion as structure and agency in the community of Butawal.

Macroscopic and Microscopic Perspectives of Religion

Several contemporary works on the sociology of religion in South Asia provide a useful background for our investigation of the religious culture in the Tharu community. These studies focus on the ways in which religion has influenced and governed communities' social behavior and helped forge particular social structure. Caroline Sweetman (1998), in her edited collection, explores the complex relationships between culture, religion, and feminism, which have a direct bearing on development work in the South.¹ In the same vein, Ibrahim Hashim (1998) argues that there are social structures and norms related to religion that may aid the effective realization of development initiatives.² In yet another influential work, Fatima L. Adamu (1998) discusses the issues of gender, development, and religion by emphasizing the inseparable link between the ideological frameworks of development and religion and examining particularly successful development programs in Muslim societies. Sharon Harper and Kathleen Clancy (1998) expose how the religious ideologies of the self locate women in particularly exploitative contexts. Uma Narayan (1997) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) also suggest gender inequality in Third World contexts may be rooted in religion and religious identity. Although they accurately note that some studies of contemporary religion have taken religion to be simply a set of beliefs and practices that is unconnected to economic, social, and political agendas, and rightly fear that these inadequate analyses of religion fail to thoroughly explain a complex social phenomenon, they, like many other feminists, often assume an inverse relationship between religiosity and power. That is, they associate a high degree of religiosity and active participation in religious ritual with lower degrees of power as far as women are concerned. This commonly held myth will be challenged in this chapter.

Whereas macroscopic studies examine the structural parameters of social institutions and offer information about associations within the social system, microscopic studies point how individuals relate to and function within those structures. Ethnographic studies utilize a microscopic perspective. For example, Michael Hutt's ethnographic study of Nepali society (1994) investigates the specific but often implicit religious dimensions in the lives of politically active Nepalese of the Kathmandu valley in order to understand both the larger social structure and the individual actions of its residents. John Gray's work in the Kathmandu valley (1995) gives us a vivid and rich depiction of the ways in which cultural and social structures, including ethnicity and religion, shape one Nepali community, although his work is limited to the perspectives of men. The ethnographic study of Steven Parish (1996) reveals the importance of religious customs for the Newars in Bhaktapur, an ancient city in the Kathmandu valley.

The obvious advantages of the macroscopic literature that largely focuses on the needs of women, and the equally obvious disadvantages of some of the microscopic anthropological work that fails to examine women's voice, have fueled current trends in the feminist and sociological literature that increasingly focus on women and religion. A collection of essays written by anthropologists and historians, edited by Michael Allen and S. N. Mukherjee (1990), explores the ritualistic aspects of the social life of Nepalese and Indian women. J. C. Watkins (1996) looks at the role of religion in a northern Himalayan Nepalese society. Her work explores the changing relationships between lay women and the spiritual realm in two ethnic Tibetan communities in Barabog in northwestern Nepal. Aparna Rayaprol (1997) examines the religious ideologies and institutional practices of immigrant Indian women. Farida Shaheed (1998), taking a microscopic look at the social role and function of religion, observes that although the participatory aspect of religion is very much part of women's lives, it is rarely studied in feminist analysis. These works all focus on the ways social structures affect women in both the household and the community, and how their individual agency has influenced and is influenced by the social structures of religion. The lacuna in existing literature indicates the need to study religion as a macro structure that governs the way the people act and interact on a daily basis.

The aforementioned collection of anthropological, sociological, and feminist works provide a multidisciplinary background for the study of religious culture in the Tharu community by enriching our general understanding of religion in South Asia. Although they are thorough and important studies of religion and religiosity in Nepal and South Asia, none focus on the Tharu. Moreover, they do not examine the role of religion in the families' decision-making processes. Specifically, they neither address religion as a crucial factor in matters related to education, nor specify how gender plays a role in religious identity and participation, which also relates to the educational decision-making process.

Keeping in mind the findings and inadequacies of these works, we offer our analysis of the hierarchies and positions and the relations and rules that link the overarching religious culture to individuals in it. Religious culture in this community is expressed in three forms and may thus be investigated from three angles. First, we look at the national, government-supported religion in the Kingdom of Nepal and the way it is fashioned, manifested, and accepted in Butawal. Second, we note how the national school system, which because largely designed, planned, and implemented by high-caste Hindu officials, propagates and promotes Hindu religious values in the local school. Third, we reveal and unpack the meanings of the local indigenous religion of Butawal, showing how it is practiced by the local residents.

Let us take a closer look at the three religious structures. Religion has played a critical role in the construction of Nepali national identity. The

country's social system is based on Hindu hierarchy. Early in the kingdom's history, in an attempt to forge a Hindu national religious identity, the ruling class instituted the caste system, which was squarely derived from the Hindu ideological conception of the world. Thus, the system aimed to structure the diverse population according to a Hindu world view. Laws and ordinances consolidated a hierarchical structure that defined the roles and rights of all men and women. Local ethnic groups were identified and placed within the lower section of the Hindu system. Today, the kingdom still refers to itself as a Hindu nation. The Tharus in Butawal are acutely aware of their social position in the hierarchy. For example, one day as I was sitting in the courtyard of the home of the Brahmin family, the Lamichhanes, Mr. Tharu, one of the poorest members of the village, approached the kitchen of our house. Mrs. Lamichhane immediately greeted him at the door of the kitchen and asked him to join us in the courtyard. After a brief conversation about his ill wife and young daughter, he asked Mrs. Lamichhane for rice. Mrs. Lamichhane went back into the kitchen and scooped a handful of rice out of its container. She gently poured rice from her hand onto the small, square cloth that he had placed on the ground. He gestured to thank her for the contribution and quietly left.³ The "untouchability" of Mr. Tharu, and the lack of physical contact in this interaction, demonstrates the ways in which the subjective nature of the caste system has become an objective fact in everyday life in the village.

Religion also plays a role in the operation and conception of the school system in the national context. The government promotes a nationalistic religious discourse to create the impression of a unified, mono-religious nation. The Nepalese public school system is organized and governed by the Hindu Kingdom's Government (His Majesty's Government). It is controlled by the Ministry of Education, whose highly centralized organization oversees the National Education Committee. The committee formulates educational policy, and its education plans are approved by the government under the rubric of the five-year Development Plan. Lofty goals and objectives are set up to guide an educational system that is flawed, bedeviled by a host of school-related challenges that include inadequate administrative guidance and teaching staff, insufficient funds, and poor facilities. Moreover, the government (that is, ruling party members, most of whom are high-caste Hindus) has designed an educational system with a state curriculum, featuring Nepali as the language of instruction. The unified curriculum and language in effect reinforce a nationalistic agenda where Hindu religious values prevail. The dominant nationalistic nature of the educational system, evident in its plans, policies, and programs aimed at promoting national unity, is closely aligned with the rhetoric of the high-caste Hindus who play a major role in its operation.

Hindu religious ideals and practices are seamlessly aligned with indigenous Tharu religious thought and action in Butawal. Simply put, religious pluralism is the existence of two or more religions in the same society. They

can be complementary and inclusive, or they can be competitive and exclusive (Droogers 1995). In Butawal, complementary and inclusive religious pluralism exists and thrives. It appears in the form of what André Droogers (1995) refers to as an external dimension, in which individuals position religious identity in relation to others' religious identity. Droogers contends that the external dimension includes the beliefs shared by those who qualify for membership—who have the right to grant admission, which is an exercise in power—and those who do not. The external dimension also includes the hierarchical relationships of sub- and superordination of others postulated, or not postulated, by their beliefs (Platvoet and van der Toorn 1995).

In Butawal, this external dimension is evident in both microscopic and macroscopic aspects. With regard to the microscopic view, Tharu women are entitled to believe in the gods and spirits but are not permitted to participate in rituals that include interaction with them. Second, there is a relatively high degree of communication between the high-caste Hindus and the Tharu in Butawal. This may be due to the fact that the Brahmins and Thakuris farm the land that they own and employ Tharus to work alongside them. Third, the Tharus strive to assimilate the high-caste Hindus' social and cultural traditions so as to achieve a higher social status. For example, some Tharu men believe that there is a direct link between social mobility and high-caste Hindu traditions. By adopting the latter's religious practice, one becomes closer to the high-caste Hindu tradition. Some Tharu women also recognize the relationship between high-caste Hinduism and social mobility, but they do not try to achieve it through religious action. Instead, they believe that appropriating and imitating some of the social customs, such as wearing a sari and applying a *tikka*, will bring them closer to high-caste status.⁴

With regard to the macroscopic view, the amalgamation of religions is evident in three cultural markers. First, we may recognize the cultural dominance of Sanskrit values in the fact that Tharus worship Hindu gods and goddesses, who influence Tharu religious thought and practice. Second, the pervasive influence of Jhankrism (shamanism), the culture of mediums and sorcerers who bear various names (*guruwa* in Tharu), remains apparent in the animistic-shamanistic religion of the Tharus. Third, the notions of seasonal ceremonial occasions (based on planting, cultivation, and harvesting periods) in indigenous Tharu religious tradition and annual Hindu holidays, such as Desai, require ritual worship and are practiced by Tharus living in Butawal. Most of the Tharu identify themselves as Hindu in the religious sense and Tharu in the ethnic sense,⁵ and they structure their lives to conform to both traditional Hindu and Tharu religious beliefs and rituals. This is directly related to the Tharus' individual religiosity and to the relations among religions' members.⁶

The case study included a measurement of religiosity to probe the Tharus' affiliation with religion. Responding to the questions on the general

survey questionnaire, 98 percent of the Tharu men indicated they are Hindu; 82 percent of the Tharu women claimed their religious affiliation as Tharu. We also used a religion scale (Basabe et al. 1967) in an effort to relate religious affiliation to the decision to enroll a daughter in school.⁷ The relationship between adults' religiosity⁸ and girls' enrollment was investigated using a t-test. The t-test results of girls' enrollment and adults' religiosity scores did not reveal statistically significant differences. We also conducted another t-test using gender and their religiosity as independent and dependent variables respectively. The results revealed that there were no statistically significant differences by gender. In order to investigate the interaction effects between girls' enrollment and gender, we developed a two-way ANOVA. Neither main nor interaction effects were found ($F = 1.40, 1.79, 0.53$ $p > .05$). Unlike their ethnicity, religiosity as measured in this quantitative way does not appear to play a key role in Tharu adults' decision to enroll a daughter in the local village school. This finding does not reveal that which the qualitative data and its analysis uncovered, however. The individual and focus group interview data did reveal that only several Tharu men, and their immediate male family members, used the process of religious ritual to settle a domestic dispute. While the quantitative tool did not reveal religion to be a statistically significant indicator of educational decision-making, my observations of deity rooms inside the home, *thans*, or temples, outside the home, religious ritual in the field and interviews with the residents who claimed they "remembered" the gods for specific purposes led me to investigate how religion is perceived in this community and how it contributes to the life of the Tharu women and men in the village.⁹ The particular amalgam, the Hindu/Tharu religious identity, expressed itself in the local setting in three distinct ways: the relationships between the individuals' dynamics of believing, the collective experience of the believer, and the consequences of religious practice (Hervieu-Léger 1998).

The Dynamics of Believing

First, the dynamics of believing refers to both the structure and agency of religion. Individual religious agency emphasizes individuals' beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and values as they relate to the larger cultural elements of the overarching structure. From an individual's perspective, religion can be viewed as the attempt to accommodate and contend with one's desires, as well as fears, by subordinating them to a conception of absolute good. Religion, seen in this way, is a system of beliefs and practices with which a group of people deals with the problems of human life by appealing to the transcendent (Yinger 1994). In turn, one's beliefs are based on and forged by a particular religious identity.

The Tharus structure their religious beliefs in accordance with both Hindu and Tharu traditions. The Tharus believe in the traditional cosmological legend



Photo 2: A Tharu family's than and ritual objects, Butawal, 2001.

that describes the origins of the first Tharus. They told me that the earth, created by fire and smoke, gave birth to Gurubaba, the first Tharu god. Feeling lonely, Gurubaba created the goddess Maya, who became his wife. All men and women are their descendants. The Tharus also believe in both benevolent and malevolent gods and spirits; the former assist and protect while the latter cause pain and distress.¹⁰ The benevolent ones are honored with ritual performances, prayers, and offerings, as they are responsible for blessing the faithful with a happy and peaceful life. Clay objects representative of benevolent spirits are placed in the courtyard or village shrine as well as in the home's deity room.

Photo 2 represents what Jan Platvoet (1995) refers to as the multimedia dimension of religion, that is, a collection of objects that represent multiple points of worship. It relates to the dynamics of believing by representing the polyvalent symbols that are clustered in forms of personal expression and used during the ritualistic act. This feature of ritual includes the use of ritual objects during religious practice, the selection of participants who engage in the act, and the choice of space in which the ritual is conducted. In Butawal, the deity room and courtyard shrines provide the space in which clay figurines representing and symbolizing the spirits and gods are kept and displayed.¹¹ They are also a space in which men can meet to pray to the gods and spirits in an attempt to resolve a dilemma.

One god identified by the Tharu is Bhairava (also called Mahadeo), who is worshipped as the god of reproduction.¹² Despite the shamanistic basis of the Tharus' beliefs, the Tharus also identify with the Hindu and Buddhist god

Sīta, the epitome of unquestioning surrender and sacrifice, and the Hindu gods Ram and Krishna.¹³ Kalika, the goddess who presides over life and death and who wields supreme power in the universe, is worshipped by the Tharu men and “remembered” by the Tharu women. Tharu women, more often than Tharu men, noted that Saraswatī (goddess of learning), Durgā (goddess of protection and power), and Kalī (goddess of power) are gods whom they “remember.” They use this word “remember” to mean that they know the gods’ names and identify the gods with good and evil. But they do not and cannot participate in religious rituals devoted to the gods or spirits. The women also remarked that the malevolent spirits must be acknowledged, by the men pleasing them with offerings either at one of the exterior shrines or in the interior deity room. The malevolent spirits can be controlled with spells, ritual threats, or other forms of magic. Gods worshipped, festivals celebrated, ceremonies performed, and foods eaten by the Tharus all conform to guidelines that are traditionally observed in both religions.

For the individual, the dynamics of belief concern the agency of his or her membership in a group of believers, including religious specialists. To Tharu men and women, this dimension means different approaches respectively to the higher world of mysterious power. Tharu men, as has been clearly shown, actively participate in religious consultation with other men and with gods and spirits. They have a direct and strong relationship with the providential forces. They also have direct access to and dealing with the village *guruwa* (priest). Thus, the Tharu men’s religious identity bespeaks authority, in that the men have the opportunity to approach the ultimate transcendent power. On the other hand, to Tharu women the gods are more distant beings. They “remember” and know of the gods. They are in fact often fearful and in awe of them.¹⁴ They believe in the powers of both the benevolent and malevolent gods and the spirits, and think of them in such terms. Most important, women do not and cannot, as a result of tradition, directly seek the gods’ advice by performing the proper religious rituals that are available and accessible only to men.

André Droogers’s notion of internal and external dimensions of religious identity and religiosity is useful here. His internal-external duality is based on the dichotomy of membership in groups of believers and nonbelievers. Droogers implies that the believer is a practitioner, and thus imbued with religious power. This is often true. However, in Butawal, his framework does not serve to explain the entire situation. In this Tharu community, not all believers are religious practitioners. The male believers are practitioners while the female believers are not. The practicing believer (male) and the nonpracticing believer (female) do not share equal power.¹⁵ By the simple fact that women are not expected to engage in religious ritual and religious worship, they are essentially excluded from what is being discussed during those activities and ultimately disassociated from the outcome of the ritual experiences. In other words, the believer who is a nonpractitioner is powerless. This is especially

pertinent when men consult the gods and spirits to make a final decision, such as one that determines the education of a daughter. Men assume the role as the receiver of messages from the gods and spirits. Their voice is therefore regarded as valuable because of their receipt of gods' or spirits' useful advice during the ritual act. Women, on the other hand, are merely the caretaker for the sites where the rituals are conducted. They have the right neither to pose questions to the gods or spirits nor to receive suggestions or advice from them. In short, power, in this context, is the capacity to influence the outcome of decision. An important aspect of a religion's power is its license to control or dictate. In this case, the individual who is privy to the religious ritual is more powerful than the person who is excluded from it.

The Collective Experience of the Believer

Second, the collective experience of the believer is the way in which religion is practiced by a group of individuals. This may be experienced in the formal setting of a religious institution or the informal settings of the home. Moreover, the collective experience of the believer, that is, the actual ways in which belief is practiced by the community, varies by gender. Anjali Bagwe (1995) specifically addresses the gendered differentiation of decision-making and arbitration in matters of ritual. She notes that males are directly involved in religious ritual; women are sidelined as occasional participants during ritual, but they are usually the preparers for the religious sites. Janaki Chaudhari and Maudhi Chaudhary, two Tharu women in Butawal, told me that they participated in the religious ritual, albeit in two different ways. Janaki Chaudhari said,

Anyone can sleep in the deity room. But we do not allow outsiders to sleep in it. We do not use the room as a stove that often. If someone dies, we cook food only for the departed soul in that room while offering that food to the soul. We sit and cry. This is a tradition of Deoshaura Tharu.¹⁶

I interviewed other Deoshaura Tharu women who lived in Butawal, but Janaki was one of only two women I spoke to who claimed to have participated in some kind of religious service or ceremony. The other woman, Maudhi Chaudhary, a young mother with two small boys, told me,

We do *puja* for the household god. It is our ancestors' custom. That's why we have to do this. We must respect *duota* [spirit]. If we don't respect *duota*, then we can get sad. From the beginning, our ancestors they used the *duota*, now they offer a *prasad* plate of food. [This family used to use clay sculptures to represent the *duota*. Presently they offer food for *puja*.] I prepare the food. If we don't give him *puja*, they give us sadness in our house.

Maudhi believed that it was her responsibility to prepare the meal and serve it to the *duota*. She believed that her participation contributed to the well-being

of the household. This act not only represents a shift from traditional Tharu religious practice (clay *duota*) to contemporary Hindu practice (*prasad*, or plates of food used as offerings to the spirits) but also an extension of the female role as preparer of the ritual site—the woman was a participant during the actual ritual. Nuiyan Chaudhari, another Tharu woman who was approximately fifty years of age, performed a similar task. She said,

We use deity room for sleeping, storing. While sleeping we must leave some space for the god and his movement. We must keep the space clean. If we do not leave a passage, the god will stomp on us, pull our hair, bend and pull our ears—but he protects us as well. For example, if a thief sneaks in, the god wakes us by pinching us.

Although Janaki and Nuiyan did have express a private experience with the gods, and participated in some form of religious ritual, Maudhi Chaudhari, also a member of the focus group interview, shared a different perspective of her concept of religious space and ritual. Maudhi noted,

In the deity room we do not cook food. However, we sleep in the room. Our guests can sleep there too, but a bit farther from the idols, if it becomes necessary for guests to sleep in the room. We always keep that room clean.¹⁷

Maudhi, whose voice was by far the most representative of the Tharu women's in the village, demonstrated the typical female experience with religion. She did not claim that she called the spirits, nor that she experienced their presence.

In current literature, there are various interpretations of women's identification with the domestic perspective of religious ritual. For example, Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai (1991) examine women's minimized role in religious ritual and attribute it to their learned notion of self as wives and mothers, not individuals. They argue that women's assessments might also be hindered by their preconceived notions and their lack of information or consciousness about the situation in which they find themselves. Amartya Sen (1990) also relates women's socialization to their perception of agency. Sen relates women's difficulty in differentiating between their interests and those of their families with a socialization process that depicts them as wives and mothers. Women are likely to be more aware of their practical needs (i.e., what allows them to fulfill their daily social roles as wives and mothers), than of their strategic needs (i.e., what reduces their dependence on and subordination to the decisions of others). This perspective is especially important when it is compared to the responses of the Tharu men about their perceptions of involvement in religious ritual.

Satya Chaudhari, a father of two primary school-aged children, stated:

Our family talks about sending the girl to school. There are many places she can go. We have to decide where she should go. My wife and I discuss this.

Sometimes we argue. We cannot say what is [to be] done. [We cannot decide whether to send her to school.] We can call on the *duota* to help us to decide. When we make a decision in the room, my brother and I make it. We ask other people and the *duota*. They will make our eyes open. They help us to decide. We go to the deity room and ask for their opinions.

Mr. Chaudhari's comments were similar to those of other two families who used a deity room on a regular basis. The comments of both Tharu women and men reveal explicit differences in how they participate in religious ritual. In these cases, the men's role as an active participant in the religious ceremony differed from the women's. Most Tharu women in Butawal report that they use the deity room as an extended part of the house to store foods and accommodate guests. They also have to assume the responsibility to clean. Tharu men of several families, on the other hand, use religious ritual as a strategy to resolve the family's inability to reach a unanimous decision about a matter. The men have control over that which happens during the ritual, and apparently the outcome of it.

Within the Tharu community itself, the exercise of religious power can be witnessed in the relationships between the practitioners (males) and the nonpractitioners (females) of religious rituals. The male role enables the men to control and maintain a hierarchical social structure in which they occupy a higher position. By socializing Tharu women into believing that they are not supposed to participate in ritual worship,¹⁶ Tharus deprive women of their ability to influence what is discussed and undertaken during religious ritual acts. Most simply, Tharu men are identified as the recipients of religious practice and ritual for an particular purpose that contributes to the decision-making practices of the household. Tharu women support this practice by maintaining their role as housekeepers of the religious icons and space. These traditional practices have serious consequences for the women of this community.

What is religious ritual and how is it practiced and experienced in Butawal? Religious ritual, such as those practiced by the Tharu men, is often explicit. It is the regularly repeated, sequential ordering of stylized, traditional behavior that symbolizes a value or belief that takes place during a special event or occasion (Platvoet 1995, 41–2). These rituals, as with religious rituals elsewhere, bear a number of common structural characteristics: (1) they provide solutions to problems; (2) they are rooted in experience; (3) they involve the demarcation of boundaries; and (4) they reinforce, or reify, social processes. These structural characteristics of rituals are manifest in a variety of ways.

Several dimensions of religious ritual are particularly helpful to understanding the religious culture in Butawal. Jan Platvoet (1995) refers to the communicative dimension of religiosity that includes both explicit and implicit messages. In the explicit sense, some Tharu males use ritual to make a

decision about an issue on which the family cannot reach a unanimous decision. For example, they pray to the gods for help in deciding whether to send a daughter to school. The male family members who had conducted the rituals told me that they had used this opportunity to determine their daughter's educational fate. In the implicit sense, this ritual practice demonstrates men's power to control an outcome. The implicit message here is that the gods will give the men a solution to their dilemma. The Tharu men are those included in the act and are the recipients of the answer; a decision is the right one because it comes from the gods. This act leaves out women. It is interesting to note that although many of the gods and spirits actually assume female forms, Tharu women are not entitled to share in their wisdom and advice, and the advice of human women is not respected by the men who accept counsel from female deities. This dichotomy between religious thought and actual practice illuminates the boundaries between the metaphysical/mythological religious world and social/theoretical world, as if they are entirely different spheres that have no connection.

Jan Platvoet (1995) also refers to the aesthetic dimension of religion, which identifies the adherence to the traditional or proper ways in which the ritual is performed. In Butawal, gender plays a significant role in this dimension. Tradition allows and encourages Tharu males to participate in the religious ritual process. Tharu women neither participate in nor challenge this male-dominated practice. They do not, interview data suggest, believe that they are being excluded from a significant act. The women state that they do participate through service to the gods by maintaining the deity room and courtyard shrine and preparing food during festivals. Yet by upholding this traditional or "proper" ritual process, women contribute to the very act of exclusion that oppresses them. Our findings in Butawal add to our current understanding of women and religion.

According to Jan Platvoet (1995), ritual functions create solidarity in a group and, in effect, boundaries around it as well. In Butawal, ritual no doubt creates solidarity among men. It also erects boundaries between them and the women. Such an integrative act is paradoxically premised on the exclusion of women from the ritualistic tradition, thereby limiting women's ability to influence and ultimately control their social, cultural, and economic lives and those of their children, as in the case of educational decision making. But Tharu men defend such ritualistic tradition. Narayan Chaudhari, a school graduate in his thirties with three children, endorses the existing ritual convention. He told me frankly,

My wife didn't want the girls to go to school. I wanted the girls to go to school. We discussed it but could not make a decision. [Who discussed it? I asked. Mr. Chaudhari told me that his wife and he discussed it.] I told my brother. He and I went to the deity room. We were all alone. We talked to

the gods. We asked them for their advice. They [the gods] told us to send the girls to school. This is right. After that, we went to my wife and told her. She agreed.

In this way, the boundary determined by male membership in the religious act barred the woman from having any say in the matter. She was considered an outsider in a matter that related directly to her own daughter. In effect and practice, she was excluded from the inner workings of the household in which decision-making was conducted. The Tharu woman's lack of identity and power is clearly revealed in the integrative dimension of Butawal religious ritual.

The Consequences of Religious Practice

In terms of local expressions of Hindu/Tharu religious identity with regard to gendered decision-making, the consequence of religious practice, Hervieu-Léger's third dimension of religious identity, is the outcome of the act of religious belief and worship. These outcomes may be realized in a sense of fulfillment experienced by the individual, in terms of a psychological satisfaction for the individual. The outcomes can also result in exclusion and indirectly, oppression. The consequences of religious practice also differed along gendered lines. As pointed out, the majority of Tharu women reported that their primary religious role was to maintain the physical space of the deity room in the house. They used the room as the need arose and did not associate it with their own religious practice. On the other hand, Tharu men who discussed the importance of religious worship actively engaged in religious ritual in that same space. They appeared to have full and complete control over the activities of the event when the gods were consulted. What are the consequences of this separation and segregation?

In this sense, the institutional structures of religion in Butawal shaped the participants' abilities to use, produce, manipulate and interpret objects and rituals. In particular, given this different access to and use of resources—in this case, the *duota*—men maintained power. Given that they consulted the gods when a unanimous decision could not be made, they were able to use the act of religious worship to influence the desired outcome. In other words, their power to use the religious institution in this way affected their ability to make their voices heard. Tharu women, not privy to the religious ritual, were essentially prevented from voicing their dissenting opinion on the topic under discussion, such as the enrollment of a daughter in school. This does point to a central irony in this chapter. Although some Tharu women support the education of their daughters, other Tharu women do not support schooling for daughters. If the Tharu mother who opposes a daughter's education would articulate her disinterest in sending her daughter to school, and actually convince the male members of the household that schooling for the daughter is not important and unnecessary, we may actually find fewer Tharu girls enrolling in school. But we must reveal a critical point. If one looks beyond this ironic idiosyncrasy, we

recognize the importance of examining the family's discussion in detail. If the family understands the reason *why* a Tharu mother opposes the education of her daughter, the conversation may result in ideas that address her concerns and propose possible solutions to the problem. For example, if the Tharu mother is opposed to the education of her daughter because the time spent in school would reduce from the time that the girl would spend doing housework, the family's discussion might result in a new schedule that would allow the daughter to complete housework during early morning or after school times of the day. With regard to the consequence of religious practice, by excluding Tharu women from religious ritual, Tharu men exclude women's voice and the possibility of any discussion because the "discussion" takes place during the ritual.

The consequence of the gendered religious ritual here is that despite very lofty conceptions of womanhood in some metaphysical frameworks and mythological constructions, the social structural reality of gender in Tharu society delegates women to an inferior position, barring them from being involved in religious ritual practice (Verma 1995).

In sum, the structural significance of religion is largely shaped by the religious influence of a plural society. First, the kingdom's culture is based, in large part, on the Hindu hierarchy that assigns all individuals a status within the caste system. Although the caste system has been outlawed, today's residents of Butawal identify themselves as members of the social classifying system and are fully aware of the expectations and restrictions that are placed upon them because of their rank. Second, the village's school, as part of a national system, regulates the type of material that children learn, thus indirectly supporting and promoting a Hindu agenda. Third, the religious structure of Butawal, which is an amalgam of both Hindu and Tharu traditional practices, clearly divides the community along gendered lines. Women and men understand, accept, and engage in religious practices according to preconceived and preexisting expectations of female and male roles. These observations lead us to the important outcomes of structure and agency. First, religious structure provides the frame in which Tharu adults function. Second, religious ritual used to settle a disagreement in the family represents individual agency which is male-controlled. This results in serious consequences for the women who are excluded from the practice.

Concluding Remarks

If we accept the village Tharu *guruwa*'s perspective, the Tharu religion is a fading tradition and ritual exercise is a vanishing habit. Butawal's Tharu *guruwa* laments the decline of religion as the loosening of Tharu cultural identity:

We are losing our Tharu identity. Years ago, many people would come to see me and ask me to pray to the spirits for a good crop, for healthy children. Now, they do not come. They do not pray to our gods.¹⁷

On the other hand, fieldwork reveals indications that religious life and practice are still viable elements for at least some Tharu families in Butawal. Given this situation, failure to examine religion and religiosity would limit our analysis and understanding of the social structures and levels of individual agency inherent to Tharu life.

We have examined the concepts of religion as structure and agency to interpret the meanings of religion for the Tharus in Butawal. Specifically, we have explored the connection between the macro-social structures of Hinduism and Tharu indigenous religion and the micro-social patterns of individual identification with, beliefs about, and attitudes toward religious practices and values. The link between structures (religious ideology) and individual agency (religious ritual) is an integral and inherent force in the life and experience of both Tharu men and women and, as such, acts as a powerful cultural element that affects the decision-making process within some families.

Both Jan Platvoet (1995) and André Droogers (1995) provide us with detailed models for the ways religious structure and individual religiosity can add to our understanding of social life in Butawal. Platvoet reminds us that religious ritual can be analyzed in multiple dimensions. Ritual performance is an event that is held for a particular purpose. Objects maintain an important role during religious ritual. He also points out that religious ritual can separate and divide. Rituals impart explicit and implicit messages to Tharu women and men in the community. These messages create boundaries that divide along gendered lines.

André Droogers (1995) refers to these facets of religion and religious ritual in a more general manner. He identifies the importance of the gods and spirits that are prevalent in the society and of the relationships between the religious ritual and its participants. He also shows how, through religious ritual, groups in the community are divided and alienated from each other. This separation illuminates how religious ritual, when it excludes women, is an oppressive force in the social community.

While these two theorists provide important foundational information in the study of religious structure and individual agency, our own examination of religion as a social structure and religious ritual as a practice of individual agency in Butawal arrives at several striking findings. First, religion there is a social structure that is a complex mix of both indigenous Tharu and traditional Hindu beliefs. These structures promote certain assumptions about men and women's roles in the ritual life of the community. Second, this structure, with its religious power, forges social biases. Such biases generated from within the religious structure are manifest in individuals' action and inaction. In the case of Butawal, this distinction is based on gender differences. Both Tharu men and women recognize religion and accept it as part of their community and their lives. They are both familiar with the stories of creation, and both describe the significance of the gods and spirits in their supernatural world.

However, they respect the gods and spirits, and call or “remember” them, in different ways and for different reasons. Men and women do not have equal opportunities to worship the gods and spirits. Tharu men and women do not participate in religious ritual at the same rate or for the same purpose. Tharu men participate in religious ritual; Tharu women do not.¹⁸ The Tharu women are religious, but they conceive of their own religiosity in a way that does not challenge the existing religious structure of the community. Third, insofar as there is this structural inequality, religious agency, defined in terms of practitioners and nonpractitioners, is also bound by gender roles. The exclusionary practices of religion prevent or at least discourage women from engaging in meaningful and necessary decision-making practices. By disaggregating and dissecting the complexity of the religious culture, including religious world views and practices, we uncover layers of the cultural fabric that help us paint a more nuanced picture of the forces at work in the decision-making process pertaining to education for girls. Fourth, both structure and agency yield power. Religious ritual in the Tharu community, which is only experienced by men, creates and maintains a power structure that imbues them with the power to listen to the word of the gods and spirits, and to convey their interpretation of those words to women. We know that on several occasions, the families did rely on consultation with the spirits and gods to solve a dispute between family members who could not reach a unanimous consensus on the enrollment of a daughter in the village school. Women’s religiosity, in and of itself, does not oppress them; however, it does exclude them from religious ritual. This limits their agency, that is, their ability to wield power, for example, in decision-making situations that ultimately have implications for both their daughters and themselves. In other words, the Tharu women of Butawal do not have the power to involve themselves in religious ritual, and, hence, do not have the power to influence that which transpires during the ritual and its outcomes. Our study of Tharu religiosity suggests that power includes the ability to exclude others, whether through the process of social forces and institutional practices or through individuals’ decisions. By investigating the ways in which women and men perceive religion and practice it, we uncover the ways in which the power structures ultimately govern the future chances for some girls’ schooling.

NOTES

1. “South” refers to countries south of the equator.
2. Education is commonly associated with development initiatives, such as those discussed in earlier chapters.
3. Field notes, June 1, 1997.
4. These two ideas came from separate focus group interviews with men and women, respectively, in January 2001.

5. Results of survey questionnaire (Shrestha and Lamichhane et al. 1983).
6. This references André Droogers's (1995) internal dimension.
7. F. M. Basabe et al. (1967) is one of the few instruments to measure religiosity that is not based on Christian foundations. The instrument that was used in this study was modified while in Nepal and translated and back-translated by three people. Although we believe that the instrument was suitable for this population, continued work should be devoted to the development of a tool that probes religiosity and the ways in which it influences the lives of both women and men.
8. The Religion Scale (Basabe et al. 1967) provided the most appropriate instrument to measure Tharu adults' religiosity. The reliability of the instrument was tested with the equivalent forms method. In this method, one compares the results of two different questionnaires given at the same time to the same group of participants. The questions of both questionnaires were practically identical in content but formulated differently. The coefficient of correlation between the parallel questions of each questionnaire showed the reliability of each question. After applying this test to the survey, Basabe retained only those questions with a coefficient of correlation higher than 0.89. This instrument, like Jean Phinney's ethnicity measure, was translated and back-translated by three different native Nepali speakers, also fluent in Tharu and English.
9. In this case, there was not a statistically significant number of people who use religion to make an educational decision for a daughter. This might have been due to the lack of religious ritual practiced in Butawal. This also might have been due to the instrument's inability to measure this facet of social practice. There is a need to develop religiosity instruments for this population.
10. Both men and women, on separate occasions and in different settings, shared with me their knowledge of this legend.
11. My field notes (1997) indicate that conversations with the residents indicated that years earlier, the village shrine was also used for this purpose. When I entered the village for the first time in 1997, the village shrine was in a state of disrepair. The residents told me that the shrine had not been used for years.
12. Hindus worship Bhairava or Mahadeo as the god of destruction.
13. A legitimate and valuable question to investigate is the ways in which and extent to which indigenous religious and ethnic beliefs and traditions have influenced Buddhist and Hindu religions.
14. Numerous individual and focus group interviews throughout the field work, with the exception of the very first visit, revealed this information.
15. All Tharu women in Butawal told me that they believed in the spirits and their ability to bring desired benefits prayer as well as to guard the women and their families against harm.
16. Focus group interview January 5, 2001.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Numerous women told me that they do not learn about religious ritual and that they perform it only once, before marriage.

Epilogue: Present Findings and Future Possibilities

Nepalese girls do not enroll in school at rates deemed acceptable by the Education for All initiatives. Moreover, the goals and objectives established by the Nepalese government that aligned with the well-known international initiative have not been attained (Primary Educational Final Report, 1996). The Tharus, one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Nepal, have one of the lowest educational participation rates in the kingdom. Analysis of girls' enrollment in school (differentiated by ethnic group and Hindu caste hierarchies) show that Tharu girls consistently enroll in school at lower rates than girls from other ethnic and Hindu groups. They also maintain one of the highest repetition rates in the country and drop out of school more often.

Given the limited success of the international initiatives and Nepal's own educational efforts for girls, the study of educational participation in government-sponsored schools has engaged both scholars in academia and development specialists in international agencies. As the profession struggles to reveal the circumstances and conditions that relate to and influence girls' educational participation in Nepal, this study primarily addresses two sets of questions. First, what general factors influence Tharu girls' participation in school in Butawal, a place where Tharu girls attend school at higher rates than the national average? By examining this case, can we find other possible indicators of girls' participation? Second, and more specifically on the issue of gender, whose voices are heard in investigations of educational decision-making practices for daughters? What social structures contribute to the beliefs about, attitudes toward, and values of education for a daughter? To what extent have we listened to the voice of the mother? Can her voice offer a different perspective to further our understanding of daughters' participation in school?

The study answers these questions by employing and analyzing the data generated in a series of field visits from 1997 through 2001. The data were in

turn complemented by the use of documentary and statistical resources, all of which are analyzed with reference to the most useful theoretical frameworks and approaches offered in current sociological, anthropological, and educational literature, not to mention feminist writing. Our investigation brings into sharp relief two of the most important structural and sociological conditions in the educational decision-making process, namely ethnicity and religiosity, both of which are given in-depth and critical consideration. These conditions or factors are seldom adequately explored in studies in the field of educational participation. Our work, by revealing their significance, contributes to a more richly textured discussion of the issue of the education of girls. Here, by way of a conclusion, let us not only recapitulate our findings but also suggest ideas for future studies in the field, aware that our study is merely the beginning of the sort of multiperspectival inquiry that is increasingly necessary in educational research. Thus, this final chapter not only takes a backward glance by summarizing our thesis, but also looks ahead by pointing to some future research possibilities that may enrich our understanding of an endemic phenomenon, that is, the undereducation of girls common in many poor countries such as Nepal.

A Recapitulation: Summary and Conclusions

The study of girls' educational participation requires complex and interrelated methods to collect and analyze the factors and circumstances that influenced a decision to educate daughters. In order to thoroughly investigate them, we examine how people live and how social, cultural and religious elements influence the decision to educate a daughter.

The book begins with a case study of the facets of life in a Nepali village inhabited mostly by Tharus, in southwestern Nepal. Through my regular visits to the field, I was able to construct a detailed picture of the geographic and demographic features of the research site. The visits served three purposes. First, they enabled me to investigate and gather literature from Nepali scholars and development agency professionals in Kathmandu and to become accustomed to life in rural Nepal while I resided in Tharu and Brahmin homes in the village. During this fieldwork, I learned the routines of the married women and carried out the work that was assigned to me. Second, the series of field visits also provided time that was necessary to develop a rapport with the community and to build trust with the residents. Finally, it allowed me the time to embark on ethnographic data collection, observing and recording my perceptions of the environment. As I explored the setting, I began to formulate ideas about the relationships between social structures and individual agency in the everyday context that contributed to the dynamic process of educational decision-making for the Tharus in this community. As part of the data collection, I conducted surveys as well as individual and focus interviews, followed

by initial analyses. The periods in between the fieldwork visits provided me with the time to contemplate what I experienced in the field. It afforded time to talk with other interested parties and experts—fellow graduate students and professors during the early years of the project, and colleagues during the later years. The use of the integrative methodologies and the undertaking of a series of field trips formed the bedrock of this study on the educational decision-making process for girls.

The case study uncovers the ways in which ethnic and religious culture plays an important role in the educational participation decision-making process. It exposes how ethnicity influences the Tharus' perceptions of education's value. Tharu fathers and mothers strongly identify with their Tharu ethnic group—a group that they believe has been discriminated in the past because of inadequate formal education. They also differentiate their ethnic Tharu group from the high- and low-caste groups in the village and identify with the importance of high-caste culture that supports girls' education. For example, Tharu mothers' perception of education is influenced by that of their high-caste neighbors. They respect the decisions of the Brahmin and Thakuri women who sent their own daughters to school, but they are not impressed by the low-caste families who also sent their daughters to school.

Ethnicity as a factor is directly linked to, but distinguishable from, another crucial factor: religion. Religion is another structure that influences the decision-making process, although for far fewer families than ethnicity. In a case where a family cannot reach a unanimous decision to enroll a daughter in school, a Tharu father participates in religious ritual to settle the dispute. Tharu mothers accept this practice and support the outcome of the rituals, even if these are not in accord with their own viewpoints.

One constant element in both the social structures of ethnicity and religion, and in both the individuals' ethnic identity and religiosity, is the role of power, which also brings in the question of gender. For example, the perceived power of the high-caste Hindu influences Tharu mothers so that they enroll daughters in school. The interethnic demonstration of power in the community has potential implications for the lives of Tharu girls. Mediated by gender, power rears its ugly head in these Tharu households in the form of the oppression of women. When Tharu women attempt to assert their power to discuss enrolling their daughters in the local school, their voices are not heard during family discussions. In other words, the gendered power structure of the family dynamics prevents the mother's opinions from being heard. Power is also present in religious practices. In several cases, when a unanimous decision to enroll a daughter in school could not be reached in the family, Tharu mothers did not have the opportunity to participate in religious rituals in which the question of a daughter's school enrollment was discussed. This religious culture means that in this case, the fathers are ultimately in control of both the family's discussion and, apparently, its outcome.¹

While the diversity of the Tharu culture forms the groundwork of much of the book, the constant and ubiquitous element of power, mediated by and negotiated through gender, is evident in the relations between Tharu women and men. Thus, this book also explores gender not only as an analytic category but also as a critical fact in Tharu life, defining it as a critical element in the sociocultural process of articulating ideas, formulating opinions, acquiring knowledge, and manifesting power, based on the interactions between men and power. By situating gender within the socially constructed ethnic and religious contexts of everyday life, we identify complex environments in which women's voice is heard and silenced. Building on and expanding the findings of feminist theory and literature, this study demonstrates how gender can be interrogated in the context of the sociological literature. In particular, we present and critique this body of literature germane to the study of gender: Women in Development (WID), Gender and Development (GAD), and feminist standpoint theory (FST), while relating their insights to our own educational research in Nepal. First, by studying the Tharu in Butawal, we reveal the shortcomings of the main tenets of the WID and GAD literature, and show how their flaws may well be rectified by appropriating FST, which emphasizes the importance of listening to and understanding women's voices. Thus, we come to possess the right conceptual and methodological instrument for plumbing the intricate reasons for Tharu women's support of or opposition to education for girls, enabling us to rethink and more effectively tackle the difficult problem of low educational participation by girls in Nepal.

Second, to better analyze and apprehend the paramount issue of gender as a factor in educational decisions, we also suggest an alternative investigative approach, namely Multiperspectivity (MP), an epistemology and methodology to contemplate how hearing women's voices helps to explain gendered differences and inequities in the household. MP recognizes that knowledge constructed and produced by women has been missing from much of our education-related scholarship. By acknowledging and utilizing women's voice as "grounds of knowledge" and "voice of authority," we legitimize the unheard or devalued voice in the gendered context of the household and the village, thereby helping us to explain accurately the educational decision-making process in Butawal. By valuing women's voice and position, MP lays the groundwork for the recognition of female-centered knowledge, which in turn may lead to a praxis orientation that actually advances the social position of women. MP, in other words, recognizes that the ultimate goal is to stimulate a self-sustaining process of advancement for poor countries, which assumes women to be both knowledge receivers and knowledge producers.

In order to organize and make sense of the multifaceted ethnic, religious, and social structures and agencies, we need to describe and understand the sociological conditioning and construction of knowledge. Hence the need to purposefully use social theory to show how the social structure relates to

international education. Specifically, we utilize social theory's relationism, which accommodates multiple representations of knowledge in the varied social, cultural, economic, and political structures. It thus broadens the epistemological foundation on which discourses of females' education participation could be more firmly built and redefines the socially constructed knowledge base of educational participation studies. In short, social relationism reveals and unravels the complex interaction between the acts and world views of individuals on the one hand and the structural institutions on the other hand. The interrogation and examination of methodological relationism effectively bridges the macro (the grand sweep of the social structure) and the micro (the individual in society) by disclosing how agency functions within structures. By doing so, we see how individual agency and social structures contribute to the decisions made for Tharu girls' enrollment in school.

We also employ social theory's integrated paradigm to explain the intricate linkages between overarching social structures and contingent individual agency. This paradigm identifies the micro-subjective actions and voices of both the mother and the father, which are influenced by the macro-objective social realities of ethnicity and religion in village life. By identifying ethnicity and religion as *integral* components of *both* the individual (micro) and societal (macro), we link macro structure with micro agency, showing how the patriarchal structure of the household manipulates and controls women's voices, thereby ultimately affecting the outcome of the educational decision-making process.

Not only does this book emphasize the importance of power, gender, and the social structure in our investigation of girls' education, as suggested earlier, but all these crucial analytical issues and sociocultural phenomena must also be understood in terms of ethnicity and religion. Indeed, data from fieldwork, findings from scholarly literature, and insights from theories all apparently confirm that understanding educational decision-making involves understanding ethnicity and religion, which have been heretofore neglected or played down as factors in the field of educational participation studies. This book hopes to enrich the field by meaningfully and strategically including the two factors that seem to play active roles in places such as Nepal and other emerging countries in South Asia.

The book regards ethnicity through a collection of theories based on the assumption that people can be grouped into categories according to physical, behavioral, and cultural differences (Linnekin and Poyer 1996). This tenet, which supports our notion that both structure and agency are essential aspects of analysis, is interwoven into the empirical data from Nepal. In Nepal, the Muluki Ain treaty of 1854, although now outlawed and supposedly no longer in force, has done a great deal toward structuring ethnicity in Nepal. The treaty made the nationalistic claim to "unify" the diverse peoples of the country by categorizing all Nepalese citizens within a hierarchical social structure

of caste based on the Hindu religious ranking system. The Tharus, an ethnic group indigenous to Nepal, were assigned to a low position within the hierarchical system. This hierarchy is still very much in evidence in numerous ways in present-day Tharu life. The ethnic structure of Nepal is also visible in the nationalized school system. High-caste Hindus from the majority fill the top educational administration positions. They have created educational policies, devised educational plans, implemented a nationalized curriculum, and evaluated student achievement in order to promote national unity and civic responsibility to the kingdom. Although there are obvious political benefits in promoting such a monoethnic system dominated by Hindu views and values, the system flattens the rich ethnic diversity of Nepal, denying indigenous knowledge and language an equal role in the schools.

Given such homogenizing policy with regard to ethnicity, our study is interested in finding out how individual agency fares within the ethnic structure in the case of a local community, such as the Tharu one in Butawal. Agency refers to the individual's movement in and relationship to the larger social structure. We define the agency of ethnicity in terms of self-awareness, attitudes toward others, and interactions with others. Our ethnicity survey questionnaire discloses that both male and female Tharus proclaim a clear affiliation with their Tharu heritage. The questionnaire also reveals that the Tharu women of Butawal display more positive attitudes toward the high-caste Hindus and interact on a more regular basis with them than Tharu men. These interactions include discussions about the importance of education for girls. The survey questionnaire data analyses show ethnicity to be a statistically significant indicator of the decision to enroll girls in school. This finding distinguishes our case, for many other works that deal with ethnicity often only identify the surface relationship between ethnicity and education—they correlate the ethnic groups with their respective rates of enrolling girls in school, but they do not probe what ethnicity actually is and means. Our present study seeks to show how ethnicity actually works as a factor in educational decisions.

Like ethnicity, religion looms large in the lives of the Tharus; religious beliefs and rituals inexorably influence the educational decision-making process. In our study, religion is defined as both a philosophical structure that provides the foundation for religious thought and a pragmatic channel through which individual agency is realized as a series of actions in a particular local setting. Specifically, we examine the connection between the macro-social structural elements of Hinduism and Tharu indigenous religion, and the micro-social agency in terms of individuals' identification with, beliefs about, attitudes toward and valuation of religious thought. We illustrate how the objective structure of religious organization (and the subjective perception of it) in terms of the Hindu caste hierarchy figures as the dominant religious component of social life in Butawal, showing how it orders and shapes Tharu culture. We also reveal how the subjective elements of individual agency yield and breed

attitudes about the value of religion for Tharu women and men. Strategically, we examine religious identity by looking at individuals' religious behaviors, based on both participant observations and interview data. By doing so, we see a pattern of participation of religious ritual emerge, which clearly shows how Tharu men's participation in religious ritual, or collective experience, differs from Tharu women's. Our study brings into sharp relief the gender-based differentiation between the religious ritual practitioner (the Tharu father) and the nonpractitioner (the Tharu mother). We expose the consequences of religious practice with regard to the decisions made for a daughter's educational future. By excluding women from religious rituals, Tharu men assume a powerful role as the sole ritual practitioners and thereby serve, *de facto*, as the sole determinants of the educational fate of girls. Here, we see at work the subjectively interpreted traditional authority of men, who participated in the rituals. We also see the powerlessness of women, who take on a subservient role and who often meekly and helplessly act as mere supporters of the customary religious practices.

The complex relationships between social structures and individual agency, involving the issues of gender, ethnicity, and religion, make us aware of the need to view educational policy in a new light. Thus this book embarks on a critical analysis of international educational policy for girls' education in South Asia. Our contention is that we may pinpoint the general problems in previous policy research by directing our attention to the findings generated in our in-depth local case study of a community in Nepal. To rethink educational policy is to contemplate those very forces at work in rural Nepal with regard to girls' education. Our critical examination of the internationally renowned Education for All policy and its adoption in various South Asian countries' reveal glaring omissions. EFA and its local and national manifestations ultimately fail to address the complex factors, conditions, and circumstances that influence the decision to enroll a girl in school. As Amartya Sen has suggested in many of his works, educational policy must be faulted for its use of excessively simplistic snapshots of human society to explain highly complex situations. The principal problem is that the policy fails to tackle cultural conditions inherently embedded within structural institutions that influence girls' participation in education. For example, there is a blatant lack of attention to the importance of the ethnic and religious cultures in the daily lives of residents in local communities throughout South Asia. Ignoring these factors as potential contributors to issues of educational participation by girls in Nepal and elsewhere dooms any real chance of successful attainment of policy goals and objectives. In other words, by failing to grapple with the difficult and complex problems of ethnicity and religion in the educational decision-making process, policy makers essentially prevent the construction of a comprehensive policy that addresses the crucial factors and conditions that relate to girls' educational participation.

Thus, our study maintains that the problem of girls' underenrollment in school involves a set of complex issues that cannot be resolved by simply recommending girls' participation in school, as the country EFA documents propose. Individual actors—girls, parents, extended family members, neighbors, teachers, principals, district education representatives, national policy makers, and international advisors—must all have a voice in the process and policy so that educational goals and objectives may succeed. The submerging of the individual voice in the EFA policies calls our attention to their major flaw: ignoring the culture of the very people who are supposed to be the policies' recipients and beneficiaries.

By utilizing a multiperspective approach and methodology, the book reveals the importance of both the larger societal structures (power, gender, ethnicity, and religion) and the individual's place in them. Specifically, by paying attention to women's voice, it reveals the possibility of the transformative leverage of individuals vis-à-vis the overarching structures. Women may not be the ultimate determinant of the educational future of the daughters, but whether they are in support of or opposed to a daughter's education, their actions and opinions do represent individual agency. Sometimes these are explicit, when, for example, they actively engage in discussion with high-caste neighbors. Sometimes they are implicit, hidden behind the veil of religious ritual practices.

All in all, our book integrates commonly used economic indicators with the oft neglected social and cultural elements of gender, ethnicity, and religion, the goal of which is to identify more precisely and completely the influences at work in the process of making decisions about girls' education. Correctly identifying the interlocking web of factors opens up the possibility of designing and enacting better policies that enable more girls to enroll in and graduate from educational programs. Our present inquiry may have important implications for future research.

A Prospectus: Possibilities for Future Work

The questions we ask in this book should compel us to ask further questions. First, our work shows the need for more gender-aware research—but the issue is not that gender studies are disembodied, guided by ideological fervor or theoretical speculation. Rather, it is that gender research is itself grounded in many contexts—the household, the community, the region, and the nation—whose *gendered* nature we can pick apart. By identifying the social structures that form and organize social space, and that in the process influence and shape educational decision-making, we are more likely to understand who makes the decisions, how these decisions are made, and why they are made. These social and cultural structures must be understood from the perspectives of *both* women and men, and in the political context of the households where decisions

are made. In these contexts, we may more fruitfully study and understand how power, inevitably tinged by gender, governs the final decisions about girls' educational future.

Second, future research should be concretely based on empirical data generated from intensive and in-depth study of particular localities. Policies and ideologies that supposedly cater to the general (and thus universal) needs and good often breed a kind of essentialism, that is, generic and generalized perception of actual problems, which in turns yields impracticality when the policies are implemented. Instead, we should examine the activities and values of individuals and their connectedness in varied individual settings with their particular complexities. What are the influential forces in the decision-making process for families from various regions? Do we find, for instance, as we do in the case of Butawal, that ethnic interaction influences women's perceptions of the value of education? Is this also the case for men? Are women from other areas excluded, as are the Tharu, from religious practice, thereby limiting their power to voice an opinion when ritual is used as a method to settle a family dispute? Do men use religious ritual as a powerful tool to influence outcomes of decisions? Future comparative studies in various regions within countries, as well as between countries, will help us to answer these questions and forge effective policies that address the truly universal social and cultural elements that pertain to a larger population.

Third, future research should also develop new research methods that will help us amass a large quantity of data and develop high-quality analysis regarding the recipients of the educational systems. Household studies do capture the complexity of factors that affect individual behavior and choice, but they rely on conventional methodologies that measure largely economic indices. There is a need to develop new and enhanced quantitative methodologies that allow the collection of large-scale survey data that measure the complexities and intricacies of cultural elements like ethnicity and religion. Moreover, we must collect data from and about women and their behaviors and views. For example, the conversations between Tharu women are different from those between Tharu and high-caste women. These conversations must be recorded and their meanings and significance deciphered. In addition, we must design analytical tools that help us differentiate and understand the shifts from a women's voice in a social group to her voice in the household. Such goals can only be accomplished if we allot adequate time in the field to capture women's voice. Researchers need to patiently build trust and inspire the confidence of the women whom they study, so that they are willing and ready to articulate in their own words their views and opinions. Eileen Kane and her associates (1998) have pinpointed the endemic problem of the absence of women's voices in literature dealing with educational decision-making. The fact that women always seem to be in the background while men assume visible roles at all levels of the decision-making process stems from this: "The

hidden problem was that no-one had sought their opinions. . . .”(p. 41). In a nutshell, listen to men, but be sure to ask the women.

Quantitative data collection must be accompanied by the development of enhanced qualitative data collection. In other words, we must develop methods that critically record the voices of both women and men, separate from and in relation to each other, in order to understand how voices change in the social context of the gendered environment. We also must differentiate voices in the social setting from the language of the household. Qualitative data collection should include personal narratives, oral histories, life histories, and metanarratives, that is, the unspoken and yet guiding thoughts and ideas that a particular social world imbues in its denizens, including cultural and religious symbols. In cases where women are hesitant to share their thoughts because they are not accustomed to voicing their opinions, we can enhance their spoken language by the development of strategies that use the local traditions to provide a form of visual articulation of their ideas and knowledge. Dance, drama, and art could be explored as possible venues through which to collect this information. This attention to the voices of women and men, and to their conversations and activities in a variety of settings, is the key to utilize information that portrays accurate pictures of the universe in which educational decisions are made.

Fourth, future research must also develop more sophisticated methods to analyze data. This includes the need to utilize complementary frameworks and concepts that contribute to an interdisciplinary approach to the study of educational participation. As Couma Mar Gadio and Cathy A. Rakowski (1999) notably suggest, sociological concepts offer useful tools for organizing reality and assessing the explanatory power of sociological theories. Our work represents an approach in this direction by critically appropriating concepts and theories from a host of sources—literatures such as *Women in Development*, *Gender in Development*, feminist standpoint, social relationism, and so on. Employing and amplifying their insights, we delineate the interconnections of gender and the social structures that contribute to and sustain it, seeking in the process to understand both individual and household voices, male and female. In doing so, we are able to discern the differences in, and shifts between, the individual agency and the social structure of the household. When we examine the similarities of and differences between these two types of voices, we can design better representational conceptual maps and theoretical models that help to explain household decisions, such as those related to education. In this specific manner, we refine feminist research that only stresses, in a general way, the need to listen to women, to give voice to women’s ideas, to validate their knowledge, and to legitimize their perceptions of reality. We hope future work will expand this dimension of gender analysis so as to shed more light on the interconnection of agency and structures.

To be sure, we are here dealing with a long-standing issue in sociological and anthropological research, namely the constant and continued need to check the work of the ethnographer and anthropologist so as to insure a valid and reliable assessment of the information collected and processed in fieldwork. Clifford Geertz (1995, 94) states:

Field research in such times, in such places, is not a matter of working free from the cultural baggage you have brought with you as you enter, without shape and without attachment, into a foreign mode of life. It is a matter of living out your existence in two stories at once.

Indeed, we do live out our existence while in the field, together with the multiple and varied stories we bring with us. Moreover, we call upon these stories, experiences, and ideas while in the field. We must be aware of this preconceived information in the form of biases, preconceptions, preferences, and inadequacies, for they all shape our analyses.

Finally, future research, if it is to be of lasting value, should lead to social and political actions in the forms of policies and practices that empower women and men, that recognize oppression and seek to change it. Uma Narayan (1997, 11) claims that women must not only be critically aware of the gender dynamics within their families, but also view those dynamics as a “*systematic* part of the ways in which their family. . . script[s] gender roles and women’s lives.” She adds that it requires “*political connections* to other women and their experiences, political analyses of women’s problems, and attempts to construct political solutions for them” for women to recognize and reject oppression.² My fieldwork in the Nepali village witnessed at least the development of a nascent form of social and political awareness, if not action. During my early visits, the Tharu women in the village were puzzled by my decision to leave my family and bewildered by my interest in their lives and their voices. They were hesitant to speak with me. During my subsequent visits, as I developed familiarity with them, my conversations with the women (and men, but to a lesser extent) became lively discussions about our families and our lives. Over the months, they gained more confidence in articulating their own opinions and readily offered their ideas about their daughters’ education and the reasons they either supported or opposed it. This voicing and articulation of opinions on the part of women may well advance their ideas and knowledge and lead to social actions. Patricia Lengermann and Jill Niebrugge-Brantley note that

A central work of feminist practice is to help women discover the power of naming their experiences as they have lived them. The operative word in feminist method here is “discover.” The feminist researcher does not provide vocabulary of the subject but rather a setting and a responsiveness that may allow the subject to find expression for problems and experiences that heretofore have had “no name.”

Hopefully, my research and future ones will help women “discover the power of naming their experience” (1990, 328).

Social and political action leading to betterment of the lives of girls by way of education can also come from international and national policies that create appropriate and realistic goals and objectives. Policies must address girls who are likely to enroll in school as well as those who are unlikely to do so. Policy makers must design suitable yet challenging educational programs that clearly demonstrate the advantageous outcomes for all participants in every community. They must also develop helpful evaluative tools for educational programs, which require input from all community members so as to assess the current educational situation from multiple perspectives. Instruments should have the capability to collect information from both individuals and focus groups that record progress of and changes to the educational system. Finally, the tools must allow residents to assess their own needs, and develop strategies to meet those needs.

As more local studies emerge with detailed data and specific analyses that are cognizant of the forces of both the social structures (power, gender, ethnicity, and religion) and individual agency, we may begin to pinpoint and generalize the multiple elements that play significant roles in determining girls’ chances for educational participation. The challenge, then, is to effect real social change that enhances the substantive opportunities for all girls to pursue education.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that in the cases where Tharu men used religious ritual to settle a dispute in the family, the men reported the gods’ opinions to the family. In each case, the opinion of the god was the same opinion as the Tharu male. This leads us to wonder if these cases demonstrate an exceptional set of occurrences, or if the Tharu men used religious ritual, which was respected by the female family members, as a means to control the dispute’s outcome.
2. Although I object to Uma Narayan’s suggestion that women need “us” or the academic audience to provide the solutions, Narayan does make an important point about the political awareness and action that is required to eliminate oppression.

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Education/Asian Studies/Gender Studies

Daughters of the Tharu identifies and examines the cultural conditions and circumstances that influence the process of educational decision-making for girls in Nepal, recognizing and studying the significant, yet often forgotten, voices of women. Situating women's lives within the context of their families, neighborhoods, region, and country, Maslak explores the cultural and sociopolitical conditions that shape, mold, and dictate individual agency, conditions that determine the educational choices women make for their daughters. This book seeks to go beyond the existing educational participation literature by exploring how ethnic identity, ethnic interaction, religious beliefs, and religious rituals function as interweaving sociocultural forces in the community, and how familial relations in the home are influenced by the power structures that subsume gender roles.

By examining the process of educational participation with special reference to ethnic and religious culture, and linking macro-structural perimeters and micro-individual agency of attitudes and beliefs, this book paints a much broader and more nuanced picture of the varied forces that govern and influence girls' participation in school.

Mary Ann Maslak is an assistant professor of education at St. John's University. Her current work involves the study of gender and education in the international context. She has published works on girls' and women's education in Asia, and she is currently examining gender and education in Hispanic and Chinese communities.

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