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Sarjana Kc

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**[‘Impacts on social well-being of women due to the CHHAUPADI tradition (Being untouchable during menstruation) among the women of far western Nepal’]**

**[A case study of the 'CHHAUPADI' tradition (a form of culture based gender discrimination) in Achham district, Far Western Region, Nepal]**

**Master's thesis in Impacts on social well-being of women due to the CHHAUPADI tradition (Being untouchable during menstruation) among the women of far western Nepal'**

**Thesis submitted for the fulfilment of master degree in International Social Welfare and  
Health Policy  
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**OsloMet- Oslo Metropolitan University  
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# 1. ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Menstrual cycle is normally a physiological process in women which occurs during their active reproductive years. However, menstruation is perceived in different ways in different countries, societies, cultures and religions. Menstruating women are still perceived as impure and unclean during menstruation and it is still perceived as a taboo in many societies in the world. Menstrual bleeding is perceived as extreme impurity in some districts of far western region of Nepal and extreme discriminatory menstrual practices imposed on menstruating women and on women with new-born baby (during the first 14 days of the post-partum period). They are considered impure confined to isolated, unsanitary huts. Traditionally, this extreme form of discriminatory menstrual practice is called *Chhaupadi*. The Chhaupadi tradition is banned and outlawed by the constitution of Nepal in 2005 and criminalised by the government of Nepal in 2017. However, this is still practiced in far western region of the Nepal.

**Objective:** The aim of this thesis research is to find impacts on the social well-being of the women in the Achham district of far western region of the Nepal due to the Chhaupadi tradition, and to put better light on the plight of the women's condition due to this tradition.

**Methods:** Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interview, serendipity data collection method and purposeful maximal sampling method. It was conducted in-depth interview with 3 key participants, formal interview with 8 respondents, and informal discussions with various informants.

**Findings:** The study shows that most of the women perceive menstruation as the natural process however, as the symbol of impurity and sin. Chhaupadi practicing women experience several challenges including risk of illness, wild animal attack, sexual abuse, social isolation and discrimination based on gender. Most of the people in Chhaupadi practicing community are still unaware of law against Chhaupadi. Those who have heard about Chhaupadi being illegal do not know how they can take action against it. And some of the community members deny the idea of criminalization of this tradition as they consider it as part of their culture. The continuation of practice is influenced by various factors like society, culture, family, lack of awareness about the menstruation, fear of being isolated from society etc.

**Conclusion:** The Chhaupadi practicing women are at high risk of physical illness, psychological stresses, social isolation, gender-based discrimination and accidental deaths in the Chhau-hut. These women lack social integration, are not socially accepted, they feel hopeless about their situation and lack the awareness about menstruation, legal establishment against the Chhaupadi practice and they see no hope for a better life. This finding suggests that social well-being of the women is adversely affected by this tradition and this issue needs to be addressed.

**Key Words:** Chhaupadi, Chhau-goth, Chhau-hut, Menstruation, Social well-being, Women, Gender discrimination, Far western Nepal, Tradition, Impure, Sin.

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### **3. DECLARATION**

I, Sarjana Kc do hereby declare to OsloMet- Oslo Metropolitan University that, this Thesis is my original work and that it has never been submitted for a degree award in any other University.

Sincerely  
Sarjana kc

#### **4. ALL RIGHT RESERVED**

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## **8. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

FMG- Female Genital Mutilation

HIOA- Høgskolen I Oslo og Akershus

INGO- International Non-Governmental organization

NGO- Non-Governmental Organization

UN- United Nations

UK- United Kingdom

UNICEF- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

USA- United States of America

VDC- Village development committee, a term used to refer local administrative division in Nepal

WHO- World Health Organization

S. NO- Serial Number

NSD- Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata/Norwegian Centre for Research Data

## 9. Chapter I- Introduction and background

### 9.1 *Understanding health*

Health is defined by World Health Organization-WHO as being physically, psychologically and socially well, not merely absence of illness<sup>1</sup>. Thus, if any culture, tradition or practice brings imbalance to physical, psychological or social well-being of a person, that signals to the imbalance in health of that person. Well-being is the absenteeism of negative circumstances and feelings and social well-being is the consideration of one's situation and functioning in society (Keyes 1998)

Women's health is prioritized by United Nation's convention 1979<sup>2</sup> which obliges all states members to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning (Kathree 1995). Regarding women's rights, the convention on elimination of all kinds of discrimination against women (approved by 136 United Nation members in January 1995) obliges all State members to take action against the social causes of women's inequality, and it calls for the elimination of laws, stereotypes, practices, and prejudices that impair women's well-being<sup>3</sup> (Winter, Thompson, and Jeffrey 2002).

### 9.2 *Culture based practices and women's health on international perspective*

Traditionally, cultural practices are principles that are followed by members of a society for long period of time passing from generation to generation. Such practices are prevalent among people in all communities in the world. Many of the traditional practices such as child/early marriages and dowry systems (Field and Ambrus 2008), female genital mutilation (FGM) (Okojie 1994), son preference and female feticide and infanticide ( Fact Sheet No. 23, United Nations), menstrual taboos, early pregnancy and menstrual taboos such as 'zur zur' and the Chhaupadi tradition in Nepal (Ranabhat et al. 2015) are harmful particularly to women and their health.. Zur zur is a traditional practice in some African countries where a deep cut is made in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/about/mission/en/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/11949.pdf>

the anterior area of the female genital organ during 34th and 35th weeks of first pregnancy as early preparation for child birth. However many women face over-bleeding and death as a consequence (Mandara 2004).

Among the strangest traditions in some societies in African countries, delayed child delivery is linked with misdeeds done by women (M'soka, Mabuza, and Pretorius 2015) and they are forced to admit their fault which creates great mental stress on women. In addition, there is a prevalence of taboos and negative social stigma linked to simple bodily processes like the menstrual cycle of women. Menstruation is a normal biological and physiological process in the female body; however different societies, traditions, cultures, and religions have created a social taboo and negative stigma for menstruating women. All kinds of harmful traditional practices which are particularly targeted towards women can have negative impacts on physical and psychological health, and social well-being of the women.

### ***9.3 Perception of menstruation on international perspective***

Menstrual cycle is a physiological process in women which occurs during their active reproductive years (Ranabhat et al. 2015). During menstruation, blood from the uterus flows through the vagina for 4-6 days every month. The onset of menstruation is usually during puberty at the age of 11-15 years whereas menopause (the ceasing of menstruation) usually occurs before the age of 50. Scientific explanation of the cause of menstruation is "ovulation followed by missed chance of pregnancy that results in bleeding from the endometrial vessels and is followed by preparation of the next cycle" (Garg and Anand 2015). Women experience similar physical changes during menstruation regardless of their culture, society, status or ethnicity (Crawford, Menger, and Kaufman 2014). However, menstruation is perceived in different ways in different countries, societies, cultures and religions (Severy et al. 1993). A scientific study conducted by the World Health Organization in ten different countries shows that menstruating women are perceived as impure and unclean during menstruation and it is still perceived as a taboo (Organization 1981).

Menstrual taboo is prevalent in both rich and poor countries. Evidences show that menstruating women are avoided, disliked in USA and they feel that they are viewed differently than normal women when other people are aware of their menstruation (Roberts 2004). Some women in the United Kingdom (UK) prefer to hide their menstruating situation from the public as these women experience discomfort to discuss about it (Newton 2012). Menstrual taboo is visibly present in poor countries where women are considered ritually unclean, prohibited from performing day to day life activities such as entering to temple, entering to the kitchen, cooking food, sharing dining table with family, sharing bed with husbands or even touching a male

relative (Kandel, Raj Bhandari, and Lamichanne 2010). Menstruating women in India are surrounded by taboo and myth which excludes them from several socio-cultural activities (Garg and Anand 2015). Socio-cultural exclusion during menstruation can be helpful in some extent as women get rest from physical activities which is good for their health. However, menstruation is stigmatized socially which is generating gender discrimination to a varying extent all over world (Greenberg, Koole, and Pyszczynski 2013).

Perception on menstruation is diverse among different religions, cultures and societies. Most of the Christians do not have strict beliefs linked to menstruation excluding few orthodox church believers; for example, Russians, Ukrainians and Greeks who do not recommend females to be in close affiliation with other people while menstruating. Judaism and Islamic religion forbid intercourse while menstruation (Ranabhat et al. 2015). However Hindu religion has broad spectrum of cultural mixture on menstruation. Buddhism accepts menstruation as normal phenomena, few ethnic group in Nepal consider menstruation as positive sign for productive reproductive life; in south India, the menarche- first menstruation is celebrated and girls get special presents to applaud this special day. In Nepal, most of the diverse Hindu cultures consider menstruation as impure and girls experience some sort of isolation during menstruation (Ranabhat et al. 2015).

#### ***9.4 Menstruation in Context of Nepal***

Menstruation is topic of shame, impurity and sin in context of the Nepal. There are several Nepali terms used for menstruation which signalize it as matter of extreme impurity:

- ⇒ “Para Sarne”- moving away to maintain purity
- ⇒ “Nachhune Hune”- being untouchable
- ⇒ “chhui hune”- being untouchable
- ⇒ “Ghupha basne”- being underground for purity

In most Nepalese families, menstruation is considered impure and menstruating women are treated differently than male counterparts in the family (Dahal 2008). Irrespective of women in well-educated family or women in remotest villages, there are certain restrictions to be followed during menstruation. Menstruating Nepalese women usually follow traditional barriers at least for the first four days of the menstrual period; for examples, menstruating women are not allowed inside kitchen, no family members can eat food cooked by menstruating women, they are not allowed to touch water source inside or outside house, are forbidden to enter inside the temple and they are not allowed to share bedroom with husband during menstruation. At the fourth menstrual day, women are asked to clean themselves and these women take bath by using

water in which gold ornaments are dipped. They believe that, the water in which gold ornaments are dipped is symbol of purity and by sprinkling gold dipped water women gain purity. However, as long as women maintain their hygiene during menstruation, there are no scientific evidences proving women unclean or impure due to menstrual bleeding (Kandel, Raj Bhandari, and Lamichanne 2010).

### **9.5 Menstruation and Chhaupadi tradition in far western region of the Nepal**

Menstrual bleeding is perceived as extreme impurity in some districts<sup>4</sup> of far western region of Nepal and extreme discriminatory menstrual practices are imposed on menstruating women and on women with new-born baby (during the first 14 days of the post-partum period). Menstruating women are considered not only unclean and impure, but they are also prevented from carrying out activities of daily living and being confined to isolated, unsanitary huts. Traditionally, this extreme form of discriminatory menstrual practice is called **Chhaupadi** (Ranabhat et al. 2015).

In order to understand the tradition of Chhaupadi, it is important to understand the term “Chhaupadi”. The term Chhaupadi in the local language, means turning *unclean, impure and untouchable*. "Chhau" stands for menstruation and "Padi" stands for women in the local language. In this tradition, menstruating women and women with new born baby are considered unclean and therefore are not allowed to touch anything inside the house. To keep house pure, these women are sent to live in the small, narrow hut or cowshed. Local people believe that any objects touched by menstruating women becomes unclean, impure and contaminated (Khadka 2014).

(Bhandaree et al. 2013) has explained the concept of Chhaupadi as:

*“This practice stems from the belief that when a woman/ girl has her periods, the woman is “impure” and could pollute household. This belief stems out from the myth that Indra<sup>5</sup> was cursed for killing the Brahmins<sup>6</sup> and this curse was transferred to women as menstruation. Females are forced to stay in the shed for thirteen days during their first and second menstrual cycle, seven days in their third cycle and four days of every other menstrual cycle. The practice of Chhaupadi is also followed by woman during child birth and for up to eleven days after the*

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<sup>4</sup> Districts – Term used in Nepal for second level of administrative center after provinces.

<sup>5</sup> Indra- Name for one of the God under Hindu Religion

<sup>6</sup> Brahmins- Term used for one of the upper caste people in Nepal

*delivery. Even their babies are sent to live in these sheds with their mother. The shed is called Chhau-Goth<sup>7</sup>, which has a dreadful living condition with temperature drop up to freezing zero”.*

Chhaupadi is practiced particularly in districts of the far-western region of Nepal such as Achham, Dadeldhura, Baitadi, Darchula, Bajhang, BajuraDoti and Kailali districts (Kandel, Raj Bhandari, and Lamichanne 2010) and some districts in the mid-west, such as Humla, Jumla, Mugu, Dailekh, Jajarkot and Surkhet (Khadka 2014). This practice forces inflexible boundaries upon women, young adolescent girls who have just started their menstruation and mothers who have just delivered a baby. These women are mostly put in very narrow, unheated huts, away from their own home and family members. This period lasts for two weeks for girls having their first-time menstruation and for women who has just given birth to baby. This time period is restricted up to 4 to 5 days every month during menstruation (Kandel, Raj Bhandari, and Lamichanne 2010).

In extremely strict families, menstruating women are banned to touch and see male members of the house including their husband or father. Women are confined in small, cold sheds or huts, sometimes together with cattle and goats and they are not allowed to enter even in the surrounding areas of their own house (Ranabhat et al. 2015). These women are prohibited to consume nutritional foods such as milk and meat items and are forced to survive with some dry foods, salt and rice. In extreme cases of Chhaupadi, women are not even allowed to look at the sun, touch trees or go to work or school. In this tradition women are not only kept in physical challenging situations but also treated in disrespectful manners (Crawford, Menger, and Kaufman 2014).

### ***9.6 Chhaupadi as culture and religion based practice***

The Chhaupadi tradition is highly influenced by Hindu religion practitioners (Kandel, Raj Bhandari, and Lamichanne 2010). The logic behind considering menstrual women as impure and untouchable is found to be due to religious and superstitious believes (GC and Koirala 2013). Superstitious beliefs and taboos associated with menstruation are often linked to evil spirits, disgrace and awkwardness in the context of sexual relationships and reproduction. Some women bury their inner cloths used during menstruation to shield them from being used by evil spirits. Superstitious perception on menstruation among people of far west region of Nepal is relatively high compared to other regions of Nepal, especially among low cast families such as

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<sup>7</sup> Goth- Nepali term for Shed/Hut



*damai, kaami, saarki*<sup>8</sup> families. The extremely superstitious believers in the society consider that if the menstruating women touch or share bed with their husbands, they might become sick or die. If they touch trees then trees would not produce any fruits, if they touch animals then animals will not give products and if they go to educational institutions during menstruation, the Goddess of education would become angry. If menstruation women live or eat together with family members, all the family members become sinners (GC and Koirala 2013). People believe that menstruating women are obliged to follow Chhaupadi or else she herself would become sick, her bones would break or she will turn infertile. Chhaupadi is connected not only to personal status but it is also seen as social norm. It is believed that if women reject to practice the Chhaupadi, that would lead to society being shattered, cursed and would no longer survive (Khadka 2014).

### **9.7 Why is the Chhaupadi a problem?**

During the Chhaupadi, menstruating women are denied of healthy foods like milk, ghee, fruits, yogurt or meats. They are asked to eat only flatbread or rice with salt. These women are prohibited to use public tap water or any other public water sources. They are allowed to use only specified tap designed for the Chhapuadi practicing women. This might lead to unbalanced physical and mental well-being as well as an unbalanced social well-being (Khadka 2014).

Menstruation is not accepted as a natural phenomenon and women are sent to isolation in the Chhaupadi hut, away from family, friends and home. Women are likely to get depressed and stressed which affects mental health. These women are not allowed to consume nutritious food which might lead to weakness and sickness. Mentally stressed and physical weak adolescent girl are likely to learn less and score lesser marks than boys of the same age at the school. Instead of school, these girls are confined to small narrow huts. Many girls tend to fall out on learning at school compared to boys in their class due to many absences (Ranabhat et al. 2015). In a recent study by UNICEF in rural Nepal, it is found that as much as 95 % of the adolescent girls were restricted to attend school during menstruation. These girls find it difficult to talk about this issue with others as it is still considered as the subject of social taboo. Most of the girls in rural areas are not even aware of the menstruation as a natural phenomenon and they accept it as a matter of shame and social taboo as taught by parents , family and society (Gautam 2016) . This might be one of the reasons behind the lack of education among girls compared to boys in the Chhaupadi practicing regions which makes it difficult to get gender equality in the society.

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<sup>8</sup> Local reference names for low cast families

There have been reports of many young girls and new mothers' death inside huts during Chhaupadi due to wild animal attacks, snake bites, extreme cold, lack of oxygen and carbon dioxide poisoning due to fire used inside hut to battle cold. Menstruating women thus face stress and anxiety of being ill or getting killed by wild animals in the Chhaupadi hut. Such practice thus could be harmful not only on a physical level but could also influence the social well-being of women (Ranabhat et al. 2015). In spite of various detrimental effects of Chhaupadi, there are not much research conducted on the Chhaupadi practice in the far western region of Nepal (Crawford, Menger, and Kaufman 2014).

The Chhaupadi tradition is banned and outlawed by the constitution of Nepal in 2005 (Dahal 2008). *In august 9, 2017, the Chhaupadi was criminalized by the government of Nepal and the law was introduced stipulating a three-month jail sentence and up to nepali rupee 3,000 fine for people who practice Chhaupadi.* Irrespective of Nepal being a UN member and outlawing the *Chhaupadi* practice, it is still being practiced because people have superstitious beliefs rooted in the psyche and it is also not being questioned by community members. The Chhaupadi practice however could violate the women's rights by limiting their freedom to live safely at home and by depriving adolescent girls from the opportunity to attend school during menstruation. It also identifies power structures like patriarchy by the ruling of women's lives (Khadka 2014). The achievement of a sustainable, healthy and equitable society is not achievable until basic health rights and social well-being of the other half of the human population (which is women) is rejected and dishonoured.

### **9.8 Significance of Study**

After the abolishment of the Chhaupadi tradition, this practice started new forms. Because the government of Nepal could not assure the adequate follow up programs in the Chhaupadi practicing districts, local people continued sending women to the huts. Because the government could not implement immediate measures of punishment against Chhaupadi practice, local society accepted it as normal practice. This practice continued to make menstruating women feel temporarily isolated, stigmatized and socially excluded. This practice is prevalence not only among uneducated, middle class or low caste families, but some of the well-educated girls are still practicing Chhaupadi. The reason behind seems to be that these girls have been practicing Chhaupadi since first time they got menstruation and this has become norm to them. Various studies and research exist on Chhaupadi system. Most of the studies are focused either on socio-cultural aspects of Chhaupadi, or on direct effects on reproductive health of women or on the human right perspectives. Most of the researches have included the direct health issues due to Chhaupadi tradition though the impacts women perceive on their social well-being due

to the Chhaupadi tradition is a different and deserves a closer inspection. Therefore this thesis research aims to give primary focus on finding impacts on the social well-being of the women in the Achham district of far western region of the Nepal, in order to put better light on the plight of the women's condition due to Chhaupadi tradition. I will do so by exploring their perception and attitude on Chhaupadi and its legal abolishment, their past and present Chhaupadi experiences, and its consequences faced by these women in the context of social well-being.

## **10. Chapter II- Research Aim and Research Questions**

In applying a qualitative research method and employing critical theory and feminist theory perspectives, my study aims to conduct a research project to find out impacts of the Chhaupadi tradition on social well-being among women of far western Nepal.

### ***10.1 Research questions***

1. How do women practicing Chhaupadi perceive this practice, is it their own choice or do they feel it as compulsive or as gender discrimination?
2. What is the perception and attitude of these women on legal abolishment of Chhaupadi?
3. What are the past and present experiences of women while practicing Chhaupadi?
4. What are the consequences of Chhaupadi faced by these women in the context of social well-being?

## **11. Chapter III- Theoretical Perspective**

In order to answer the questions above, I have chosen critical theory, theory of suffering, feminist theory and Corey Lee M. Keyes' five dimensions of social well-being. Critical theory is an approach that digs in-depth into social problems with a critical analysis and aims to bring changes in society as a whole. Theory of suffering is borrowed from the medical field where the term suffering is more vague as it includes various perspectives of suffering such as feeling

of pain, distress, anxiety, insecurity, grief, sorrow, misery and agony (Oreopoulos 2005). On the other hand, feminist theory deals with analysing gender inequality and aims to empower women. A critical theory perspective is concerned with the empowering of human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class and gender, whereas feminist theory is more concentrated specifically with women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations (Creswell 2013). Corey Lee M. Keyes in his study of social well-being described that the existing theories highlight on the private features of well-being, for example physical status, emotional features or psychological functioning. He however, added that individuals remain connected with society, bear numerous social tasks and confrontations. Therefore, to understand optimum functioning and health of an individual it is important to investigate an individual's social well-being, i.e. in context of the society of which he or she is a member. To evaluate the social well-being perspective, Corey Lee M. Keyes proposed five dimensions of the social well-being: *social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualization, and social acceptance* (Keyes 1998), which will be used in this study as an additional theoretical perspective to evaluate social well-being of Chhauandi practicing women.

### ***11.1 Critical Theory***

Critical theory dates back to 1923 when the Institute for Social Research - Frankfurt School was established in Germany. The Frankfurt school has generated German philosophers and social theorists such as Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Friedrich Pollock, Leo Lowenthal and Walter Benjamin (Agger 1991). Critical theory emerged as the explanatory approach to the question "why the socialist revolution occurred by Marx in the mid-nineteenth century did not occur as expected" (Agger 1991) and Frankfurt theorists believed that they had to reconstruct the idea and method of Marxism to make it more relevant to the modern twentieth-century capitalist society.

The critical theory perspective in social research has both its narrow and broad meaning. According to the Frankfurt School Critical theory in a narrow sense 'is critical to the extent that it seeks human emancipation' (Bohman 2005) , or 'to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them' (Horkheimer 1982). Critical theory in the narrow perspective covers many generations in the history of the social sciences. Critical theories in broad senses are developed in connection with social movements that identifies various forms of social domination in modern societies. Critical theories in a narrow perspective and broad meaning, both offer the descriptive and normative foundation for social query and aim to decline the dominations and increase the freedom of human beings (Bohman 2005).

According to Horkheimer, a definition of Critical Theory is incomplete without three major criteria: 'it must be explanatory, practical and normative, all at the same time' (Bohman 2005). This means that critical theory explains the fault in existing social actuality, recognizes the activist to bring changes in the fault, and provides the base for disapproval and sets the attainable goals to bring about social transformation. As critical theory aims to discover and defeat conditions that limits the freedom of humans in society, in-depth research is needed in various social aspects such as traditional norms, cultural practices, psychological perception and social dimensions (Bohman 2005). Due to its highly ambitious philosophical concept and aim of social transformations, critical theory is including extensive tensions. Critical theory focuses on the various social issues such as power and justice, race, class and genders, ideologies, discourses, education, tradition, culture and religion, and social institutions (Zou and Trueba 2002).

What I understood about critical theory is that it is an overall idea that focuses on oppressive social issues and criticizes these issues so that one can find ways to eliminate such issues. Cultural practices like Chhaupadi is a major socio-cultural issue in Nepal which is causing various problems to women's health, rights and social well-being and this issue needs to be criticized and discussed for Nepal to eliminate such detrimental practices.

### ***11.2 Theory of suffering***

The word "suffering" is commonly used about medical conditions to define various states of feelings such as pain, stress, anxiety, grief, and depression. These feelings may be due to physical trauma, to psychological stress, to social burdens, due to loss of a dear person and so on. Suffering is described by DG Oreopoulos in his work "is there meaning in suffering" as a condition of extreme ache linked to incidents that menace the intactness of the person (Oreopoulos 2005). Suffering is the state where no particular part of a person is affected but it distresses the person as a whole including physical, psychological, emotional, sociological and spiritual sides (Khadka 2014). The idea of suffering is commonly in use in medical fields to determine the level of distress experiences. Based on the level of suffering, the framework of the therapy is built. However, suffering is not associated only with medical conditions. A person can experience stress in various aspects he/she is associated with. It might be experienced in relation to the society in which a person lives, tradition, culture and religion with which he/she is associated, customs, rules and regulations in his/her surroundings, his/her relation with family, friends or relatives, and also a relation a person has with him/herself or his/her own body (Khadka 2014, Oreopoulos 2005).

Suffering is not simply the bodily capacity to feel pain or a simple explanation about cruel life situations. The pain and suffering are different. A person can feel the pain without actually experience suffering. When a person gets a cut injury on the hand, he feels pain; however, if the cut doesn't get healed for a long period and it limits everyday life of a person then he/she experiences suffering (Dahal 2010). Experience of suffering can elaborate the physical, emotional, psychological or social condition in which a person is living. The meaning and level of sufferings have been highly discussed issues among anthropologists and they suggest that every individual does not suffer in the similar way in a similar condition as some respond to the situation more calmly where as some get easily exhausted by it (Han 2013).

However, suffering is a distinct experience and can be described only by the person who actually goes through it; though there can be similarities between experiences of different persons who experience similar sufferings. Thus, the distress caused by socio-cultural issues is therefore important to label in order to find out if the existing socio-cultural practice is causing harm to the person or society.

In this study, the theory of suffering is applied for the analysis of past and present Chhaupadi experiences, and to analyse if suffering is one of the consequences of this tradition. The theory of suffering will support this study to label if the Chhaupadi is a socio-culture source of suffering which affects the well-being of women.

### ***11.3 Feminist theory***

The word 'feminism' is broad and can be understood as the assortment of measures that aim to explain, determine and defend equivalent political, economic and social rights between the sexes. A person can be labelled feminist if he/she has beliefs based on feminism and if he/she might get engaged in movements to accomplish changes related to his/her beliefs. Both feminism and feminist theory do not have one particular single school of thought or path. Many philosophers have their own meaning on feminism and feminist theory. *Simone de Beauvoir* presented ground breaking thought on gender where she considered gender as being 'constructed' and female being constructed as 'other' or 'second sex' (Moi 2010). I will explicitly use following theory presented by Toril Moi, an academic researcher on Beauvoir to analyze Chhaupadi based gender discrimination:

*In the Second Sex Beauvoir formulates three principles and applies them to women's situation in the world. First is her foundational insight that man 'is the Subject, he is the Absolute: she is the Other.' Man incarnates humanity; woman, by virtue of being female, deviates from the human norm. The consequence is that women constantly experience a painful conflict between their humanity and their femininity (Moi 2010).*

I will further be relying on Moi's description on Beauvoir's second principle : "*freedom, not happiness, must be used as the measuring stick to assess the situation of women*" (Moi 2010) to analyze the situation of women who practice Chhaupadi. Beauvoir simulate that women should be as free as men. When any conditions are imposed on her, her status becomes 'other', her situation becomes unjust and oppressive. However, women are obliged to handle freedom with responsibility. (Moi 2010) states that "*When women consent to their own oppression and help to oppress other women, they are to be blamed*". This theory will be used to describe how Chhaupadi practicing women in Nepal consent to their oppression and force their daughters and other female members to follow the Chhaupadi. Here is the prevalence of discrimination among same gender. However, Beauvoir's principle focuses on concrete freedom, not just abstract equality such as right to drive, right to vote or right to become member of parliament. *Actual freedom to women applies to right to have good health, education, economy and social inclusion* (Moi 2010). I will rely on this theoretical perspective to analyse impacts of social well-being of women due to Chhaupadi.

The third principle by Beauvoir on feminism is different as she refers to 'femininity' as patriarchal and symbol of the unfree; whereas she considers 'feminine' women to be the ones who accepts self as the 'other'. Beauvoir argues on her book *The Second Sex* that for women to be free, femininity must disappear.

I will be relying on these principles to analyse gender based discrimination as the consequence of the Chhaupadi tradition.

#### ***11.4 Five dimensions of social well-being by Corey Lee M. Keyes***

Corey Lee M. Keyes in his work *Social well-being* has proposed five dimensions of social well-being: *social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualization, and social acceptance* (Keyes 1998).

***Social integration*** is a dimension that valuates the quality of one's relationship with society. It is the extent of feeling part of society, sharing the common characteristics with other members of the society and belonging to this particular community. If an individual feel socially estranged and isolated and feels that society does not reflect one's own value, then this brings imbalance to one's health. The healthy individuals should feel that they are a part of society (Keyes 1998).

***Social acceptance*** is the construal of society where individuals accept others as trustable, kind and feel comfortable with each-other. Social acceptance is the other form of self-acceptance. When people accept others with their both good and bad aspects, it exemplifies good mental health and thereby wellness (Keyes 1998).

***Social contribution*** is an assessment of the social value of the individuals. This symbolizes that an individual is a valuable member of society. Social contribution reflects to what degree individuals feel that their contribution is appreciated by their society (Keyes 1998).

***Social coherence*** is the awareness of the social world. Healthy individuals care about the type of society in which they live, they have awareness about the happenings around them and they see their lives meaningful in their particular society (Keyes 1998).

***Social actualization*** is the assessment of the potential and path of the society. It is the faith in the progression of the society and consciousness that society has prospective for its inhabitants. Healthy individuals feel positive, are hopeful about their potentiality of their society. Socially healthy people visualise that their contributions are important for the social growth. They feel powerful and potent in their society (Keyes 1998).

I will also use these dimensions to analyse the impacts on the social well-being of women due to the Chhaupadi tradition.



## **12. Chapter IV- Methodological consideration**

The appropriateness of the methods is decided based on the research questions presented above. I selected the methods below to grip the vitality that the research questions carry while revealing impacts on social well-being of women due to the Chhaupdi practice.

### **12.1 Qualitative research methods**

Qualitative research methods investigate not only the what, where and when but also why and how. Questions of why and how are vital to know phenomena being researched (Silverman 2006). Silverman describes that qualitative research methods are methods which include a wide range of data collection and analysis perspectives. These methods do not just include statistical numbers but also involve understanding of the context, feeling utterances of the people, their behavior, texts, images, and views. The qualitative research methods are most rational when a research aims to answer why and how of actions of people and to analyze meanings, beliefs, traditions, cultures and behaviors (Silverman 2006). Qualitative research methods are approaches for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell 2014, 4).

Based on the nature of this study, qualitative methods are adopted as research methodology. The objective of the qualitative research is to describe and analyse people's perception, views and experiences on the Chhaupadi tradition. A qualitative approach is the most rational for my study as I intend to study about impacts on social well-being of women due to the Chhaupadi tradition which includes analysing people's perceptions on the Chhaupadi, feelings of the Chhaupadi- practicing women, their behaviour and their views.

### **12.2 The study designs**

This qualitative study will take the form of *observational study* and *the case study*.

The observational study method is included in this study as this method focuses on "real-world" behaviour to achieve more accurate and objective information (Bernard 2017) (Altmann 1974). Observational studies are the one which "involve the systematic recording of observable phenomena or behaviour in the natural setting" (Baker 2006). My role as researcher with an observational method is as *observer-as-participant*, where the researcher is involved in observation as well as conducts short interviews with the participants. The data collection on observational study includes the writing, dictating, tape recording, logs and field notes. Observational notes include the detail what the researcher actually sees which can be more detailed, analytic and more interpretative (Baker 2006). I implemented this method in my study

and I obtained several details related to Chhaupadi tradition through observation. Detailed findings obtained through observation will be presented later in chapter IX – observational analysis.

In a case study approach a researcher depicts social elements by describing or analyzing a single situation or a case such as a specific study of a person or group or event (Silverman 2006). Case study, according to Creswell in his book *Qualitative inquiry and research design* "is an approach in which the investigator explores a case or cases over time, through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case based themes" (Creswell 2007, 73). In my research the Chhaupadi tradition is a case and it's impacts on social well-being of women is the theme of the case. To represent the Chhaupadi case, this study will use the cases of three women and their detailed experience will be explored using in-depth data collection through interviews, observations, audiovisual materials, documents and reports. I prefer to illustrate the cases using different examples, thus, specifically I will select *collective case study method* (Creswell 2007, 74) in which we select one issue or concern and we use multiple cases to illustrates the issue. Thus, this study is designed as a *multi-case study*.

### **12.3 Data sources**

This study is based on primary data obtained through the field work. The information was collected in the field by *observations and interviews* with people. The study was carried out to get most precise, rich and true information. I travelled through the remote villages of Achham, arranged formal and informal interviews and interactions with different actors and representatives to get the in-depth data. I obtained extensive data from multiple sources of information such as interviews, observation, audiovisual material, images, documents and records. The actors involved were the Chhaupadi practicing women and teenage girls, local community leaders, local political leaders, local people living in different villages in Achham, local teachers, local employees within the health sector and representatives of NGO's and INGO'S working for better health of women at the site of my concern. I also observed the Chhaupadi sheds/huts and Chhaupadi practicing women in these huts.

In addition, I used secondary data from literature review and analysis from established databases. I am using databases for searching article from academic search premier (HIOA)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> HIOA- Høgskolen i Oslo Akershus- Norwegian name for Oslo and Akershus University College

database), Google scholar, PubMed, reports from INGO's such as the World Health Organization, Save the Children, United Nations etc, reports from district headquarter, reports from the Ministry of Children and Women's Welfare, Nepal and news reports about the Chhaupadi tradition published by national/international news portals.

**Data collection through a *Serendipity* approach:** Serendipity in the data collection became one of the most interesting part of my study. Serendipity is the art of discovering unplanned/unsought findings (Rivoal and Salazar 2013). The researchers observe phenomena and facts which they had not planned for and/or were not prepared to see. (Fine and Deegan 1996) in their work *Three principles of serendip: insight, chance, and discovery in qualitative research*, defined Serendipity as the unique and contingent mix of insight coupled with chance. It may lead to conclusions that are defined as surprising, yet obvious, that contribute to the presentation of interesting research results.

Anthropological research is an enduring nomadic expedition of discovery in which the world revenues an immeasurable number of unexposed matters and vast ways of studying them. Serendipity in anthropology has become a suitable notion to point out the experience of unexpectedly coming to realise something that had formerly been out of notice (Rivoal and Salazar 2013). Serendipitous research requires time – time to observe, understand and realize something new which is relatable to the research. It requires to prolong the research time/period, go back and forth to gather data, if needed.

Initially, I had the plan to include past national/international reports on the Chhaupadi practice as part of the literature findings. I had plan to go through published media reports in the past and include it as literature review to support my study. Therefore, this study includes one chapter (chapter 5.1) on review of the media reports from the past. As I developed this study, and was constantly updating myself with the latest updates/news/reports about the Chhaupadi tradition, I realized that it was important part of study which could built strong database. These reports became the major part of data source in my study which helped to determine the ritual aspects of this tradition, current status of this tradition in the field of my study and its effect on the social well-being of the women. With the guidance of supervisor Ida Hydle, in the Chapter VII, this study includes the latest media reports which were reported/published until this study was completed, as the part of data sources through the serendipity approach.

#### ***12.4 Sampling method***

I preferred to choose the “cases” for research which could show different perspectives on my study issue. Therefore I used "purposeful maximal sampling" method (Creswell 2007, 75). This

is the sampling technique which is used for the purpose of the identification and selection of information rich cases. “This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas et al. 2015).

To achieve this, I included three examples of all age groups of women (young, adult and women with new born baby) who were involved in the Chhaupadi tradition, as cases for this study. These cases are examples of extreme cases of the Chhaupadi tradition, based on their experiences and explanations. To finalize these extreme cases, I conducted several interviews throughout the villages of Achham.

Sampling also included observations in the field and of participants, interactions and interviews with several other members of the villages, local political leaders, health professionals and regional governmental officers of selected areas for their general views on my research area as supporting information to my study.

### ***12.5 Analytical strategy***

The analytical strategy for this study is a "typical analysis format for multi-case study research" (Creswell 2007, 75). The first analytical approach will be "*within-case analysis*" (Creswell 2007, 75) where I will first present a detailed description of each case of Chhaupadi practicing women and the theme within the cases, i.e. the impacts on social well-being of women. Within-case analysis is an analytical approach where detailed description of the case and its setting is carried out. It will be followed by "*cross-case analysis*" (Creswell 2007, 75) in which *thematic analysis* across cases will be presented. Through cross-case analysis I will try to present similarities and differences between the three different cases of my study.

Thematic analysis involves recognizing critical themes from the study and interpreting them into one another. A theme captures something important about the data related to research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis is a strategy which focuses on reading the results numerous times, coding and finding the themes, comparing these themes and identifying the crucial features interlinked with each theme (Braun and Clarke 2006). To find the theme in my cases I would like to hold the reference by (Ryan and Bernard 2003) where they suggest checking the views that have been repeated several times, and similarities and differences between these themes. Repetition is one of the easiest way to identify a theme by recognizing topics that occur and reoccur.

### ***12.6 Ethical consideration***

As per requirement, permission to conduct the research was obtained from NSD <sup>10</sup>Norway. The verbal consent was asked from the local authorities and representatives of government of Nepal. The verbal consent was asked from all participants whereas; both verbal and written consent was asked from key participants and informants. All the personal information about participants and informants was deleted after the required data was analysed. All personal data were anonymized by the date 01.02.2018 by deleting all direct personal data (names/lists of reference numbers) and deleting/rewriting indirectly identifiable data such as residence/work place/age/gender.

All the pictures and any other identifiable data used in this study have obtained written consent from the participants. All the participants were informed both verbally and in written that they have right to take contact with the author if they have any question or inquire regarding this study.

### ***12.7 Limitation of the Study***

Chhaupadi is practiced in many districts in far western region of the Nepal. The study was conducted only in a few villages of the Achham district and thus, this study does not include information about the Chhaupadi in the entire far-west region of Nepal. As this study was for the master thesis, there was limited time and resources.

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<sup>10</sup> NSD- NORSK Senter for Forskningsdata/ Norwegian Centre for Research Data

## 13. Chapter V- Review of the Literature

This chapter presents literature review on the impacts of Chhaupadi practice, based on the available journals, reports, articles, books, web-based information and news portals.

### *13.1 News Reports on the Chhaupadi tradition and its effects*

The latest report published in the Kathmandu post- leading daily news portal in Nepal, states that “Chhaupadi is still a norm in Achham” and there are women in Achham who voluntarily choose to live in sheds during their periods and after giving birth. These women are not ready to give up on the tradition due to fear of social exclusion. To follow the report from the news, one of the local women says:

“If I dared to stay in my house when I am menstruating, I could be ostracized by my family and my community,”<sup>11</sup>

These women are aware that Chhaupadi is outlawed in Nepal, but still demand to preserve Chhaupadi and also force their daughters to practice it. Although the anti-Chhaupadi organisations are demolishing the Chhaupadi huts, either many of the huts are rebuilt or women have chosen animal sheds to practice Chhaupadi.

The news report titled “Cultural rights and wrongs”<sup>12</sup> by Prakash Budha Magar on January 26, 2018, mentioned about yet another death of women while in Chhaupadi shed during menstruation. Menstruation is a natural process and it should certainly require no justification at all, but this tradition is still protected and practiced by a large section of far western society in Nepal.

Another daily news portal in Nepal “myRepublica” published on January 9, 2018 reported that a twenty-two-year-old girl in Bhairabsthan village, Turmakhand rural municipality in Achham was found dead inside her Chhaupadi hut. The report further describes that “the Chhaupadi tradition was banned in this village about two years ago on the initiation of the Department of women and children and Save the Children”<sup>13</sup>. It is shocking to hear that a woman dies due to the Chhaupadi tradition in the same village where the Chhaupadi is banned. To follow the report of myRepublica, two women who belonged to Timalsen village and Gajra village in Achham also died in menstrual huts last year.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2018-02-23/chhaupadi-is-still-a-norm-in-achham.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2018-01-26/cultural-rights-and-wrongs.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.myrepublica.com/news/34024/>

Another news report titled *Chhaupadi takes its toll on women in Achham* published by the leading daily portal in Nepal, *The Himalayan Times* on November 24, 2016<sup>14</sup> described the tragic deaths of several girls and women in Achham. According to the report, a 21-year-old girl from Timilsen VDC<sup>15</sup>, Achham, died inside the Chhaupadi hut on November 2016, and three other women including a 16 years old girl died inside chhaupadi huts in different villages in Achham in recent years.



**Figure 1** Chhaupadi hut

**Source:**

[https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/834/cpsprodpb/81AD/production/\\_97279133\\_gettyimages-136061099.jpg](https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/834/cpsprodpb/81AD/production/_97279133_gettyimages-136061099.jpg)

There are several other tragedies reported by the national and international news portals connected to the Chhaupadi tradition. The Washington post, USA<sup>16</sup> based news portal published a news titled *A Nepali teen died after she was banished to a hut for having her period*, on December 20, 2016. According to the news, the teen-ager was burned to death inside the Chhaupadi hut from a fire she lit to keep herself warm. In another tragedy, a girl was bitten to death by a snake inside the Chhaupadi hut where as another girl was taken by a jackal. Another

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14 <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/chhaupadi-takes-toll-women-achham/>

15 VDC- village development committee, a term used to refer local administrative division in Nepal.

<sup>16</sup> USA- United States of America

extreme example given by News report is that “an 11-year-old from western Nepal died of an illness because her family and neighbours refused to take her to a hospital, believing they would become impure if they touched the menstruating girl”<sup>17</sup>

Aljazeera, the international new portal published report titled “Nepali teen dies from snake bite in menstruation hut”<sup>18</sup> in July 8, 2017. According to this report, an 18-year old girl died inside the Chhaupadi hut as she was bitten twice by a venomous snake. The devastating fact is that she died after 7 hours after the snake bite but died because her parents took her to the village shaman for treatment instead of taking her to health care professionals.

A video report published by Aljazeera shows the look of Chhaupadi shed in Nepal <https://youtu.be/ll44D578jsY><sup>19</sup>. Women in the video describe their concern about safety during isolation in the shed. The video also shows the view of the parents of a deceased girl inside the shed. The parents themselves seems uncertain and unsure about the death of the girl as they say, “some say she died due to suffocation, some say she died due to the cold”.

Kathmandu based print and radio journalist *Danielle Presis* wrote for the national public radio United States of America on August 10, 2017- according to the law passed by Nepal on August 2017, “any family member who forces a woman to practice Chhaupadi can be punished with a jail sentence of 3 months and/or a fine of 3,000 rupees (about \$30)”<sup>20</sup>. However, ending centuries old tradition of Chhaupadi is not easy. A law against the Chhaupadi was passed already in 2005, but the Chhaupadi did not come to end until today. To follow the report by Danielle Presis, a study conducted by the Government of Nepal in 2010 showed that there were 19 percent of the total female population of Nepal involved in the Chhaupadi practice and almost 50 percent of them belonged to the mid and far western region of the Nepal. Danielle Presis further writes that 60 percent of the people in the far western of Nepal in 2017 did not even know that the Chhaupadi practice was illegal. These data show how bad situation is. There are several complex issues connected to the Chhaupadi tradition and its elimination. Even though the new law criminalises the Chhaupadi, there must be written complaint from the Chhaupadi practicing women or someone on her behalf for action to be taken against the Chhaupadi practice. This means that the women should file complaint to the police against her own family.

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<sup>17</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/12/20/they-banished-their-15-year-old-for-having-her-period-she-died-in-a-cold-nepali-hut/?utm\\_term=.a37c271b6a14](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/12/20/they-banished-their-15-year-old-for-having-her-period-she-died-in-a-cold-nepali-hut/?utm_term=.a37c271b6a14)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/nepali-teen-dies-snake-bite-menstruation-hut-170708084307951.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://youtu.be/ll44D578jsY>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2017/08/10/542585664/law-in-nepal-sets-penalties-for-forcing-a-woman-into-a-menstrual-shed>



A complaint to the police by Chhaupadi practicing women against the Chhaupadi seems to be either very difficult or impossible until now. The report titled “chains of Chhaupadi” by Usha Pokhrel and Ajaya Budhathoki was published for the daily news portal of Nepal- my republica on November 11, 2017, and according to this report “there is a huge gap between the laws against Chhaupadi and its implementation as women are unlikely to revolt against their own family members, making them liable of both fine and imprisonment”.<sup>21</sup>

These are just a few examples of news reports on the effects of the Chhaupadi on women which came to the light. It is expected that there might be several other un-reported cases of sicknesses, deaths, physical assaults, rapes, psychological problems and many other problems associated with the Chhaupadi tradition. Irrespective of national and international attention to the Chhaupadi practice, irrespective of the law against the Chhaupadi tradition in Nepal, it is still practiced, preserved and followed up by the society. It is a complex societal and health problem and it is very difficult to predict about when and how this tradition will be eradicated from the society. This practice might disappear eventually after many years, but my concern is that, by that time, many women and girls will have suffered or died due to Chhaupadi tradition.

### ***13.2 Theoretical literature review on the Chhaupadi tradition and unsafe menstrual practice***

There have been several studies on Chhaupadi from the perspective of women’s right, discrimination, and violence. Scientific researches and studies related to the Chhaupadi and its impacts on social well-being of the women are very limited. This section will present available studies related to the Chhaupadi tradition.

A study conducted by (Ranabhat et al. 2015) have found that currently 20% of the household practice Chhaupadi tradition and most of them have a deep root in the far western Nepal and especially in the Achham district. Ranabhat quotes the Achham as the one of the source of the Chhaupadi culture. Study also showed that Chhaupadi tradition has affected reproductive health of women. Chhaupadi practicing women have experienced reproductive tract infections and uterovaginal prolapse which also led to maternal morbidity in the Bajhang district of far western region.

(Bhandaree et al. 2013) cites from the study conducted in Nepalese schools by Wateraid in 2009 which found that only 11 percent of participants responded as not having experienced menstrual restriction or isolation. According to the report by the human rights council, Nepal in 2011, the Chhaupadi system has caused a high-rate of uterine prolapse and as much as 60% of the women

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.myrepublica.com/news/30480/?categoryId=81>

have been found living with such condition in one of the sample district in far west. Whereas, according to Nepal's monthly monitoring and Annual Performance Review Worksheet 2009-2010 there were as much as 96 cases related to the menstruation disorders/complications reported every month to the health center of one sample district in mid-western Nepal (Bhandaree et al. 2013).

They also (Bhandaree et al. 2013) studied about the 28 incidents of Chaupadi that were recorded in the paper articles of the year 2010 to 2012 and found that the 9 of the incidents were about the deaths of the Chhaupadi practicing women and girls, 2 incidents were related to the illnesses caused by Chhaupadi practice and 7 of them were connected to the reflection of ill practice of this tradition. 5 cases of them were directed to the awareness program where as 5 other incidents were regarding the family conflicts and girls being rejected to their schools during menstruation.

Another report by (Dahal 2008) shows that 2 women died within the time span of less than 5 months in the year 2008 after they were isolated to the Chhaupadi shed during menstruation. One woman developed cough due to extreme cold conditions in the shed and died as she further developed sepsis pneumonia. Another girl died following complications of diarrhoea developed during the first day of stay in the shed, and she did not receive any medical treatment, as the tradition does not allow it. This finding is similar to the other study done by (Kadariya and Aro 2015) which states that menstrual isolation is associated with several health issues. Freezing cold winter temperature and sweltering high summer temperatures inside the Chhaupadi shed results in to health complications such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, chest infection, suffocation and respiratory tract infection. This is a direct reflection on the physical health issues. On the other hand women and girls are highly affected psychologically as although they are forbidden to enter inside their own house and they are forbidden to consume nutritious food, they are expected to carry all other labours works outside the house such as digging lands for harvesting, going to the jungle to collect and carry firewood, collect and carry grass for the house animals. When it comes to the new mother, it is even worse as they are left alone in the shed to take care of the new born baby all by themselves under harsh conditions. Such exclusion and isolation every month results in to severe depression, anxiety, loneliness and very low self-esteem and disempowerment among girls. Women and girls also develop the fear of e.g. animals or sexual abuse. All these factors result in to negative impacts on the social well-being of women (Kadariya and Aro 2015).

The study by (Kadariya and Aro 2015) was focused on the general discussion about ethical issues surrounding the Chhaupadi practice and its public health significance. According to this

study, despite this tradition being declared illegal, it is still practiced due to illiteracy, ignorance, traditional belief system, gender disparity and power difference. This practice has negatively affected the health and social well-being of women and girls. This study has come with clear conclusions:

“the only way to abolish this practice is through mass awareness and education at the community level. That calls for a prolonged multi-sectorial involvement of the government and non-governmental organizations in area of health, women empowerment and livelihood to increase the ongoing social awareness among affected Nepali communities about the natural character of menstruating and the harmful practice of Chhaupadi. This also requires a lot of patience with the recognition that age-old practices do not die easy”(Kadariya and Aro 2015).

In a study titled “ Menstruation among Nepalese girls” (GC and Koirala 2013) most of the participants answered that menstruation was a natural phenomenon. However, these participants commonly stated that they were confined to isolation for 14 days when they got menstruation for the first time. Some of the participants responded as:

*“I omitted study for 14 days during my first menstrual cycle and I could not sit on the final assessment of my class.”*

*“I was put into dark room by my mother saying that I can’t touch anything and just stay quietly in a separate room and I can come out only when it is dark.”*

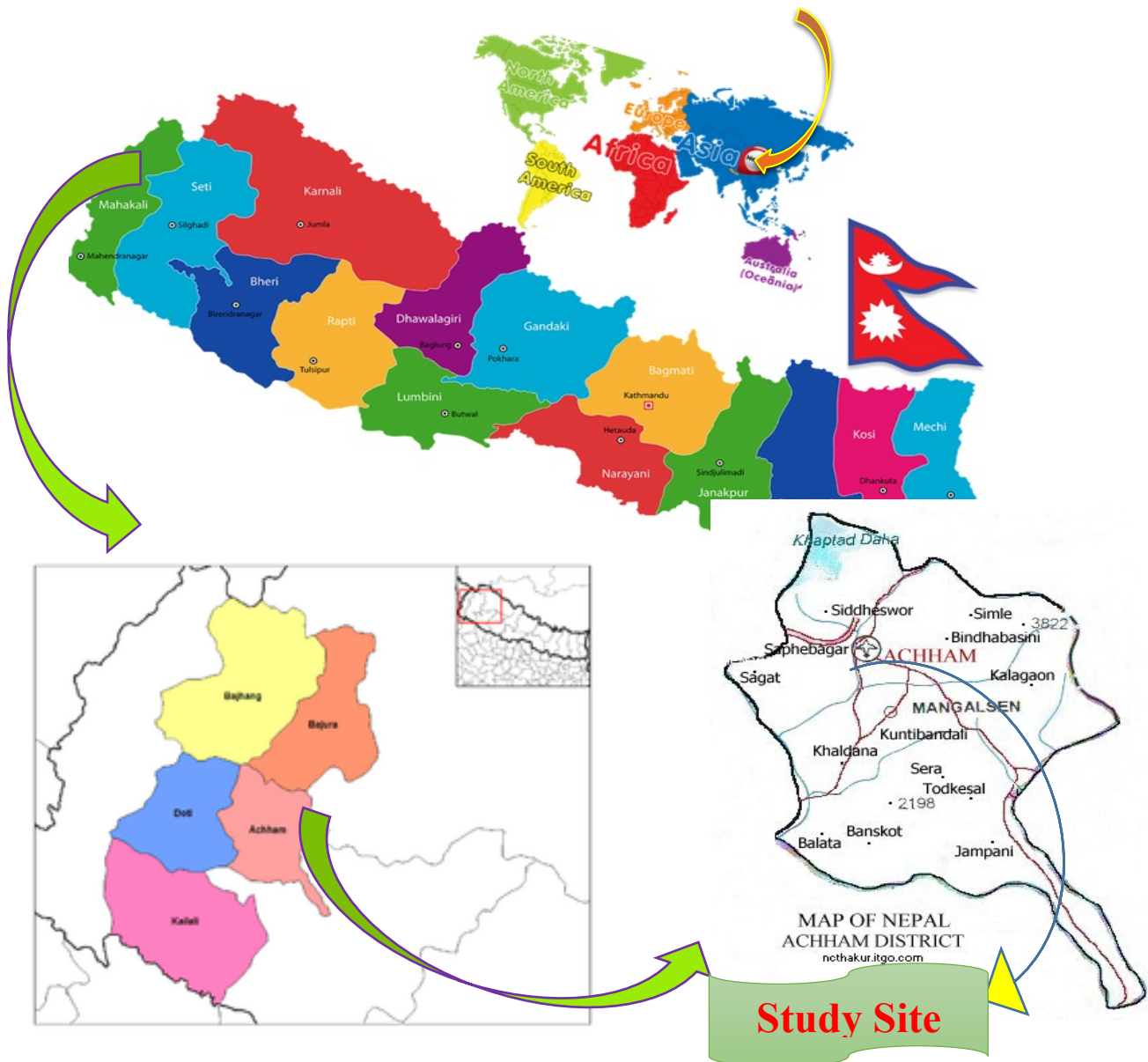
*“I was crying most of the time when I had my first menstruation because I was like jailed in my own house.”* (GC and Koirala 2013).

Yet another study titled “Chhaupadi Partha: Socio-cultural Violence against Women in the Far-Western Region of Nepal” (Joshi 2015) states that in spite of illegalisation of this tradition, 97% of the total female population in far western Nepal practice Chhaupadi. Furthermore, these women showed a high sense of fear during the isolation period; 63% feared thief and injuries, 56% worried about their child's health, 51% stressed about household chore and 13% were worried about sexual abuse. These findings show that a majority of women in far western Nepal are directly affected by menstrual isolation. Almost every study conducted on the Chhaupadi has similar findings. Women seems to be treated inhumanly and socially excluded and deprived of personal hygiene and nutrition. This kind of isolation seems to affect not only their physical health but also the mental and social well-being of women.

## 14. Chapter VI- Material and Method

### 14.1 Presenting the field of my study and its background

Following the concise description of my research issue above, I would now like to present the field of my study - the Achham district, Mangalsen municipality, in far western region, Nepal. Below is the representing map of Nepal following by the map of the Achham district and the location of Mangalsen municipality within Achham.



*Figure 2 Study Site*

Nepal is a landlocked country situated between India and China. Geographically Nepal is divided into three areas: Himalaya, Hilly and Terai region. Nepal was divided into 14 administrative zones and further into 75 districts until 2016. However, the government of Nepal

has now developed a new constitution and is still working further on dividing Nepal into 6-7 provinces. I conducted my fieldwork in the Achham district which is part of the current province no 7 in the far western region of Nepal. Mangalsen is the headquarter of Achham where the study was conducted. Achham is one of the most Chhaupadi affected districts in the far western region of Nepal. It is also one of the remotest districts of Nepal and lies on mid-hill and high-hill regions. Most of the population are dependent on agriculture, i.e. farming and livestock.

### *14.2 Accessing the field of study*

The access to the Achham is difficult. It is possible to travel to Achham either via road from the capital city Kathmandu via a Midwestern city Nepalgunj and via paved road that runs along the western border of Nepal; or via flight from Kathmandu to a western city-Dhangadi and further by bus to the Mangalsen, Achham.



*Figure 3* Narrow, paved road connecting Mangalsen, Achham

It took three days for me to reach Mangalsen, Achham. My journey started with the 55 minutes flight from Kathmandu to the Dhangadi, a small town in the Kailali district in the far west, Nepal. Since it was only one bus leaving to the Achham every morning at 5 am, I had to stay in the hotel in Dhangadi to catch the bus in the next morning. The bus to the Achham was scheduled from *Ataria*, another neighboring small town, to the Sanphebagar, former headquarter of the Achham district. The road was narrow and the bus had to stop to the side to give way to traffic from another direction. The bus had seats for around 40 passengers, but it was filled with almost 80 passengers. Some of the passengers were smoking inside where as some were drunk. Some of them began to fight and quarrel inside the bus. The bus driver was quite young, driving the bus with high speed. With this experience, I was already scared for my life. The bus reached Sanphebagr around 6 pm in the evening. The journey further began early

morning on the next day. After half an hour walk from the Sanphebagar, there was a minibus to the Mangalsen. It was around 6 hours journey and I reached Mangalsen around 12 pm in the afternoon. I was lucky to get the minibus at this time as there were good weather conditions. It is only seasonal minibus service during good weather conditions, otherwise it is almost 8-12 hours of walking to reach Mangalsen from Sanphebagar.



*Figure 4* Nameplate at the entrance of Mangalsen, Achham

I have presented this background here as it shows what a difficult life people from Achham district must be living. Difficulty to access bigger cities and better opportunities might be one of the major factor for people in Achham to remain still under harmful age old traditions.

### *14.3 Meeting my informants*

At this point, I will shed light on how I got access to the participants, from whom I collected the whole of information for my study. Conducting a study with the Chhaupadi practicing women and in remote areas like villages of Achham was very subtle work. Access to Achham itself as a first challenge is described above. In addition, people in the villages of the Achham were already used to many national and international organizations visiting them for different projects and offering them economic benefits in the form of cash, for being participants. Therefore, many of them expected money for being my informant which I did not agree with. Furthermore, I had planned to interact with many informants so that I could choose three of them who had rich information, as cases for my study. Thus, I had to rely on many local people who were living in Mangalsen and were working in different governmental sectors.

As soon as I reached Mangalsen, I went to the Governmental Women welfare organization and district level health care center; where I got to meet the supervisor for family planning and

women welfare and the district level medical officer. I told them the purpose of the visit and asked for their assistance. They agreed to supervise me throughout the field work and organised a meeting the following evening at a hotel where I was staying. They came to the meeting with some other representatives of the governmental offices in Mangalsen and also two local inhabitants who knew the surrounding villages well. Through this meeting I got suggested field sites where the Chhaupadi tradition was most practiced. I decided to travel to different villages and try to interact with as many people as possible. With the suggestion from my informants, I decided to go for a *multi-site* study and picked up the following places as my main study site:

1. Mangalsen-5, Kukudipata, Achham
2. Payal-4, Achham
3. Sanphe municipality-2, Jalpadevi, Achham

Reflecting on the use of a multi-cited study approach, Audet and d'Amboise in *The multi-site study: An innovative research methodology* have pointed out that the multi-site study is “designed to gain in-depth knowledge of an organizational phenomenon and it combines the observation and analysis of several sites using cross-case comparisons and explanation techniques to analyse data” (Audet and d'Amboise 2001). Though there are some limitations of the multi-site study, including travelling from place to place, observing and studying every site in detail and difficulties in relating data that are gained for the same research questions from the different participants in different places, I still found it the most rational approach to my study referring to the analytical strategy for this study described above.

#### ***14.4 Study assistants***

As Achham is a very remote district without good transportation facilities it was not easy to access. I was worried and concerned about the difficulties in getting access to participants. My worry was also because people in Achham have a dialect which is different from Nepali. People here are religious and Chhaupadi is deeply connected to the Hindu religion. I was also concerned about people's reaction to my curiosity for Chhaupadi. I addressed my concern to the local representatives and they found two local people who agreed to travel along with me at every field of site as guides. These two people were very important helping hands without whom I would have not been able to understand the local language, to walk several kilometres to different villages and to access the right persons.

### ***14.5 Key participants and informant selection***

The most difficult task was to select the right persons as participants to suit my study. With the *purposeful maximal sampling* method, I focused on identifying and selecting persons among the groups that were particularly experienced and knowledgeable about the Chhaupadi tradition. To achieve this, I had uncountable formal and informal conversations with many people. It was easy for me to hold conversations with many people as I had two research assistants who belonged to the local community. and local people became comfortable and curious to talk to me as I was introduced to them. Participants of conversation included local politicians, teachers, students, homemakers, farmers, religious leaders, police representatives, governmental officers and members of INGOs and NGOs. Key participants were selected, based on the knowledge they had and the experience they shared with me during the conversations.

The following Table 1 and 2 presents the list of key actors, participants and informants by age, gender, profession, occupation and location.

***Table 1 Key actors involved by age and occupation, Achham district***

<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Age, Gender</b>	<b>Profession</b>
1	44, Female	supervisor for family planning and women welfare
2	41, Female	Teacher
3	37, Male	District level medical officer
4	34, Male	Agriculture Promotion Officer
5	43, Male	Technical Assistant
6	45, Male	Local politician
7	52, Female	Representative of INGO working in the field of health sector, Achham
8	33, Female	Health care professional



*Table 2 Key informants/participants by age and profession*

<b>S.No</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Practice area</b>
1	51	Female	Politician at local level	Mangalsen , Achham
2	28	Female	Housewife/Agriculture	Payal, Achham
3	16	Female	Student	Payal, Achham
4	31	Female	Housewife/Agriculture	Payal, Achham
5	28	Female	Housewife/Agriculture	Payal, Achham
6	22	Female	Housewife/Agriculture	Mangalsen, Achham
7	18	Female	Student	Jalpadevi, Achham
8	45	Male	Agriculture	Sanphebagar, Achham
9	30	Female	Housewife/Agriculture	Mangalsen, Achham
10	21	Female	Housewife/Agriculture	Mangalsen, Achham
11	28	Female	Housewife/Agriculture	,Jalpadevi, Achham

#### ***14.6 The field and participant observation***

Observations in the field and with participants was one of the important aspects of my study. Field here stands for the specific geographical area from where I collected data. By participants I mean those people who were directly or indirectly involved in the Chhaupadi tradition. As mentioned earlier under methodological consideration my role as researcher was participant *observer as well as interviewer*.

During my **field observations**, I walked from village to village, thanks to the two local people who guided me throughout. I got the chance to see the daily life of people in the villages of Achham, their rituals, behaviors, customs and culture.



*Figure 5 Mangalsen, Achham*

On the fourth day of my journey to Achham, the actual field study started. After two hours walk up to the hills, I reached to a tiny village named **Kukudipata**. Kukudipata is a typical remote village and no modern facilities such as internet, electricity, hotels, restaurants, shops, high schools or hospitals are available. There is no road connecting this tiny village but there are many narrow, uphill pathways. People seemed busy in their household activities which included farm work and taking care of livestock. People seemed to be fully dependent on agriculture for living. I observed that every household had land where they had grown crops and vegetables. When I walked through the village, I saw that most of the household had built a tiny hut only about a few meters away from the house; as shown in the figure 7 below. Some of the houses did not have such huts and when I asked the guides about it, they said that some of the families build a hut together in one common place, and women of these families share this hut.



*Figure 6 Distant view of Kukudipada Village, Achham*

I was surprised to see how these families were so smart to build the hut in such manner that people from outside the village or district could not suspect that they send their female members to the Chhaupadi huts. The government of Nepal, NGOs and INGOs working against Chhaupadi are authorized to banish Chhaupadi huts and warn the families who built it. Therefore, to be safe from this, the families had built a common hut that nobody would own personally and if caught by the authorities, none of the families would get into trouble.



*Figure 7 Chhaupadi Hut / Kukudipata Village, Achham district, Nepal*

On the other hand, local people had different views on this. I asked some of the families about it and they said that 4-5 families built such a hut in common so that they can minimize the costs for building individual hut. Huts, when observed closely, were built of mud and without a door, window and ventilation. The hut included only one narrow entrance.

Detailed information obtained from the observation will be discussed later under the analysis section.

In addition to field observation, **participant observation** is also one of the foundations for my study. I adopted the statement of Schensul and Schensul as the basis for participant observation,

“Participant observation is the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting” (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999).

The participants for the interview were not decided in advance, but general information about our visit was sent to the village a day before my entrance. My aim was to get interaction with as many as people possible and then choose the best of the cases among them. Therefore, I spent a lot of time interacting with many people in the different villages of Achham. To get the overview of their experiences of daily living, I participated in the daily routines of the women and girls in these villages.

People in this tiny village seemed to be hardworking farmers and simple living peoples. They behaved friendly, offered water, tea and food. Life seemed difficult. When asked about daily routines one of the women said:

“We as female members of the house have as duty to get up early in the morning, fetch water from a nearby water tap, make food for the family members, do household chores within 10 o'clock in the morning. Then we go to the nearby jungles to fetch grass/food for the livestock, and sometime to fetch the wood which is used to cook food. After hard work all day long, we come back home to cook food for the family. We should also take care of children. What to do, being women we are entitled to do all this work and satisfy our family members”

People in this village were open to describe their daily routines. However, most of the women were shy to share their views, especially when the topic was menstruation. Participant observation played a vital role to understand the perception of women towards menstruation. I spent a lot of my time talking to women and girls who were having menstruation at the time of my visit. Some of them were surprised as I asked for permission to be with them inside the hut and to get touched by them. They warned me that I could fall sick due to my proximity with them. They seemed relieved as I assured them that I would not blame anyone for my action and I would take the full responsibility of all the consequences.



**Figure 8** Local women expressing discomfort while talking about menstruation

Details about participant observation will be discussed in the analysis section later.

#### **14.7 Interview procedures**

An interview can be one of the most effective methods of data collection. It includes asking questions, talking and listening to the interviewees. Kajornboon , Annabel Bhamani explains interview methods as “ways for participants to get involved and talk about their views”.

A semi-structured interview method was used for this study and is a non-fully standardized interview method often used in qualitative research. In such interviews, a researcher prepares a list of main themes, issues and questions which can be asked to and discussed with the participants. However, the researcher must not stick to particular sets of questions only and questions can be modified and added along and according to the conversation or dialogue, in order to achieve maximal knowledge of the field.

Kajornboon , Annabel Bhamani (Kajornboon 2005)quotes Corbetta 2003, and explains semi-structured interviews as :

*“The order in which the various topics are dealt with and the wording of the questions are left to the interviewer’s discretion. Within each topic, the interviewer is free to conduct the conversation as he thinks fit, to ask the questions he deems appropriate in the words he considers best, to give explanation and ask for clarification if the answer is not clear, to prompt the respondent to elucidate further if necessary, and to establish his own style of conversation.”*

I adopted the above statement to conduct interviews with many participants. I had prepared a set of questions for the interview. However, I started every interview with informal conversations and blended the key questions in during the conversations. It helped participants to talk to me as in a normal conversation between two people and I observed that participants seemed comfortable and open to give answers. I allowed the participants to express their views openly, without any restrictions and limitations. As I conducted the semi-structured interviews, I and the research assistants took notes of their answers and tape recorded their views. It helped me to re-read, hear again and understand the statements better. Based on the richness of information collected during the interviews, I chose three specific persons from all the participants, as my cases for this study. These cases will be presented later in the following section. Detailed findings from the interviews will be discussed later under the analysis section.

#### ***14.8 Challenges and dilemmas***

It was a very challenging work for me to complete this study. First of all, the study sites were located in a very remote area that was challenging to access. The travel included flights, bus, minibus and long hours of walking in narrow pathways in the hilly region. It was a tiresome and long journey. In addition, people in the villages of Achham were used to visits from NGOs and INGOs, who offered them financial help for being part of a study. I could not offer financial help to the participants and I had to explain in detail and assure them that I was not doing anything wrong to them. The most challenging situation was when one local person came to me in the field and began to shout at me. He meant that I was in the field to manipulate innocent villagers so that a century old tradition would die. Fortunately, with the help of the study assistants and some local people I could handle the situation.

In addition, the informants spoke dialect, the local language which was different than Nepali and it was hard to understand exactly what they intended to express. I had to request informants to repeat themselves many times before I could note down. Luckily there were some people who could translate dialect in to Nepali for me. The real challenge was to write down the exact terms and categories used by informants in to the English language, without modifying the real meaning. I have tried my best to present originality in this study as much as I could.

## 15. Chapter VII- Presenting the Cases

### 15.1 Case 1: Teenage girl expresses her experience with the tradition of Chhaupadi

She is 18 years old and is 10<sup>th</sup> class student at a local school.

*In a remote village of Achham district, I live with my family. My family is very traditional and we don't talk about menstruation. It is the subject of shame and we don't discuss about it, especially with male members of our family. I don't have mother, she passed away few years back. I miss her every single day and I wish that I had her to share my feelings and difficulties. My mother used to say that I have become a mature girl after getting menstruation and I am ready to get married and bear a child. I learnt to use a piece of cloth during menstrual bleeding and sanitary pad sometimes if it is easily available in a shop in the nearby small city. My family sends me to the Chhaupadi hut during menstruation. Actually, nobody forces me to stay in the Chhaupadi hut but I myself feel uneasy to break the tradition of the village. I feel lonely and irritated when I stay in the Chhaupadi hut but I embrace the tradition because it is my duty to follow the ritual as I am a girl.*

*I go to school and there I learnt about menstruation. In my understanding menstruation is a periodic, natural and regular bleeding from the body of the women. There is nothing wrong about having menstrual bleeding but I am grown up in a society where everybody practices Chhaupadi and I am also influenced psychologically. I think the tradition was practiced in the ancient times due to unavailability of sanitary pads and clean clothes were not sufficient to use during menstrual bleeding but it has become norm now. Although I am aware that having menstruation is not sin, my psychology don't let me ignore it. Therefore, I stay in the hut during my periods. When I got menstruation for the first time, I stayed in the Chhaupadi hut for about 7 days. Now I stay there for about 5 days.*

*It is not easy to stay in the hut for 5 to 7 days as I am not allowed to use bed, blankets and any other warm clothing. I am allowed to use grass or a hard mat made up of grass and it is really hard and cold to spend the night this way. I do not sleep the whole night for the fear of animal attack, snakebite as the Chhaupadi hut usually lies far away from home and near the jungle. I also get scared as there have been many incidents of rape and molestations with many other girls during their stay in the hut. My hut doesn't have any window or door. There is just one narrow opening through which I can crawl inside. Although I use some clothes to cover the opening, the cold wind blows all night long and I get cold shivering. My mother said that women were not allowed to come out of the hut in their younger days. However, I am allowed to come*

*out of the hut but only to work on the fields or to go to the jungle to collect grass for the animals in the house, or to collect woods. Though I cannot touch any animals, cannot enter inside the house and cannot go to school. I work hard all day long and then I spend the night in the cold hut.*

*In our village, there are a few shared Chhaupadi huts and some girls stay in a personal hut. Those who share hut stay in a group and it is safer than staying alone. I get scared to go out during night if I need to pass the urine. There is no toilet and I must go out in the open area. It is usually cold and dark in the nights. Sometimes, in the fear of getting attacked by animals like tigers or snakes or by getting molested by males, I hold the urine until the morning or pass it inside the hut itself. It is very uncomfortable but I have got no other choice. I have it better than some of my friends. Some of the girls from my village are from poor families. They cannot afford a hut, neither can they share the cost of a shared hut. Instead, they stay inside cowsheds, along with domestic animals. It is very dirty inside there, smells cow dung and insects like mosquitoes are everywhere around.*

*Due to poor hygienic condition inside the hut and cold conditions, I have been suffering from pneumonia. Luckily, I haven't got seriously ill although I have been taking general, basic medications from it. But I fear that I might die due to dangerous illness someday If I don't get proper treatment. Even though I wish for better treatment, there is no hospital in our village and it is almost one day journey to the headquarter where there is a good hospital. We cannot afford to travel so far away, stay overnight and get treatment. I remember an incident one night when I was staying in the hut. I got sudden, severe pain in my stomach. I was alone and I got very frightened. I missed my mother so much, tears rolled down my cheeks. I have one younger sister and I succeeded to crawl out of the hut and shouted out loud after my sister. Luckily, she heard me and came running to me. I explained my situation and she ran inside the house and brought me hot water with pepper. I felt better after drinking hot pepper water. I still get frightened remembering that night.*

*It is not just physical difficulties I face while staying in the Chhaupadi hut but also, I feel stressed psychologically. Sometimes, some drunk people make a lot of noise, sometimes some male members of the village try to enter inside my hut, sometimes I hear wild animals roaring near my hut. It gives me a lot of mental tension. I remember one incident when I heard a goat crying during night, then heard a tiger roaring nearby. I got so scared I started crying and shouting after my father. Then, he and some other neighbor came out to find that the tiger had killed a goat and taken it away from our animal shed. I started shivering out of fear as I was not allowed to go inside my house. My father covered the hut with some woods and asked me to stay inside without fear. I was awoken, scared, tense and frightened the whole night. I also*



*feel isolated and socially excluded as I cannot touch anyone including animals. Nobody touches the utensils I use for eating food, nobody shares the tap where I go to collect water. People clean themselves with gold and water even if they come in touch with me by mistake. It is really a horrible experience as I feel like alien from another planet.*

*In addition to mental tension, I feel physically weak after I stay inside hut for five days because I do not get regular meals. I do not get to eat any milk products, meats or cereals. I cannot even eat fruits or vegetables. I get only plain rice with salt or bread with salt.*

*I think this is an evil ritual which is deeply rooted by the religious belief. People in our village scare me saying that if women reject to stay in the Chhaupadi hut during bleeding, souls of our ancestors will get angry and punish the whole village and villagers. I think this is just a misunderstanding. I think our ancestors started the Chhaupadi tradition because they wanted women to stay clean, separate and take a rest during menstruation. It might also have started because women wanted to stay free from household workloads during menstruation. I think it is good if women could get free time and take a rest during menstrual bleeding as I also get severe stomach pain during my menstruation and would be happy to take a rest. I have heard some married women talking that they are happy to stay on the hut during menstruation as their husbands cannot force them to sexual relationships. It might be good to stay in the hut if we consider these facts but not the way we live. I wish our hut had doors and windows with good ventilation, I wish I could get warm meals and some time to rest.*

*Unfortunately, it is not suitable conditions in the hut and in addition our older generations are very strict about this tradition. I cannot deny our older generations. Even if I decide to step out of the hut, nobody will talk to me or touch me, I will not be able to go to school and if any bad incident happens in my village, I will be blamed for that. It is not easy to change mind-set of the older generation but I think the situation will be changed in the future. If I get a daughter one day, I will never send my daughter to these sheds.*

*I have heard that it is against the law to send women in a hut and some organizations are working against it. But nobody from our village dare to take issue to such organizations or lodge a police complaint. I know that if anyone does this, then the person will be socially excluded. Due to fear of being socially excluded and being crushed by ancestors, we women ourselves do not wish to take any action. I have heard that we can complain to the police if there is an incident of crime like murder of a person but I have no idea about where I can go to lodge any complaint against Chhaupadi. Forget about taking action, I also fear to talk against the Chhaupadi tradition.*

### **15.2 Case 2: a woman who has practiced Chhaupadi for 17 years**

*I am 29 years old married woman and I live with my family in a village of the Achham district in far western region of Nepal. I went to school until I passed 11<sup>th</sup> class then I got married as my family's wished. I was not forcefully married, however I wanted to continue my studies but could not reject my parents as they could not afford the costs for my higher education. At school, I learnt about menstruation and I understand it as regular natural change that occurs in the female body between the age of twelve to fourteen and this is the starting phase of hormone production for reproductive health.*

*I got menstruation at the age of 12 for the first time and I was sent to the Chhaupadi shed for 21 days and I lived there all alone, all by myself, away from my parents, my siblings, my friends and the rest of society. I was not allowed to come out as it was my first menstruation and I was supposed to be very careful. I was banned to look directly on the sun, see any male members or touch anybody. I spent most of my time lying on the hard bed made by bamboo grass and wondering when I would be able to come out. I missed my school, I missed my parents and my family a lot. I cried most of the time and wanted to go home. Now, I stay in the hut for 5 days. I have practiced Chhaupadi for 17 years now. It is not an easy or beautiful experience. I used to get an allergic reaction around my genitals as I used pieces of clothe as sanitary pads during menstruation and I did not change it frequently. Time has changed now and we get to buy sanitary pads in a nearby town and it is much easier and healthier for me.*

*People who live in our village say that god becomes angry and bad luck comes to villagers if we do not follow Chhaupadi tradition during menstruation. I think that Chhaupadi is practiced since ancient time and maybe there was not enough water source at that time and women were sent to hut during menstruation from the hygiene perspective. But this tradition has become norm now. Although nobody forces me directly to follow it, I am pressured to follow it as every woman practice it and those who do not practice are considered as reason for any bad thing that happens to my village. The reason why I still practice Chhaupadi is very complex. In my village, we all rely on the crops we harvest and get food from it for living. People here say that if a woman stops practicing Chhaupadi then there will no growth of any crops in the field. I do not want to believe but I have been hearing this since my childhood and I am highly influenced by this. My mother-in-law also wants me to stay in the hut during menstruation and I can't deny her. My husband is her son and I am taught to obey my mother-in-law and my husband. My husband is abroad to earn money and I do not want to give any tension to him by denying*

*Chhaupadi at this age. Actually, it is not easy for me to break years old tradition. This tradition is normalized, accepted and passed from our older generations to new generations. However, it is very difficult to stay in the hut for 5 days because I am not allowed to use any bed, bedsheet or blanket. I can't even touch or wear good clothes, I just get a mat made up of grass to sleep. My Chhaupadi shed is far from my house. I do not get proper sleep due to fear of dangerous animals, snakes. It gets very cold during winter, some women fire inside hut to overcome cold but I am scared to fire inside the hut as some of women have died due to suffocation caused by gas from the fire inside the hut.*

*I have experienced physiological and psychological problems when I stay in the hut. I feel ignored, isolated, and excluded from my family and friends. I miss my children whom I am not allowed to meet or touch. It makes me very irritated that I do not get access to tap water or a common toilet. I must wait for it to be dark so that I can go to open field if I want to go to the toilet, moreover it is shameful as some people can see me while I pass urine on the open field. I find myself vulnerable to physical assault by other male members in the village, may be abduction or attack by snakes or bears. I find it difficult to manage my menstrual days. It is difficult to take a bath as I must wake up really early, when it is still dark to get access to a nearby tap, which is assigned mainly to menstruating women. Due to lack of proper hygiene and nutritious food I have become sick many times. I remember once I got so much lower abdominal pain that I thought I would die. It was extremely painful to pass urine and I felt very weak. We do not have any health center here in our village. No one wanted me to take to the health center in the nearby town as I was not supposed to touch any other people or socialize. Instead I just got warm water with salt to drink with some ginger pieces to chew. I had good immunity power and that helped me to recover though I did not get proper medical support.*

*Not everyone is as lucky as I am to get recovered from illness during the hut stay. The 15-year-old daughter to my elder sister was found dead inside the hut a few years ago. She used to complain about breathing difficulty while her hut stay. We all took it as normal, but one day she went to sleep inside the hut and never woke up again. People say that she died due to lack of oxygen inside the hut, some other say she might have got pneumonia and some other say she might have touched someone and she got punished by God. Thinking about her only breaks my heart apart. I have a daughter who is nine years old and have not got her menstruation yet. I am so scared to send her to the hut. I know I cannot convince my family or my society not to send my daughter to the Chhaupadi hut and I do not want her to suffer. Sometimes I think that I will send her to a hostel in Kathamandu - the capital city so that she gets a good life there. On the other hand, she is too young to send away from me and the family. This tradition has therefore become no less than torture to me.*

*I have heard that it is against law to practice Chhaupadi. I have also heard there are people and organizations working against this tradition but I have never seen them in my village. My village lies in the very remote area of Achham district and one must walk one - two days to reach here. Even if someone manages to come here, I am sure that older generations of this village will unite together and defend them. I can just hope and pray that one day there will come to end to the Chhaupadi tradition and peace to women of this village.*

### **15.3 Case 3: In the Chhaupadi hut with a six days old baby**

*I am a 28 years old married woman and I live with my family in a small village near the headquarter of the Achham district. I have a four-year-old daughter and I gave birth to a son six days ago. I stayed in the chhaupadi hut for 11 days when I gave birth to first child and now also I am staying here in the hut with my 6 days old baby. When I had first child I did not get any warm and good clothes, I was given old and useless clothes and blankets because clothes once taken inside the Chhaupadi hut are not allowed inside the house again. However, I got permission to use better, newer and warmer clothes this time.*

*I will be staying here in the hut until there will be the naming ceremony for the newborn and that is on the 11<sup>th</sup> day after his birth. It is a little different staying in the hut after having given birth than during menstrual bleeding. I am allowed to come outside the hut but prohibited to touch and use the common water tap in the village, I am not allowed to touch any water source, go to school and not allowed to touch the cattle either. It was not allowed to use the common toilet until a few years ago but now I can use the common toilet. However, I should wrap the baby with the new cloth and place the baby on the ground from where another person picks up the baby without touching me, and they take care of baby until I come back from the toilet. Otherwise, I wait until my baby goes to sleep to go to the toilet. It sounds really strange but this is normalized and practiced in our village.*

*I find it difficult to maintain cleanliness inside hut. There is no availability of diapers in our village and my baby passes urine and stool on his underwear. I must change his clothes very frequent but cannot wash them immediately as I am not allowed to touch the tap water. I must wait for my family members to bring water for me. Moreover, I do not get any help from family members to clean the hut as they are not allowed inside the hut. I should clean the hut, maintain the cleanliness of the baby and myself and carry every work by myself. I feel tired and exhausted all the time. On the other hand, I do not get food which I want to eat while I stay inside the Chhaupadi hut. I must eat only ajwain (a special type of spice) soup and rice. There is a belief that women should not eat fish, meat and any milk products until they become pure after the 11<sup>th</sup> days.*

*There is no provision of cooking inside the Chhaupadi hut and I am forced to wait until family members bring me food. As I breastfeed my baby I become hungry very often but do not have access to food whenever I want. When family members bring food, they place it in front of the hut and I should pull it inside without touching them. I should wash the vessels used for eating and let them dry under the sun, otherwise nobody touches these vessels either. I feel dominated and neglected.*

*I have heard from the radio that it is important for both a mother and a newborn baby to have nutritious food but I do not have much idea about it. People in my village say that if I eat greens, beans, fish, meat or any milk products, the baby gets relatively high and indigestible nutrition through breastfeeding which can make the baby ill or die. Therefore, we don't eat these kinds of foods until the baby is 3 months old. Then we start to consume normal food gradually. I think babies become more prone to malnutrition because of this tradition. I try to consume vegetables from our field without the knowledge of my family members but I am very scared about the consequences if they come to know it, they might take my baby away from me.*

*On the other hand, there is no proper treatment if a baby becomes ill during the stay inside the Chhaupadi hut. People in our village are very conservative and believe in evil spirits and witchcraft and therefore we take babies to the shaman. My first child was born during summer time and did not get seriously ill. But my son now is suffering from cough, cold and makes strange, harsh sounds while breathing. I think he has got pneumonia or some kind of infection. I am very worried and want to take my child to the health center in the headquarter. I hope I can convince my family. I am very stressed mentally and tired physically. I do not understand why a mother should suffer like this. I think it was my fault to be born as a daughter in this society. I do not even have the freedom about my own child, my health, food I want to eat or things I want to do. I hope that this will change one day and I hope that future generations will not suffer like this.*

#### **15.4 Case 4: Views of a random sample of people from different villages in the Achham district**

##### ***The view of a local politician on the Chhaupadi tradition***

*I am a 51 years old woman and I went to school until I passed the 10<sup>th</sup> class. I have been involved in politics for 23 years now, and I am a member of VDC- the Village Development Committee in my village.*

*The chhaupadi is the tradition where menstruating women and those who are bleeding after giving birth to a baby, are sent to the Chhau goth-hut. I have been practicing this tradition since I got my first period. It was difficult in my teenage days but there are no strict rules anymore and it is not very challenging to stay on the Chhau hut. I have never heard any cases of formal complaints against the Chhaupadi; however, I have sometimes heard about people who discuss about awareness programs against the Chhaupadi tradition. In my view, it is not right to force a woman to practice Chhapadi and maybe there are legal provisions against this; though, I don't have much knowledge about the nature of the punishment one can get for forcing others into the Chhaupadi tradition. However, I have heard witnesses of many negative effects of this practice. As a political worker and as a woman, I have been trying my best to minimize and eradicate it. On the other hand, my soul doesn't permit me to enter inside my house while I am menstruating. The deep-rooted culture inside me pushes me to stay outside the house, nevertheless, I keep myself safe in the way that I use warm clothes, a good bed to sleep in and to make sure that I get fresh air inside the hut while I am inside it.*

*I am in my fifties now and I have been witnessing many Chhaupadi related incidents in our village. There have been small incidents of sicknesses up to the horrible cases of death.*

*“One day early in the morning, the chief officer of the district administration came running to me to inform me that they found a 23 years old women dead inside the Chhau-hut in the nearby rural village. Last time she was seen by others was while she was having dinner. She didn't have any window or door in her hut but just a small opening to enter inside. It was a cold winter night and she had lit the fire for warmth. People presumed that she might have died due to smoke inhalation. She left behind two small children and her husband. He became so heartbroken that one day he hanged himself to the death. Two small children were later taken care of by their grandparents from their mother's side as they didn't have grandparents from their father. I heard that these kids were taken further away by some orphanage home in Kathmandu as the grandparents were too old to take care of them and I have no idea about their whereabouts now. There were two similar incidents of death in our village in 2016”.*

*As there is a law against Chhaupadi in Nepal, a local committee in our village has passed a provision to socially boycott those families who send menstruating women to the Chhau-Goth, and deprive these families from all kinds of social support from the government, but there is no decline in the number of women who stay in the Chhau-Goth. In addition, there are several organizations in our VDC who are working against the Chhaupadi, but there are no remarkable changes. From my experience, it is a difficult task to work against a centuries old tradition. The only actor who can bring difference is a higher authority which can be political leaders, strict rules, re-educating programs and youth who can stand strong and say no to this tradition.*

### ***The view of a well-educated local person on the Chhaupadi tradition***

*I am a 45 years old man and I have completed a bachelor grade in business studies. In spite of having a degree, I could not get a job. I have been involved in agriculture for many years now. I am aware about the Chhaupadi tradition and it is deep rooted in our village, even females in my family stay in the Chhau-hut during their menstruation. I think it is a crime and against the human rights to send females in the Chhau- hut, but the custom, culture, and social practice create stronger and higher influence in our life. Therefore, in spite of being a literate person and in spite of having heard about its adverse effects, I, myself do not have enough courage to stop sending my wife to the Chhau-Hut. However, I feel restless whenever my wife sleeps in the hut due to many incidents of illness and deats that keep on happening due to this tradition.*

*“One incident that happened recently in our village took the life of a new mother and her baby. She gave birth to a baby after two years of marriage. She was sent to the Chhau-hut along with her baby, even though it was the rainy season. On the fourth day, she was found dead inside the hut due to a snakebite. The baby also died after a few days. This is just an example and Chhaupadi-related deaths in our village are uncountable”.*

### ***The view of a local person without formal education***

*I am a 45 years old man and I have lived in this village all my life. I have never gone to formal school and I have been involved in the agriculture sector for my living. I have a very good understanding about the Chhaupadi. It is our custom where menstruating women stay away from the house, in a special hut. This is essential because women are impure while they are menstruating. If we keep them inside the house, the souls of our forefathers get angry which results in a destruction of family peace in the way that our cattle might die, or other family members might get seriously ill. Even though some females have died inside the hut, that was their fate. I would not like to discuss more against this tradition as I might create a sin for my society.*

### ***A government employee’s view***

*I am 36 years old woman and a government employee in the field of women’s welfare. I am born and raised in this village. I was sent to the Chhau-hut during my adolescent age but I do not practice this tradition anymore. The local community is against me, they speak against me in my back but no one has spoken directly with me, perhaps due to the high position I hold at my work. We have been operating several awareness programs in this village, however there have been no cases registered against those who practice Chhaupadi. Nevertheless, youth of*

*this village have been involved and organized several awareness programs in co-operation with the 'Save the Children' and other NGO's and INGO's.*

*I am aware of the legal framework imposed by the Nepali Government against the Chhaupadi. It is the social crime and the government has declared this as an evil tradition. According to the constitution of Nepal there shall not be any discrimination against women based on gender, every woman shall have right on her reproductive health, and physical, psychological or any other forms of abuse to the women shall be a punishable act. The case against this tradition was registered by advocates to the supreme court May 02, 2005, based on which the supreme court of Nepal had issued directive to different bodies of the government. The directive stated that:*

- Within one month from the date of order from the supreme court, the Government of Nepal shall declare the Chhaupadi as an evil tradition*
- The ministry of health and family welfare shall formulate a committee of medical officers to research, evaluate and review the impacts of the Chhaupadi on the women and shall submit the report to the Government of Nepal.*
- The Government of Nepal shall give directives to the ministry of social welfare to develop a concrete plan within three months from the date of order from the supreme court and shall focus to eliminate any kind of discrimination against women.*

*Based on the above-mentioned directive from the supreme court of Nepal, the chhaupadi was declared as an evil tradition on 09 May 2006 and the Government of Nepal issued a directive of the Chhaupadi elimination in 2007.*

*If you ask my personal view, there are several negative impacts of the Chhaupadi on women, their health and society as well. Uncountable numbers of death accidents have been reported where several other women are suffering mentally, socially and physically. However, I have observed that our society has three different group of peoples if we relate them to the Chhaupadi practice:*

- ❖ Society of elder generations: This group includes people from the older generation who have been practicing Chhaupadi since they remember, are very strict about tradition, religion, and century old practices. These people try to use their power of heirship and put pressure on the younger generation to obey elders and they scare others in the name of god.*
- ❖ Society of adults: 30-45 years old: This group is comprised of groups of people who are confused about the validity of the Chhaupadi. These people are influenced by the modern era, follow the latest health updates, however, these people have also practiced*



*Chhaupadi under the pressure of elders since their teenage days. Therefore, these people still practice this tradition, but have their own limitations such as consuming nutritional food and using warm clothing during menstruation.*

- ❖ *Society of the young generation: 20-30 years old: In this group, most of the people are educated, updated with the outside world, are aware about the impacts of traditions like Chhaupadi, are young, energetic, fearless and brave enough to say no to the Chhaupadi. There are the group of youngster who stay inside the house with family members, use warm clothing, consume healthy food and are social during their menstruation. These are the future of our society.*

*I am glad to see youth of today who are trying to eliminate ages old tradition. I have been involving in the campaigns against this since my teenage days, however I was forced to stay in the Chhau hut during my initial years of menstruation, even though my family was educated and a well-settled family. I was able to make them understand and convince them against the Chhaupadi when I got educated. My husband is also supportive and the Chhaupadi is not practiced in our family now. As an employee in the ministry of women and social welfare, I have tried my best to minimize/eliminate this practice from our society. Some of the villages in our municipality are already declared as Chhaupadi-free villages, however there are many more villages that are still covered by this tradition.*

## 16. Chapter VIII- Current Chhaupadi Status

I would like to include the Chhaupadi-related reports, news and incidents that are coming out every other day while I am working on this thesis. I think these media coverages are highly relevant sources of data for this thesis.



**Figure 9** An example of the Chhaupadi hut published by ABC News – a national news service in Australia, on 10 March, 2018.<sup>22</sup>

The diplomat- an international online news portal which covers Asia pacific region published article titled *Nepal's Deadly Chhaupadi Custom- A dangerous social practice in far western Nepal is causing reoccurring deaths* on January 30, 2018, which stated:

*“In the first week of January this year, a Nepali woman who was sleeping in a hut during her menstrual cycle was found dead by her neighbors. According to the preliminary investigation, police suspected that Gauri Bayak, 23, a permanent resident of Turmakhad Rural Municipality-3 in Accham district, died due to suffocation, thanks to the narrow and congested hut where she was sleeping. She was the latest victim of the Chhaupadi custom, which is prevalent in several far-western districts of Nepal”<sup>23</sup>.*

The picture below speaks louder than I can describe in thousand words. This was published on June 19, 2018 by Tara Todras-Whitehill for *The New York Times*, an international news portal based in USA.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-09/chhaupadi-hut/9533404>

<sup>23</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/nepals-deadly-chhaupadi-custom/>



*Figure 10 Kokila Bk, 38, left, who is staying in a chhaupadi hut, is given water by her daughter, who makes sure not to touch her, in the village of Dakohanedada.<sup>24</sup>*

On one hand government of Nepal, NGO's, INGO's and many organisations are working to diminish this tradition, whereas, on the other hand, pictures like above are coming out, now, in the year 2018. Nothing can be as heart wrenching as this for the women of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, new law which is recently passed in Nepal has criminalised the Chhaupadi and anyone who forces women to practice Chhaupadi will face imprisonment up to 3 months or 3000 rupees<sup>25</sup> or both<sup>26</sup>. The question that strikes me is – why is it criminalised only if anyone forces women to practice Chhaupadi? It should be crime if anyone practices it regardless it is forced or by own will. One of the latest research published in December 2017 reports that 50 % of the participants still believed that their family and society will get cursed by god if they don't follow the culture associated with menstruation. According to this study, 55.4% still believed that menstruating women should not consume any milk products, sour fruits. This report also mentions that participants still practice self-purification after menstruation by sprinkling gold water<sup>27</sup>(Yadav et al. 2018).

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/19/world/asia/nepal-women-menstruation-period.html>

<sup>25</sup> rupees- term used for the Nepali currency

<sup>26</sup> <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2018-08-17/free-press-on-edge-as-new-laws-come-into-force-today.html>

<sup>27</sup> Menstruating women who are practicing Chhaupadi purify themselves on 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> day: these women would dip the gold ornament on water bowl and sprinkle this water on themselves.

Recent research results correspond the reality of Chhaupadi practicing societies. According to the recent news published by leading daily tabloid in Nepal “The Himalayan Times” on June 13, 2018, a woman from the rural municipality of Bajura district in far western Nepal is staying in a den in the forest after group of women activists of her locality demolished her Chhaupadi shed in a bid to declare the village a Chhaupadi-free village. She further added that women in her village agreed to activists as they promised to take against them who promoted the chhaupadi. However, these women were forced to stay in a plastic tent or den in the jungle during menstruation and those activists were nowhere around to support them. Many villages are declared as the Chhaupadi-free villages, however these villages are Chhaupadi free only on the paper. In reality, women in these villages are regretting for letting activists to demolish their Chhaupadi shed as they are being forced to stay in the den and plastic huts which is even more harder than before.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/chhaupadi-still-rampant-in-bajura-district/>

## 17. Chapter IX- Analysis and Discussion

### *17.1 PART I- Observational Analysis: Chhaupadi and its Impacts on Well-Being of Women Through My Eyes:*

#### *17.1.1 Observation of Chhau-Goth/hut*

As I went from village to village I witnessed many tiny huts where menstruating women were banished every month. In most of the villages, every house had a hut in a distance of about 200 - 300 meter. However, some of the villages had built a common hut which could be shared by 3 - 4 menstruating women.



*Figure 11* Narrow opening to the Chhaupadi Goth

In a closer observation of a hut where one of my participants spends 4 days every single month, I saw that it was a tiny hut made up of stones and mud. It had no proper door to enter but just a narrow opening with no other openings or source of ventilation inside.

Inside the hut there was an unused, old cloth hanged in the ceiling. The floor was filled with rice-straws on which she sleeps during her menstruation.



*Figure 12 Floor inside the hut where rice-straws are spread as 'mattress' for sleeping purpose*



*Figure 13 Inner view of the Chhau-goth where one of my participant spends 4 days during her menstruation*

If I had to spend a cold night in that hut with severe menstrual cramping pain, I would not think for even a second before I lit the fire to make it warm inside. It made me understand why women lit the fire while sleeping inside the hut, knowing that many others had died due to excessive carbon dioxide generated by fire. Anyhow, the danger of death inside the hut is always there, either due to extreme cold or due to carbon-dioxide poisoning due to fire. I would choose to die in a peaceful sleep rather than taking a last breath while shivering due to freezing temperature. Freezing temperature inside the hut relates to the narrow opening to the hut. I observed that if there was a window or a little opening inside and provision to lock the door outside, it would minimize many risk factors such as cold, wild animal attack, sexual harassment and death due

to lack of oxygen. I asked some of the participants about it but they did not have any clear answer. Some of them blamed the poor economic situation and mentioned that it costs a lot for them to have a door and window in the hut. As an observer, I understood that people are not interested in investing in the hut.



*Figure 14 Chhau-Goth in Achham District, Nepal*

Being isolated for 4-5 days in such a hut every single month seems very difficult. There was no provision for cooking inside the hut and being dependent for food on those people with whom she can't even come in contact with, is definitely a cause of irritation and mental pressure. I also observed that there were insects, ants and houseflies in the surroundings of hut. It is not surprising that many women suffer from diarrhoea, pneumonia and other communicable diseases while they are banished in the hut. In addition to this, there was no establishment of toilet nearby the hut and women are therefore forced to use the open area for passing stool or for urinating. On the one side, this can lead to spread of communicable and contagious diseases. On the other side, it is the matter of social shaming as women can be seen by others while they are out for toilet purposes. There is no practice of open toilet in the civilized world and especially when women are menstruating. I wondered how it was for these poor women to go outside in a dark, cold night for urination. It definitely makes women more vulnerable to wild animal attacks and sexual harassment. Hence, I argue that menstruating women should get access to their own house to secure privacy, hygiene as well as safety.

### ***17.1.2 Observation of the participants***

First of all, I experienced that the participants were not very open for the conversation at the beginning. We had informed the entire village and taken oral/informal consent of our visit from the local authorities but we didn't give exact date and time. This was done to avoid any artificial preparation by the participants and to achieve maximal possible genuine data. I observed that the local people were reserved and sceptical about the information they gave to the people from other societies.

I could feel the difference on what exactly a hut looked like and how they described it. Some of the young students/informants at the local primary school said that the elders in the village usually try to cover the facts about the Chhaupadi as they feared the encounter of shame with the outer world. However, they still consider practicing it right and justify it with their value of culture and tradition.

Throughout my field work I met with several people in different villages. It broke me emotionally several times as I saw how women crawled inside those very narrow huts. Most of the women did not have proper knowledge about menstruation and said it was acceptable for them to stay because they were impure. Some of the male participants seemed very strict about it. When the husband to one of participants said that it is just a matter of five days to stay away, she is polluted while she is menstruating and it is not right to contaminate house, the wife nodded her head in support. However, while she showed me her hut she said that the rainwater comes through the torn roof of the hut and she spends sleepless nights in the wet hut. Her eyes were tearful, her voice shaken and I could feel the pressure she has from family and society. These observations indicated towards the fact that, on one hand, the mental, physical, and social well-being of women is affected by this practice and on the other hand women are being victims of culture based discrimination.



After going through many villages of the Achham district, in one remote village I got the chance to meet a mother with a new born, six days old baby.



*Figure 15* Mother outside her Chhau-Goth with a six days old baby



*Figure 16* Mother and baby with a special bucket used as baby bed

The new mother with an infant, whom I met just outside her hut was holding her baby and enjoying the warmth from the sun. As I approached her, it was hard for me and could be hard for any person from the outside of this community to see her in that situation. There were few utensils in the corner, kept for drying in the sun. The mother explained that these utensils were not touchable as she had used them. There was a doko<sup>29</sup> which she used as bed for the baby, as it could provide shadow to the baby. This poor mother had no companion, no one around to talk to her, to share her joy of being mother. Instead, she was banished to the narrow hut without proper food, clothing or the emotional support from her family. It would be challenging for her indeed to take care of the baby and herself and carry out daily life activities all by herself. In such a situation, how would a mother recover from the delivery related complications, how would she protect herself from the risk of infections and communicable diseases and how would the baby get proper care?

Women's life seemed tough with this tradition. The lack of proper understanding of Chhaupadi seemed to be one of the main reason for continuation of this practice. The new mother said with tears in her eyes that she becomes ill if she goes inside the house with the baby; she does not rejoice being isolated, however she doesn't want to get ill, get cursed and disrespect god. I got the impression that if she or the community were aware enough to understand the biological reason behind menstrual bleeding, this tradition would have been eliminated long time ago.

## ***17.2 PART II- Analysis of Cases***

### ***17.2.1 Perceiving and understanding the attitudes towards the Chhaupadi***

The Chhaupadi seems to be one of the major socio-cultural issues which is highly influenced by Hindu religious practices. Most of the women in Achham district of Nepal still link menstruation as a religious monthly process; few understand it as natural, regular bleeding and almost every woman still feel uncomfortable to enter inside their own house while menstruating.

#### ***At home/family level:***

The menstruation is not even the issue of talk within a family. It is taken as the topic of shame. When a girl is sent to the chhaupadi hut for the first time, how and to whom would she express any discomfort, pain or anxiety she is experiencing; whilst talking about it within the family is considered shameful. The key informant about menstruation to a daughter is solely her mother. The mother herself carries an understanding from previous generations. Some of the young girls do not even get the privilege of the mother's support. One of the informants in the cases

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<sup>29</sup> Special basket made up of bamboo, used mainly for carrying goods.

presented above did not have her mother and she mentioned that “I miss my mother every single day and I wish I had her to share my feelings”. How can one expect a young girl to understand the burden of the Chhaupadi custom at her tender age, all by herself and isolated to the Chhaupadi hut? What kind of definition about menstruation would she develop in her mind and what kind of perception would she carry? It is obvious that the perception and understanding about menstruation and the Chhaupadi is passed from generation to generation without mere modernization, improved definition or progressive values. In a similar study, it was found that 77% of the participants in the Achham district reported that restrictions during menstruation was imposed by their own family members (Center 2015). This is also supported by findings in the similar study by Sandbakken (Sandbakken 2011) which identifies traditional culture and power structure like patriarchy as important determinants for the continuation of the practice. A tradition that is practiced for many generations does not automatically make it right and acceptable. Instead, Chhaupadi in case of Nepal seems to be a major factor for unbalanced well-being of women in the society. Therefore, I would link Chhaupadi as a socio-cultural issue, a fault in social actuality which needs to be addressed to bring social transformation.

***At society level:***

Having menstruation seems to be similar to committing a social crime for people in Achham. Almost every participant perceived menstruation as a natural process although as dirty, impure, a sin and cause for social destruction. Even if people said that it was a normal process, they perceived it as something impure which stopped them for going inside houses, temples, schools or participate in any of the social events. The ban on nutritious food, good clothing and to touch others was prevalent in every family in my field of study. The ban was supported by neighbouring families and eventually the whole community. Each of the key informants referred to the society while expressing their views on chhaupadi as “there is nothing wrong about having menstrual bleeding but I grew up in a society where everybody practices Chhaupadi and I am influenced”, “people who live in our village say that bad luck comes to us if we don’t follow Chhaupadi”, “the chhaupadi is normalized and accepted in our village”, “the deep rooted culture pushes me to stay in the Chhaupadi hut”, “staying in the hut is essential because women are impure while they are menstruating”. This explains that the perception on the Chhaupadi is actually socially imposed knowledge. Everyone is following the instruction from the society without self-assessment and self-understanding. The type of perception on the Chhaupadi at the society level corresponds to the findings from a situational analysis of menstrual practice in Dailekh District of Nepal, presented by Radha paudel (Radha paudel June 2017) as she mentions that almost all participants in her studies credited the community for the restrictions during menstruation and mentioned social taboo and superstition as the cause. The

study also found that people are comprehensively influenced from the neighbourhood and adjacent districts, elder generations and their attitude towards menstruation.

Perception, acceptance, and practice of Chhaupadi, both at family and community level is inherited from generations to generations. People seem to be believing their elders in the family and community and follow their instructions without actually analysing its validity. Chhaupadi has indeed strong roots in the Hindu religion that has been practiced for hundreds of years. Local communities (is this right) have linked Chhaupadi to the God Indra and his curse which came as menstruation. This religious belief is deep rooted in the society and has become the matter of the social structure. Religion and its structural link to the social organization has always been the topic of interest for many sociologists and theorists. Catherine Bell in her work *Ritual Perspectives and Dimension* refers to the great French sociologist Emile Durkheim's work *Elementary forms of the religious life* in which he has focused religion as a social phenomenon (Catherine 1997). Catherine Bell quotes Durkheim to state that "*the religion is the set of ideas and practices by which people sacralise the social structure and the bonds of the community. In this way, religion functions to ensure the unconscious priority of communal identification*" (Catherine 1997, 25). Catherine further quotes Durkheim that the rites and ceremonies play vital roles in how religion influences the social structure (Catherine 1997). Indeed, the practice like the Chhaupadi tradition in Hindu religion is therefore deep-rooted in Nepali society, being inherited from generation to generation as the part of ritual within the Hindu religion. Rituals as described by Durkheim are the important part of religions which stimulate a passionate intensity and the feeling of enthusiasm in which people experience something higher than themselves. These passionate reactions drive people to identify themselves within religious practices (Catherine 1997) and therefore such practices become part of each individual in a particular society.

When considering a particular actor within the Nepali society who influences a woman to practice chhaupadi, it is the female/women herself. Almost every participant in my study said that it was the mother who taught them about Chhaupadi. Male members have supported the female members; however, the mother or the mother in law is the key actor who makes sure that their daughter or the daughter in law actually practices it. In this case I see women themselves also as the ones of the key actors to be blamed for passing the Chhaupadi practice from generation to generation. This can be co-related with the theory "when women consent to their own oppression and help to oppress other women, they are to be blamed" (Moi 2010). When women themselves accept menstruation as a curse given by god and having menstruation as being impure then they identify themselves as the "other", as the second person and as the incomplete human. This is where women put men as the absolute and pure. As long as women

continue accepting themselves as the “other” (Moi 2010), or a second person, they constantly push themselves into the conflict between being human and being women.

### ***17.2.2 Chhaupadi - choice or compulsion or gender discrimination?***

Participants in my study seem to be dwelling between thoughts of Chhaupadi as imposed upon them or they practice it because they think it is the right thing to do. Most of the older people answered that they follow Chhaupadi because they do not want to hurt their God and they do not want to invite any destruction to society by making God angry. These people also said that having menstruation is not wrong, but they accepted it as symbol of impurity:

*“Nobody forces me to follow the Chhaupadi but I myself feel uneasy to break the tradition of the village”*

*“I embrace the Chhaupadi tradition because it is my duty to follow the ritual as I am a girl”*

*“As a political activist and as a woman I have tried to minimize Chhaupadi, but my soul doesn’t permit me to enter inside my house while I am menstruating”.*

These views are similar to the findings of another study which states that the participant women felt that it was not right to create public awareness regarding this tradition or to give any support to the women in the Chhuapadi hut; they believed that any attempt to deny Chhaupadi has brought various mishap to the village (Center 2015).

Where does this perception come from? Is it forced consent from their parents? Society? The dilemma here is that these women lack the knowledge about menstruation and thus stuck between right and wrong. They pass the same dilemma to their children. Here the Chhaupadi is not forced but the women consent to their own oppression (Moi 2010). Women accept the Chhaupadi as a ritual that define them during menstruation as impure, even though they label it as a normal phenomenon; therefore, it is women themselves that are to be blamed for continuing this practice.

However, women making Chhaupadi as their own choice is a narrow picture of the whole situation. If we look at the socio-cultural structure of Nepal, it is patriarchal society bound into cultures and subcultures. It is the man who rules the house, it is the man who leads the family, it is the man who instructs the females. My participants said that they highly obey their fathers, their husbands and cannot disobey them by entering the house while they are menstruating. Therefore, the choice women make to stay in the hut is indirectly a compulsion imposed by a male dominated society. It is not weird to blame the patriarchal society of Nepal for the Chhaupadi; because almost every decision is made by the male head of the family which is later followed by everyone else, by choice or maybe indirect compulsion. After all there are many proverbs used in the Nepali society where males are accepted as superior to females:

- ⇒ *Shrimati shrimanko khuttako dhulo (the wife is dust on the husband's feet)*
- ⇒ *Pothi baaseko suhauaina (it does not suit for women to speak up)*
- ⇒ *Shriman ko sewa gare Swarga puginchha (those who serve the wish of the husband are to be granted a place in heaven)*
- ⇒ *Chhoriko janma hareko karma (a daughter is born to a hopeless fate)*

Considering this patriarchal social structure, there is surely male dominated decisions which are imposed upon women and women accept it as normalized practice; and so is it in case of the Chhaupadi. Women have accepted menstruation as impurity and sin, and they have normalized the Chhaupadi practice as the measure of purity. The question is purity for whom? Purity for women themselves? Purity for male members of the family? Purity for an unknown, unseen factor - God? Purity for society? Or it is just the decision imposed upon females hundreds of years ago by a patriarchal society? The experiences from the Chhaupadi explained by participants in my study surely is a signal of the Chhaupadi practice as a result of a male dominated society:

*"Menstruation is a topic of shame, especially for male members of the family"*

*"God becomes angry and bad luck comes to our village if we don't follow the Chhaupadi"*

*"I do not want to give any tension to my husband by denying Chhaupadi"*

*"I think it was my fault to be born as a daughter in this society. I do not even have freedom about my own health"*

*"Custom, culture and social practices create greater influence and even after becoming a literate husband, I do not have the courage to stop sending my wife to the Chhau-hut"*

*"I am 45-year-old man and I think it is essential to send women to the Chhau-hut because women are impure while menstruating"*

The above-mentioned views by informants give a clear picture that the Chhaupadi is not just the choice of women because they consider menstruation impure, but going to the Chhau-hut is also the result of indirect compulsion created by the male dominated society. This finding in my study is similar to the findings in another study which concludes that Nepalese women are dominated by males since birth, and that patriarchal dogmas and socio-cultural principles further enhance the discrimination process (Bhandari 2013, Center 2015). This is also supported by Kunwar (Kunwar 2013) who states that more than 95 percent of women still practice Chhaupadi in the Achham district. Women in this district are victims of extreme violence and discrimination. Young girls do not have proper access to education. Women do not get hygienic food while menstruating and during giving birth, and they also lack proper reproductive health

care. These reports indeed indicate that a tradition like Chhaupadi is the major cause of gender discrimination.

### ***17.2.3 Perception on legal abolishment of the Chhaupadi practice***

Participants in my study had no or little awareness about the legal abolishment of the Chhaupadi in Nepal although Chhaupadi was already considered as illegal by the supreme court of Nepal in 2005 (Subedi 2017). One of the participants said that although people in the village had heard about the law against forced Chhaupadi, they did not have courage to lodge complaint due to the fear of being socially excluded. They did not even consider talking against it as they feared that it might lead to social exclusion and curse from the ancestors. Most of the villages where this practice is prevalent are located in very remote areas of Nepal and access to these places are extremely challenging. This makes it more difficult for people to take a decision against their own community. In addition, organizations and institutions who wish to support those who would decide to take a stand, have difficulties to reach these remote villages. One of the informant in my study said:

*“my village lies in the very remote area of the Achham district and one must walk 1-2 days to reach here. Even if someone manages to come here, I am sure that the older generation of this village will unite and defend them”*

This attitude towards the law against Chhupadi seems to be the result of lack of correct information, awareness and support to the people who could think about speaking against it.

Some of the participants who have completed basic formal education at school seem more aware about rules and regulations; however, they seem to be suppressed by strong socio-cultural influence. People in some of the villages in the Achham district consider this practice as illegal and support the law against Chhaupadi, issued by the supreme court. One of the participants stated that:

*“the local committee in the village has passed a provision to socially boycott those families who send menstruating women to the Chhaupadi and deprive them from all kind of social supports; however, it has had almost no influence on the people and there has been no decline in the numbers of women staying in the Chhau-hut”.*

When we take closer look: how can these people be aware about the law passed by the supreme court in the capital city Kathmandu, when they don't even follow the rules made by their own community. This shows the very limited effect of laws passed by the Nepali government on the local people in remote villages.

Another participant rejected to having heard anything against this tradition. He rubbished the idea of complaining against this practice, and blamed people for underestimating the sentiments of the locals, and justified his view by stating:

If we keep women inside while menstruating, our forefathers get angry and it leads to the destruction of family peace in the way that our cattle might die. The participant also blamed the fate of those women who died inside the hut and dismissed the idea of lodging complain against Chhaupadi by saying that

*“I would not like to discuss more against this tradition as I might create a sin for my society”*

In spite of many organizations being active to increase awareness against Chhaupadi and availability of legal assistance, people seems to be not ready to accept anything against this tradition. Several other studies have similar findings;

- in spite of the Chhaupadi pratha being outlawed by the supreme court in 2005 and being criminalized in 2017, it is still practiced in mid and western areas of Nepal (Shakya and Shrestha 2018),

- according to a 2011 UN report, 95 % of the women in the Achham district still practice Chhaupadi even though the Ministry of Women, children and Social Welfare declared parameters to eliminate Chhaupadi nationally (Thebe Limbu 2017)

The tradition is being practiced for hundreds of years and people have a fixed mind-set that menstruation is impure. Laws, rules and regulations are being discussed in towns, in the newspapers, in the parliament houses but have failed to reach the mind-sets of the people living in Chhaupadi prevalent villages.

### ***17.3 Past and present Chhaupadi experiences***

Most of the participant in my study talked about similar kinds of experiences related to the menstruation and Chhaupadi tradition. Difficulties and challenges faced by menstruating women in far western region of Nepal are similar whether it is experienced by women who have practiced it for 25 years or a teenager girl.

*“I do not sleep the whole night in the fear of animal attacks, snakebites and danger of getting molested”*, said a teenager participant in my study.

According to her it is hardly bearable to sleep on a hard mat when it is freezing cold and the temperature zero or below. Cold air blows through the narrow opening of the hut and it causes shivering cold. She further added that although she is not allowed to go inside the house or touch anybody, she is sent to work on the field. At the end of the day she is obliged to go back to the cold hut where there is no warm bed and no warm meal. It leads to extreme tiredness, feeling of irritation and she feels less valued as a human. As per her experience she considers herself lucky compared to some of her peers who share the shed with domestic animals



(Bhandaree et al. 2013). She has witnessed some of her friends who stay inside a cowshed as their families are not economically able to build a Chhau-goth. Those who stay in the cowshed are in higher risk of getting ill as it is more dirty inside the cowshed (Amgain 2012), cow dung is everywhere and insects like mosquitoes are everywhere around the cowshed.

Another participant in my study recalled the horror of being sent alone to the Chhaupadi hut for 21 days when she got menstruation for the first time. She had to stay isolated, all by herself in the cold, dark hut and she did not even understand what exactly was happening. She experienced severe depression, and cried most of the time. This experience of distress due to Chhaupadi is a cause of suffering for the women. Women have been suppressed by the burden of tradition and they have normalized it as part of their life. A participant in the study said she is so stressed that she takes it as the matter of fact that she is obliged to stay in the hut during menstruation as she does not want to get cursed by ancestors and she doesn't wish to be boycotted by her own society. She now misses her children and gets worried about them while she is not allowed inside her house. It is also difficult to maintain the personal hygiene and she experiences fear of being sick every month.

Sicknesses like pneumonia, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and health issues like general weakness, fatigue are very common experiences (Khadka 2014). According to her she once got extreme pain while urinating and became more ill day by day; however, nobody came forward to help her to reach the health center in another city as she was considered untouchable due to her menstruation. She is not only the person to experience it. A participant in a work by Nirajan Khadka "Chhaupadi Pratha: Women's condition and suffering" said that if she violates the rule of Chhaupadi she might lose her vision, or will lose her mental health or will create sin for her society which will bring destruction to everyone (Khadka 2014). Feeling of fear of social exclusion, feeling of stress, feeling of loneliness and experiences of physical discomfort and illnesses are indeed the factors that signalise that women go through all sorts of suffering due to this tradition.

The table presented below sums up the Chhaupadi experiences in the past and at present (2018) based on the experiences discussed by the participants:

**Table 3 Chhaupadi then and now**

<b><i>Chhaupadi in the past</i></b>	<b><i>Chhaupadi at present (2018)</i></b>
❖ Chhaupadi huts were extremely poorly built, most of the times women shared a cowshed for six days of menstruation.	❖ Better Chhaupadi huts are available now. Even if some cannot afford building one, there is a provision for building shared Chhaupadi huts.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Women had to stay in the hut for minimum six days</li> <li>❖ Woman used to use piece of clothes during bleeding and there was no concept and no availability of sanitary pads.</li> <li>❖ Difficult access to the water source as the only water source was natural – pond, lakes, river.</li> <li>❖ Women didn't take bath or washed clothes for six days due to difficult access to water source</li> <li>❖ Following Chhaupadi tradition was obligatory, people did not even think of it as a bad practice and nobody dared to speak against it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Women stay in the hut for four days now</li> <li>❖ There are at least some few villages that have access to sanitary pads.</li> <li>❖ Tap water source is easily accessible</li> <li>❖ Woman have better hygienic conditions due to easy access to water, though there are still restrictions.</li> <li>❖ Today's generations do not follow Chhaupadi as strictly as older generations, they use warm clothes, healthy food and some of the youths are not scared to stand against this tradition.</li> </ul>
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The beginning of the Chhaupadi tradition seems to be linked to menstrual hygiene that was suitable at that particular time. Some of the participant explained that ancestors started sending women away from home and forbid them to stay inside the house so that they could get time to take care of themselves without worrying much about household work. Some of the participants in my study said in general talks that they were happy about staying away from home during menstruation as it reduces their burden of daily house chores. They would be happy to stay in the Chhau goth and avoid hard work if there was no restriction on the use of warm clothing, healthy food and access to a water source and if they could participate socially.

On the other side, Chhaupadi experiences of women with new born babies are even worse. The postpartum period is one of the most vulnerable times for both the mother and the new-born baby. At this time, both mother and baby are in risk of diseases due to weak immunity power and it is highly recommended to stay clean, eat healthy and take good rests (Bevan 2017). On the contrary, women who is practicing the Chhaupadi have no access to healthy food, have a tough living environment and are vulnerable to diseases. A participant in my study who had a six days old baby and was staying in the Chhaupadi hut explained the awful condition she went through during her last childbirth and now. The lack of warm clothes, nutritious food and severe weather conditions was challenging and she experienced extreme fear of getting sick and losing her baby when she was sent to the Chhaupadi hut for 11 days with her first child. Her experience

now is better than before as she says she has “permission to use better, newer and warmer clothes this time”. Nevertheless, the better clothes or food is not the only factor that is challenging. A new mother with her new-born baby hardly gets any time to take proper rest as she is left alone, all by herself in the Chhaupadi hut. She does not get any help to carry out the daily life, she cares for her baby, cleans the hut as much as possible, carries water from the nearby water source, washes clothes and takes care of the baby as well. In addition, a new mother is not allowed to come in touch with others and she is treated as an impure, untouchable person.

Chhaupadi-related difficulties are witnessed not only by those who actually practice it. One of the male informants in my study described that he understands the challenges faced by women, effects on health, difficult weather conditions and feelings of neglect that woman bear every month. Yet, he doesn't have enough courage to stop sending his wife to the Chhaupadi hut because he experiences fear of being excluded from his own society. In contrary to this, one of the informants from the government sector explained that she was sent to the Chhaupadi hut during her adolescent age, but she stood up against it, and does not practice it anymore. She has experienced psychological stress as she gets informed from third party that people blame her for destroying the local culture. Nevertheless, she is aware that this tradition brings no positive changes and it is illegal as well. She doesn't practice it and is working hard to increase awareness against it.

Participants in my study are not the only persons to experience such harsh conditions. Almost every participant in Chhaupadi related studies and researches have presented similar kinds of experiences. These explanations expressed by the participants are the features of *suffering* caused by the socio-cultural Chhaupadi tradition. DG Oreopoulous described suffering as the hopeless condition where the person no longer relates the situation as bearable, and experiences extreme feeling of distress, anxiety, isolation, depression and irritation (Khadka 2014) (Oreopoulos 2005). The feeling of suffering is a major fact that should not be avoided as it leads to an unbalanced state of well-being. It is the symbol that the Chhaupadi tradition is a source of stress in women's life. To achieve better health of the society it is important that women in a particular society are healthy. And thus, in order to have a healthy society, it is time to re-consider the validity of the Chhaupadi tradition.

## ***17.4 Consequences of Chhaupadi in the context of social well-being of women***

Participants and informants in my study had various stories linked to Chhaupadi that signalled many negative consequences of this tradition rather than any positive aspects. Mothers and new born babies are exposed to various diseases and longstanding illnesses. Young girls are vulnerable to sexual assaults and death due to wild animal attacks. The consequences that are carried by this tradition seem more serious than what we know of today. Only a minority of the Chhaupadi-related accidents are visible to the world. In a heart wrenching voice, one of the participant in my study said that:

*“the 15-years old daughter of my elder sister was found dead inside the hut..... one day she went inside the hut to sleep and never woke up again”*

Narrow huts without proper ventilation have caused the lives of many women which has gone unreported. She further added that as she has witnessed the deaths due to this tradition and she lives in the state of anxiety and feeling of helplessness as she fears for her young daughter who might have to go to the hut when she gets her menstruation. She is afraid that she will not succeed to convince her family against this tradition and she even considers sending her young child daughter away to another place where she might be safer. The pain of a mother being separated from her young child is the source of suffering and suffering does not affect any part of the body in particular but affects the whole being – i.e. physical, mental and social well-being (Oreopoulos 2005) and thus, the Chhaupadi tradition seems to be ***one of the major sources of suffering among the women.***

Women’s health consequences in context of the Chhaupadi is a highly discussed topic. Every participant in my study explained that they had either experienced sickness while staying in the hut or they had witnessed other women being seriously ill or dead. One of the participants in my study reported of severe stomach cramps while she was alone in the hut one day. She said she is also suffering from pneumonia due to severe cold and unhygienic condition in her Chhau hut. In spite of being sick, she has not received any treatment as she is untouchable and there is no availability of medical service in her village. This has led her to the feeling of fear for death. According to another participant who is a new mother with a six days old baby, there is no provision of healthy foods for mother and new born baby in the Chhaupadi tradition. Instead of providing food that provides nutrition, people say that if a mother with a new born baby eats foods like dairy products, meats and fruits, the baby who is under breastfeeding cannot digest nutrients and baby might fall sick or die. According to the (WHO et al. 2003) healthy food to the mother who is breastfeeding infant is highly recommended as it provides immunity power

to the infants against disease. However, Chhauapdi practicing mother are banned to eat everything which they actually should consume even more than before. This might lead to malnutrition and lack of immunity power to both mother and infant and thus making them more prone to illnesses. In addition, the participants described that people in her village have a high faith in witchcraft and evil spirits. Therefore, if the baby is ill they take the baby to the shaman. This is the situation where the baby could die who otherwise could survive if taken to medical experts instead of shamans. Participants and informants in my study discussed about several incidents of Chhauapdi related deaths of teen age girls, women and new born babies. According to them such incidents were prevalent in older generations and they are witnessing it now as well in as many cases as before. Therefore, this practice seems to be ***threatening the physical health of women***. This analysis is similar to the findings by several other studies; Chhauapdi practicing women have experienced reproductive tract infections and uterine prolapse (Ranabhat et al. 2015) there were nine incidents of the deaths of 28 incidents of chhauapdi between 2010 and 2012 (Bhandaree et al. 2013), and there are several health related issues caused by this tradition which leads to the negative impacts on social well-being of women (Kadariya and Aro 2015).

In addition to the negative consequences on physical health of the women, there are several other Chhauapdi related factors that are linked to the mental and social well-being of the women. One of the participants discussed about how stressful situation it was to be waken up with the news of death of a new born baby and the mother inside the narrow Chhau-goath in her village. She explained that the fire which was let to warm up the cold hut led to lack of oxygen and death of innocent lives. This was not the end of story, because the father committed suicide after getting into a severe depression after and their two children were eventually sent to the orphanage home. My concern is about those two small kids and their mental trauma. This kind of mental stress at a young age can affect the whole life. This suggests that Chhauapdi is a cause of mental disturbance not only for the women themselves but also for the entire society. When we analyse closely, the women seem to be the main victims of this tradition. Participants in my study expressed their agony in different ways:

“I feel dominated and neglected when other people do not let me touch any vessels, water source and people”

“I feel ignored, isolated and socially excluded... it makes me feel very irritated....”

*Social integration* is one of the five dimensions of social well-being (Keyes 1998) which means that healthy individuals should feel that they are valued as part of their society. However, women who are practicing this tradition expressed their feeling as being socially estranged,

which signalize that their society does not reflect women's values and thereby brings imbalance to women's social well-being.

*"I feel lonely and irritated when I stay in the Chhaupadi hut..."*

*"people clean themselves with gold and water if they touch me by mistake... it is really a horrible experience and I feel like alien from another planet"*

According to the *social acceptance dimension* of social well-being (Keyes 1998) healthy individuals in society accept each other, feel comfortable for each other and are kind and trustable to each other. Being socially accepted reflects self-acceptance. But, in the case of this tradition, society does not accept menstruating women as normal and other members of society are not kind to the Chhaupadi practising women. Therefore, women's situation under this tradition exemplifies the negatively affected mental health and social well-being.

*"I work hard all day long and stay in the cold hut the whole night"*

*"This tradition is no less than torture to me"*

If we refer to the *social contribution dimension* of social well-being (Keyes 1998) healthy individuals are appreciated for their role in the society. However, Chhau practicing women, on the one side, are sent to the isolated Chhau-hut without proper care, and on the other hand they are sent to the hard work in the field the whole day and forced to sleep in cold huts after day-long, tiresome work. This signalize that these women are hardly appreciated for what they are doing for their culture and society, instead they are being told that it's their duty to do whatever they are told to do.

*"I dare not speak against Chhaupadi as I fear for being cursed, being socially expelled, or being cause of destruction"*

*"I don't sleep the whole night in the hut due to fear of wild animals and fear of sexual harassment"*

One of the five dimensions of social well-being is *social coherence* (Keyes 1998) which means that the healthy individuals in the society are aware about the society in which they live, the happenings around them and they see their lives as meaningful in the community where they reside. However, the statements of the Chhau practicing women suggest that they are not aware about the fact that menstruation is not a cause of sin and it does not bring any destructions to their society. These women seem to be accepting whatever that is happening in the society,

without actually analysing if it is good or bad. Also, they expressed that they do not see any meaningful life in their society as they live with fear and stress.

*“I feel stressed.”*

*“I miss my family, friends and school”*

*“I am very worried about the health of my child during my stay in the hut”*

*“I have no idea about where I can go to lodge any complaint against Chhaupadi. Forget about taking action, I also fear to talk against the Chhaupadi tradition”.*

*The social actualization dimension* of the social well-being (Keyes 1998) is the valuation of the potential and path of the society. Socially healthy individuals believe in their society, have faith in the future of their community and individuals are positive, hopeful. They see that their inputs are valuable for the progression of the society. Conversely, women in the Chhaupadi tradition are worried about themselves and their children in their own society, they fear to take action as they see no hope for the help.

***The analysis shows that none of the dimensions of the social well-being are fulfilled under the Chhaupadi tradition.*** Women do not feel socially integrated, nor socially accepted. They do not, feel that their contribution to the society is appreciated nor do they feel that they have meaningful lives in their society. In addition, these women lack social actualization as they are not hopeful that this tradition will be eradicated from their society sometime soon in the future.

The explanations of the participants suggest that this tradition has affected women as mental torture, stress, depression, a state of anxiety and sadness. The findings in my study coincide with the work “*Chhaupadi Practice in Nepal - Analysis of ethical aspects*” by (Kadariya and Aro 2015) which describes that, on the one hand women are exposed to risk factors of diseases such as extreme cold, poor hygiene, lack of healthy food; on the other hand, they are exposed to risk factors that influence their mental and social health, such as inhibition to enter their own house, touch others or take part in any social event. This study further adds that social exclusion and isolation every month leads to extreme depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and disempowerment among the Chhaupadi practicing woman. Another similar study, “*Social Dimension of the Chhaupadi system*” (Amgain 2012) states that this system restricts women’s right to live a healthy and meaningful life by neglecting and socially excluding them from their family and society during their menstruation or giving birth. The analysis of the statements by participants in my study and findings from other corresponding studies suggest that the ***Chhaupadi tradition is harmful to the social well-being-of women.***

In addition to mental, social and physical health consequences, the Chhaupadi tradition seems to be a main cause for the gender based discrimination since the women are being targeted by the male dominated society because they have labelled the menstruation - a normal bodily process as the symbol of impurity and sin. The concept of impurity and sin is imposed on the women on the basis of gender differences. Here, it is important to understand the differences between the gender and the sex. Sex is the determinant of difference on physical appearance of the body while gender is concerned about psychological, social and cultural differences between man and woman (Khadka 2014). The Chhaupadi tradition in Nepal is imposed only on woman, and therefore the burden of socio-cultural tradition is carried out only by women, not by men. When both men and women are part of the same society but the burden of tradition is imposed only on the females on the basis of gender, then it is surely the matter of ***gender based discrimination***.

The topic of gender based discrimination is linked to the freedom women get. I would like to borrow the second principle of the French author *Simone de Beauvoir* to analyse the gender based discrimination linked to the Chhaupadi tradition; which states that “freedom, not happiness, must be used as the measuring stick to assess the situation of women” (Moi 2010). Some of the participants in my study, especially those from the older generations expressed that they were happy to follow this tradition because it is part of their culture. It seems like women are influenced and convinced by the tradition that is followed for many years. The question here is not merely if they are happy to follow it, but also if they have the freedom as much as male members of their society have. If we take the statements of the participants into account, women definitely do not have freedom - freedom to touch others, freedom to stay inside their own house, freedom to go to school, freedom to have healthy foods and warm clothes and so on. I therefore suggest that women who are considered impure while menstruating and isolated in the huts are victims of gender based discrimination. These women cannot be considered free if we apply the theory of *Simone de Beauvoir* which says that the actual freedom to women applies to right to have good health, education, economy and social inclusion (Moi 2010).

However, women who practice this tradition seem to be highly convinced by the socio-cultural aspects. One of the participants said:

“My mother-in-law wants me to stay in the hut..... my husband is her son and I am taught to obey my mother-in-law and my husband... I do not want to stress him by denying Chhaupadi”. She seems to be highly dependent upon her husband to carry on with her life. When a person loses the own identity, she accepts herself as the “other”. I use the theory of femininity by Moi (Moi 2010) at this point where she states that the concept of femininity is patriarchal and a symbol of unfree and the feminine women are those who accept self as other. The Chhaupadi



practicing women should understand that if they are practicing it to please the community or its male or the senior female family members. As I analyse the expressions of my participants I see that they follow following this tradition as demanded by the male dominated society, a demand of women who consent to their own oppression and also help other women to oppress the other women. But they are in difficult double-blind situation, between non-compatible knowledge and power systems. Therefore, ***this tradition is a mixed result of gender based discrimination as well as the result of “women suppressing other women”***. This has led to an imbalanced society as women are always considered as ‘second human’, are exposed to harmful traditions that causes both physical and psycho-social imbalances in their health. Women consist of more than half of society. This half is finding itself as discriminated and ill-treated. The Chhaupadi tradition thus signalises ***gender based discrimination and contradicts the right to health for women*** (Joshi 2015).

### ***17.5 Cross-Case Analysis: Chhaupadi experiences: similarities and differences***

In the table below, I have summarized similar and unlike views about the menstruation and the Chhaupadi tradition after analysing the statements of the participants on my study.

***Table 4 Similar and unlike views about the menstruation and the Chhaupadi tradition***

<i>Similar experiences/explanations from participants</i>	<i>Unlike views on the Chhaupadi</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Menstruation is a natural phenomenon and it is not essential to send them to the Chhau-hut, however it is the subject of shame.</li> <li>2. No particular person forces anyone to practice Chhaupadi but the entire society, culture and ritual present menstruation as a sign of impurity. However, it is a mother or a mother-in law who is the one who sends a daughter to the Chhau-hut for the first time.</li> <li>3. Those who don't let us speak against it are from the older generation and are using their heirship to scare youths in the name of the God and force this practice on us.</li> <li>4. Have stayed in the Chhaupadi Goth for 15-21 days during the first menstruation and for 4-7 days in following menstruations.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Women are impure while menstruating and it is essential to send them to the Chhau-goth.</li> <li>2. If women deny staying in the Chhau-goth, it brings destruction to our society.</li> <li>3. Those who speak against this tradition are from young generations and are spoiled by other</li> </ol>

<p>5. Feeling of irritation, isolation and rejection during the Chhau-Goth stay.</p> <p>6. Fear of being cursed from god and ancestors for denying the Chhaupadi.</p> <p>7. Harsh condition- difficult stay in the Chhau-Goth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Cold freezing temperature, down to zero during winter</li> <li>⇒ Restrictions on use of warm clothes, blankets and bed inside the Chhau-Goth</li> <li>⇒ Fear of wild animal attacks and snake bites and Fear of being victim of physical assault/molestations/rape</li> <li>⇒ Tiredness due to hard work on the field while menstruating and lack of proper food or rest inside the Chhau-Goth</li> <li>⇒ Feeling of shame due to lack of proper toilet for the use while menstruating</li> <li>⇒ Fear of illness due to poor hygiene in the Chhau-Goth, especially when women are sent to a cowshed instead of Chhau-Goth</li> <li>⇒ Effect on proper education due to the ban to go to school while menstruating</li> <li>⇒ Difficult to maintain hygiene of the mother and new born baby in the Chhau-Goth</li> <li>⇒ Lack of proper medical services in case of illness</li> <li>⇒ Feeling of mental stress and physically tired</li> <li>⇒ Have witnessed or heard of death accidents inside the Chhau-Goth and harsh living conditions inside the Goth are to be blamed for such accidents</li> </ul>	<p>organizations/people trying to destroy our culture.</p>
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Most of the participants in this study expressed similar explanations and experiences in the Chhaupadi. However, views and explanations on the Chhaupadi differed among the female and male participants, among the young and older generation and among the literate and illiterate participants.

The older generation is strict in their faith in god, the idea of purity and sin and practice of isolation during menstruation. However, the younger generations seem to be in the state of confusion about the validity of the Chhaupadi tradition. Besides, most of the similar statements above are expressed by this group and they have indicated that it is difficult to follow the rules and regulations of menstruation, they are also uncomfortable in following this tradition, thus they complain about physical, psychological and social difficulties. As explained by one government employee and informant in my study, some from the younger generation are brave enough to deny this tradition though I did not get the chance to meet any of them. However, some of the male participants strictly said that menstruating women are impure as they shed impure blood which is a symbol of sin. In their view, it was a sin taking menstruating women in or having any close relationship with them. Even though there were not vast differences about the perception, experiences and explanations of the Chhaupadi among the participants/informants, most of them thought that this tradition had resulted in many negative consequences such as deaths, illness, discrimination and an imbalanced society.

## 18. Empirical results

Based on the analysis of this study I would like to present answers to the following research questions:

1. *How do women practicing Chhaupadi perceive this practice, is it their own choice or do they feel it as compulsive or as gender discrimination?*

Before conducting this study, I used to think that women were forced to practice the Chhaupadi tradition by male members of their family/society. I had perceived this tradition as extreme form of gender discrimination. However, through this anthropological study I have uncovered some of the vulnerable issues associated with this tradition and gender discrimination.

I found that most of the women perceive menstruation as a natural process, however as the symbol of impurity and sin. Participant women see this practice as difficult and life threatening, however they said it was important to stay in the hut so that their ancestors and god do not get angry. They have accepted it as the part of their culture, religion and society.

I observed that it is not male member of the family who pressurize women to stay on the Chhaupadi while menstruating. It is women, themselves who play vital role on continuation of this practice. Most of the women, whom I interacted with, had misconception about menstruation as they described it as sign of impurity. They did not have scientific explanation on how menstruation is sign of impurity. They adopted the concept from their families and societies and accepted it as sign of impurity and sin. Women themselves have normalized this practice and willingly participating in continuation of the tradition, while male members of the society are supporting and encouraging women to stay away from their own home while menstruating. I think if the mind-set of women themselves does not change, then it is hard to break this tradition

Most of the women said that nobody forces them in a direct way to stay in the Chhaupadi hut. However, they feel pressurized to follow this tradition due to fear of getting blamed for any bad incidents that occurs within family or the society as a result of women ignoring the Chhaupadi. This shows that women lack the awareness about the menstruation. Women participants said that they follow this tradition as they perceive it as their duty because they are women and they are impure while bleeding. Both the males and the females are part of this society, however, only females are indulged with the burden of this particular socio-cultural practice of the Chhaupadi. This shows that the women discriminate themselves based on their gender while male members of the community play a role to encourage the entire community to follow this discriminatory practice.

Therefore, I would conclude that women themselves have a major role in promoting this discrimination as it is the female lead in the family that makes sure that their daughter or daughter-in-law practices this tradition. I think that, female members in a family could play an important role in bringing changes. My mother, irrespective of coming from a remote area of Nepal, where there was little possibility of formal education, never restricted me in any way while I got menstruation. Me, and all of my sisters always stayed in our own house, had access to the kitchen, we could go to school and participate in every kind of activities while menstruating. This never brought misfortune to our families, neither the people who were in our close contact got sick, nor the animals who were touched by us, died. However, if my mother had believed that menstruation was a sign of sin, then me and my siblings would also have adopted this belief. Nevertheless, menstruation is not the topic of shame in my family. If every woman in a Nepalese family could understand the fact about menstruation and could teach their children, then this practice would disappear in no so long time.

2. *What is the perception and attitude of these women on legal abolishment of Chhaupadi?*

Most of the participants clearly lack the knowledge about legal abolishment of the Chhaupadi. Some of them have heard about it, however they do not know how action is taken against it. While some of them are scared to file any complaints due to fear of being socially excluded. And most of them think it is not right to take any legal action against their own family. A few of the participants blame lack of support from the government and other institutions even if they want to take any legal actions. In addition, this tradition is criminalised in Nepal in the way that it is a crime only if someone directly forces women to practice it. But no law is passed against those who voluntarily practice. The problem is that there is a breach between the law against this tradition and its implementation as women are doubtful about taking action against their own family, making them prone to both fine and imprisonment.

Furthermore, I also think that the Government of Nepal has not succeeded to make people understand that the state is not against them or their culture but is against the negative impacts of this tradition on these people, themselves. There is a lack of interactions between law-makers and the people. The Chhaupadi practicing people have perceived the state or any other organizations who are working against this practice, as a destructor of their culture. They seemed fearful about that the state would obliterate their culture, custom and identity. I think that, this misconception is the result of lack of communications, discussions and interactions of the state or organizations with the people of the Chhaupadi practicing society.

Through this study, I see the need of serious communication between the state and the local community before forcing any laws against the Chhaupadi practicing people. There is need of change the way the Government of Nepal is implementing the rules. I see the necessity of bringing massive awareness programs, educating all age group people of the vulnerable society, giving them opportunity to travel to other societies who follow the same religion but where there are no restrictions on the menstruation. Instead of just criminalizing it, it is important to make people realize on negative consequences of this tradition and make them belief that the state is with them to make their life better. After all, in order to bring about change one needs to work with the people, not against them.

### *3. What are the past and present experiences of women while practicing Chhaupadi?*

The analysis of the Chhaupadi experiences in my study summarises that most of the women experience:

- Isolation in the Chhau-goth: with no contact with family and society (Khadka 2014)
- No access to healthy food (GC and Koirala 2013)
- No access to proper rest (Ranabhat et al. 2015)
- Fear of illness, wild animal attacks, snow bites (Bhandaree et al. 2013)
- Fear of sexual violence and discriminated on the base of gender (BUDHA 2018)
- Feeling of being neglected and discriminated (Adhikari et al. 2007)

### *4. What are the consequences of Chhaupadi faced by these women in the context of social well-being?*

- Cause of social exclusion
- the major source of suffering among the women.
- this tradition promotes gender based discrimination. A feeling of being discriminated affects the mental health and thereby well-being of women.

Through this study I found that the Chhaupadi tradition is harmful to the social well-being of women as the quality of their relationship with the society and community is poor. The analysis shows that none of the dimensions of the social well-being are fulfilled under the Chhaupadi tradition. Women do not feel socially integrated, nor socially accepted. Their contribution to the society is not appreciated nor do they feel that they have meaningful lives in their society. In addition, these women lack social actualization as they are not hopeful that this tradition will be eradicated from their society sometime soon in the future.

Furthermore, as an observer and as a researcher, I perceive that women's social well-being is imbalanced under this tradition. I think that women are socially suppressed by this tradition, and they lack actualization about their selves. These women perceive themselves inferior in comparisons to the men, due to the fact that they menstruate and they become untouchable. I would argue that women can be labelled as socially well only if they could realize and gain their right to respect, dignity, pride, freedom and be able to live a meaningful life. However, life under a narrow and dark hut can never be meaningful, in my views. The self-respect is at its lowest when women accept themselves as impure just because they bleed during menstruation. The dignity is vanished when women themselves make sure that the other women practice this tradition while male members stand by them with their strong support. In addition, the life satisfaction and happiness is also negatively influenced by this tradition.

Therefore, I would argue that it is not just all about facing challenges in physical health or not getting equal human rights, but the women also live socially challenged life under the Chhaupadi tradition. Thus, the social well-being of the Chhaupadi practicing women is imbalanced and this issue needs to be seriously addressed. After all, a healthy society cannot be achieved if the other half of the society (that is women) are not equally healthy.

## 19. Conclusion

The Chhaupadi practicing women are at high risk of physical illness, psychological stresses, social isolation, gender-based discrimination and accidental deaths in the Chhau-hut. These women lack social integration, are not socially accepted, they feel hopeless about their situation and lack the awareness about menstruation, legal establishment against the Chhaupadi practice and they see no hope for a better life.

*This finding suggests that social well-being of the women is adversely affected by this tradition and this issue needs to be addressed.*

While activists are demolishing the Chhaupadi huts, while NGO's and INGO's are launching awareness program against it, while teachers are educating students about natural phenomenon of menstruating, while the Government of Nepal is criminalizing the Chhaupadi and while reports, research results, thesis works and news updates are being penned down in current time, many of the women somewhere in far western and western region of the Nepal are still banished to a windowless, crumbling shed without ventilation, are still forbidden to touch own family members and some of them are still losing life. I am terrified to realize the fact that even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century now people merely realize that menstruation is just a part of reproductive health, not the curse from god or ancestors.

Criminalizing it only validates the fact that the government of Nepal illegalizes it, but this cannot ensure it that people will actually stop practicing it. People will destroy the Chhaupadi shed and then send women to dark idle corner of the house, the plastic tent or den in the jungle. I am afraid that law will just criminalize Chhaupadi in paper as just rules cannot change the attitude. This practice might disappear gradually after many years but I am afraid that, by that time, social well-being of the other half population of Nepalese society (that is women) would have been hugely affected and entire society would still remain unhealthy, and lack progression also in many years from now.



## **20. Recommendations**

To achieve the women's social well-being and to reduce culture-based gender discrimination, the government of Nepal, all the national international organizations and lawmakers involved in the development and implementation of rules, policies and laws must work collaboratively and in an organised way. The awareness about menstruation, menstrual hygiene, taboos associated with menstruation and laws against it should be provided regularly and effectively to the local community level where the Chhaupadi is most prevalence. Schools should provide knowledge about reproductive health to the students from an early age on. The authorities should ensure the implementations of laws against it. Most importantly, all the concerned authorities should work with people for them to be able to change the mind-set of gender and the Chhaupadi tradition through awareness programs.

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## 22. Appendix 1 NSD Approval



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Vår ref: 51860 / 3 / AGH

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

### TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 02.01.2017. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

51860

*Impacts on well being of women due to culture based gender discrimination: CHHAUPADI (Being Untouchable) tradition among women of far western Nepal'*  
*Case Study of the 'CHHAUPADI' tradition in Far Western Region, Nepal.*

*Behandlingsansvarlig*

*Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus, ved institusjonens øverste leder*

*Daglig ansvarlig*

*Ida Hydle*

*Student*

*Sarjana Kc*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.02.2018, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Kjersti Haugstvedt

Agnete Hessevik

*Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.*



The Data Protection Official presupposes that research is conducted in line with laws, regulations and guidelines in Nepal.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the project is to find out various challenges faced by women who are practicing traditional Chhaupadi (being untouchable) in Far Western district - Achham of Nepal.

### SAMPLE AND RECRUITMENT

The sample will be women practicing Chhaupadi, local political leaders and local health and social personal. The sample will be over 16 years old. According to the notification form, an informed consent will be collected from parents of participants who are 16-17 years old.

Your sample will be recruited among your personal network. Please note that when recruiting among your own connections, you should take extra care in attending to the aspect of voluntary consent in your request for participation.

### DATA COLLECTION

According to the notification form, you will collect data through personal interviews, observation and blog/social media/ internet.

You also write that you will take pictures from a distance of the Chhaupadi hut and other Chhaupadi practicing women (other than those women directly being interviewed).

We presuppose that you collect an informed consent from all persons who will or may be recognizable in you data material collected through interviews, photos, observation and blog/social media/ the Internet.

### INFORMED CONSENT

According to the notification form, participants will receive verbal information about the project and give consent to participation. In order to satisfy the requirement of informed consent of the law, the participants must be informed of the following:

- which institution is responsible (HiOA)
- the purpose of the project
- which methods will be used to collect personal data (interviews, photos, observation and/ or blog/social media/the Internet)
- what kind of information will be collected
- that information will be treated confidentially and who will have access to it



- that participation is voluntary and that one may withdraw at any time without stating a reason
- the expected end date of the project
- that all personal data will be anonymized when the project ends
- whether individuals will be recognizable in the final thesis/publication
- contact information of the student and supervisor

#### SENSITIVE INFORMATION

There will be registered sensitive information relating to ethnic origin or political/philosophical/religious beliefs and health.

#### THIRD PERSONS

There will be registered some information about third persons (e.g. family members). Please note that identifying information about third persons should only be registered when necessary for the scientific purpose of the project. The information should be reduced to a minimum and must be made anonymous in the publication. As long as the disadvantage for third persons is reduced in this way, the project leader can be exempted from the duty to inform third persons.

#### DATA SECURITY

The Data Protection Official presupposes that the researcher follows internal routines of Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus regarding data security.

#### END OF PROJECT

Estimated end date of the project is 01.02.2018. According to the notification form all collected data will be made anonymous by this date.

Making the data anonymous entails processing it in such a way that no individuals can be recognized. This is done by:

- deleting all direct personal data (such as names/lists of reference numbers)
- deleting/rewriting indirectly identifiable data (i.e. an identifying combination of background variables, such as residence/work place, age and gender)

## 23. Appendix 2 Consent form in English

Respected Participants,

My name is Sarjana Kc and I am master student in International Social Welfare and Health Policy at Oslo and Akershus University College in Oslo, Norway. I am doing research on

***'Impacts on social well-being of women due to the CHHAUPADI tradition (Being untouchable during menstruation) among the women of far western Nepal'*** as part of my study.

Hereby I would like to invite you to participate voluntarily in this project.

***The purpose of the project:*** The purpose of this thesis research is to find impacts on the social well-being of the women in the Achham district of far western region of the Nepal due to the Chhaupadi tradition, and to put better light on the plight of the women's condition due to this tradition.

***The study Method:*** Data will be collected through observation, semi-structured interview, serendipity data collection method and purposeful maximal sampling method. It will be conducted in-depth interview with 3 key participants, formal interview with 8 respondents, and informal discussions with various informants. Interview and discussion time will be variant can range from 15 minutes to 2 hours. The interview will be recorded at your consent, important facts will be written down in your consent, pictures of the participant and the field of study will be taken at your consent. Information regarding the Chhaupadi will also be collected through available journals, web information and published media reports.

***The information that will be collected:***

No personal information will be collected which are not relevant to this study. All the information will be related/relevant to the Chhaupadi practice.

***The confidentiality:***

This project has ethical clearance from NSD (Norwegian Social Science Data Services). Every participant in this study have right to privacy and confidentiality. ***The participation to this project is voluntary and one may withdraw at any time without stating a reason.*** The information collected will be used only for the purpose of this study. This study requires information about third person/family members which is related to the chhaupadi tradition. Information about third person will be taken only if necessary and only for the scientific purpose of the study.

No data/information will be provided to third party. No other person than myself will have access to detailed data. No data/information will be saved in any kind of format. No duplicate form of data will be produced. All the data will be deleted permanently from every kind of external record like written notes, voice records, videos, questionnaires-answers, after the required data is used in this study. Any pictures that will be published in this study will be used with your consent. If any data/pictures used in the final publication will be recognizable, it will be used with your consent. All the personal data will be anonymized in the final publication. Final date when personal data will be anonymized is 01.02.2018. Making the data anonymous will be carried out by

- Deleting all direct personal data (names/lists of reference numbers)
- Deleting/rewriting indirectly identifiable data such as residence/work place/age/gender.

### ***Voluntary participation***

Participation in this project is voluntary and you have right to decide if you want to participate in this study. You can withdraw from this project at any time without stating a reason to anyone. The interview will be carried away at the place where you feel most comfortable. It can be at your house, workplace, hotel, social gatherings, meeting points, Chhaupadi hut, at open area or at field. ***If you are willing to participate in this study, please read this form carefully, mark the box in which you give your consent and sign.***

If you have any questions or concerns about this project please contact me at mobile 009779851198579(Nepal), 004798037509 (Norway), email- [s300707@oslomet.no](mailto:s300707@oslomet.no) or my supervisor Ida Marie Hydle in email address- [idaahy@oslomet.no](mailto:idaahy@oslomet.no).

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I give my consent to publish my pictures on the final publication.

I give my consent to publish pictures of Chhaupadi hut in my area in the final publication.

I give my consent to publish my pictures with baby in final publication of this study.

I give my consent to publish information about my age/gender and work without mentioning name, in the final publication.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

***Signature of participant***

----- Signature of participant Date

***Signature of researcher***

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

----- Signature of researcher Date

## 24. Appendix 3 Consent form in Nepali

आदरणीय सहभागी महोदय ,

मेरो नाम सर्जना केसी हो र म अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय सामाजिक कल्याण र स्वास्थ्य नीतिमा ओस्लो अकर्शुश युनिवर्सिटी मा मास्टर विद्यार्थी हुँ। मेरो अध्ययनको भागको रूपमा म छाउपडी परम्पराहरूको कारण पश्चिमी नेपालका महिलाहरूको सामाजिक भलाइमा पार्ने प्रभाव को बिषय मा अनुसन्धान गर्दैछु। यसकारण म तपाईंलाई यस परियोजनामा स्वैच्छिक भाग लिन आमन्त्रित गर्न चाहन्छु।

यस परियोजनाको उद्देश्य:

यस थैसिस अनुसन्धानको उद्देश्य छाउपडी परम्पराको कारणले गर्दा नेपालका पश्चिमी अछाम जिल्लाका महिलाहरूको सामाजिक भलाइमा परेको प्रभाव को बारेमा अनुसन्धान गर्नु हो।

अध्ययन विधि:

डेटा अवलोकन, अर्ध संरचित साक्षात्कार, सेन्डिपिपिता डेटा संग्रह विधि र उद्देश्यपूर्ण अधिकतम नमूना विधि को माध्यम ले जानकारी एकत्र गरिनेछ। 3 प्रमुख सहभागीहरू, 8 उत्तरदाताहरूसँग औपचारिक साक्षात्कार, र विभिन्न संवाददाताहरूको साथ अनौपचारिक छलफलका साथ गहन साक्षात्कार सञ्चालन गरिनेछ। साक्षात्कार र छलफल को समय फरक हुनेछ 15 मिनेट देखि 2 घण्टाको दायरा रहनेछ। तपाईंको सहमतिमा जानकारी रेकर्ड गरिनेछ, महत्वपूर्ण तथ्यहरू तपाईंको सहमतिमा तल लिखित हुनेछ, सहभागीका तस्बिरहरू र अध्ययनको क्षेत्रलाई तपाईंको सहमतिमा लिइनेछ। छाउपडी सम्बन्धी जानकारी पनि उपलब्ध पत्रिकाहरू, वेब जानकारी र प्रकाशित मिडिया रिपोर्टहरू मार्फत जम्मा गरिनेछ।

यो जानकारी एकत्र गरिनेछ:

कुनै पनि व्यक्तिगत जानकारी सङ्कलन गरिने छैन जुन यो अध्ययनसँग सम्बन्धित छैन। सबै जानकारी छाउपडी अभ्यास संग सम्बन्धित / सान्दर्भिक हुनेछ।

गोपनीयता:

यो परियोजनासँग एनएसडी (नेर्वे सोशल विज्ञान डाटा सेवा) बाट नैतिक अनुमति छ। यस अध्ययनका प्रत्येक सहभागीसँग गोपनीयता र गोपनीयताको अधिकार छ। यस परियोजनाको सहभागिता स्वैच्छिक छ र कुनै कारण बिना कुनै पनि समयमा छोडेर जान सकिनेछ। एकत्रित जानकारी मात्र यो अध्ययनको उद्देश्यको लागि प्रयोग गरिनेछ। यो अध्ययनले तेस्रो व्यक्ति / परिवारका सदस्यहरूको बारे आवश्यक जानकारी लिने छ जुन केवल छाउपडी परंपरा संग सम्बन्धित छ र केवल अध्ययन को वैज्ञानिक उद्देश्य को लागि लिइनेछ।

तेस्रो पक्षमा कुनै डेटा / जानकारी प्रदान गरिनेछैन। मेरो भन्दा अरु अन्य व्यक्तिलाई विस्तृत डेटाको पहुँच हुने छैन। कुनै डेटा / जानकारी कुनै पनि प्रकारको ढाँचामा बचत हुनेछैन। डाटाको नक्कल गर्ने फारमको उत्पादन हुनेछैन। हरेक प्रकारको बाह्य रेकर्ड जस्तै लिखित टिप्पणीहरू, भ्वाईस रेकर्डहरू, भिडीयोहरू, प्रश्नप्रदहरू-जवाफहरू, यस अध्ययनमा आवश्यक डेटा प्रयोग गरेपछि सबै डाटाहरू स्थायी रूपमा मेटिनेछन्। यो अध्ययनमा प्रकाशित कुनै पनि चित्रहरू तपाईंको सहमतिको साथ प्रयोग गरिनेछ। यदि अन्तिम प्रकाशनमा प्रयोग गरिएको कुनै डेटा / चित्रहरू पहिचान हुने छ भने यो तपाईंको सहमतिको साथ प्रयोग गरिनेछ। सबै व्यक्तिगत डेटा अन्तिम प्रकाशनमा अज्ञात गरिनेछ। व्यक्तिगत डेटा अज्ञात गर्ने अन्तिम मिति 01.02.2018 छ।

- सबै प्रत्यक्ष व्यक्तिगत डेटा (सन्दर्भ संख्याहरूको सूचीहरू / सूचीहरू) अप्रत्यक्ष रूपमा पहिचानयोग्य डाटा / आवास / कार्य स्थान / उमेर / लिङ्ग को जानकारी मेटाइने छ।

स्वैच्छिक सहभागिता:

यस परियोजनामा सहभागिता स्वैच्छिक छ र तपाईं यस अध्ययनमा भाग लिन चाहानुहुन्छ भने निर्णय गर्न अधिकार छ। तपाईं कुनै पनि कारण बताउन बिना कुनै पनि समयमा यो परियोजनाबाट हट्न सक्नुहुन्छ। साक्षात्कार त्यो स्थानमा हुने छ जहाँ तपाईंले धेरै सहज महसुस गर्नुहुन्छ। यो तपाईंको घर, कार्यस्थल, होटल, सामाजिक सम्मेलनमा, बैठकका बिन्दुहरू, चौधरी नरम, खुला क्षेत्रमा वा क्षेत्रमा हुन सक्छ।

यदि तपाईं यस अध्ययनमा भाग लिन इच्छुक हुनुहुन्छ भने, कृपया यो फारम सावधानीपूर्वक पढ्नुहोस्, बक्सलाई चिन्ह लगाउनुहोस् जसमा तपाईं आफ्नो सहमति दिनुहुन्छ र आफ्नो हस्ताक्षर गर्नुहोस।

यदि तपाईंसँग यस परियोजनाको बारेमा कुनै प्रश्न वा चिन्ता छ भने कृपया मलाई 00977 98511 98579 (नेपाल) 00479803750 9 (नर्वे), ईमेल -3003007@oslomet.no वा मेरो पर्यवेक्षक आइडा मैरी हाइडले इमेल ठेगाना- idahy@oslomet.no मा सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस्।

- म यस अनुसन्धान अध्ययनमा ..... स्वैच्छिक भाग लिन सहमत छु।
- म बुझ्छु कि म अहिले भाग लिन सहमत छु भने, म कुनै पनि समय बिना कुनै पनि परिणाम बिना कुनै प्रश्नको जवाफ दिन वा रद्द गर्न सक्नेछु।
- मैले यस उद्देश्यको उद्देश्य र लेखन को प्रकृतिमा मलाई व्याख्या पाएको छु र मैले अध्ययनको बारेमा प्रश्न सोध्न मौका पाएको छु।
- मेरो फोटोलाई अन्तिम प्रकाशनमा प्रकाशित गर्न मेरो सहमति दिन्छु।
- म अन्तिम प्रकाशनमा मेरो क्षेत्रमा छाउपडी गोठ का चित्रहरू प्रकाशित गर्न मेरो सहमति दिन्छु।
- मेरो अध्ययनलाई यो अध्ययनको अन्तिम प्रकाशनमा बच्चाहरूसँग बच्चा प्रकाशित गर्न मेरो सहमति दिन्छु।
- म मेरो बारे मा अन्तिम प्रकाशन मा मेरो नाम बाहेक अरु जानकारी प्रकाशित गर्न मेरी सहमति दिन्छु।
- मैले बुझें कि मैले यस अध्ययनको लागि प्रदान गरेको जानकारी गोप्य रूपमा राखिन्छ। म बुझ्छु कि म अनुसन्धानमा संलग्न व्यक्तिलाई थप स्पष्टीकरण र सूचना खोज्न स्वतन्त्र छु।

सहभागीको हस्ताक्षर

----- सहभागी मितिको हस्ताक्षर

शोधकर्ताको हस्ताक्षर

म विश्वास गर्छु कि सहभागीले यस अध्ययनमा सहभागिता जनाउने सहमति जनाएको छ

----- शोधकर्ताको मिति हस्ताक्षर

## **25. Appendix 4- Interview Guide in English**

### **Interview Questions for Case Study of 'Chhaupadi' Tradition in Far Western Community, Nepal**

Age:

Sex:

Educational qualification:

Profession:

**List of questions for the study of 'Impacts on well-being of women due to the CHHAUPADI (Being untouchable during menstruation - culture based gender discrimination) tradition among women of far western Nepal'.**

#### **1. List of questions for the local people, local health professionals, political leaders and regional governmental officer:**

- What is your knowledge about the Chhaupadi tradition?
- Have heard about the Chhaupadi tradition or seen women practicing it? Or do you have any female family members or relatives who practice Chhaupadi?
- Have you ever got any complaints or reports from anyone which is concerned with the Chhaupadi?
- Do you know about any legal frameworks for Chhaupadi?
- Do you know or have you heard or seen any health-related problems faced by Chhaupadi practicing women?
- Do you want to share your personal view about positive and negative sides of Chhaupadi?

#### **2. List of Questions for the women involved in Chhaupadi practice:**

- What is menstruation according to you?
- Do you wear any special pads or clothes during menstruation?
- What is your perception on Chhaupadi?
- What is reason for practicing Chhaupadi? Is it your personal choice or it is something you are asked to practice?
- If you practice Chhaupadi how many days do you live in a hut?
- Do you live inside the hut until you finally leave or do you come outside in between?
- What do you do if you need to go to the toilet?

- Do you have any restrictions on daily life activities during Chhaupadi practice? If yes what can you do and what can you not do?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of the Chhaupadi practice according to you?
- Is there any person or society which has any influence on you for practicing Chhaupadi tradition?
- What is the structure of the Chhaupadi hut that you use? How is it built?
- Is it easy to live in the hut during menstruation?
- Do you face any challenges or difficulties to live in the shed?
- Have you experienced any health-related problems during your stay in hut? Did you ever get ill during short stay in the hut? If yes what kind of illness have you experienced?
- Do you visit health care professionals like a doctor, nurse or health assistants in case you get health problems during practicing the Chhaupadi ?
- Do you feel stressed during the stay in the hut during menstruation?
- Do you become upset or angry or sad or emotional or weak during the stay in the hut while having menstruation?
- would you send your daughter to the Chhaupadi hut during her menstruation?
- Do you get any pressure from male members of the family or the society to follow Chhaupadi?
- Do you know any person or place where you can complain about lack of help?

**3. List of additional Questions for women living in the Chhaupadi hut with new born babies:**

- Is it your first time to stay in the hut with a new born baby or have you experienced this before?
- How many days will you stay in the hut?
- Are you allowed to come outside in between or do you have to stay continuously inside the hut until you are allowed to come outside?
- What do you do if you need to go to the toilet or when your baby passes stool or urine?
- Do you use diapers or baby clothes for stool and urine?
- Do you know about hygiene or sanitation that you should follow for you and the new born baby?
- What do you do to maintain sanitation inside the hut?
- What kind of food do you eat during living in the hut?



- Do you make food yourself or can you get it provided from family members?
- Do you know about nutritional requirement for mothers and new born babies?
- What do you do if you or your baby fall sick?
- Did you or your baby fall sick while living in the hut previously?
- Do your family members visit you in the hut?

## 26. Appendix 5 Interview guide in Nepali

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शुद्ध-पश्चिममा चलन चल्तीमा रहेको छाउपडी प्रथा सम्बन्धी अध्ययनको लागि तयार

गरिएको प्रश्नावली विवरण:-

१. नाम:-
२. उमेर:-
- ३.सलिङ्ग
- ४.अध्यायन
- ५.पेशा

नेपालको सुदूर पश्चिम क्षेत्रमा प्रचलित छाउपडी प्रथाको कारणले महिलाको शारीरिक तथा मानसिक स्वास्थ्यमा पर्न गएको प्रतिकूल असर तथा सो प्रथाले निम्त्याएको लैंगिक विभेदको वारेमा गर्न लागिएको अध्यापनको प्रयोगार्थ तयार भएको प्रश्नावलीको विवरण

भाग -१

स्थानीय व्यक्ति स्थानीय कर्मी, राजनैतिक प्रतिनिधि र सरकारी कर्मचारीको लागि सोधिने प्रश्नहरू:-

१. तपाईंलाई छाउपडी प्रथा वारे ज्ञान छ -१
२. तपाईंले छाउपडी प्रथा सुन्नु भएको छ वा देख्नु भएको छ ? तपाईंको घरमा मोही महिलाले सो प्रथामा वस्नु भएको छ ?
३. तपाईंलाई कोही कसैले छाउपडी प्रथाको विरोधमा केही उजुरी गर्नु भएको छ ?
४. छाउपडी प्रथा सम्बन्धी कानूनी व्यवस्था वारेमा तपाईंलाई थाहा छ ?
५. तपाईंले छाउपडी प्रथा मान्ने गरेको कोही महिलालाई स्वास्थ्य प्रतिकूल भएको देख्नु भएको छ ।
६. तपाईंले छाउपडी प्रथाको पक्ष र विपक्ष सम्बन्धी अमलाई भन्न वताउन चाहानु हुन्छ ?

छाउपडी प्रथा अभ्यास गरिरहेका महिलालाई सोधिने प्रश्नहरू ?

१. तपाईंको विचारमा महिनावरी वा रजस्वाला भनेको के हो ?

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२. तपाई महिनावारी भएको वेला केही प्याड अथवा कपडा प्रयोग गर्नु भएको छ ?
३. छाउपडी सम्बन्धी तपाईको धारणा के रहेको छ ?
४. छाउपडी प्रथा (चलन) अभ्यास गर्नको कारण के होला भे यो तपाईको आफ्नो चाहाना हो की अरु कसैले जोड गरेको हो ?
५. यदि तपाई छाउपडी प्रथा मान्नु हुन्छ भने छाउपडी गोठमा कति दिन वस्नु हुन्छ ?
६. तपाई महिनावारी नसकीएसम्म छाउपडी गोठ भित्रै वस्नु हुन्छ की विच विचमा निस्कनु हुन्छ ?
७. यदि तपाईलाई शौचालय जान पर्ने भएमा के गर्नु हुन्छ ?
८. तपाई छाउपडीमा रहेको अभ्यासका समयमा तपाईको दैनिक कृयाकलापमा के के गर्नु हुन्छ के के गर्नु हुँदैन ?
९. छाउपडी प्रथाको वारेमा सवल पक्ष र दुर्वल पक्ष के के रहेको छ ?
१०. छाउपडी प्रथालाई प्रोत्साहान गर्ने व्यक्ति वा समाज कुन हो ?
११. छाउपडी वस्ने गोठको बनावट संरचना वारेमा तपाईलाई थाहा छ ? के वाट बनेको हुन्छ ?
१२. महिनावारी भएको समयमा छाउपडी गोठमा वस्न सजिलो हुन्छ ?
१३. छाउपडी गोठमा बस्दा तपाईलाई के समस्या या चुनौतीको सामाना गर्नु पर्दछ ?
१४. तपाईलाई छाउपडी गोठमा बस्दा कुनै प्रकारको स्वास्थ्य समस्या देखा परेको छ ? के विरामी पर्नु भएको छ ? यदि छ भने कस्तो प्रकारको विरामी पुर्न भएको थियो ?
१५. तपाई छाउपडी गोठमा बस्दा यदि विरामी हुनु भएको हो भने के तपाई कुनै डाक्टर वा स्वास्थ्य सम्बन्धी सहायताको लागि जानु भएको थियो ?
१६. के तपाईले छाउपडी गोठमा बस्दा तनावको सामना गर्नु परेको छ ?
१७. तपाई महिनावारी भएको वेला छाउपडी गोठमा बस्दा दिक्क, निरास, रिसाहा, कमजोर, दुःखी के कस्तो महसुस गर्नु भएको छ ?
१८. के तपाई आफ्नो छोरीलाई छाउपडी गोठमा पठाउनु चाहानु हुन्छ ?

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१९. के तपाईलाई तपाईको घरको कोही पुरुष सदस्यले वा समाजले छाउपडी प्रथा अङ्गाल्न प्रयोग गरेको छ ?
२०. के तपाईलाई छाउपडी प्रथाको विरोधको लागि उजरी गर्ने ठाउँको बारेमा जानकारी छ ?

भाग- ३

भर्खरै जन्मेको बच्चा सहित छाउपडी प्रथामा बस्दा अभ्यास गरिरहेका महिलालाई सोधिने प्रश्न

१. तपाईको लागि बच्चा सहित छाउपडी बस्नु परेको पहिलो पटक हो ? वा अगाडि पनि बस्नु भएको थियो ?
२. तपाई कति दिन बस्नु पर्ने हुन्छ ?
३. के तपाईलाई छाउपडी गोठमा बस्दा बाहिर निस्कन दिइन्छ ? वा पुरा दिन भित्र बस्नु पर्छ ?
४. शौचालय जानु पर्ने अवस्थामा के गर्नु हुन्छ ?
५. के तपाईलाई बच्चाको स्वास्थ्य तथा सरसफाई सम्बन्धी ज्ञान छ ?
६. छाउपडी गोठ भित्र सरसफाई व्यवस्था गर्न के गर्नु हुन्छ ? वा कसरी सरसफाईको व्यवस्था गर्ने गर्नु भएको छ ?
७. तपाई छाउपडी गोठमा बस्दाको समय कस्तो खानेकुरा खाने गर्नु भएको छ ?
८. के तपाई खाना आफैँ पकाउनु हुन्छ की परिवारको सदस्यले पकाएर दिनु हुन्छ ?
९. तपाईलाई आमा र बच्चाको पोषणको बारेमा जानकारी छ ?
१०. तपाईको बच्चा बिरामी परेको समयमा के गर्नु हुन्छ ?
११. के तपाई वा तपाईको बच्चा छाउपडी गोठमा बस्दा पहिला कुनै समय बिरामी भएका थिए ?
१२. के तपाईको परिवारको सदस्य छाउपडी गोठभित्र प्रवेश गर्दछन ?