Cultural Collaborative Ways of Knowing, Doing, Valuing and Becoming: A *'Pandheri Guff'* Inquiry of Nepali Women Scholars

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ABSTRACT

In Nepal, women are facing challenges in academia due to gender biases and limited opportunities. This article explores the experiences of Nepali women scholars who are redefining traditional knowledge, which is typically confined to textbooks, notes, and lectures. These critical issues are often ignored in academic settings. However, women academicians can overcome these barriers by collaborating, reflecting on their experiences, and seeking innovative solutions. To this end, the authors introduce Pandheri Guff, a traditional Nepali method for discussing and addressing such issues. Subscribing Pandheri Guff as a method, the authors engaged in a cultural Nepali collaborative inquiry, combining their narratives to create meaning. Their virtual weekly meetings, which began during the COVID-19 pandemic, focused on reflections about class participation, assignments, and learning experiences over two months by documenting their insights in Google Docs. The analysis is categorized into four themes: believing, meditative, doubting, and dismantling ways of knowing. This method fosters a judgment-free environment for sharing experiences, enhancing their learning, and empowering them to transform themselves. This article argued that this cultural approach advances understanding of women's knowledge acquisition and enhances higher education learning by providing a collaborative and reflective space to overcome gender biases and improve learning experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Pandheri Guff is a traditional way for Nepali women to gain knowledge by sharing their experiences at *Pandheri*. *Pandheri Guff* is a compound Nepali word. *Pandheri* means a water source like a small pond or well, particularly in rural parts of Nepal where mainly women go to fetch drinking water carrying pots, particularly in the morning and evening, as women have to be engaged in other tasks throughout the day. *Guff* means 'conversation' in Nepali or informal dialogue. However, it is often associated with the negative aspects of gossiping, which overlooks its potential benefits and strengths in academic contexts. Further, we value dialogue and believe a dialogic approach can explore and address women's issues. Next, "dialogue refers to something outside a strict linguistic sense of language" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 181), to an unfolding conversation about the meaning of utterances that a person engages with words, signs, and body gestures (among others). *Pandheri Guff* is also a dialogue among women. They share their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and information, including body language, openly and freely in the absence of men while waiting for their turn to collect water in the *Pandheri*. In *Pandheri Guff,* women share everyday happenings in their homes and neighborhoods. They, particularly elderly or experienced ones, give suggestions and advice to those who ask for tips on personal and family issues. *Pandheri Guff* is considered a traditional practice among Nepali women, wherein they exchange knowledge and experiences during morning and evening gatherings at the *Pandheri*. Despite its potential as a valuable informal learning mechanism, this practice is often overshadowed by its association with gossip, thereby neglecting its academic and educational merits. Nevertheless, rather than connecting traditional sociocultural best practices, we were continuously encouraged to adapt conventional methods (e.g., in-depth interviews and focus group discussions) to conduct social and educational research. These approaches seem less friendly to women. Rather than *Pandheri Guff*, in academia, we were introduced to *Chautari Guff,* which appears more men-friendly than women-friendly and akin to conventional methods.

Unlike *Pandheri Guff*, *Chautari Guff* is a dialogue under a big tree where men spend the evening talking about family, educational, and social issues of the nation and beyond. *Chautari Guff* is a men's friendly approach to knowing as, at that time, women remained busy preparing meals.

Contrasting in *Pandheri Guff* in *Chautari Guff,* keeping aside all chores, men sit and talk about issues other than personal and family-related. In short, like *Chautari Guff,* we keep aside all our duties, attend university classes in the evening*,* and participate in dialogues on social and educational issues. Thus, we enter into men's discourse. We could enter into men's discourse and discuss social issues, but we could choose our ways of knowing. With the above, we took responsibility for exploring women's ways of knowing and empowering ourselves as a traditional method for Nepali women to acquire knowledge by exchanging our experiences. By conducting a critical collaborative inquiry (Martínez-Arbelaiz et al., 2024), we communicate our understanding better, which further engages us in transformative learning and prepares us to engage our learners in the transformative learning process (Dahal, 2024; Willink & Jacobs, 2011). This process of hermeneutic dialogue helped us explore meaning-making in-depth and thus helped create new meanings of transformative learning (Lawrence & Mealman, 1999).

With the above discourse on *Pandheri Guff* for exploring women's ways of knowing, doing, valuing, and becoming as a cultural collaborative approach, this study explored the strengths of a traditional and almost forgotten Nepali method of women's ways of knowing. Guided by the research question, how do Nepali women scholars collaboratively construct and express their cultural ways of knowing, doing, valuing, and becoming through the practice of *Pandheri Guff*? This inquiry further aimed to explore women's ways of knowing, doing, and valuing via the traditional culturally grounded research method *Pandheri Guff*. As we explored our traditional way of knowing to generate meaning-making of our experiences, we came up with four themes to frame our '*Women's ways of knowing'*: believing ways of knowing, meditative ways of knowing, doubting ways of knowing, and dismantling ways of knowing. These ways of knowing gave us a strong sense of belongingness, helped us express ourselves, and empowered our voices as women scholars and researchers.

THEORETICAL REFERENT

This study subscribes to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) as a theoretical referent. The main essence of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is the fundamental role of social interaction in the process of cognition development (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018). This study is primarily based on the social interaction of the authors to make meaning of their experiences and ways of knowing. Mercer and Howe (2012) argue that "Knowledge is not just an individual possession but also the creation and shared property of members of communities, who use 'cultural tools' (including spoken and

written language), relationships and institutions (such as schools) for that purpose." (p. 12). However, the COVID-19 pandemic originated in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. It rapidly disseminated across Asia and subsequently worldwide by early 2020, prompting stringent lockdown measures. During lockdowns, we, the authors, engaged in virtual interactions, utilizing our native language to share our university learning experiences. This approach fostered a comfortable environment and facilitated freedom of expression, as *Guff* later metaphorically calls this approach *Pandheri Guff*. In this regard, John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) claimed that "sociocultural approaches emphasize the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge" (p. 191). This research encapsulates the authors' collective ways of knowing and experiences in supporting each other throughout their university learning journeys as women serving different roles and responsibilities at home and university. The philosophical alignment between collaborative learning and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Novita et al., 2020) is the foundational background of this inquiry. Consequently, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory profoundly influences this inquiry, particularly through the lens of collaborative learning methodologies for exploring women's ways of knowing. For this, we used our research conceptual framework in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1
Ways of Knowing
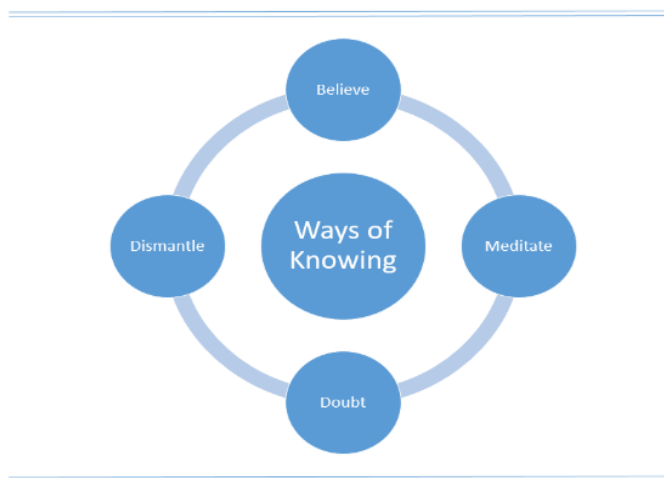
'*PANDHERI GUFF*' AS A RESEARCH METHOD

This study subscribed to a culturally grounded qualitative research design called *Pandheri Guff*. Based on three stages of data generation for this inquiry: (1) formation and initial collaboration, (2) virtual meetings and informal discussions, and (3) continuous *Guff* and writing. Table 1 on the next page shows three stages that outline the progression of the study from initial formation to continuous collaborative inquiry and writing.

Table 1 Stages of Our Collaborative Inquiry

Stage 1: Formation and Initial Collaboration	Stage 2: Virtual Meetings and Informal Discussions	Stage 3: Continuous *Guff* and Writing

• Participants: First, second, third, and fourth authors (women university scholars) and the fifth author (a kind-hearted male, critical friend).
• Roles:
  • First Author: Ph.D. scholar, educator, mentor (elderly lady of Pandheri Guff).
  • Second, Third, and Fourth Authors: Master's students, mentees.
  • Fifth Author: Ph.D. scholar, critical friend.
• Activities:
	• Timeline: During the COVID-19 pandemic in July 2020.
	• Platform: Google Meet.
	• Frequency: In the beginning phase, daily evening meetings last one hour and gradually shift to weekly.
	• Activities:
	  • Informal reflections on classes.
	  • Sharing feelings, emotions, and personal experiences.
		• Timeline: Two months of weekly meetings.
		• Activities:
		  • Actions/reflections as self-study.
		  • Discussing, writing, and sharing ways of learning or knowing.
		  • Providing feedback and improving insights.
		  • Writing about lived experiences.
		  • Developing individual stories and sharing them in Google Docs.
		  • Critical reflection on

• Formation of the group.	• Development of a supportive and collaborative environment.	ways of knowing.
• Initial collaborative writing on existing issues.		• Exploration of *Pandheri Guff* as a research method.
• Critical review and guidance by the fifth author.	• The decision to continue weekly meetings.	• Formation of four unique and collective ways of knowing themes.

Likewise, Table 2 illustrates each author's key roles and contributions in the study.

Table 2 Roles and Contributions of Each Author

Authors	Roles	Background	Contributions
First Author	Ph.D. Scholar, Educator	Specializing in education, taught research methods	Played the role of the elderly lady in *Pandheri Guff*, encouraged students—and other authors to value their inner voice, invited authors to collaborative writing
Second Author	Master's Student	From a marginalized community	Felt vulnerable, found warmth in companionship, participated in collaborative writing
Third Author	Master's Student	Single mother of two faced personal, social, professional, and academic challenges.	Continued studies to heal from trauma and participated in collaborative writing.

Fourth Author	Master's Student	Extensive experience in educational leadership	Participated in collaborative writing
Fifth Author	Ph.D. Scholar, Critical Friend	Kind-hearted male	Critically reviewed the article, added observations, and guided in framing and reframing the article's overall structure

Further, the first, second, third, and fourth authors were women university scholars. They invited the fifth author, a kind-hearted male, as a critical friend. The first author was doing her Ph.D. specializing in education and simultaneously taught a research method course in the master's degree program. The second, third, and fourth authors were the first author's students enrolled in the university's master's program. The first author played the role of the elderly lady of the *Pandheri Guff,* who gives tips to other younger women (second, third, and fourth authors) on their personal and academic issues. The first author always encouraged second, third, and fourth authors to value their inner voice and explore the issues that trigger them. The second author, who belonged to a marginalized community, felt vulnerable as she was the only person from her community in the class. She found warmth in the companionship of the first, third, fourth, and fifth authors. The third author, a single mother of two sons, had personal, social, professional, and academic challenges. She continued her studies to heal herself from the trauma that she went through after losing her husband. The fourth author had extensive experience serving the educational sector in leadership positions. The first author invited her students to form collaborative writing on their existing issues, which the second, third, and fourth authors excitedly accepted. The fifth author, the critical friend, was a PhD scholar at the same university. He critically reviewed the article and added his observations here and there to strengthen the quality and presentation of the ideas and concepts in the article. He also guided in reframing and restructuring the article's quality.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in July 2021, right after completing our semester following the invitation of the first author, we (the first, second, third, and fourth authors) continued our meeting virtually through Google Meet every evening for one hour at the beginning phase. Evening time is comfortable for all of us to discuss because we are free. Metaphorically writing, our discussion in the meeting was like *Pandheri Guff.* For instance, on the first day of our conversation, we reflected on our classes informally

based on the questions that worked well and what did not. Gradually, we shared our feelings and emotions as if nobody was hearing us except ourselves. Then, we began to laugh and gossip. We shared positive feelings in the informal meeting. Then, we decided to continue our meeting every week. In the following meeting, we shared our weekly experiences, including personal, family, and university classes. Then, our discussion gradually moved ahead to planning to write an article based on our *Pandheri Guff*.

Then, we continuously had weekly meetings in our actions/reflections as self-study for two months, discussing, writing, and sharing our ways of learning or knowing. We shared our feedback and improved our insights. We decided to write about our lived experiences and communicate to the rest of the world how a *Pandheri Guff* can support exploring women's ways of knowing through collaborative inquiry. Then, we individually developed our stories and shared them in Google Docs. Our stories created pedagogical thoughtfulness (Dahal, 2023; Van Manen, 2016) as we critically reflected on our ways of knowing. By not following a predefined analysis protocol, we reviewed naturally occurring talk (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) individually and collaboratively to explore our ways of learning and enhancing learning. Rather than connecting traditional sociocultural best practices, we were continuously encouraged to adapt conventional methods (e.g., in-depth interviews and focus group discussions) to conduct social and educational research. However, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions seem less friendly to women. Rather than *Pandheri Guff*, in academia, we were introduced to *Chautari Guff,* which appears more men-friendly than women-friendly and akin to conventional methods.

In doing so, we explored many strengths of *Pandheri Guff* as a traditional culturally grounded research method, which challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions. We never discussed Pandheri Guff as a possible educational research method in our university classes. Therefore, we argue that *Pandheri Guff* is a potential research method to explore and address women's critical issues, particularly women's ways of knowing (Locatelli, 2007) and studying in Nepali higher education.

WAYS OF KNOWING

Our study identified and examined four distinct and interconnected themes as ways of knowing, which we present as our key findings. These themes are articulated through the personal narratives of the authors: the second author's story illustrates the theme of believing ways of knowing, the third author's story delves into meditative ways of knowing, the first author's story explores doubting ways of knowing, and the fourth author's story

addresses dismantling ways of knowing. Each narrative provides a unique perspective, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of these diverse epistemological approaches.

Believing Ways of Knowing: Second Author's Story

We value collaboration because we believe that co-learning and connecting with peers or colleagues fosters our learning as we feel accepted, acknowledged, and interconnected. We think this is a way of believing akin to a connected way of knowing (Belenky & Stanton, 2000) and collaborative learning (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). Similarly, Rocca et al. (2014) argued that "experiences of collaborative learning in the university contribute to the students' acquisition of the meta-knowledge required to complete their learning with profit and success" (p. 62). Lawrence and Mealman (1999) emphasized that the interconnection of an individual's life with others in society is essential to developing their ways of knowing. According to Belenky et al. (1997), connected knowers "learn through empathy" (p. 115). So, in this section, we present how collaboration built on trust has helped us to make our learning journey easier, worthy, and more meaningful.

For instance, sometime in 2015, I had a friendship with a shy friend in my master's class. She was good in academics but hesitated to share her thoughts in class, thinking she would be wrong. Collaborative tasks allowed us to open up, know each other, and build a bond. In the final semester, we were supposed to conduct research and write a thesis to fulfill our master's degree. At that time, I gave birth to my daughter, and immediately after a month, the earthquake shook the nation in 2015. I had almost lost hope of completing my research on time; however, this shy friend came as an angel into my life. She motivated me to continue working hard and never give up. Research and thesis were new to both of us; however, we began to help each other in our research work and went together to collect the data for our respective research. We spoke more often and continued to carry on our mission of thesis completion. Finally, after a few months of hard work, we completed our thesis. We continued sharing our ups and downs and joined another educational learning journey to help us improve our practices as educators and leaders.

People often mistake that higher education should be achieved through self-study and one who works hard does well. However, we believe that peer support makes us believe in our capabilities, accept our weaknesses, and become strengths of each other. They keep motivating us and pushing us to keep going. Many researchers (Lawrence & Mealman, 1990; Rocca et al., 2014; Scager et al., 2016) also argued that collaborative learning promotes

students' deep learning and achievement. The success of collaborative learning is built on trust, cooperation, and teamwork (Fung, 2010). Similarly, we argue that collaborative learning promotes trust and believing ways of knowing.

Meditative Ways of Knowing: Third Author's Story

We love peace, and we prefer to remain silent. Remaining silent does not mean choosing to be passive; instead, learn meditatively. Here, the meditative way refers to a self-reflective form of knowing that might appear inactive to peers and teachers but shares the qualities of an intuitive way of knowing (Belenky & Stanton, 2000) as it supports examining thoughts, feelings, and emotions and improves learning.

For instance, in 2018, I was a mother of two adorable babies, a wife of an understanding husband, and an educator in one of the preschools. I had a complete life and wanted nothing more from God but the continuity of this happiness. However, I could no longer live with that beautiful feeling. A catastrophe challenged my life and left everything scattered. My life changed just in the blink of an eye. I was just a mother, not a wife. My society gave me another identity—a single mother. My whole world changed. I was not able to understand what happened to my life. I forgot to smile. In the meantime, the so-called rich Nepali culture added an insult to my injury. My heart aches when I stop performing any rituals. I was desperate to escape that situation and willing to go far from all those sufferings. However, I knew I also had a responsibility to fulfill as a mother. I started to find a way to collect my scattered pieces, which might take an eternity to manage them. However, one day, a light of hope entered my life. A colleague, being wary of my situation, suggested that I continue my studies to divert my mind and upgrade professionally. I decided to follow the light, hoping to collect those scattered pieces. I stepped into the journey of learning.

This learning journey empowered me to find myself, and the perspective of society towards me changed. Singh et al. (2018) state that education tends to bring justice and act as a tool to uplift the family reputation, as education is considered the dominant technique to change society. Various types of discrimination, dominance, and inequalities are prevalent in society. Sandhya (2015) claimed that women need more potency to fight against such a system, and such power comes when one is empowered, and empowerment comes from education. In the collaborative process (Thorpe et al., 2023) of engaging in my learning, one of my well-wishers came to me and suggested, "... *don't read too much; otherwise, you will get more tension. So don't take too much tension.*" Listening to this statement, I didn't reply, forgiving his

incognizance because he could not imagine how education had directed my steps toward enlightenment. Singh (2016) claimed that education enables women to overcome challenges, withstand their conventional roles, and transform their lives because education is viewed as a landmark of women's empowerment. Hence, education helped me transform my pattern of thinking and behavior and, most of all, how I look into my life. So, I again continued achieving another MPhil degree in my learning journey. The enlightenment and empowerment I gained in learning awakened my willingness to learn more. The learning journey fortified me with devoted companions and mentors who paved my path with abundant knowledge, lending my path to the light. In this process, I was unknowingly healing silently. Although I could not collect all the scattered pieces, I was healing while learning and writing to some extent when cultural and social barriers killed me emotionally.

Doubting Ways of Knowing: First Author's Story

We believe that women's education is a powerful tool for gender justice that is possible through dialogue and empowering engagements in community activities. We think exchanging thoughts, feelings, and insights supports us in resolving our doubts and prepares us to be gender-responsive. The doubting way is akin to the doubting game or critical reflective way of knowing (Belenky & Stanton, 2000).

For instance, my life is my pride, though it is like a roller-coaster. I asked myself numerous times whether life has done justice to me, or I have done justice to my life. Being a woman was always challenging as I faced the so-called male ego and dealt with them for my rights. I wanted to talk openly about my life as a daughter and the discrimination I faced against all the sons in my family, but it was not as easy as I thought. Being the only daughter in my house, having many do's and don'ts changed me from timid to empowered. Unlike many of my friends, my family never pampered me. I think I was brought up like a son. I never experienced an overprotective family environment in which I could feel protected or pampered. I started earning pocket money (which I used to pay monthly tuition fees for my school) from tutoring kindergarten kids when I was in Grade 6. I started my professional career right after completing Grade 10 or getting a School Leaving Certificate (SLC, now called SEE). In selecting college, stream, and even a life partner, I got almost no support, which was unusual and uncommon in my context. Those situations arose, doubting my way of knowing my decision abilities and/or power.

At that time, I had many doubts. I used to get angry with my family as I felt neglected. I questioned myself: do they care about me? Why was I

not protected like my friends? Why was I left alone to decide? I used to feel that nobody loved me. I felt unprivileged. I thought of rebelling by not obeying their do's and don't. Whenever they assigned any task, in the beginning, I used to say 'No!'. But later on, I used to do the job without feeling compelled. I did not ask them. Perhaps asking questions to elders, family, teachers, and gurus was not a positive remark in my context and culture. However, questioning or inquiry was deeply rooted in my sociocultural historical context, i.e., in Hinduism (e.g., Prasna Upanishad) and Buddhism (Buddha attained knowledge by seeking answers to many questions). Reaching here, I realized that creating a doubtful space was a way of empowering as I was empowered. I was left to doubt, question, and decide. Perhaps this way, I could make the final decisions in many cases, which made me who I am today as an empowered woman.

Growing up, I challenged the social and professional structural barriers to establish my identity as an equally capable being. This doubting game also challenged and pushed me to do better academically and develop an agency for women's empowerment in academia. In her interview with Ashton-Jones et al. (1990), Belenky mentioned:

"Women have no problem with the doubting game in such a collaborative setting. You can be a marvelous doubter, and doubting can be life-enhancing if it takes place in the service of the clearest possible understanding of truth rather than in one-upping another." (p. 284).

Doubting here means not to fight for winning or competing; instead, it is taken as a stance to question the doubts and get clarity for the common good. Often, we find leadership positions occupied mainly by men in every sector and even at home (Aiston & Fo, 2020), which is not for the common good.

Thus, the leading roles are in the hands of men. This has also created a structural barrier for women to come to the forefront. Much empirical research reveals that women are denied tenure and promotion in higher education due to structural barriers (Bonawitz & Andel, 2009; Rudman et al., 2011). We argue that women have the potential to lead their homes, organizations, and academia as well. Education is the most crucial tool to help women challenge these injustices. Moreover, through educational dialogue, we can put forward our voices and talk about the injustices happening around us and the world, take action to reform the wrong practices and create a better and more inclusive society.

Dismantling Ways of Knowing: Fourth Author's Story

Our dismantling way of knowing shares the critical nature in which we learn from dismantling existing inequitable practices. We value gender justice, and we feel we are educational activists. We opposed things we did not like and started our journey by traveling, studying to achieve higher levels of education, and further working in a reputable institution. From an early age, gender difference starts to strip away the joys of youth and narrows future opportunities, with girls around the globe being excessively impacted. Gender segregation is noticeable at the educational level, as females are mainly in the Social Sciences and Humanities, leading to lower labor market prospects and income. Women started working in the labor market at progressively high rates in the 70s; however, they often engaged in specific divisions, substantially affecting their income (Cortes & Pan, 2018).

On the contrary, male students prefer science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields that offer high-income and greater-status career opportunities (Barone & Assirelli, 2020). However, these days, girls are coming up to show their presence in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) education. To advance women's equality, scholars have devoted much effort to conceptualizing gender equality, its elements and significance for women and society, and right actions and policies. Research on many issues has been covered, including women's education, employment, and societal roles (Kamin & Vezovnik, 2017). All of the above literature based on social-role theories claims that the gaps between men and women will decrease when gender parity is attained (Eagly & Mitchell, 2004). Wood and Eagly (2013) argued that cognitive and personality gender differences are results of socially constructed gender identities based on stereotyped wrong beliefs that males and females are intrinsically different.

Next, men mostly feel powerful enough to snatch opportunities given to women. For instance, sometime in March 2021, I faced similar problems inside the classroom. For example, my two friends and I were supposed to make a group presentation regarding the workshop for the teachers in the government school, and we needed to prepare lesson plans and the contents. There was no coordination and collaboration within the group by the male friend. I was ready to make a presentation regarding the updates, but he jumped to start his own version and mentioned that he prepared the contents by himself. That was a big surprise for me! He did not even care to share his presentation with us. Then, I interrupted him in between and shared our collaborative work. Thus, we, women, empower ourselves by dismantling inequitable classroom situations.

DISCUSSION

Dialogue, a suitable word for collaboration (Belenky et al., 1997) and for raising voice (Delong, 2020), is the main essence of this article. Dialogue in this article is represented by the traditional Nepali collaborative ways of knowing *Pandheri Guff*. We, the authors, found *Pandheri Guff's* approach a powerful means to communicate our experience of being (possibly) transformative academic women scholars. According to the feminist point of view, voice is the reflection of the writer's experience, sentiments, and identity (Mitchell, 2017). However, women's voices worldwide are oppressed in academia due to pre-dominant ideologies of the male voice (Aiston & Fo, 2020; Belenky et al., 1997). So, in this article, we have discussed four different themes under women's ways of knowing to empower women scholars in academia.

Believing ways of knowing is about how women can learn and grow by believing and becoming strengths of each other. Empirical studies show that women in traditional Asian culture are seen primarily as wives, mothers, and homemakers, which influences their academic performance and identity (Aiston & Fo, 2020). Often, we find that our cultural practices influence our educational practices as well, impacting the learning opportunities for Nepali women scholars. Nepali women's cultural identity is called homemaking, and they are responsible for caring for family members and doing internal household activities. Thus, women scholars have to fulfill their home duties along with their academics, which also creates trouble for them in managing time for their studies. Moreover, due to this, men consider them less capable in academia. To solve this, we argue that women can engage in a robust academic dialogue when they believe in each other and collaborate. So, we can talk freely about our academic problems without judgment and collectively find possible solutions.

Meditative ways of knowing help us to continue our learning despite having many cultural and structural barriers, and our question is: "Why should women always compromise while making decisions?" Men mostly dominate decision-making power in almost every sector, including academia. Through this study, we found that women scholars can make learning a choice for themselves to overcome the pain in their lives. For example, in the second theme, the fourth author in the story was/is facing many cultural challenges that try to create a barrier in her academic learning journey. However, her friend (the second author) motivated her to continue her educational journey and prove people wrong through academic excellence. Moreover, her friends believe an academic learning journey can heal her wounds with time as she remains occupied with exploring other aspects of life and learning. This also

helped the latter make decisions that improved her life. As she gained more knowledge, she advocated for herself and many women like her.

Doubting ways of knowing is being critical of our values, beliefs, and assumptions. It also means questioning the "status quo" to create an equitable environment for women in academia. In Nepali society, girls are not supposed to be highly educated; why? Because she would not find a "groom" as she gets "older." Many such questions bar women from participating in higher education and getting exposed to many opportunities. Creating identity in academia is one such opportunity. Women scholars can become the strength of each other, continue to empower themselves and create their own academic identity. However, we also realized that self-motivation is equally important and that even a single woman leader in academia inspires many others as they find similar stories of struggle and passion. Substantial gender inequities persist because of a systems-based problem in academia—a problem that will require a conscious choice and action at the leadership level to solve (Acosta et al., 2020, p. 1468). The phrase, "I can DO it, YOU can DO it, and WE can DO it," should be the slogan of women scholars. Women scholars can realize their innate power by valuing their voices to overcome hurdles. Likewise, when women chase their dreams, they change the doubting game to a win-win game. So, our doubting ways of knowing to help us to prove our caliber through collaboration and dialogue.

Likewise, dismantling ways of knowing helped us to seek an equitable environment for women in academia, saying 'NO!' Women in higher education face a more challenging set of expectations from students and colleagues than men despite the continued reliance on meritocratic norms (Jackson, 2017). In academia, we oppose things that discriminate against women based on gender. For example, in this study, we found that many male scholars did not consider their women's voices in collaborative tasks. Many such instances might be heard or unheard of as some share them while others keep them within themselves. Why should women consistently be underestimated or considered less knowledgeable beings in academia? Through this article, we also advocate for agency and resilience to fellow women scholars in Nepal and worldwide. Our collective voices can create an inclusive space for women in academia, which is much needed worldwide.

CONCLUSION

We explored our ways of knowing and enhancing learning by interacting like Nepali women who used to be involved in *Pandheri Guff.* This collaborative sharing platform helped us to empower ourselves by sharing our learning experiences, believing in our strengths, mediating

structures, being critical of our beliefs and assumptions, and speaking against inequities. However, we experienced two challenges: (1) our male colleagues doubted it as a research method, and (2) we engaged much time talking and discussing, which hindered the research as we had planned. However, we explored the power of women's dialogue in academia, which is expressed below.

Power of Women's Dialogue in Academia

In dialogue, we found "strength,"
In dialogue, we found how to "vent,"
In dialogue, we found "stance,"
In dialogue, we found "empowerment,"
In dialogue, we found "agency and resilience,"
"To transform ourselves and other selves,"

In short, the feminine qualities of *Pandheri Guff* explored multiple ways of knowing, which are not limited to only women's ways of knowing, as masculine and feminine are inherent attributes of humans. Therefore, we see the possibility of '*Pandheri Guff* as a research method' and its significance not only in the educational context but also in the social context in Nepal and beyond.

FINAL REMARKS

This study explored the transformative power of dialogue in empowering women scholars in academia, represented by the traditional Nepali concept of *Pandheri Guff*. Through collaborative discussions and shared experiences, the authors found strength, resilience, and a sense of agency. Despite cultural and structural barriers, *Pandheri Guff* provided a supportive platform for women to voice their experiences, challenge the status quo, and advocate for equitable academic environments. This method facilitated personal and academic growth and underscored the importance of believing in each other, meditative reflection, critical questioning, and dismantling inequities. The study advocates for recognizing and adopting *Pandheri Guff* as a valuable research method to explore and address women's critical issues in higher education and beyond.

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