

Superstition Chhaupadi

I am a woman. A very strong woman. living up in the countryside of Nepal and witnessing so many unhealthy and unhygienic superstitious belief encourage me to write this article. The issue I would like to highlight in this article is the superstitious form of menstrual taboo, which is called Chhaupadi, which is prevalent in Nepal. Chhaupadi pratha is a tradition that banished menstruating girls and women from their house and force them to live in hut which also known as 'chhau' in local language. Women live with poor sanitation facilities, and poor healthcare. The superstitious belief labels girls and women who are menstruating or experiencing their periods, as impure. As a result, they are prohibited from participating in various activities surrounding the family. The people believing this superstition and exercising it, hail from the Western Part of Nepal, where this is an established, and regular practice (Bagale, 2020, p.1). it is hard to believe that such superstitious beliefs are still in practice, in the 21st century, irrespective of where it is occurring.

Being a girl and hailing from Nepal, I know the pain and humiliation this causes to all women. I personally experienced the superstitious culture "chaupaddi" as a teenager in Nepal. As a child, I would see my mother leave the house every month for a few days. What surprised me was that my father did not go to even ask her where she is. She would be away for a week, and then return, and continued with her life as if nothing had happened. Whenever I asked her where she would go, she would not answer, and she would often start crying. My father did not tell me when I asked him anything. It was in school that I eventually found out what was going on, and it hurt me deeply to see my mother being treated this way. What I also found out was that all women of our town were treated in the

same way and were ostracized from society when they were menstruating. Even the most traumatizing time is when I first started menstruating, my parents sent me to a small hut in a nearby village, away from my home for 12 days. They claimed I could not see my dad or my brother and should be alone during this traumatizing time. This kept going on, every month, for every period. They believed that my ancestors would be angry, or disasters would occur if I did not do this.

I was not allowed to go out and play when I had my period, because of the established custom of Chhaupadi in the town I resided in. Even at home, I was not allowed to go into the kitchen if I was hungry, and was treated as a disease-ridden bag of filth, that everyone avoids to not catch anything. I have seen the elder females of this town quietly accept the rules enforced in society, even if it is completely devoid of logic. The leaders of the town, who are male, have a misogynistic attitude towards the women of their population. This occurs because the people from this country are not aware of what is happening outside of Nepal and another reason is male dominated society. I hail from an undeveloped corner of the world, where we cannot share the atrocities being perpetrated on women because we do not have the means to do so. It is crucial to spread awareness regarding the matter, as this kind of thought can only occur to someone who lacks a decent education. The gender-biased notions are allowing misogynistic individuals to oppress and treat women unfairly in my hometown. I have provided this context because it shows the plight of all women hailing in the regions where Chhaupadi is still prevalent. We should strive towards a society that promotes equality and eradicates all forms of prevalent discrimination.

I will start by explaining the menstrual superstitions, and their execution on women of all ages. I will examine research conducted to determine the negative physical and

psychological effects that chhaupadi has had on the women of Nepal. I will follow this up with the reasons making this an important issue to address and discuss the issue in detail and provide historical background for the origin of these superstitions. I will also present relevant data and statistics as and where applicable and follow up by identifying the demographic that is impacted and explain why my perspective is necessary to address the issue. I will identify the factors contribute to the survival of such discriminatory superstitions then present approaches to eradicate this practice.

Chhaupadi was prominent in the western part of Nepal, however, the tradition of chhaupadi bans women from their homes, and must live in some other form of dwelling. Some have labeled them as menstruation huts (Nour, 2020, p.2) Women of all ages are impacted in regions where this belief is practiced. According to the statistics, I have presented above, the affected demographic lies in the years, from the beginning of a woman's menstrual cycle to menopause. Women aged between 12-49 are the key demographic targets of Chhaupadi.

Chhaupadi is a discriminatory religious belief, which has its roots embedded in Hindu mythology. This superstitious belief stems from the myth that Lord Indra cursed women with menstruation. The beliefs that have survived till this day are that a menstruating women would bring ruin to whatever she touches (Godley, 2020, p.28). It is also believed that if a menstruating woman reads a book, then she would anger the Hindu Goddess of Knowledge, Saraswathi. It is also associated with childbirth, as they must spend a few weeks with their newborns in these so-called menstruation huts.

Chhaupadi is not only responsible for restricting our rights but is also a health hazard, and women are exposed to various life-threatening situations, or fall sick from the harsh conditions they are made to live in. The harsh living conditions range from poor ventilation to lack of heat.

There have also been incidents of rape on women, practicing Chhaupadi. Women also develop reproductive health problems and UTI. As a result of practicing this, heinous belief.

The data and statistics available, do not provide a clear picture of the ill effects of Chhaupadi, however, it can be said for sure that girls and women practicing Chhaupadi are dying every year (Gettleman, Sharma & Adhikari, 2021, p.4). The few cases of this happening are listed as follows:

- The death of an 11-year-old girl in 2010, from dehydration because her family refused to take her to a hospital out of fear of becoming impure after touching her.
- The deaths of 2 women from carbon monoxide poisoning, because of lighting fires to keep warm in 2016.
- A 14-year-old girl dying due to a cold-related illness while staying at a menstrual hut in 2017.
- A 19-year-old woman died from snake bites, while they were exiled in 2017.
- A mother of 35 and her two sons aged 9 and 12 respectively died from smoke inhalation, in 2019.
- A 21-year-old woman dying from suffocation.

The two factors that I have created or contributed to this issue, are the misogynistic attitudes and the superstitious and religion attitudes of the community towards science. Misogynistic attitudes are prevalent in Nepal. (Bam, 2020, p.6). Women have been rejected for generations; however, some have completed their education, practice these beliefs, passionately. It is simply because society predominantly must be misogynistic, and women need to have restrictions based on them. Rejection of science and superstition serve to keep women controlled.

Rejection of scientifically proven facts, in favor of a religious practice that was established years ago, for baseless reasons. Women were not allowed to receive education, which again

displays the prevalence of misogyny at play here (Mukherjee *et al.* 2020, p.5). Science has established that this occurs to all women of all ethnicities, yet those who practice these beliefs sternly believe that can be de they are doing God's work this is happening due to superstition. Superstition is a belief or practice that arises from lack of knowledge, fear of the unknown, or any misconception regarding an idea in society. In many countries across the globe, superstition is an important part of culture. Some superstitions have evolved to promote mental satisfaction, and some have evolved as a social taboo. It has deep roots in our society, which makes getting rid of superstition not an easy task. In other words, it has turned into a social malady

The religious and superstitious belief that this was a curse placed on women by Indra, but I believe that no God is merciless enough to leave women to die, because of a biological function occurring in their bodies. The recurring deaths of girls and women make it clear enough that those practicing such beliefs either do not know the risk and damage it does to women, or they just do not care at all about women, even if they are their own families (Baumann *et al.* 2021, p.8).

These misinformed notions end up being fatal for girls and women of varying ages, in regions where these beliefs are practiced. A lack of awareness and education is also a reason that this custom persists. Women are not made aware that this is a normal functioning of our bodies, and that it is an integral part of our reproductive system. Women need to be extra careful at these times, and must be in healthy environments, and must practice healthy habits to ensure that they do not develop any diseases (Pandit *et al.* 2021, p.26). Instead of being taken care of, women are ostracized from society and are made to live in harsh conditions.

The Supreme Court of Nepal has banned the practice of Chhaupadi, the year 2005, but it is still in effect because of the number of people who believe in the custom. It isolates women

from society allowing misogyny to be established and prevail. The lack of widespread awareness and education amongst citizens is another causal factor. Most of the people hailing from my hometown are uneducated and blindly believe in religion.

The issue is being caused and is exacerbated by the incivility of other members of society, especially males. They are forcing women to follow such rules and making them endure living conditions that could potentially end up being fatal for them. Women have died all over Nepal because the custom was allowed to continue. Women who have survived, and entered menopause are also not able to say anything against this practice, as their opinions are considered important by other members of society. Women are already being treated as prisoners, and further incivility inflicted on women would amount to nothing more than torture.

I believe that the indifference harbored by our society towards women is the main causal factor of this tradition still being carried out. It seems like Men simply don't care about what women experience because of the religious beliefs that they enforce, and this attitude has allowed the practice of Chhaupadi to endure through the years, since its inception. Most of the educated men are also follow this because they are brainwashed. The governments have made efforts towards ending this practice, and after the practice was condemned by the Supreme Court of Nepal, there have been no new complaints regarding this practice. Their efforts have not been enough to eradicate the practice of Chhaupadi from the communities of Nepal.

The main contributors to the issue of Chhaupadi, are the lack of education, the strong beliefs of religion harbored by Nepalese citizens, the misogynistic attitude among men in Nepalese communities. Additionally, I also blamed the political leaders of Nepal, who have taken so long to act against this ridiculous custom. The lax attitude of the government allowed this custom to prevail and for men to exercise it time and time again, not concerned about the many fatalities; they leave in their wake. Another causal factor is the lack of opposition from women

themselves. They have mostly accepted such customs, and those who resisted were treated violently, being forced to obey the religious customs, established, and implemented (Joshi & Maharjan, 2020, p.168).

The two possible solutions that I believe can potentially eradicate the practice of Chhaupadi are to promote awareness and education regarding its adverse effects and the strict enforcement of laws against Chhaupadi by the government of Nepal.

The first step toward eradicating chhaupadi is to increase awareness of its adverse effects on women in Nepalese communities. Spreading awareness can be used to appeal to the civility of Nepalese citizens to stop the practice of Chhaupadi in Nepal (Shields, 2020, p.32). Civility defined as formal courtesy exercised in speech and aware. Civility is common politeness we exercise with other human beings. Civility should allow women and men being viewed and treated as equals. It can be used to appeal to the humanity present in individuals to enforce values of equality amongst Nepalese Citizen to stop the practice of chhaoupadi in Nepal. If people are made aware of the fatalities occurring because of this religious practice, then they can potentially exercise their civility and stop it. It would be easier to appeal to the civility of an educated person, as compared to someone uneducated.

Additionally, education must be provided to all citizens to eradicate such policies from the fabric of Nepalese society. People must be made aware of the biological reasons for menstrual cycles in women. This can reduce the occurrence of Chhaupadi in Nepal. The government must make efforts and allow non-governmental organizations to promote awareness regarding the negative consequences that Chhaupadi has on a woman, and especially growing women. The education that will be provided to citizens must emphasize science, to ensure the eradication of such religious customs.

The lack of education amongst members of Nepalese societies is one of the primary reasons for Chhaupadi to have endured over the years. The government has not been able to provide sufficient education to make its citizens aware of the biological importance of menstruation. It is the means of reproduction and is the reason that humans have survived through all these years. This education must be imparted to members of such communities. The lack of awareness regarding the plight of women practicing “Chhaupadi” must also be expressed and explained to reduce and possibly eliminate this practice. The ignorance exercised over so many years must end and replaced with an informed awareness regarding the issues.

In addition to providing education, the government must enact and enforce strict laws against the practice of Chhaupadi and making efforts to eradicate this practice from society. Law enforcement must enforce these laws to ensure that this practice is completely ended. The punishment must be made severe and should not be restricted to paying financial fines. The laws must dictate strict action to be taken against the perpetrators of this so-called religious custom.

The government has not made significant efforts in the past to ensure that Chhaupadi is eradicated from all Nepalese households. The lack of law enforcement condemning Chhaupadi and other such discriminatory religious practices has allowed it to endure through history (Baumann *et al.* 2021, p.24). The government must ensure the safety of all its citizens, without being partial, and by exercising an anti-discriminatory attitude.

The awareness that can potentially stem from promoting education will help in reducing the instances of Chhaupadi even further than it has been curtailed until now. Additionally, with the implementation of laws condemning and punishing the execution of such customs, it can be assured that the practice of Chhaupadi is eradicated from our society. The government must ensure that these solutions are implemented in the entirety of their nation.

The practice of Chhaupadi has resulted in negative consequences for the mental and physical well-being of women across the entirety of Nepal. It has also resulted in many both disclosed and undisclosed fatalities. Most regions have abolished the practice, however, in some regions of Western Nepal, this practice continues. The lack of awareness and education amongst members of Nepalese society has become a causal factor in the survival of this custom (Khadka, 2020, p.84). Another contributing factor is the misogynistic and careless attitude that Nepalese citizens have towards the lives of the female members of their society.

The solution I have presented is to promote education in all regions of Nepal and promote awareness regarding the plight of women still practicing Chhaupadi. The reinforcement of laws punishing this practice will also prevent people from exercising it. Their thoughts will change because of the education imparted to them.

In my opinion, the women of Nepal, and around the world have suffered enough, and this practice calls for corrective action. The fatalities of women because of poor health conditions are a matter of shame for our nation. This makes it important for both the government and the citizens of any nation to understand the importance of eliminating such practices, and moving towards, a society of equality.

References

- Adhikari, R. (2020). Bringing an end to deadly “menstrual huts” is proving difficult in Nepal. *BMJ*, 368.
- Bam, A. B. (2020). Negotiating pathways for the continuation of chhaupadi system in remote parts of Nepal. *Contemporary Research: An Interdisciplinary Academic Journal*, 4(1), 3-14.
- Bagale, K. B. (2020). Is Menstruation Still a Dark Side of the Society in 21th Century in Nepal?. *Siddhajyoti Interdisciplinary Journal*, 1.
- Baumann, S. E., Lhaki, P., Terry, M. A., Sommer, M., Cutlip, T., Merante, M., & Burke, J. G. (2021). Beyond the menstrual shed: exploring caste/ethnic and religious complexities of menstrual practices in Far-West Nepal. *Women's Reproductive Health*, 8(1), 1-28.
- Baumann, S. E., Merante, M. M., Wilttrout, C. T., Cutlip, T., Finkel, M., Maharjan, B., ... & Burke, J. G. (2021). Is criminalization the answer? Perspectives of community members and police on menstrual seclusion policy in Far-West Nepal. *Health Policy and Planning*.
- GETTLEMAN, J.; SHARMA, B.; ADHIKARI, R. Nepal's Grim Superstition, Known to Lead to a Death by Shame. (Cover story). New York Times, [s. l.], v. 167, n. 57999, p. A1–A6, 20 jun. 2018. 57999.
- Disponível em: <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.seattleu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=130236862&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Acesso em: 9 jul. 2021.
- Godley, B. Z. (2020). Chhaupadi in Nepal: traditions, perceptions, and contemporary practices.

- Joshi, P. R., & Maharjan, R. K. (2020). Exploring perceptions and experiences of community people toward chhaupadi culture in Nepal: Social-ecological approach. *Journal of the Scientific Society*, 47(3), 168.
- Khadka, N. (2020). ChhaupadiPratha: Women's Experiences and Perceptions about Social Suffering. *Molung Educational Frontier*, 81-92.
- Mukherjee, A., Lama, M., Khakurel, U., Jha, A. N., Ajose, F., Acharya, S., ... & Shrestha, S. (2020). Perception and practices of menstruation restrictions among urban adolescent girls and women in Nepal: a cross-sectional survey. *Reproductive health*, 17, 1-10.
- Nour, N. M. (2020). Menstrual huts: A health and human rights violation.
- Shields, W. (2020). Proposal for a Federal Directive to Support the Empowering Nepali Women Initiative to Help Eliminate Chhaupadi in Nepal by 2030 by Training Men and Boys about Gender Equality and Social Norms.
- Pandit, C., Singh, A. K., Parajuli, A., & Pandey, A. (2021). Misconception and Effect of Menstruation (Chhaupadi) and Delivery on Women's Health in Bajura, District Nepal. *Europasian Journal of Medical Sciences*, 3(1), 24-29.
- Thapa, S., & Aro, A. R. (2021). 'Menstruation means impurity': multilevel interventions are needed to break the menstrual taboo in Nepal. *BMC Women's Health*, 21(1), 1-5.