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Social Status of Women in Ancient and Medieval Nepal

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Abstract:

This study aimed to analyze the social, religious, cultural, marital, and political conditions of women in ancient and medieval Nepal, highlighting the transition from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society and its impact on women's status and rights. This study utilized historical analysis, literature review, and archival research methods. Primary and secondary sources, including ancient texts, historical records, and scholarly articles, were reviewed to gather data on the status of women in ancient and medieval Nepal. The study finds that women's status significantly declined from ancient to medieval Nepal, with the rise of patriarchal structures leading to restrictive social practices such as child marriage, polygamy, and the sati system. This study is helpful for gender, history, anthropology, and sociology. This provides insights for researchers, educators, and policymakers interested in understanding the historical context of women's rights and social conditions in Nepal. By uncovering lesser-known historical factors and practices that facilitated gender inequality, it challenges prevailing narratives and provides a fresh, in-depth perspective on the historical forces that continue to shape women's rights and social conditions in Nepal.

Keywords:

Ancient Nepal,
Gender,
Medieval Nepal,
Social status,
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古代和中世紀尼泊爾婦女的社會地位

摘要：

本研究旨在分析古代和中世紀尼泊爾婦女的社會、宗教、文化、婚姻和政治狀況，強調從母系社會轉變為父系社會及其對婦女地位和權利的影響。本研究採用歷史分析、文獻回顧與檔案研究方法。我們回顧了主要和次要來源，包括古代文獻、歷史記錄和學術文章，以收集有關古代和中世紀尼泊爾婦女地位的數據。研究發現，從古代到中世紀，尼泊爾婦女的地位顯著下降，父權結構的興起導致童婚、一夫多妻制和薩蒂制度等限制性社會習俗。這項研究對性別、歷史、人類學和社會學有幫助。這為有興趣了解尼泊爾婦女權利和社會狀況歷史背景的研究人員、教育工作者和政策制定者提供了見解。透過揭示導致性別不平等的鮮為人知的歷史因素和做法，它挑戰了流行的敘述，並為繼續塑造尼泊爾婦女權利和社會條件的歷史力量提供了新鮮、深入的視角。

关键词：古代尼泊爾、性別、中世紀尼泊爾、社會地位、婦女權利

1. Introduction

The term "woman" encapsulates femininity. In a broader context, a woman demonstrates healthy eating habits, moral integrity, positive behavior, and inner strength (Bradbury & Nicolaou, 2012). In this context, a woman is defined by her dedication to virtues, kindness, and integrity rather than solely by gender. In Sanskrit, 'unurnarsya dharmaya' signifies a disciplined and virtuous individual, describing a woman who embodies both discipline and virtue. Women are revered as creators of society and goddesses in Hindu culture. The term 'Nari' (woman) in Sanskrit symbolizes goodness in appearance, conduct, and religious devotion, reflecting a deep cultural significance.

The complex interplay of cultural, religious, and social factors determines the social status of women. Furuta and Salway (2006) found that women's household positions, particularly spousal communication, influence maternal healthcare use, emphasizing the impact of education. Ancient Nepalese society originated from Hindu traditions introduced by Vedic Aryans from India. The wife's dedication to her husband was considered her primary religious duty. Polygamy was prevalent, and educational opportunities for women were limited. Women were generally respected as mothers, and royal persons held positions of honor. Although the sati system was prevalent, women were not compelled to follow it (Bazaracharya, 1973).

The middle period in Nepal started on October 20, 879 AD, and concluded in 1768 AD. During this time, Nepalese society was mainly dominated by men. In this era, women were always suppressed by their spouses and had to struggle for existence. Practices of the Sati system, polygamy, and slavery were common during this period. This information was also found in the Hindu epic book 'Swosthani Vratkatha' (Adhikari, 2020). Despite patriarchal norms, women of the elite class have played significant roles in politics, art, and architecture. Upadhyaya (1996) reported gradual improvements in women's literacy, marriage age, and fertility but noted continued

subordination due to patriarchal values.

Limited literature describes the ups and downs in the social status of women in Nepal over time. These works explore specific periods, highlighting the shifts in women's roles, access to education, and societal standing within different cultural and religious frameworks. Acharya (2020) traces the change from the equal treatment of genders in ancient times to male dominance due to warfare and nation-building. Similarly, Shrestha et al. (2015) focused on contemporary Jyapu women in Nepal, highlighting their critical domestic and community roles despite limited financial resources.

Although there have been advancements in women's literacy, marriage age, and fertility rates, gender inequalities persist, particularly affecting women's socioeconomic status at the grassroots level. These papers highlight the need for continued efforts to address gender disparities and promote women's empowerment. Despite increased efforts to empower women, their overall financial and social standing at the grassroots level remains unchanged, with persistent inequalities in education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (Mahat, 2003).

This research examines the historical impact of male-dominated customs and behaviors on women's roles, rights, and status in Nepalese society and how these historical patterns shape current gender dynamics. This study seeks to explore and document the historical conditions of women in Nepal during the ancient and medieval periods, from around 500 to 1100, to understand better the origins and persistence of these gender disparities.

By providing a comprehensive historical context, this study aims to inform policymakers, activists, and scholars and offers valuable insights for designing effective interventions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Nepal. Exploring the struggles and achievements of women from historical periods can inspire and guide current efforts to advance women's rights.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative approach to capture the nuanced aspects of women's social status in ancient and medieval Nepal. The choice of this research object was based on the significant, yet often overlooked, roles of women in historical contexts, which are crucial for understanding cultural and social dynamics. This study aimed to provide insights into how these roles influence contemporary gender norms and societal structures.

2.2. Data Collection

2.2.1. Interview

Primary qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with 10 pertinent individuals. The criteria for selecting these participants included their expertise and knowledge of historical narratives and gender roles in ancient and medieval Nepal. These individuals were chosen because of their ability to provide rich contextual insights into the research subject. The semi-structured interviews allowed for a detailed exploration of the perspectives and insights.

2.2.2. Library Research

Extensive research has been conducted on libraries housing historical texts, academic books, and archival documents. The criteria for selecting these sources included their relevance and authenticity in providing firsthand accounts of women's lives, roles, and societal perceptions during specified periods. Primary sources, such as manuscripts, inscriptions, and historical records, were scrutinized to gather accurate and relevant information.

2.2.3. Online Sources

Online databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and academic journals were used to access scholarly articles, research papers, and publications. The selection of these sources was based on their academic credibility and relevance to the study's focus on Nepalese history, gender studies, and sociology. These sources provided secondary data to complement the primary findings of library research.

2.3. Data Analysis

2.3.1. Thematic Analysis

The collected data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and shifts in women's social status across epochs. The analysis focused on themes such as religious, educational, economic, political, and cultural representation. The criteria for theme selection were based on their relevance to the research questions and potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

2.3.2. Narrative Exploration

This study employed narrative exploration to contextualize the findings within the broader historical and sociocultural milieu of ancient and medieval Nepal. This approach was chosen to ensure that the results were deeply rooted in the cultural context and to provide a detailed understanding of women's experiences and societal perceptions.

2.3. Documentation and Reporting

MS Word was used to document and organize the findings into a cohesive narrative. This study prioritized qualitative descriptions over quantitative methods, as the focus was on capturing the qualitative essence of women's social status. The findings of this study are intended to contribute to a broader understanding of gender dynamics in historical contexts and their implications for contemporary societal structures.

2.4. Ethical Consideration

Ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the research process, ensuring respect for historical accuracy, confidentiality of sources, and sensitivity towards cultural interpretations of gender roles in Nepalese history. The application of these findings is expected to inform future research in gender studies and contribute to policy-making and educational efforts aimed at addressing gender disparities.

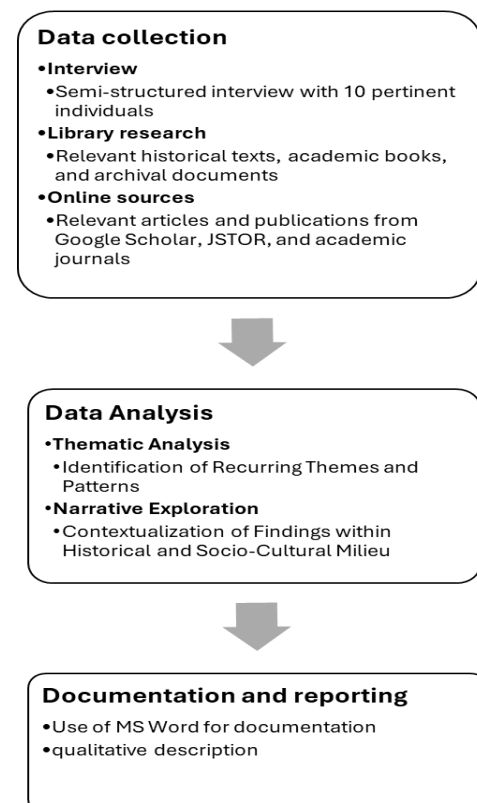


Figure 1. Flowchart of methodology used (Developed by the authors)

3. Results and Discussion

Throughout history, the distribution of power and responsibilities between males and females has been uneven, with males often dominating their gender counterparts. However, ancient societies exhibited greater tolerance towards women, in contrast to the more restrictive medieval period. Hansen et al. (2012) suggested a broader hypothesis linking longer agricultural histories to less gender equality, indicating that advancements in agriculture have increased fertility rates, leading to reduced roles for women beyond domestic responsibilities. The complex interplay of cultural, economic, and historical factors, such as changing societal norms, economic opportunities, and historical events, has gradually transformed gender roles in society from ancient times to the present.

3.1. Status of Women in Pre-Vedic Society

In ancient times and during the early stages of civilization, men and women shared equal responsibility for building human society. Historical accounts suggest that women often hold leading positions within their communities, playing a crucial role in transitioning society from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled, more organized way of living (Kaini, 2018). According to Baral (2016), women are credited with initiating their first civilizations, guiding humanity from nomadic (wandering) to settled life. As societies have shifted to agriculture and animal husbandry, family and social customs have developed, elevating women's roles in family life. The responsibility of a capable woman was deemed essential to maintaining a harmonious family structure.

Evidence from ancient European and Asian artifacts, such as female idols, suggests that these societies were matriarchal and held women in high esteem (Hannam, 1997). Nevertheless, as civilization advanced, there was a gradual shift towards male dominance in societal dynamics. In later periods, the status of women in ancient European societies declined steadily, evident in practices such as polygamy among the male elite, reflecting increasing female oppression. This decline in women's social and political positions spanned from Paleolithic times to the 16th century, indicating a significant transition towards male dominance influenced by various societal changes (Sari & Görmez, 2022).

Feminist scholars have identified polygamy as a significant contributor to women's oppression and impoverishment. It perpetuates lower social and economic status and violates fundamental rights (Von Struensee, 2004). The narrative challenges traditional views of monogamous marriages in medieval Europe, highlighting instances of elite polygyny in Scandinavia and its broader social and political implications (Rüdiger, 2020). Despite the development of

monogamous norms in certain societies, historical evidence shows persistent polygynous practices among wealthy men exacerbating female inequality in the marriage market (Gould et al., 2004).

These studies collectively underscore the gradual decline in women's societal status across European history, coinciding with practices such as elite polygamy that reinforced gender inequality and female marginalization. Notable philosophers and thinkers of the time, including Aristotle, Saint Thomas, and Rousseau, have contributed to this narrative by portraying women as imperfect beings, symbols of weakness, and peripheral figures in society. They argued that women's primary role as supporters of their husbands led to diminishing societal regard for women (Tumbahamphe, 2002).

3.2. Status of Women in Vedic Society

Since the Vedic period, women in Hindu societies have held a prominent position. Vedic texts highlight women's roles in their self-development, marriage, property rights, education, and social esteem. Marriage was seen as a means for women to potentially ascend to queenship. Mahabharata stresses that a household lacks completeness without a wife, underscoring the essential role women fulfill in family life. The presence of a woman in the family was considered pure and holy, as Rigveda to Hindus (Dixit, 2012). Early Mimamsa texts mention joint property ownership by husbands and wives, indicating equality in rituals, such as yagnas, through their shared responsibilities.

Although the Vedic period acknowledged equal social responsibilities for men and women, a gradual predominance of male influence was observed through activities, such as lineage extension, *tarpan*, and *17 anda*, which were predominantly male responsibilities, indicating a shift in gender roles. This shift is evidenced by the prevalent desire, praise, and prayers for sons in contrast to the absence of similar expressions for daughters. Despite these trends, Vedic literature does not contain derogatory references to women. Polygamy was practiced during this era, and widowed remarriages were socially recognized. The practice of sati existed, but was not mandatory (Baral, 2016).

3.3. Status of Women in Post-Vedic Society

The status of women in Vedic society, once revered, underwent a significant decline by the end of the post-Vedic era, around 600 BCE. Practices such as child marriage have become prevalent, hindering women's development and education (Gharti, 2013). As polygamy increased and societal changes unfolded, the number of women dwindled because of reduced opportunities for marriage, leading men to increasingly assume dominant roles. The outbreak of wars further

increased men's responsibility for the security of society because they assumed protective roles during conflicts, leading to a gradual shift towards male dominance.

Intermarriage between Arya men and non-Arya women reduces women's participation in religious activities. Smriti texts began to depict women as vain, ignorant, and lacking in character (Baral, 2016). During this period, women were increasingly perceived as needing protection. They were first protected by their parents in youth, then by husbands in marriage, and finally by their sons in widowhood.

The status of women significantly declined from the relatively high position they held during the Vedic period in a post-Vedic society. During the Vedic era, women enjoyed many freedoms including access to education, participation in religious ceremonies, and the right to choose their spouses. However, influenced by the patriarchal structures of later periods, post-Vedic texts and practices have begun to severely restrict women's roles (Devi, 2020). Women's education was deprioritized, their roles shifted to primarily domestic, and they faced increasing exclusion from the public and religious spheres. Practices such as child marriage and sati (a practice where a widow self-immolates in her husband's funeral pyre) began to appear.

These changes profoundly affected the societal structure of regions influenced by Hindu cultural and religious practices, including in Nepal. Over time, especially in recent decades, there has been a growing movement towards gender equality. This shift is driven by global human rights discourse, local activism, and legislative reforms aimed at improving women's social status.

3.4. Status of Women in Ancient Nepalese society

Since ancient times, Nepalese society has been shaped by the Hindu social system rooted in the traditions of Vedic Aryans from India. According to Hindu cultural norms, the wife's dedication to her husband was her primary religious duty. However, women in the royal family retained the ability to accumulate power and face challenges, as highlighted by Acharya (2003). Even before the Lichchavi period, a structured social environment existed in which Hindu women were expected to lead refined and conscientious lives, possibly due to cultural or religious beliefs (Dixit, 2002). However, owing to a lack of historical records from the first half of the Lichchavi era, accurately depicting women's conditions during that time remains challenging.

Despite this, insights from historical sources during the reign of King Mandev provide an understanding of women's roles in society. The Garuda Pillar inscription at the Changu Narayan Temple mentions King Mandev's mother Rajawati, who contemplated performing sati upon the death of Babu Dharmadev. King Mandev's intervention to prevent his mother from

committing sati suggests that the practice was not compulsory during this period (Bazaracharya, 1973). Subsequent sources document that Abhiri Gomini, mother of Samanta (feudal) Bhaumagupta, and Batsadevi, mother of King Jayadeva II, chose not to practice sati and adhered to widowhood rituals. This evidence suggests that women's status in Nepalese society is neither superior nor inferior.

Women were revered as mothers within the Lichchavi society. King Mandev's verses in the records of Changu Narayan, which extolled his mother, underscored this reverence. The inclusion of the name of his senior queen Bhogini in currency also reflects the esteemed position women held in Nepalese society at the time (Bazaracharya, 1973).

Historical accounts suggest that Aviri Gamini, in collaboration with her son Bhaum Gupta, established a shivlinga, indicating that the customary guardianship role sons had over widowed mothers. King Narendra Dev's Pashupati inscriptions and Yagavahal's records stipulated severe penalties for husbands who committed crimes, where wives were mandated to join the Arya Sangh and the offenders faced identical punishments (Regmi, 1996).

In ancient Nepal, the term 'Arya Sangh' denoted a community where individuals adhered to specific norms, such as ethical conduct and righteous living, as outlined in ancient texts. The exact nature and specific practices of the Arya Sangh in ancient Nepal can vary based on the historical context and interpretation of ancient texts. In essence, it represents a social or religious organization in which individuals dedicate themselves to preserving moral values and principles (Bazaracharya, 1973).

In ancient Nepalese society, women's experiences were greatly influenced by their social status, which led to significant disparities. The Lichchavi period, also known as the ancient period in Nepal, has highlighted this disparity. Women belonging to royal families and those with high social standing were privileged with respect and privileges that were unavailable to women from ordinary families (Regmi, 1952). For example, records from the reign of Anshuvarma clearly depict this difference. For example, women involved in menial or low-status occupations received significantly lower compensation than their counterparts. This significant contrast highlights how social hierarchy determines the value and respect given to individuals based on their status. Women from ordinary backgrounds frequently encounter notable socio-economic hardships and must sustain themselves primarily through wages (Bazaracharya, 1973).

King Narendradeva's historical accounts in Anantalingeshwar recount the narrative of 20 maids, revealing the persistence of slavery practices during the Lichchavi period (Sharma, 2018). These records indicate that women from ordinary families often

served as slaves and received very low wages for their labor. Throughout the Lichchavi era, women became more deeply entrenched in a society dominated by men. Polygamy was prevalent. The practice of women utilizing facilities and resources to secure their rights has started fading, with privileges now bestowed through the benevolence of men.

In contrast, women of the elite class during this period enjoyed similar privileges as men, including access to education, participation in religious activities, philanthropy, and the establishment of *guthi* (trusts) and temples. For example, records from Thankot and Sitapaila revealed that elite women engaged in charitable activities and received education. Likewise, a woman named Jaisundari received a farm as a dowry from her brother, indicating that the dowry system was maintained in Lichchavi society. This stark disparity highlights the significant differences in the status and treatment of women based on their social class during the Lichchavi period, with elite women experiencing more privileges than those from lower social classes.

Nepal has had a Gurukul-based education system since ancient times, but it has not been suitable for women because of restrictions or limitations inherent in the system. However, it is understood that the royal family and other aristocratic people also learned about gurus in their residences and educated women. Based on a record written by King Mandev's daughter Vijayavati in Pashupati, it is known that some women during the Lichchavi period were educated, highlighting a specific historical source of this information. The expansion of Buddhist education in Nepal during this time played a significant role in providing women with increased access to educational opportunities and empowering them through alternative learning avenues. Women became nuns and joined nuns associations, indicating the presence of alternative educational avenues for women beyond the Gurukul system. Given that Hinduism was the predominant religion in Nepalese society during the Lichchavi period, societal norms and behaviors, especially concerning women, were profoundly shaped by Hindu religious texts such as the Manusmriti and the Vedas. These texts dictated the actions and conduct of the women during that era.

3.5. Status of Women in Medieval Nepalese Society

The period from the ninth century to the eighteenth century is known as the Medieval Period in the history of Nepal. This medieval era was further divided into two parts: the pre-medieval period and the post-medieval period. Before the reign of King Jayasthiti Malla (1380–1395), this was referred to as the pre-medieval period. Following this, the era extending until 1768, when King Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha conquered the Kathmandu Valley, was recognized as the post-medieval period (Shah, 1992). In the pre-medieval period, three significant kingdoms emerged within

Nepal: the Khas Malla kingdom in the far western Karnali region, the Simraungarh kingdom in southern Terai, and Nepal Mandal in the Kathmandu Valley. During the post-medieval period, Nepal further fragmented into more than 50 small kingdoms. To study the condition of women in Nepal during this medieval period, it was essential to classify them into two groups: elite, aristocratic, and royal families and the common class. This classification highlights the stark differences in the experiences and status of women based on their social standing.

Women from the royal family and elite class in medieval Nepal held vital positions in various aspects of society, including the social, economic, religious, political, and cultural domains. For instance, Queen Deval Devi, the wife of King Harisinhadeva, the final ruler of Sinroungarhand, and the sister of King Rudra Malla of Bhaktapur exemplify this. Following the attack on Simraungadh by Gaysuddin Tughlaq, the Muslim ruler of Delhi, in 1324 AD, Deval Devi lost her kingdom and sought refuge in the Kathmandu Valley. Even in the face of adversity, she skillfully navigated the political landscape of Nepal post-Rudra Malla's demise, showing that significant political power elite women could wield in medieval Nepalese society (Vaidya, 1992).

King Rudra Malla, who was on the throne of Bhaktapur when Deval Devi entered Kathmandu Valley from Simraungadh, did not have a son. His only child was a daughter, named Nayak Devi. Nayak Devi played a crucial role in shaping Nepali politics after the passing of her father Rudra Malla. Originally married to Prince Harishchandra of Kanshi in accordance with the Dolaji custom, where women without brothers married men to integrate them into the matriarchy, Nayak Devi became a widow following Harishchandra's death in a court conspiracy. Subsequently, she married Deval Devi's son, Jagat Singh. Nayak Devi also had a daughter named Rajalla Devi, who tragically died on the tenth day after her birth. Deval Devi diligently oversaw the marriage of her granddaughter, Rajalla Devi, ensuring she married a young man named Jayasthiti Malla from Terai. After the death of Deval Devi in 1366, Jayasthiti Malla took over the kingdom of Nepal with the help of the queen Rajalla Devi.

Even before that, following the death of Jayatunga Malla, Rudra Malla's father and widow, Queen Padumal Devi effectively managed the kingdom by placing her son Rudra Malla on the throne. This further exemplifies the crucial role played by women in the royal family in governance and political affairs in medieval Nepal, navigating personal challenges and political complexities to maintain dynastic stability and continuity. By actively participating, these women safeguarded the kingdom's continuity and stability amid times of transition and turmoil (Hada, 2000). In medieval Nepal, women of the royal family and elite

class played pivotal roles in the social, economic, religious, political, and cultural spheres, navigating challenges, and ensuring stability and continuity in governance.

During the post-medieval period, Nepal was fragmented into over 50 small states, with the kingdom of West Nepal holding significant power, where King Nagaraja and Queen Suryamala played crucial roles. King Nagaraja of West Nepal was supported by his queen Suryamala, while King Malaya Varma was aided by Queen Ratnamala. This period exemplifies the active involvement of royal queens like Queen Suryamala and Queen Ratnamala in the governance and affairs of their respective kingdoms in medieval Nepal (Adhikari, 2003). Similarly, during the medieval period, Mangaldevi, the mother of King Gajendra Shahi of Jajarkot, played a crucial role, while Queen Chandraprabhavati, the consort of King Narbhupal Shah of Gorkha, played a significant role in political affairs. Queen Chandraprabhavati, in particular, served as the guardian of Prithvi Narayan Shah, shaping his early life and making significant contributions to Gorkha's politics of Gorkha (Pant, 1984). Lalmati, the mother of Siddhar Singh Malla and the inaugural ruler of the Patan kingdom, played a pivotal role in the kingdom's separation from Kantipur, ultimately leading to the establishment of its independence (Kshetri & Rayamajhi, 1997). After King Yoganarendra Malla of Patan died, his daughter Yogmati also took over Patan's politics.

Queen Dayavati, a consort of the last Malla king Jayaprakash Malla of Kantipur, is noted for her active involvement in politics, which included advocating for the rights of women in high nobility and royal families during the Malla period. In addition to their political engagement, these women participated actively in constructing religious monasteries, erecting statues, building public infrastructure such as roads and bridges, making donations to religious institutions, managing guthi trusts, and performing rituals such as home and sacrifices (Adhikari, 2003). These diverse roles underscored the significant contributions of women to shaping the political landscape and socio-religious fabric of Malla-era Nepal.

In medieval Nepal, women from upper-class families played active roles in politics despite societal norms dictating their control and direction by men. Many women were brought to the palaces and served as attendants. In Kathmandu's Newari society, the practice of revival allowed lower-class women to avoid Sati. Newar was the majority caste group during the medieval period. While lower-class women had the option to remarry if widowed, the prevalent practice of Sati was more common among royal and noble women because of cultural traditions and expectations. In instances where the crown prince was young and unable to rule independently, royal mothers sometimes

refrained from Sati and governed as regent (Tiwari, 1964). After the death of King Parthivendra Malla of Kantipur in a poisoning scandal, Queen Mother Riddhilakshmi abstained from Sati and took on the role of regent for Navalak's eight-year-old son, Bhupalendra Malla, effectively managing the government with the support of her aides. Riddhilakshmi later published a currency under her name (Joshi, 1985). In Nepal, there is a small dry currency that she made available.

During the Malla period in Nepal from 12th to 18th centuries, women from ordinary families did not inherit property rights upon marriage. The prevalent joint family system ensures that ancestral property remains undivided for several generations, resulting in limited inheritance for women. Property bestowed on daughters by their mothers-in-law typically comprises only marriage expenses or dowries. However, upon the husband's death, if the land was held under his name, widows and their sons were entitled to an equal share of the inheritance (Kshetri & Rayamajhi, 1997). Apart from that, there was a practice of giving personal property to women at the time, known as *Pewa Dhan*.

In medieval Nepalese society, there was a rule enabling a woman, even if she had only one daughter, to inherit her parent's property, provided that the necessary documentation was executed while her parent was alive. During this period, celibacy and remarriage were uncommon among the castes with strict marital customs. While some women from these castes could opt for *parpachuka* (divorce) under certain conditions, societal norms at the time often restricted divorce for various reasons (Regmi, 1965). However, in society at that time, especially the women of Brahmin and Chhetri castes, they could not *parpachuka* (divorce) due to strict societal norms and traditions within these castes.

During the medieval period in Nepal, King Jayasthiti Malla instituted social reforms to enforce caste-based regulations. Women engaged in relationships with individuals from different castes faced a prescribed punishment. However, widows were permitted to remarry their castes. Despite this allowance, remarriage is often viewed as socially inferior. Nayak Devi, the daughter of King Rudra Malla, remarried Prince Jagat Singh of Simraungad after her first husband, Harishchandra, was assassinated in a conspiracy. Such remarriages were generally accepted among women during that period because of cultural norms and social practices. Historically, women, especially common women, rarely held government positions or engaged in political activities in Nepal.

4. Conclusion

Since ancient times, Nepalese society has adhered to Vedic Sanatan and Hindu religious texts, which prescribed specific behaviors, particularly for women. During the Lichchavi period, Nepalese society was notably structured and disciplined, with women holding

respected positions, including the recognition of having their names inscribed on the currency. However, the culture at that time was patriarchal, often subjugating women to roles subordinate to those of men, such as limited educational opportunities and restricted property rights. Practices like sati and slavery persisted during the medieval period in Nepal's history. King Jayasthiti Malla's social reforms introduced specific codes of conduct for each caste and class to regulate societal norms. These reforms sought to reduce disparities caused by distortions within the Hindu caste system.

Despite these efforts, challenges such as child marriage, polygamy, the sati system, and slavery continued to hinder the overall progress in women's rights, leading to significant social and economic implications for women in Nepalese society. While women from royal and elite families enjoyed favorable social and cultural conditions in both ancient and medieval times, those from ordinary classes faced less satisfactory circumstances, highlighting the varied experiences of women across different social strata.

To address the lingering effects of historical gender disparities, it is crucial to promote educational and economic opportunities for women across all classes. Efforts should focus on eliminating practices that have historically subjugated women, such as child marriages, polygamy, and remnants of the caste system. Policymakers and educators should collaborate to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into social reforms and educational curricula to foster an environment where women's rights are recognized and respected.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of historical gender norms on contemporary Nepalese society, particularly how these norms continue to influence women's roles in education, politics, and economic participation. Comparative studies examining women's experiences in different regions and communities within Nepal could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse challenges faced by women. Additionally, research could investigate the effectiveness of modern reforms addressing these historical disparities and suggest ways to enhance their implementation.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, D.R.K.; methodology, T.N.G.; validation, T.N.G.; formal analysis, T.N.G.; investigation, D.R.K.; resources, D.R.K.; data curation, T.N.G.; writing—original draft preparation, all authors contributed equally; writing—review and editing, T.N.G.; supervision, D.R.K.; project administration, D.R.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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