

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Overview

This study is about beliefs on existence of witchcraft, its social dimensions and consequences of witchcraft accusation in Nepal. Social dimensions have been shaped and cultivated through a multitude of social processes. In order to comprehend these processes, it is imperative to possess an understanding of various socio-economic aspects within a given society, including literacy levels, economic statuses, cultural influences, and power dynamics. Against this backdrop, beliefs pertaining to supernatural forces, their associated rituals, and the ensuing calamitous outcomes have pervaded across time and geographical boundaries.

Women around the world are subjected to domination and exploitation in diverse manifestations, with detrimental social practices constituting a prominent contributing factor (Lerner, 1986). These practices are deeply entrenched within societal challenges such as low literacy rates, the caste system, male hegemony, and religious convictions (Veronica, 1979). Furthermore, the belief in witchcraft and black magic also finds its origins in these injurious social practices (Paudel, 2011).

The allegation of witchcraft, an exceedingly inhumane custom, is not confined solely to developing nations. Even in developed countries, there exist occurrences where specific communities persist in embracing the notion of supernatural abilities and magical powers. As stated by the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (Edmund, 1968), the term "witchcraft" denotes the belief in a mystical power possessed by certain individuals, enabling them to cause harm without resorting to magical or spiritual aid. Nevertheless, some employ the term to characterize malevolent acts of

sorcery. Numerous communities worldwide have a history of labeling, targeting, and persecuting women as witches. The accusation of witchcraft is prevalent in Nepal as well, making it no exception to this disturbing trend.

These women are often accused of practicing black magic, casting spells, or causing harm to others through supernatural means. The belief in witchcraft is deeply rooted in cultural and traditional beliefs, where women are seen as the bearers of evil and the cause of misfortune. The reasons behind these accusations vary, but they often stem from personal conflicts, jealousy, or the desire to control and oppress women. In many cases, women who are widowed, elderly, or have no male relatives to protect them are particularly vulnerable to these accusations.

Once accused, these women face severe social ostracism and are subjected to physical and psychological abuse. They are often beaten, tortured, and even killed in brutal ways, all in the name of eradicating witchcraft from the community. The violence is not only perpetrated by individuals but also by mobs who take matters into their own hands, fueled by superstition and fear. The lack of education and awareness about women's rights and gender equality further perpetuates this cycle of violence. The deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and societal structures contribute to the marginalization and victimization of women, allowing the practice of accusing and persecuting witches to persist.

Efforts have been made by local and international organizations to address this issue and provide support to the victims. Awareness campaigns, legal interventions, and community dialogues have been initiated to challenge the deeply rooted beliefs and practices that perpetuate witchcraft accusations. However, progress has been slow, and the fear of being labeled a witch continues to

haunt many women in Nepal. The government's response to this issue has been inadequate, with limited resources and a lack of political will to address the root causes of witchcraft accusations.

To truly eradicate this abhorrent practice, a comprehensive approach is needed. This includes strengthening legal frameworks to protect women from witchcraft accusations, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, and investing in education and awareness programs to challenge harmful beliefs and stereotypes.

Only through collective efforts can Nepal, and other communities plagued by witchcraft accusations, break free from this distressing trend and ensure the safety and dignity of all women. Majority of rural Nepali population grips deeply rooted, socially and culturally constructed views in witchcraft, they also often carry out or undergo irrational practices, rituals and follow related traditions (INSEC, 2012). According to an article the concept of witchcraft have been treated as a cultural ideology, a means of explaining human misfortune by blaming it on either a supernatural entity or a known person in the community (Pritchard, 1976).

There have been frequent media coverages related to witchcraft accusation and brutal torture. According to an annual report of Crime Investigation Department, Nepal Police, a total of 48 cases of witchcraft allegations were registered in 2019. It was 43 in 2018 and 24 in 2017 (CID, 2019). The number of accusations could be much higher than these figures because many cases remain unreported due to various reasons. The majority of accused are females, but rarely, also male. The practice is more prevalent in the southern plains of Terai than in the highlands of Nepal (Adhikari, 2014).

The vast majority of allegations of witchcraft in Nepal are based on a variety of reasons, including the purported ability to cause illness in individuals or animals, the casting of spells on food or

beverages, and the infliction of sickness upon children. Furthermore, it is widely believed that epidemics are also linked to the practice of black magic. Unfortunately, the unjust accusation of marginalized members of the community, particularly women, continues to persist to this day. Typically, the victims are impoverished elderly women, independent-minded young women, widows, women from lower castes, or a combination of these groups. In Nepali society, witchcraft is often held responsible for material losses, ailments in livestock, and other predicaments, in addition to mental and physical illnesses in humans (Pandey, 2013). Within these vulnerable groups, widows are especially prone to being accused of practicing witchcraft with the intention of causing the death of their own spouses. The majority of these accusations are accompanied by physical violence against the accused and forced ingestion of excrement. These individuals who are accused may also endure public humiliation, such as being publicly displayed in a state of nudity, their faces covered in soot or battery powder, and forced to wear a necklace made of shoes. They are subjected to the degrading act of consuming excrement, as well as being forcibly shaved, beaten, tortured, and ultimately banished from the community (INSEC, 2012). The persistent occurrence of harassment and murder of women on the grounds of practicing witchcraft continues to be a deeply concerning issue in Nepal. Witchcraft is widely perceived as a prevalent occurrence among individuals who possess harmful and catastrophic supernatural abilities, specifically referred to as witches and wizards. These purported powers empower them to carry out malicious acts, including the creation of natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, and floods, as well as the infliction of diseases and other health ailments upon both humans and animals. They are also held responsible for epidemics, deaths, crop failures, and other calamities (Grigaite, 2018). According to (Adhikari, 2014), the majority of individuals accused of witchcraft in Nepal are women, while men are only occasionally implicated in such accusations. A study (Chudali, 2021)

has concluded that the major issues associated with the problem of witchcraft include illiteracy, unemployment, gender discrimination, lax enforcement of laws, and misinterpretation of religious beliefs. The anti-witchcraft (Crime and Punishment) Act of 2014 was specifically implemented to address the issue of violence stemming from accusations of witchcraft, through the introduction of stringent measures (Nepal Law Commission, 2014). The passing of the Criminal Code Bill in 2017 further delineated penalties for the inhumane treatment of individuals accused of practicing witchcraft. However, despite these legislative efforts, numerous newspaper reports and police cases continue to highlight the persistence of witchcraft accusations within society. Particularly prevalent in the Tarai region, with lesser occurrences in the Hill region and the least in the Mountain region, cases of women being subjected to torture under the pretext of being witches remain alarmingly common (Adhikari, 2014). Academics specializing in the realm of social sciences have frequently noted a correlation between oppressive socio-politico-economic circumstances and the prevalence of witchcraft within diverse societies across historical periods. Consistently, newspaper reports indicate that allegations of witchcraft predominantly focus on individuals hailing from impoverished and marginalized backgrounds. Astonishingly, however, no scholarly investigation has been undertaken to delve into the connection between social class and accusations of witchcraft. To address this research gap, the present study aims to analyze the practices of witchcraft and their association with social class.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problem statement serves to define the research problem that will be addressed. Its primary objective is to specifically identify the issues at hand in order to facilitate a more objective resolution through research.

The issue of witchcraft accusations and the resulting violence in Nepal is deeply rooted in cultural beliefs and superstitions. Witchcraft accusations are often based on rumors, jealousy, or personal vendettas, and they disproportionately target women. These accusations can have devastating consequences for the accused, who often face severe physical and mental abuse. In many cases, women accused of witchcraft are subjected to physical violence, including beatings, torture, and even murder. These acts of violence are often carried out by community members who believe that the accused possesses supernatural powers and is responsible for causing harm or misfortune. The accused may be forced to endure public humiliation, isolation, and ostracism from their communities.

The impact of witchcraft accusations goes beyond the immediate physical harm. The accused often suffer from severe psychological trauma, experiencing fear, anxiety, and depression. They may also face social and cultural distress, as their reputation is tarnished, and they are stigmatized within their communities. This can lead to further isolation and marginalization, making it difficult for them to access support and resources. The issue of witchcraft accusations and violence is not unique to Nepal. Similar practices and beliefs exist in various regions of the world, albeit with different cultural contexts and manifestations. In some societies, witchcraft accusations are used as a means of controlling and suppressing women, reinforcing gender inequalities, and maintaining social order. These accusations serve as a tool for exerting power and control over marginalized individuals, particularly women, who are often seen as vulnerable and easily scapegoated.

Addressing the issue of witchcraft accusations and violence requires a multi-faceted approach. It is crucial to raise awareness about the harmful consequences of these accusations and challenge

the underlying beliefs and superstitions that perpetuate them. Education and community engagement programs can play a vital role in debunking myths and promoting tolerance and understanding.

Legal frameworks must also be strengthened to ensure that those who perpetrate violence under the pretext of witchcraft are held accountable. Efforts should be made to provide support and protection for the victims, including access to medical and psychological services, as well as legal assistance.

Furthermore, empowering women and promoting gender equality is essential in combating witchcraft accusations. By addressing the root causes of gender-based violence and discrimination, societies can work towards creating a more inclusive and just environment where witchcraft accusations have no place. In conclusion, the issue of witchcraft accusations and the resulting violence in Nepal is a grave concern that requires urgent attention. It is crucial to challenge the superstitious beliefs and cultural practices that perpetuate these accusations

They face social ostracization, physical abuse, consumption of human waste, burns inflicted by hot spoons on various parts of their bodies, forced contact with red-hot irons, inhalation of chili smoke (particularly by witch-doctors known as Jhankris), invasive procedures on their private organs, and public humiliation. Given these circumstances, it is unsurprising that they may confess to the accusations (Paudel, 2011). The status of women in Nepal has been a subject of discussion for a considerable period of time, and it is expected to remain a topic of discourse for many more decades to come. Throughout history, Nepal has predominantly been a patriarchal society where women have generally been subordinate to men. Men have traditionally held leadership positions within the family and have been considered superior to women. Additionally, social norms and

values have been biased in favor of men. This strong bias towards sons in society has resulted in discrimination against daughters from birth, depriving them of equal opportunities for holistic development (Bhattarai, 2014). Women in Nepal have historically confronted significant levels of poverty, social exclusion, and marginalization as a consequence of their gender. These disadvantages are further intensified for women who are part of ethnic minority communities and lower caste groups.

In Nepal, girls and women, particularly those residing in rural areas, are persistently subjected to discrimination and violence due to the prevailing patriarchal culture and their limited access to education, vocational training, psychological assistance, and economic opportunities. According to a report by Basnet (Basnet, 2020), one of the earliest forms of discrimination against women in Nepal was the practice of Sati, which was abolished by Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shmsher. However, despite its abolition, the patriarchal situation persisted, resulting in limited access to resources and opportunities for women. Women in Nepal face numerous challenges, including gender-based violence, child marriage, trafficking, transitional justice, unequal representation and participation in decision-making processes (Basnet, 2020). Additionally, witchcraft accusations serve as another form of gender-based violence, which is viewed as a social malady in Nepal, even in the modern era.

The socio-cultural dynamics of Nepali society have long been characterized by a hierarchical division based on caste, a system that also intersects with class hierarchy. The construction and perception of witchcraft in Nepal appear to be significantly influenced by various factors, including gender, caste/ethnicity, and class. In a broader context, allegations of witchcraft have become a tool used against the most vulnerable members of society, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, physically weak, uneducated, elderly, and women. This phenomenon

is particularly prevalent in Nepal, where the caste system is deeply rooted, and individuals accused of witchcraft often belong to lower castes, including the dalit or untouchable community (Paudel, 2011). The disproportionate number of lower caste individuals among those accused of witchcraft and subjected to violent persecution can be attributed to their social and economic marginalization (Adhikari, 2014). Furthermore, the prevalence of accusations related to witchcraft exhibits variation across different topographical regions. As stated in a report published by the INSEC in 2012, witchcraft accusations and the subsequent violence inflicted upon the accused witches are more prevalent in the Terai region, followed by the Hill region, and least common in the Mountain region (INSEC, 2012). A study examining violence resulting from allegations of witchcraft and sexual violence reveals that men are primarily responsible for perpetrating violence against women. Astonishingly, only 10 percent of women who live in fear of violence seek assistance from the state mechanism, with the majority opting not to disclose their experiences of suffering to anyone, as reported by the INSEC in 2012 (INSEC, 2012). According to a report by the Human Rights Watch in 2022 (Human Rights Watch, 2022), the traditional beliefs surrounding witchcraft have a detrimental impact on rural women, particularly widows, the elderly, individuals with low socioeconomic status, and members of the Dalit caste, despite the existence of a law specifically prohibiting discrimination and violence against those accused of witchcraft. In the fiscal year 2020-21, the Police recorded 61 cases of witchcraft allegations and subsequent torture, indicating a 74 percent increase compared to the previous year (CID, 2019).

From an early age, I became actively involved in the leftist movement, which instilled within me the conviction to denounce the various forms of discrimination and exploitation that pervade our society. However, it is evident that conservative ideologies are gradually adapting to the changing social landscape. Amidst this transformation, certain beliefs persist, casting a shadow on the

progress of human civilization. It is not a mere coincidence that those in positions of power, such as rulers, predominantly hail from privileged backgrounds, possessing higher castes, wealth, and education. Rather, this hierarchical structure has been deliberately constructed throughout history. Furthermore, the accusation and persecution of witchcraft serve as a tool for the powerful to oppress the vulnerable. This practice remains deeply entrenched in Nepali society to this very day. The impoverished, destitute, and less fortunate individuals are often perceived as burdens to society, with these accusations frequently originating from the more prosperous higher castes. Witchcraft allegations, as highlighted by Adhikari (Adhikari, 2014), are among the most prevalent.

The Anti-Witch Hunting Law in Nepal has made it illegal to accuse someone of practicing witchcraft and to persecute them as a result, as well as any other human rights violations that may be associated with such accusations. This law was put into effect in 2014 and carries harsh penalties, including fines of up to 100,000 rupees and up to 10 years imprisonment for those found guilty. Despite these legal measures, there are still challenges to its implementation. The Human Rights Watch World Report (2020) notes that there is a lack of political will and a legislative framework to effectively combat the deeply ingrained superstitious beliefs in Nepali society.

Furthermore, a plethora of non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in increasing public consciousness. Notably, the National Women's Commission, which was established on March 7th, 2002, has the primary objective of reinforcing gender equality and promoting the development and empowerment of women. This organization has actively advocated for the protection of women against accusations of witchcraft and related acts of violence. Another noteworthy example is the Forum for Protection of People's Rights, Nepal (PPR Nepal), founded in 2002 with the aim of advancing human rights and ensuring access to justice. PPR Nepal has made substantial contributions to raising awareness and campaigning against violence targeting women based on

witchcraft allegations (WHRIN, 2014). Nevertheless, the issue persists for women in Nepal. One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of information among the general population regarding the new legislation and their rights, particularly for those residing in remote areas of Nepal. Even those who are knowledgeable about their rights often face resistance or apathy from local authorities regarding this matter (Grigaite, 2018).

The primary aim of this study is to examine the inhumane activities that have been observed in the Bhangaha Municipality of Mahottarai district, where marginalized and disadvantaged communities reside. Once individuals are accused of practicing witchcraft, they encounter significant difficulties in assimilating into society for the remainder of their lives. Through extensive research, it has been determined that these witchcraft accusations are concocted by exploiters who seek to exploit the impoverished and vulnerable segments of society. According to a recent study conducted by (Zoowa, 2022), witches are a product of the belief in witchcraft and the act of making witch allegations. Similarly, Paudel (Paudel, 2011) asserts that society's perception of women has undergone substantial changes in comparison to ancient times.

The female gender is progressively attaining greater prominence across diverse domains of society. Nevertheless, occurrences of aggression directed towards women persist, thereby emphasizing the extent to which the inflexible hierarchical framework of society continues to wield power and sway over their existence. This serves to underscore the contentious status of women within society. In this context, the majority of studies on witchcraft have been conducted from the standpoint of social organization, socio-cultural customs, and their correlation with sorcery/magic in the fields of sociology and anthropology. But I have found significantly less work done being based on social construction of witchcraft therefore; this thesis will aim to find the answers of the following questions:

- i. What kinds of people are accused to be witches? Why they?
- ii. How does class belonging of a woman affect the likelihood of being accused?
- iii. What are the problems faced by the accused women?

1.3 Objective of the Study

There have been many studies analyzing the witchcraft accusation as a social problem created by superstition. Some studies have correlated it with the social beliefs leading by culture and tradition. But there are many evidences that it is a problem created by class clash in society. The central focus of the study is at the accusation of witchcraft as a violence against women as the major problem in Nepalese context. In this background, the main objective of the study is to analyze the witchcraft accusation as a social problem constructed by class. To achieve the main objective, following analysis has been made:

1. To bring out some issues regarding the witchcraft in Nepal and its impact in the society, especially to women,
2. To analyze the witchcraft accusation in class perspective.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

The study is mainly based on 12 case studies of four and five wards of Bhangaha Rural Municipality of Mahottari district. Witchcraft accusation is prevalent all over Nepal but the sample of the study has covered only some villages of Terai. Likewise, there are cases of accusing witch to man too but the study has covered only women. Witchcraft accusation is a sensitive issue and the victims do not want to share their story publicly. Therefore, finding the respondents was very

difficult. It was another limitation for the study. Due to time and cost, the field survey is limited only in two wards of Bhangaha Rural Municipality. Language has become next limitation. I was unfamiliar with the local language and I accept that it was very difficult to understand the meaning of words and to grab the feelings of respondents. However, one of my friends was interpreting the language for me. At last, but not the least, I tried to analyze the witchcraft accusation in the class perspective; I could not find any literature of the specific topics.

1.5 Organization of the Study

The thesis comprises of five chapters. Chapter I focuses on the introduction, encompassing the introduction itself, statement of the problem, objectives, limitations, and organization of the study. Similarly, chapter II pertains to the literature review, covering subtopics such as Witchcraft: Historical and Cross-cultural Practice, Witchcraft and Superstition, Social Constructionism and Witchcraft Accusation, Patriarchy and Witch Accusation, Class Oppression and Witchcraft, Some Media Coverages of Witchcraft Allegation in Nepal, and Constitutional and Legal Provisions Against Accusation of Witchcraft in Nepal. Chapter III is dedicated to the research methodology, including the research methodology and research process. Chapter IV encompasses the findings, interpretation, and analysis of the study. Lastly, chapter V presents the conclusion and theoretical reflections.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

This chapter addresses the preceding research conducted on the subject of witchcraft accusation and its underlying factors. It encompasses six sub-topics, namely Witchcraft and Superstition, Witchcraft: Historical and Cross-cultural Practice, Witchcraft accusation in Nepal, Some Media Coverages of Witchcraft Allegation in Nepal, Constitutional and legal provision against witchcraft accusation in Nepal, Patriarchy and Witchcraft Accusation, Social Constructionism and Witchcraft Accusation, and Class Oppression and Witchcraft accusation.

2.1 Witchcraft and Superstition

These superstitious beliefs often revolve around the idea of witches and their supposed powers. Throughout history, witches have been portrayed as evil beings who possess magical abilities and use them to harm others. This portrayal has led to widespread fear and suspicion towards women who are perceived as different or unconventional.

In many marginalized communities, women have been disproportionately targeted and accused of witchcraft. These accusations are often based on superstitions and unfounded beliefs, rather than any concrete evidence. Women who are widowed, elderly, or have physical or mental disabilities are particularly vulnerable to such accusations.

The consequences of being labeled a witch can be devastating. Accused women may face social ostracism, physical violence, or even death. They are often subjected to witch trials, where their lives are put on trial based on superstitious beliefs and hearsay. These trials are often conducted without any legal or scientific basis, leading to gross miscarriages of justice.

Superstition surrounding witches is deeply ingrained in many cultures and societies. It is perpetuated through folklore, myths, and religious teachings. These beliefs are often passed down through generations, reinforcing the idea that witches are dangerous and should be feared. Efforts to combat superstition and the persecution of alleged witches have been ongoing. Organizations and activists work to raise awareness about the harmful effects of superstition and advocate for the rights of those accused. Education and empowerment programs are implemented to challenge these deeply rooted beliefs and promote tolerance and understanding.

However, superstition and the stigmatization of witches continue to persist in many parts of the world. It is crucial to address the underlying social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to the perpetuation of these beliefs. By challenging superstition and promoting evidence-based thinking, societies can work towards a more inclusive and just future, where individuals are not judged or persecuted based on unfounded beliefs and customs.

Scholars increasingly agree that the early Scientific Revolution was heavily influenced by the occult or magical tradition in Renaissance Europe (Armstrong, 2014). A study has demonstrated in his significant studies on late medieval and early modern witchcraft treatises, authorities often used the concept of witchcraft to address fundamental ontological and epistemological issues of their time (Stuart, 1997). The University of Paris faculty of theology expressed the new emphasis on superstitious and magical practices in 1398, in a ruling that historians agree was foundational for the witch hunt (Armstrong, 2014). If magic had been viewed with suspicion before, it became even more so as the gradual spread of the witch hunt in the fifteenth century increasingly emphasized its demonic aspect (Diarmaid, 1990). The complete equivalence of superstition with witchcraft is forcefully demonstrated in a popular 1530 work, *A Treatise Reproving All Superstitions and Forms of Witchcraft*, by the Spanish theologian Pedro (Pedro, 1977), which

provides a comprehensive catalogue of contemporary superstitious practices. Drawing on According to Hippocrates, the natural order is inherently divine and exclusively governed by natural causes. Any interference with this order would disrupt the sequence of natural causes and therefore be considered a supernatural occurrence, akin to what Renaissance thinkers would refer to as a "miracle" attributed solely to God. In all other cases, the gods express their intentions solely through natural events. Any action taken by a god would not add anything beyond what was already predetermined by natural processes and bound to happen regardless (Lloyd, 1979).

Witchcraft holds a significant place in the daily lives of many societies worldwide, shaping people's understanding of the world and their position within it. The term "witchcraft" encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices related to supernatural powers and objects, which vary greatly across different communities, regions, and historical periods (Pavanello, 2017). Although witchcraft beliefs differ among cultures, for the purposes of this discussion, the term will be broadly defined as "harmful actions carried out by individuals presumed to possess access to supernatural powers" (Adam, 1998). Conversely, Gershman (Gershman, 2015) posits that witchcraft belief should be regarded as a distinct category within the realm of witchcraft, encompassing related beliefs that are conceptually intertwined, rather than being mere superstitions. Furthermore, Gershman emphasizes that witchcraft belief is closely linked to a pervasive sense of mistrust (Gershman, 2015).

2.2 Witchcraft: Historical and Cross-cultural Practice

There have been numerous studies conducted on the phenomenon of witchcraft accusation and its associated social costs. It is widely acknowledged that witchcraft has been present in human societies since the earliest days of communal living. In Roman law, a distinction was made

between benevolent magic and harmful magic, with the latter being subject to legal punishment. However, with the spread of Christianity, these distinctions disappeared and witchcraft became associated with the worship of the Devil (Sah, 2007).

While beliefs about witchcraft may vary across cultures, for the purposes of this discussion, the term will be broadly defined as "harmful actions carried out by individuals presumed to possess supernatural powers" (Adam, 1998). Belief in witchcraft itself is not necessarily problematic; however, the actions taken as a result of such beliefs may infringe upon human rights standards (Haar, 2007). When a community perceives itself to be under the threat of physical or cultural extinction, there is a tendency to rely more heavily on supernatural explanations (Barbara, 1986). In fact, in societies where belief in witchcraft is deeply ingrained, accusations of witchcraft and subsequent witch-hunts are likely to escalate during times of community stress (Irish, 1993). Currently, comparable occurrences are primarily witnessed in nations of the Global South. South Africa, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, and various other African states have observed the merciless violence inflicted upon women, the elderly, and children who are accused of possessing witchcraft abilities (Maurizka, 2023). These individuals, perceived as the manifestation of malevolent spirits that bring misfortune to the community, are subjected to severe beatings that imperil their lives (Maurizka, 2023).

According to an article (William, 1980) many accusations of witchcraft within close-knit communities are motivated by grievances that originate from external sources and are misdirected towards innocent individuals. A study (Miguel, 2005) proposed an explanation for witchcraft allegations based on his research conducted in western Tanzania. He discovered that there is a higher incidence of witch murders during years of extreme rainfall, which often result in droughts

or floods. The victims in these cases are predominantly elderly women, typically killed by their own relatives (Miguel, 2005).

The phenomenon of witchcraft accusation and persecution (WAP) is a significant social issue in various societies in the Global South, including Nepal (Adhikari, 2014). Within Nepali society, where the caste system holds sway, individuals who are identified as witches, typically belong to lower castes such as dalits or untouchables (Paudel, 2011). Women from lower castes face a triple vulnerability due to their gender, lower caste status, and poverty, which makes them particularly susceptible to being scapegoated for individual, community-wide, and societal problems or misfortunes (Adhikari, 2014).

The purported power of witchcraft is believed to be employed for the manipulation of various aspects of life, including but not limited to the health, longevity, sickness, drowning, or demise of the victim. Moreover, it is postulated that witchcraft is responsible for natural disasters such as droughts, earthquakes, floods, crop damage, and epidemics, among other calamities. Additionally, witchcraft is attributed to the causation of issues such as unemployment, divorce, automobile accidents, and premature death (Adhikari, 2014). These predicaments are believed to be initiated by women who possess magical abilities and utilize them to inflict harm upon others.

It is widely acknowledged that the transmission of witchcraft can occur between individuals, specifically with women being able to pass on their witchcraft powers to their daughters and daughters-in-law. This perpetuates a cycle where the recipients can then transmit these powers to their own offspring (Sah, 2007). In Nepal, women who are accused of practicing witchcraft are particularly vulnerable to various forms of violence, such as having soot smeared on their faces and being forced to consume human urine and excreta (Adhikari, 2014). It is commonly believed

that individuals possessing magical abilities have the potential to inflict diseases upon humans, sickness upon animals, misfortune, sudden death, impotence, and other similar misfortunes (Malowany, 2000). Classical analyses of witchcraft have indeed associated the proliferation of witchcraft beliefs in certain places and times with periods of illness, misfortune, and uncertainty (Marwick, 1965). While this belief may be deeply ingrained in Africa, it is important to acknowledge that the belief in witches exists worldwide (Muller, 2000).

The subject of Witchcraft has a long and extensive history, as noted by Summers (Summers, 1926). Recent decades have seen a notable increase in its prevalence and efficacy, according to various African sources, as reported by Kohnert (Kohnert, 1983). Accusations of Witchcraft have emerged from several African nations, with a significant number of elderly women in Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, South Africa, and Zimbabwe being either killed or forcibly expelled from their communities due to suspicions of practicing witchcraft, as documented by Hayes (Hayes, 2009). In South Africa's Northern Province, over 400 witches have met their demise since 1985, as reported by Niehaus (Niehaus I. , 2001). The escalating accusations of witchcraft and sorcery in Papua New Guinea, leading to torture and occasionally death, have necessitated a reevaluation of the existing sorcery laws (Anon, 2009).

In India, many women accused of witchcraft have suffered torture and death. Witch hunting remains a social problem, with government data showing 522 lives lost between 1991 and 2000, though the actual number is likely higher. Most victims are from the marginalized Dalit community. Similar cases of witch persecution can be found globally, like in Kenya and Tanzania where women were killed by mobs for suspected witchcraft. In Saudi Arabia, Fawzi Falih, condemned for witchcraft, hopes for a pardon from King Abdullah after an appeal by Human Rights Watch. Without it, she faces execution by beheading¹.

Social and economic differentiation, which has become deeply ingrained in rural South Africa (Ainslie, 1999), creates a fertile environment for suspicion and allegations. The significant disparities in socio-economic status give rise to social tensions when the affluent fail to meet the expectations of their less fortunate neighbors and relatives in terms of support. These tensions often escalate into suspicion, which frequently manifests as open accusations of witchcraft (Ferguson, 1999). A study conducted in Mugu, a district revealed that elderly widows are particularly vulnerable to such accusations, as conflicts over property ownership seem to be strongly associated with the underlying causes, where the removal of older individuals would facilitate the occupation by other family membersⁱⁱ.

Instances of severe violence against individuals accused of practicing witchcraft are a prevalent issue in Nepal. One such case involved a 65-year-old woman from Dhangadhimai-6 who was subjected to severe physical assault. Similarly, in Sano Bangthali-7 of the Kavrepalanchok district, a woman was subjected to torture, including being fed feces, before ultimately succumbing to fatal beatings for purportedly engaging in witchcraft. Furthermore, a Dalit woman in Gaur Municipality, Rautahat, was subjected to brutal physical assault on the basis of allegations of practicing witchcraft. It has been reported that all the accused women come from impoverished families. The implications of being accused of witchcraft can be profound, subjecting individuals to harassment, violence, and even death. In many cases, being labeled a witch is tantamount to being declared liable to be killed with impunity. Regrettably, academic literature has tended to overlook the plight of those accused of witchcraft (Haar, 2007).

Literary works exemplify the enduring presence of witchcraft allegations worldwide, particularly affecting individuals who are disadvantaged and destitute, thus succumbing to this societal malady. Considering the ancient lineage of such accusations, their influence has permeated extensively.

Consequently, it can be inferred that those occupying the most precarious positions within society are most susceptible to encountering charges of witchcraft.

2.3 Witchcraft Accusation in Nepal

Belief on witchcraft is still ubiquitous all over the world. Many studies have been made on belief on witchcraft and its social impact. There have been many studies carried out on witchcraft accusation.

Chudali (Chudali, 2021) has conducted an investigation into the phenomenon of witchcraft and its association with violence against women in Nepal. The research has shed light on the persistent nature of this issue, which has posed a significant challenge for both the Nepalese government and its citizens. The primary objective of this study was to examine the perspectives of Nepalese adults residing in Norway, who had experienced witchcraft during their upbringing in Nepal, regarding its correlation with violence against women in Nepal, subsequent to living in the egalitarian Norwegian environment that promotes fairness and justice.

The research employed a qualitative case study design. The findings indicated that the issue of witchcraft and its connection to violence against women holds a distinct significance among Nepalese individuals in Nepal and Nepalese immigrants residing in Norway. The study revealed that allegations of witchcraft are widespread in Nepal, and numerous Nepalese women have become victims of this practice. However, this issue does not hold any prevalence among Nepalese residing in the diaspora context of Norway. The research identified several factors that contribute to the prevalence of witchcraft in Nepal, including inadequate education, limited job opportunities, gender discrimination, ineffective law enforcement, perpetuation of the caste system, and deep-rooted misogyny in religion, which often targets widowed Hindu women.

Grigaite conducted a study on the accusation and persecution of women for witchcraft (WAP) in Nepal (Grigaite, 2018). The objective of the study was to illustrate the extent and intricacy of WAP in order to garner the attention of all key stakeholders, including academia (p. 5). The field survey for the study was conducted in two phases. The initial phase of fieldwork took place between December 2012 and January 2013, while the second phase was carried out in August 2018 in Nepal. During the first phase, a total of 10 face-to-face interviews (six individual and four group) were conducted with 16 individuals. In the second phase, 15 interviews (11 individual and four group) were conducted with 22 individuals, utilizing semi-structured questionnaires. Based on the study findings, the manifestation of WAP can be attributed to ingrained and socially constructed beliefs in witchcraft and supernatural abilities. Additionally, the presence and authority of Jhakri in Nepali society can still contribute to instances of WAP (refer to page 23). The study further highlights the intricate and interconnected nature of cultural, social, and legal challenges deeply rooted within Nepali society (Page 23) (Grigaite, 2018).

Drawing upon the aforementioned findings, the researcher proposes the augmentation of efficacious grassroots methodologies that have demonstrated success in countering witchcraft accusation and persecution (WAP). These methodologies ought to prioritize the eradication of WAP while concurrently upholding and advocating for human rights within the nation. Additionally, it is imperative to ensure the safety of survivors of WAP by providing them with personalized support encompassing education, guidance, legal aid, psychosocial assistance, and empowerment to pursue and attain justice. These recommendations are indispensable in effectively addressing the matter of WAP.

A study conducted by the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) has revealed that in 2011, witchcraft accusations and acts of violence against those accused of witchcraft were more

prevalent in the terai region of Nepal. The majority of individuals residing in the terai region are illiterate, living in poverty, and lacking access to healthcare facilities. The study suggests that the association between witchcraft accusations and poverty and illiteracy in the terai region is significant (INSEC, 2012).

The study's findings highlight the significant role that legal frameworks play in addressing violence against women. The absence of efficient legislation creates loopholes and gaps that allow perpetrators to escape punishment and continue their abusive behavior. Additionally, the insufficient enforcement of current laws further perpetuates a culture of impunity, where perpetrators feel emboldened to commit acts of violence without fear of consequences.

Furthermore, the absence of responsibility among government officials exacerbates the problem. When those in positions of power fail to prioritize the protection of women's rights and fail to hold perpetrators accountable, it sends a message that violence against women is not a serious issue. This lack of responsibility trickles down to society, normalizing and perpetuating violence against women.

However, the study also highlights the potential for positive change through proactive court intervention and progressive rulings. When courts take an active role in protecting women's rights and delivering justice, it sends a powerful message that violence against women will not be tolerated. These favorable outcomes provide hope and serve as examples for future cases.

Despite these positive developments, the study emphasizes that substantial enhancements are still necessary to adequately tackle violence against women. This includes strengthening legislation, ensuring its effective enforcement, and holding government officials accountable for their actions

or inaction. It is crucial to address the root causes of violence against women, such as gender inequality and harmful cultural norms, through comprehensive and multi-faceted approaches.

The study proposes that cooperative endeavors involving diverse stakeholders are key to reducing instances of rape, sexual violence, and allegations of witchcraft. This includes the active participation of civil society and human rights organizations, who play a crucial role in advocating for women's rights, raising awareness, and providing support to survivors. By working together, these stakeholders can create a united front against violence and push for systemic changes that protect and empower women.

In conclusion, the study's findings underscore the urgent need for action to address violence against women. While there are challenges and obstacles, the study also highlights the potential for positive change through proactive legal intervention and the involvement of diverse stakeholders. By prioritizing women's rights, strengthening legislation, and fostering cooperation, society can work towards a future where violence against women is no longer tolerated.

The research paper by Gurung (Gurung, 2006) presents a thorough analysis of the issues surrounding allegations of witchcraft against impoverished women, who suffer mistreatment from their communities. The author provides an in-depth examination of the significant impact that superstitious beliefs and religious convictions have on the lives of women. Furthermore, attention is drawn to the ongoing efforts made by networks advocating for women's rights and other relevant stakeholders to bring about change in this matter. Additionally, the study critically evaluates the existing legal provisions and the current state of policy enforcement on the ground. Moreover, the study aims to ascertain the strategies employed by organizations advocating for women's rights and human rights, activists, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to eradicate this

reprehensible practice, utilizing case studies as supporting evidence. Ultimately, the study concludes by offering recommendations and a comprehensive list of measures that still need to be implemented in order to safeguard these women and ensure they are able to lead a life of dignity.

2.4 Some Media Coverages of Witchcraft Allegation in Nepal

Many cases are not reported to police because of various reasons. So, actual cases could not be published. Adinkrah and Adhikari (Adhikari, 2014) wrote 'the true extent of the prevalence is unknown as only a small fraction is reported'ⁱⁱⁱ. Many of the cases go unreported, especially when they occur in remote rural communities^{iv}. In this background, I have presented here some witchcraft accusation news coverage in Nepali national newspaper published in English. The allegation news were from 2009 to 2019.

In November 2009, an article in the Nepali Times detailed the abduction and abuse of Jug Chaudhary. She was physically assaulted, forced to consume human excrement, and publicly humiliated by members of her community. The motive behind this cruelty was an accusation of witchcraft. Despite reporting the incident, the police refused to register a complaint, claiming it was a personal matter for the community to resolve^v.

In 2010, a 47-year-old Dalit woman was accused of witchcraft and abducted by 35 villagers. She was held captive in a cowshed for two days, enduring torture and starvation. Shockingly, she was forced to consume human waste and urine. Under pressure, she confessed to using witchcraft to harm a schoolteacher in her village^{vi}.

A 40-year-old widow from Chitwan was burned alive after being accused of witchcraft by a shaman. The execution was carried out by a crowd, including her own relatives. The shamans had been called to investigate a family member's illness and blamed her for it. She was attacked

with sticks and rocks while doing her daily chores, then doused in gasoline and set on fire in front of her nine-year-old daughter. Ten individuals, including five women, an eight-year-old boy, and two shamans, have been charged with murder. Eight of them have been sentenced to life imprisonment^{vii}.

Sunita Pudasaini was brutally assaulted by her own relatives, including siblings, while visiting her aunt in Jorpati, Kathmandu on March 22, 2012. She lost her vision and was admitted to Tilganga Eye Hospital. Six individuals were arrested in connection with the crime and the government pledged Rs 200,000 and covered all medical expenses^{viii}. In a separate incident, Domani Chaudhary, a 45-year-old resident of Dhodana VDC-2, Siraha, endured a brutal assault at the hands of her neighbors. This assault was motivated by the unfortunate demise of a newborn within their village.^{ix}

A news was broadcasted in BBC Nepali in 2013. According to news a sixty-year-old woman was assaulted and tortured in Kailali, in an act of vigilante justice sanctioned by the village council. She was stripped bare and had her head shaved. She was also badly beaten and made to feed on human excrement.^x

On August 15, 2013, Parvati Devi Chaudhary was accused of witchcraft and forced to leave her home in Supadi VDC. That night, she was brutally attacked and died from her injuries. Some suspects were arrested, but others remained at large as of August 26.^{xi}

Laxmi Pariyar, a 32-year-old dalit woman from Kavre, was found dead in her home on December 13, 2016, following a brutal attack on December 9th. Led by schoolteacher Hira Lama, a group of individuals restrained Pariyar to a basketball pole using a rope, repeatedly struck her with a stick, kicked her chest, and force-fed her human feces. Pariyar's nine-year-

old son witnessed the entire ordeal and stated that the shopkeeper who sold Lama the rope was also involved. After being released, Pariyar was pursued and subjected to a second assault by Lama. Villagers witnessed the attack^{xii}. Kusama Devi Yadav, a 65-year-old resident of Siraha, was violently attacked in her own home. Shiva Nath Yadav, along with two others from their village, were responsible for the assault. Tragically, her husband was also injured while trying to defend her. With the help of fellow villagers, she was rescued and taken to a medical facility for treatment. It is important to note that Shiva Nath Yadav blamed the victim for his daughter's illness, accusing her of practicing witchcraft. The local authorities have promised to take appropriate action once the victim files a formal complaint.^{xiii}

Renowned women's rights advocate Raj Kumari Upadhaya was assaulted in her own home by a group, including a member of the Nepal Armed Police Force. She endured a two-hour ordeal before being rescued. Local authorities initially tried to conceal the incident, likely due to the involvement of one of their own, but external pressure forced them to take action^{xiv}.

The Kathmandu Post has reported multiple physical assaults against Ritadevi Das by her neighbors Indradevi and her daughter Neelam Das. After the third assault on December 30th, 2017, Ritadevi filed an official report. Her neighbors accused her of witchcraft due to her husband's illness. Despite being 36 years old, Ritadevi supports her sick husband and three children through daily wage labor^{xv}.

Radha Chaudhary, an eighteen-year-old resident of Dhangadhi, experienced a distressing incident on March 8, 2018, which happened to be International Women's Day. She was forcefully evicted from her home and endured a six-hour ordeal. This reprehensible act was orchestrated by a group of individuals led by a shaman, while a crowd of onlookers witnessed

the event and showed their support through applause and encouragement^{xvi}. Gita Devi Ram, a 30-year-old resident of Rautahat district in southern Nepal, was violently assaulted by her family members on May 22, 2018. The attack was prompted by a shaman's accusation that Gita had caused her nephew's illness. Despite the child's year-long ailment, his parents and brothers beat Gita severely that night.^{xvii}

In the eastern region of Nepal, specifically in the Sunsari district, a faith healer was physically attacked on June 3, 2018. The assault was carried out by three brothers who were following their father's belief that the victim practiced witchcraft. The faith healer was seen performing rituals in a nearby temple, aiming to help a sick woman. The attackers allegedly wanted to force the victim to leave their village by applying pressure^{xviii}. On 14 November 2018, a 73-year-old unmarried woman residing in a remote village in Dhading district, identified as Seti Maya Layo Magar, was subjected to physical assault and forced ingestion of human excrement by a group of men, led by a Nepal Army officer. This heinous act was carried out after three local shamans accused her of practicing witchcraft in the village^{xix}.

Similarly, on 18 August 2019, a woman aged 35 years was forcefully fed human feces by a group of five or six women in Birta village of Bangaha municipality-4, located in the Mahottari district. The victim was immediately taken to a hospital for medical attention, and two of the alleged perpetrators were apprehended on the same day.^{xx}

In this era of scientific advancement, where we have a comprehensive understanding of sickness and mortality, it is disheartening to witness the persistent reliance on beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft as a means to explain and cope with unfortunate events. Despite the progress

we have made in unraveling the mysteries of the natural world, the prevalence of violence related to sorcery remains a significant social issue in Nepal.

Accusations of sorcery and witchcraft have caused immense social strain for numerous families in Nepal. These accusations have led to the marginalization and displacement of vulnerable individuals, forcing them out of their communities and leaving them isolated and vulnerable. Tragically, some of these accusations have even resulted in the merciless killing of defenseless individuals in horrifying circumstances.

This report presents accounts from various newspapers, shedding light on the disturbing reality of violence related to sorcery in Nepal. It is important to note that all the accused individuals were impoverished women, with the majority coming from the Terai districts, although some were from the hilly region.

The persistence of these beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft is a reflection of the deep-rooted cultural and societal norms in Nepal. Despite the advancements in scientific understanding, many individuals still turn to these beliefs as a way to make sense of the inexplicable or to find someone to blame for their misfortunes. This reliance on superstition not only perpetuates violence and discrimination but also hinders the progress of the nation as a whole.

Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach that involves education, awareness campaigns, and legal reforms. It is crucial to educate communities about the dangers of superstition and the importance of evidence-based explanations for natural phenomena. Additionally, raising awareness about the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender or socioeconomic status, is essential in combating the marginalization and violence faced by those accused of sorcery.

Furthermore, legal reforms are necessary to ensure that those who perpetrate violence in the name of sorcery are held accountable for their actions. Strengthening the legal framework and providing support for victims and their families can help break the cycle of violence and discrimination.

In conclusion, the persistence of beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft in Nepal is a concerning phenomenon in an era characterized by scientific advancements. The violence and discrimination that stem from these beliefs have devastating consequences for individuals and communities. It is imperative that society works towards eradicating these harmful beliefs through education, awareness, and legal reforms, in order to create a more inclusive and just society for all. This shows that such evil practices were denser in Terai of Nepal where literacy rate is also low (61.15) in comparison with hill- 72.33 percent (CBS, 2011).

2.5 Constitutional and Legal Provisions Against Accusation of Witchcraft in Nepal

There are constitutional and various legal provisions against witchcraft accusation in Nepal.

a) Constitutional Provision: The Constitution of Nepal contains a provision in Article 29 that guarantees the fundamental right of every individual to be free from exploitation on the basis of religion, custom, tradition, cultural practices, or any other grounds (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Similarly, Articles 50 and 51 of the Constitution of Nepal enshrine similar provisions in the Directive Principles and the State Policy. This right is further extended to prohibit any form of physical, mental, sexual, psychological, or other types of violence against women, as well as any form of oppression based on religious, social, and cultural traditions and other practices, as stipulated in Article 38 of the Constitution. The same article also ensures

that the perpetrator is punished and the victim is compensated (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015).

b). Legal Provisions: There exist legal provisions that address accusations of witchcraft, which are classified as a crime against humanity. The Witchcraft Act (Offense and Punishment-2015) delineates the actions that constitute witchcraft and provides for the treatment of victims. Law enforcement officials are required to ensure that medical professionals prepare treatment reports and arrange for urgent psychological counseling.

The Act offers relief to victims through protective orders, compensation, and funds for treatment. Victims are granted shelter, food, and protection from harm. The amount of compensation is determined by the severity of the crime and the economic status of the perpetrator. If the perpetrator is unable to pay, the court will cover the compensation. The perpetrator is responsible for medical expenses, and the Gender Violence Prevention Fund may cover expenses if necessary. Separate security arrangements can be made for the victim.

Additionally, the Act prohibits any form of discrimination or stigmatization against victims of witchcraft accusations. It mandates that all cases be handled with sensitivity and confidentiality to protect the victim's privacy and dignity. The Act also provides for the establishment of special courts to handle cases of witchcraft accusations, ensuring that justice is served promptly and efficiently.

Furthermore, the Act recognizes the need for community education and awareness programs to combat the belief in witchcraft and its harmful effects. It mandates that the government and civil society organizations work together to educate communities on the dangers of witchcraft accusations and promote tolerance and respect for diversity.

In conclusion, the Witchcraft Act (Offense and Punishment-2015) provides comprehensive legal provisions to address accusations of witchcraft and protect victims from harm. It recognizes the seriousness of the crime and provides for the punishment of perpetrators while ensuring that victims receive the necessary support and assistance. The Act is a significant step towards ending the harmful practice of witchcraft accusations and promoting human rights and dignity for all.

The Criminal Code Bill imposes penalties for inhumane treatment of those accused of witchcraft. Perpetrators may face additional charges according to the Nepal Law Commission (Nepal Law Commission, 2014).

c). International treaties and obligations: The Government of Nepal is required, in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to implement effective and appropriate measures aimed at eradicating traditional practices that have a negative impact on the health and well-being of women. Nepal, having both signed and ratified this treaty, is legally obligated to abide by its provisions. Furthermore, Nepal has actively participated in various international agreements, such as the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action-1993, UN Specialized Conferences, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action-1995. These agreements explicitly prohibit harmful practices and stress the importance of addressing any conflicts that may arise between women's rights and the detrimental effects of traditional or customary practices, cultural biases, and religious extremism. An example of such harmful practices within the Nepalese context is the accusation of witchcraft.

2.6 Social Constructionism and Witchcraft Accusation

Social constructionism, also known as the social construction of reality, is a sociological and communicative theory that explores the collaborative development of our understanding of the

world. According to a study (Gergen, 1985), social constructionism can be defined as a perspective that recognizes the significant influence of social and interpersonal factors on human life. This theory posits that our shared assumptions about reality are formed through the joint construction of meaning, rather than being individually determined (Wendy, 2009).

Many sociologists argue that various aspects of our society are socially constructed. They have examined how social constructions shape our perceptions of economic class, religion, gender, race and ethnicity, age, and other factors that contribute to our social position. Witchcraft accusations serve as an example of such social constructions. An article (Warker, 1999) notes that cultures worldwide have historically feared witches, blaming them for diseases, natural disasters, and other misfortunes that befall their communities. It is important to recognize that social constructs can vary across societies and are influenced by the specific events and circumstances of a given time period (Sinn, 2016). Social constructionism is a theoretical framework positing that individuals acquire knowledge of the world through social interactions, and that much of what we perceive as objective reality is contingent upon shared assumptions. From this perspective, many of the concepts we take for granted as immutable truths are in fact socially constructed and therefore subject to change as societal norms evolve (Sinn, 2016). The theory of social constructionism was first introduced in 1966 by sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman in their seminal work, 'The Social Construction of Reality'. This theory of knowledge asserts that characteristics traditionally believed to be biologically determined, such as gender, race, class, ability, and sexuality, are instead products of human interpretation and cultural context (Luckman, 1966).

According to social constructionism, these attributes are not inherent or fixed, but rather socially constructed through the interactions and interpretations of individuals within a particular society or culture. This means that the meanings and understandings of gender, race, class, ability, and

sexuality are not universal or objective, but rather subjective and contingent upon the social context in which they are situated.

For example, the concept of gender is often understood as a binary system with two distinct categories, male and female. However, social constructionism challenges this binary view by highlighting the ways in which gender is constructed and performed through social norms, expectations, and practices. It argues that gender is not determined solely by biological sex, but rather by the social and cultural meanings assigned to certain behaviors, appearances, and roles.

Similarly, race is not seen as a biologically determined category, but rather as a social construct that is shaped by historical, political, and cultural factors. Social constructionism emphasizes that racial categories and identities are not fixed or natural, but rather constructed through social interactions, power dynamics, and historical processes. It recognizes that race is a social invention that has been used to justify and perpetuate systems of inequality and oppression.

Class, ability, and sexuality are also understood as socially constructed categories that are shaped by cultural beliefs, norms, and practices. Social constructionism argues that these attributes are not inherent or predetermined, but rather emerge through social processes and interactions. For example, social class is not solely determined by economic factors, but also by social status, cultural capital, and symbolic meanings attributed to different social positions.

Overall, the theory of social constructionism challenges essentialist and deterministic views of human attributes and identities. It highlights the ways in which social and cultural factors shape our understanding of reality and influence the meanings and interpretations we assign to various aspects of our lives. By recognizing the constructed nature of these attributes, social

constructionism opens up possibilities for questioning and challenging existing social norms, hierarchies, and inequalities.

Social constructionism has its roots in a variety of disciplines, including existential-phenomenological psychology, social history, hermeneutics, and social psychology (Watzlawick, 1984). In this context, numerous scholars contend that witchcraft is also a socially constructed phenomenon. Weber conceptualized witchcraft as a form of technology employed to access superhuman powers (Weber M. , 1964). Similarly, Evans-Pritchard (1976) observed that among the Azande of Central Africa, witchcraft permeated their society and played a role in every aspect of their lives (Pritchard, 1976). Durkheim's (Durkheim, 1938) conceptual framework of crime and deviance assumes that all societies engage in a process of negotiating the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable actions (i.e., crime). Each society establishes these boundaries differently, thus rendering the definition of crime and deviance a socially constructed concept. Durkheim theorizes, "Where crime exists, collective sentiments are sufficiently adaptable to assume a new form, and crime sometimes aids in determining the form they will assume (Durkheim, 1938). "Critics have contended that social constructionism tends to disregard the role played by physical and biological sciences (Durkheim, 1938). As per a book published in 1999, social constructionism negates the impact of biology on behavior and culture, or posits that such influence is insignificant in comprehending human behavior (Bricmont, 1999). Psychologists Steven Pinker (Pinker, 2016) in *What Science Offers the Humanities* have censured social constructionism for its excessively limited emphasis on society and culture as a causal determinant of human behavior, thereby excluding the impact of inherent biological inclinations.

2.7 Patriarchy and Witch Accusation

Patriarchy is a social system characterized by male domination over women. This term has been employed to describe the power dynamics through which men exert control over women (Veronica, 1979). Throughout the course of human civilization, various social structures and orders have been established. According to Lerner, patriarchy is a historical construct that took nearly 2500 years to develop, created by both men and women (Lerner, 1986). Similarly, Mason and Taj (Taj, 1987) define patriarchy as a collection of social institutions that restrict women's ability to be self-sufficient, resulting in their dependence on male relatives for survival, while simultaneously favoring men in the distribution of resources and power within families. In recent years, the term patriarchy has assumed a prominent position in feminist literature. However, it is argued that patriarchy is the most suitable framework for comprehending the extent of gender biases and inequalities, despite the existence of alternative perspectives on gender disparities. Patriarchy can be defined as a social system characterized by male dominance and authority, which is both oppressive and discriminatory. According to Jones, patriarchy exerts oppressive control in social, political, economic, and cultural contexts (Jones, 2000). It also discriminates by regulating access to power, managing resources and benefits, and manipulating public and private power structures (Jones, 2000). Patriarchal systems involve the hierarchical positioning of men within and across families and generations. This process of social ranking is influenced by the actions of both men and women.

As per Walby's analysis, patriarchy encompasses the extensive, pervasive, and interconnected nature of women's subordination within the household, family, and society (Walby, 1990). She identifies six structures that constitute patriarchy, namely the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal

relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions (Walby, 1990). In patriarchal societies, the male head of the family often determines control over assets, allocation of resources, and decision-making in resource allocation. This, in turn, affects gender relationships at the family and societal levels. Gerda Lerner (1986), another prominent scholar in the discourse on patriarchy, contends that "male family heads allocated the resources of society to their families the way the state allocated the resources of society to them" (Lerner, 1986). While women may also play a role in decision-making in the family and society, such instances are either taken for granted by men or viewed as a negative exercise. The group of independent, self-supporting women in any society is typically small and highly vulnerable to economic disaster (Lerner, 1986). The advancement of women's studies in recent years has sparked new perspectives on the reasons behind the significant representation of women, approximately 85 percent, among accused witches (Gittins, 1993). Similarly, as per Godbeer, widows and postmenopausal women were predominantly targeted as witches (Godbeer, 2013).

Godbeer highlights that both men and women embraced the belief that women were more susceptible to the devil's influence (Godbeer, 2013). By accusing fellow women, they perpetuated the negative stereotypes associated with their own gender (Godbeer, 2013). A study conducted by Thakur (2019) aimed to compare four individual case studies of witch-hunting of women from Goalpara and West Karbi Anglong Districts of Assam and West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya (Thakur, 2019). The findings of the article concluded that witch-hunting serves as a strategy to maintain patriarchal control over ordinary women and hinder their progress in rural remote areas of Meghalaya and Assam. Superstition forms the larger context in which factors like jealousy, enmity, and non-acceptance are legitimized within a patriarchal framework. In her extensive discussion, Priyanka Bharadwaj (2019) highlighted how witch-hunting, as a form of gender-based

violence, significantly influences the treatment of women in contemporary society and perpetuates their subordination in India (Bharadwaj, 2019). A study (Nathan, 2020) examined several cases of witch-hunting in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh, observed that women, particularly those belonging to Dalit Bahujan castes, are the primary victims in most instances. According to (Nathan, 2020), allegations of witchcraft arise due to the pressure exerted by male heirs of the husband's family on widows, in order to force them to relinquish their claim on land in exchange for financial support (Kelkar, 1991). Mishra argues that family and community politics play a crucial role in depriving these accused women, commonly referred to as witches, of their economic resources (Mishra, 2003).

Furthermore, it is primarily the women who are renowned for their outspoken nature within the community that are frequently accused of engaging in witchcraft. In a society characterized by stereotypes, a woman's status is contingent upon her obedience and reserved, courteous behavior. Women who exhibit assertiveness, authority, inflexibility, strong convictions, or autonomy are regarded with skepticism, especially when peculiar or extraordinary incidents transpire within the community. Within this societal structure, men assume an increasingly dominant position in daily existence, while women are subjected to male dominance.

Kelkar and Nathan (Kelkar, 1991) have identified two significant aspects of witch hunts. Firstly, witch hunts provide an opportunity for men from dominant lineages to eliminate women who oppose them politically. Secondly, witch hunts serve to avoid social scandals and eliminate "undesirable" females, such as widows and those who are childless or mentally disturbed (Kelkar, 1991).

In her publication entitled "Witchcraft Accusations and Persecutions as a Mechanism for the Marginalization of Women" (2017), Samantha Spence draws upon feminist commentary from various academic disciplines, including anthropology, history, law, politics, and sociology, to address the phenomenon of contemporary witchcraft (Spence, 2017). The focus of the publication is on the resurgence of witchcraft beliefs in modern society, with the suggestion that accusations and persecution of witches are being utilized as a means of marginalizing women (Spence, 2017). Women are often punished for deviating from social expectations, including the cultural norm of subordination to men (Drucker-Brown, 1993).

Numerous studies provide compelling evidence that women, particularly those who are older, single or widowed, uneducated, and living in poverty, are most likely to be accused of witchcraft in Nepal (Adhikari, 2014). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that in certain communities in Nepal, witchcraft-related violence is a form of gender injustice employed by aggrieved men and their agents to deprive widows and other women of their succession and inheritance rights to property (Grigaite, 2018).

2.8 Class Oppression and Witchcraft

The existence of societal conflicts between different social classes has been extensively studied and documented by numerous scholars and theorists. Through their research and analysis, they have presented substantial evidence to support the notion that these conflicts are a prevalent aspect of many societies. One intriguing perspective on the manifestation of class struggle can be found in the accusation of witchcraft. Witchcraft trials and persecutions have occurred throughout history, with individuals being accused of practicing witchcraft and subsequently facing severe consequences, such as imprisonment, torture, and even execution. While witchcraft accusations

have often been attributed to religious or superstitious beliefs, they can also be interpreted as a reflection of underlying class tensions.

Social class refers to the categorization of individuals or groups within a society based on their economic and social standing. Sociologists frequently explore this fundamental concept, although there is no universally accepted definition. The Open Education Sociology Dictionary defines social class as an individual's or group's placement within the social hierarchy, typically determined by factors such as power, prestige, and wealth.

When examining the accusation of witchcraft through the lens of social class, it becomes apparent that these accusations often targeted individuals from lower social classes. In many societies, the lower classes were marginalized and lacked access to resources, education, and opportunities for social mobility. As a result, they were more likely to be associated with practices deemed deviant or threatening to the established social order, such as witchcraft. The accusation of witchcraft, therefore, can be seen as a means for the dominant social classes to maintain their power and control over the lower classes. By labeling individuals as witches, the ruling classes could justify their persecution and reinforce the existing social hierarchy. This allowed them to suppress any potential challenges or uprisings from the lower classes, ensuring their continued dominance.

Furthermore, the witch trials often involved the participation of the elite and influential members of society, such as religious leaders, judges, and landowners. These individuals held significant power and influence, and their involvement in the persecution of alleged witches further highlights the connection between class struggle and witchcraft accusations.

In conclusion, the accusation of witchcraft can be interpreted as a manifestation of class struggle within societies. By targeting individuals from lower social classes and using accusations of

witchcraft to maintain power and control, the ruling classes reinforced the existing social hierarchy and suppressed any potential challenges from the marginalized classes. This perspective adds another layer of understanding to the complex dynamics of social class and societal conflicts.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) is known for his analysis of society and class. He believed that society is made up of different classes, with the bourgeoisie (upper class) and proletariat (lower class) being the main ones. A person's class is determined by their relationship to the means of production, with the dominant class owning the means of production and the less dominant class having to sell their labor. Marx and Engels (Engels, 1848) saw social classes as economically determined and in conflict, based on the presence or absence of property. Private property is closely linked to the exploitation of labor, as the class with property controls social relationships.

Max Weber (1864-1920) posited that the ownership of property, such as factories or equipment, constitutes only a fraction of the factors that determine an individual's social class (Weber M. , 1964). According to Weber, social class encompasses not only property or wealth, but also power and prestige (Weber M. , 1964). Even individuals who manage corporations without owning them still reap the benefits of increased production and greater profits. In contrast to Marx, Weber's focus lies on the more intricate inequalities that manifest within the market, rather than viewing the organization of the economy as the foundation of stratification (Wright, 1979). Weber's theory is multifaceted, as class relations intersect with other forms of association, particularly status and party (Weber M. , 1978). The concept of party pertains to political power, representing the capacity of a specific stratum to influence society, while status denotes an individual's affiliation with a particular stratum (Hurst, 1998).

Throughout history, societies have been characterized by conflicts between social classes, with individuals from different classes opposing each other. Even in modern bourgeois society, class conflicts persist, with the fundamental division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat remaining unchanged (Marx, 1867).

In 1947, Weber provided a definition of power as the capability of an individual or group to carry out plans, take action, or implement policies, without regard for the objections of others (Weber, 1947). In contemporary society, highly paid managers hold a relatively low position in the bureaucratic hierarchy, thus lacking significant power or prestige (Weber, 1947). Nevertheless, they may receive higher salaries compared to university lecturers, who represent a prestigious profession.

Michel Foucault, a prominent figure in critical theory, has garnered considerable attention in relation to the concepts of power, knowledge, and discourse (Foucault, 1976). In his influential writings, Foucault delves into the question of power. Power is defined as the capacity of one entity to influence the actions of another entity. Such relationships seem to exist across all levels. In *The History of Sexuality Volume One*, Foucault defines power as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (Foucault, 1976).

Pierre Bourdieu, a prominent figure from 1930 to 2002, is renowned for his emphasis on the significance of symbolic practices in social classification. He posits that social classification, and its centrality, extends beyond the realm of social class, encompassing all forms of social categorization, including gender, race, and nation. Bourdieu views the symbolic as a potent yet

elusive form of power, one that engenders a "mysterious alchemy" (Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 1991).

The act of classification, through the use of symbolic schemes, plays a crucial role in society by both dividing and separating individuals while simultaneously constructing social collectivities. This process is explored by Pierre Bourdieu, who introduces the concept of habitus as a vital mediator in his explanatory framework. According to Bourdieu, habitus establishes an indirect causal link between an individual's position in social space and their practices.

Bourdieu argues that social class, as a system of objective determinations, should not be solely related to the individual or the "class" as a population, but rather to the class habitus. In his work "Outline of a Theory of Practice" (1977), he emphasizes the importance of understanding how social class is shaped by the dispositions, behaviors, and attitudes that individuals acquire through their socialization processes. The class habitus, therefore, serves as a lens through which individuals perceive and navigate their social world.

Furthermore, Bourdieu observes that the upper and lower classes, as well as the manufacturing and working classes, are clearly distinct because they occupy extreme positions within the distributions of social space. These extreme positions result in significant differences in terms of resources, opportunities, and lifestyles. However, Bourdieu also notes that as one moves towards the intermediate zones of social space, these distinctions become less effective. This suggests that the boundaries between social classes become blurred and less easily discernible in these intermediate areas.

In contrast to Bourdieu's perspective, the Marxist theory of classes views social classes as a product of class struggle. According to this theory, classes are not pre-existing entities but are defined

exclusively within the context of class struggle. In other words, classes emerge and are defined through the social relations of antagonism between different groups. This perspective, as articulated by Balibar in 1986, highlights the dynamic nature of class relations and the inherent conflict between different classes.

Overall, the act of classification has a profound impact on society, as it both divides and separates individuals while constructing social collectivities. Bourdieu's concept of habitus serves as a crucial mediator in understanding the relationship between social space positions and practices. Additionally, the Marxist theory of classes emphasizes the role of class struggle in defining and shaping social classes. These perspectives shed light on the complex dynamics of social stratification and the power dynamics inherent in class relations.

The phenomenon of accusing individuals of witchcraft based on jealousy is prevalent among the impoverished, while the affluent are often accused of practicing witchcraft to amass wealth (Golooba, 2005). The act of migrating for work has been associated with the creation of inequality, which can lead to feelings of envy and resentment (Niehaus I. , 2002). Furthermore, when migrants return to their hometowns, clashes of values may occur, resulting in strains and tensions that eventually give rise to suspicions and accusations of witchcraft (Niehaus I. , 2002). The establishment of social and economic differentiation in rural South Africa has provided a fertile environment for suspicion and accusation (Ainslie, 1999). The significant socio-economic disparities give rise to social tensions when the affluent fail to meet the expectations of their less fortunate neighbors and relatives for support. These tensions often lead to suspicion, which frequently escalates into open accusations of witchcraft (Ainslie, 1999). The well-off accuse the poor of bewitching them, while the latter accuse the former of having achieved prosperity through witchcraft (Ferguson, 1999). Economic marginalization appears to be a particularly impactful

factor. The social tensions underlying witchcraft accusations can be attributed to the unequal integration of villages and regions into capitalist market systems (Parker, 2006). Witchcraft accusations can also serve as a deterrent to the rapid progression of economic and social differentiation. By undermining the growth of wealth and power inequality, witchcraft becomes a force that equalizes society. People refrain from accumulating or displaying wealth that may provoke envy (Geschiere, 1988).

2.9 Conclusion

Through my extensive review of literature on the subject of witchcraft accusation, it has become clear that this issue is not limited to a specific region or culture. Witchcraft accusation has been documented in Europe, America, Africa, and various Asian countries, indicating its pervasive nature. The literature also highlights the diverse range of factors that contribute to this phenomenon.

Superstition plays a significant role in fueling witchcraft accusation. Beliefs in supernatural powers and the fear of witchcraft have persisted throughout history, leading to the scapegoating of individuals who are perceived as practicing witchcraft. Additionally, illiteracy and a lack of education contribute to the perpetuation of these beliefs, as people may rely on traditional folklore and myths rather than scientific knowledge.

Class oppression is another factor that influences witchcraft accusation. In societies with stark social hierarchies, accusations of witchcraft are often used as a means of exerting control over marginalized groups. The lower classes, particularly women, are frequently targeted and accused of using witchcraft to harm others or gain power.

Furthermore, a patriarchal mindset plays a significant role in witchcraft accusation. Women are disproportionately accused of witchcraft, reflecting deeply ingrained gender inequalities. The perception of women as inherently dangerous or manipulative contributes to their vulnerability to witchcraft accusations.

To gain a deeper understanding of the issue, I specifically examined news articles published in English newspapers in Nepal, focusing on cases of witchcraft accusation. Interestingly, the majority of these cases originated from the terai region of Nepal. This finding suggests that there may be specific cultural or social factors at play in this region that contribute to the prevalence of witchcraft accusations.

It is worth noting that Nepal has taken steps to address this issue through legal provisions. The country has implemented laws to combat witchcraft accusation and protect individuals from false accusations. These legal measures aim to raise awareness, promote education, and provide support to those affected by witchcraft accusations.

In conclusion, my thorough examination of literature and analysis of news articles have shed light on the pervasive nature of witchcraft accusation. This phenomenon is influenced by various factors, including superstition, illiteracy, class oppression, and a patriarchal mindset. The concentration of cases in the terai region of Nepal highlights the need for targeted interventions in specific cultural contexts. Nepal's legal provisions demonstrate a commitment to addressing this issue and protecting individuals from the harmful consequences of witchcraft accusation.

Chapter Three

Methodology of the Study

This chapter deals with the methodology used in this study. It constitutes the introduction of study area, data sources, data collection methods and researcher's impression. The present chapter provides a detailed explanation of the methodology used in the current investigation. It begins by introducing the study region, providing a preamble that outlines the geographical and contextual background of the area under investigation. This preamble helps to establish the relevance and significance of the study within its specific context.

Next, the chapter discusses the sources of data that were utilized in the research. This includes a comprehensive overview of the primary and secondary sources that were consulted to gather relevant information. Primary sources may include interviews, surveys, or observations conducted by the researcher, while secondary sources may consist of existing literature, reports, or databases. The chapter also highlights the criteria used to select these sources and justifies their relevance to the research objectives.

Furthermore, the chapter delves into the techniques employed for data gathering. This section provides a step-by-step explanation of the methods used to collect data, ensuring transparency and reproducibility. It may include details on the research design, sampling strategy, data collection instruments, and data collection procedures. The chapter also discusses any ethical considerations that were taken into account during the data gathering process.

Lastly, the chapter explores the researcher's perception and its influence on the research process. This section acknowledges the potential biases, assumptions, and preconceptions that the researcher may have brought to the investigation. It reflects on how these personal perspectives may have shaped the research design, data collection, and interpretation of findings. By acknowledging the researcher's perception, the chapter aims to enhance the transparency and credibility of the research.

Overall, this chapter serves as a comprehensive guide to the methodology employed in the current investigation. It provides a clear understanding of the study region, sources of data, techniques of data gathering, and the researcher's perception. This information is crucial for readers to evaluate the validity and reliability of the research findings and to replicate the study if desired.

2.1 Research Design

The study is based mainly on field survey and analysis has been made on qualitative data and information. Both primary and secondary data are used for the study. Field survey for collection of primary data has been carried out in Ward No. 4 and 5 of Bhangaha Rural Municipality, Mahottari Nepal. I have collected some news related to witchcraft accusation from Nepal's leading Newspaper published in English language. I found 16 cases related to witchcraft for 10 years from 2009 to 2019. Out of the 16-news published, 13 news were from terai districts. That's why I choose a district from Terai.

3.1.1 Introduction of Mahottari District

Mahottari, a district of Madhesh Province, is one of the seventy-seven districts of Nepal. Its headquarters is located in Jaleshwar, a neighboring town of the historical city of Janakpur. The district covers an area of 1,002 km² and 706,994 populations (CBS, 2011). Of the total 50.6

percent of population are female. In terms of religion, the majority of people (84 percent) in Mahottari are Hindu, 14 percent are Muslim, 2 percent Buddhist, and smaller shares of Kirat, Jain, Christian, Sikh, Bahai and of other religions. Of the total population, 80.7 percent speak Maithili, 7.3 percent Urdu, 5.6 percent Nepali, 1.9 percent Magar, 1.4 percent Tamang, 1.1 percent Tharu and 0.9 percent Magahi as their first language (CBS, 2011). Only 57 percent of boys and men aged five and above in Mahottari are literate. A dismal 37 percent of women and girls in the district can read and write (Mahottari District Profile, 2014).

The caste/ethnic composition of the district in 2011 consisted of 21 percent Dalit, 16 percent Janajati, 9 percent Brahmin, 2 percent Chhetri, and various other groups (CBS, 2011). The majority of households rely on firewood (56 percent) or cow-dung (36 percent) for cooking, and electricity (63 percent) or kerosene (35 percent) for lighting. Motorcycles are owned by only 7 percent of households in Mahottari, while 53 percent possess bicycles. A relatively small percentage (35 percent) of households have radios, fewer (32 percent) have televisions, and only 6 percent are connected to cable television. However, 51 percent of households possess a mobile phone (Mahottari District Profile, 2014).

Agriculture is the primary economic activity in Mahottari, employing 68 percent of the population. The most common sources of family income are agriculture, wage labor, trade and business, and services. Remittances also play a significant role in the district's income and contribute to changes in socio-economic and livelihood patterns in rural areas. The main mode of transportation in the district is through roads, with the East-West Highway passing through the northern part of Mahottari and subsidiary roads branching off.

According to the National Statistics Office (NSO, 2011), a total of 67,352 hectares of land were cultivated in Mahottari district, with agricultural land owned by 70,460 individuals and rented by 8,244 individuals (National Statistics Office, 2021). There are 66 agricultural marketplaces spread across the district (Mahottari District Profile, 2014). The district of Mahottari is prone to various seasonal disasters due to its soil nature and soil erosion caused by deforestation in the Churiya Hills. The District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) in Mahottari has identified flooding, accidental fires, and earthquakes as the top three disaster risks for the district.

Of the total population, four percent live in urban area and 96 percent live in rural area. The total households are 111316 and 19.4 percent households have headed by female. According to Small Area Estimation of Poverty (2011), poverty rate of this district is 16.2 percent. The women who have land and property in their name are 20.27 percent (Mahottari District Profile, 2014).

3.1.2 Bhangaha Municipality

The Mahottari district comprises ten municipalities and five rural municipalities, one of which is the Bhangaha municipality. Bhangaha municipality covers an area of 77.21 square kilometers and has a population of 55,354 according to the National Statistics Office in 2021. Among the total population, males make up 47.1 percent, while females make up 52.9 percent. The municipality has a total of 7,088 households (National Statistics Office, 2021) (National Planning Commission, 2011), resulting in a population density of 717 per square kilometer. The poverty rate in the rural municipality stands at 18.6 percent. Bhangaha is home to people of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian faiths, with the majority speaking Maithali, Tharu, and Nepali languages (National Statistics Office, 2021).

Bhangaha municipality was established following the reconstruction of Nepal in accordance with the Constitution of Nepal 2072. It was formed by merging the previous Bhangaha, Hattisarawa, Singyahi, Meghnath, Gorahnnah, Dharampur, Hariharpur, and Harinmari Village Development Committees (VDCs) (Mahottari District Profile, 2014). The municipality shares borders with Batteshwor Rural Municipality in Dhanusha district to the east, Aurahi and RamGopalpur Municipality to the west, Bardivas municipality and Batteshwor Rural Municipality in Dhanusha district to the north, and Loharpatti and Balaba municipality to the south (Mahottari District Profile, 2014).

3.2 Sample Size for the Study

The Sample size for the survey was twelve. Because identifying the sample respondents were not easy. Being a sensitive issue, respondents did not want to answer. It is the reason of being a small sample size. Sample respondents were selected in purposive method. Twelve women who were accused as witch craft were taken as sample respondents. Likewise, the rationale behind choosing all the women as respondents is reports against witchcraft accusation were of women in last three years (CID, 2019). But some males are also found accused for witch crafting while conducting the field survey.

3.3 Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources are used in the study. Primary data and information were collected in research site by using primary data collecting tools such as case study and Key Informants Interview (KII). Secondary data were collected from various newspapers, study reports and online journal articles. The use of primary data collection tools allowed the researchers to gather first-hand information from the research site. Case studies were conducted to gain a deeper

understanding of specific situations or events related to the research topic. Key Informants Interviews (KII) were also conducted to gather insights and perspectives from individuals who have relevant knowledge and experience in the field.

On the other hand, secondary data were obtained from various sources to supplement the primary data gathered. Newspapers were reviewed to gather information on current events and issues related to the research topic. Study reports were also reviewed to gain insights from previous research studies conducted on the same or related topics. Online journal articles were also accessed to gather information on the latest research findings and trends related to the research topic.

The use of both primary and secondary sources allowed the researchers to gather a comprehensive and diverse range of data and information. This approach ensured that the study was grounded in both empirical evidence and expert opinions, providing a more robust and reliable basis for the research findings and conclusions.

3.3.1 Primary Data Source

The primary data were collected through a field survey. The tools utilized for collecting this primary data included case studies and Key Informants Interviews (KII). A case study can be defined as an in-depth examination of an individual, a group of individuals, or a specific unit, with the aim of drawing generalizations across multiple units. In a case study, the focus is centered on a particular unit of interest (Gustafsson, 2017). According to Welsh (Welsh, 1981), case studies aid in comprehending the processes, events, projects, and programs, as well as uncovering contextual characteristics that shed light on a particular issue or object. The insights gained from these case studies can directly impact policy, practice, and future research (Merriam, 1998). To conduct the case study, a standardized checklist has been prepared.

The case study method is a valuable tool for researchers to closely examine data within a specific context. Typically, this method selects a small geographical area or a limited number of individuals as the subjects of study. Through reports of past studies, case study research allows for the exploration and understanding of complex issues. It is considered a robust research method, particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required. The role of the case study method in research becomes more prominent in fields such as education (Kubat, 2006), sociology (Schirmer, 2006), and community-based problems (Johnson, 2002). One reason for the recognition of case study as a research method is that researchers have become increasingly concerned about the limitations of quantitative methods in providing holistic and in-depth explanations of social and behavioral problems. Through case study methods, researchers are able to go beyond quantitative statistical results and understand behavioral conditions through the actor's perspective (Johnson, 2002). By including both quantitative and qualitative data, case study research helps explain both the process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction, and analysis of the cases under investigation (Tellis, 1997).

In addition to conducting case studies, I have also undertaken Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) as part of this study. KIIs are qualitative, in-depth interviews with individuals who possess a comprehensive understanding of the current state of affairs within the community. The primary objective of KIIs is to gather information from a diverse group of individuals, including community leaders, professionals, and residents, who have firsthand knowledge of the community. These individuals, with their unique knowledge and understanding, can provide valuable insights into the nature of problems and offer recommendations for potential solutions. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I conducted interviews with community leaders from Bhangaha Rural

Municipality, the Police In-charge, and academicians. The data collected from these interviews were coded, decoded, and analyzed using the narrative method.

3.3.2 Secondary Data Source

Despite the widespread discourse and discussion surrounding witchcraft practices, academic literature on this subject is notably scarce. Consequently, I have relied upon secondary sources such as newspaper articles, online journal articles, and reports from various studies. Furthermore, data from the Central Investigation Department has also been utilized as a secondary source.

3.4 Field Reflection

When I was young and just completed the school education, I had heard about Maranai Devi Yadav. Marani Devi, 55, from Simardahi Village in Mahottari District was accused of practicing witchcraft and beaten mercilessly by villagers and left to dead. It was the incident of 2001. When I heard that news I was really shocked and determined to know further and fight against it. Time passed but I couldn't forget it and I choose the topic of witchcraft accusation for my Masters' thesis.

Field site for my study could be no other than Mahottari district. I have described above about the reasons of choosing Mahottari for my field survey. I moved to Bhangaha Rural Municipality for my field survey but conducting field survey became very difficult due to language problem because it was very difficult to understand and speak Maithali for me. All my respondents could not understand Nepali and they spoke only Maithali.

I requested my friend who was from Mahottari for facilitation of my field survey. My respondents were village women and they felt shy and awkward to answer my questions. In one hand, they did

not want to talk and share their story with a modern urban woman. On other hand, they were victim of accusation and did not want to disclose their bitter past.

I had started the interview from the second day when I reached Bhangaha with the help of my friend. After finishing the second case study, I was totally depressed. The accused were made victim for a very simple reason and they were behaved very inhuman. The victims and the culprits were neighbors and relatives. By observing and listening the depth of the stories I decided to become more sincere in my study. I started to follow my respondents to their farm, to their working site. My friend tried to convince them that the interviews would no harm to them and inspire to speak freely. I spent a whole day for an interview. I spent 15 days in the field site. Along with 13 case studies, I conducted interviews with elected leaders as well as other local political leaders to understand the depth of the problem. Apart of these, I talked with the, political leaders, Police In-charge of this area as key informants about the trend and nature of the witchcraft accusation and root cause.

Finally, spending 15 days in Bhangaha I returned to Kathmandu.

Chapter Four

Findings and Interpretation

The findings of a study denotes the core findings of a study derived from the methods applied to gather and analyze data and information. For this study twelve case studies were conducted. The details of case studies are presented in annex one. Based on these case studies interpretation has been made.

4.1 General Interpretation

All the respondents of my study were poor. Most of them did not have their own land. Of twelve respondents, seven families did not have their own land. They do not have regular income sources. All the family members including the respondents has been working as a labor on daily wage basis. They had problem for daily hand to mouth. Of the total respondents, seven respondents do not have their own land, four have land but not sufficient for their livelihood and only one has land from where they can produce grains for their livelihood. Parmila Devi (39 years) has land but for the name's sake and no sufficient production for food and Siya Shah (70) and Dulari Devi (60 years) have their land for farming. Likewise, all the respondents are illiterate and of diverse age group.

Table 1: Socio-economic status of respondents

Case Study	Age	Education	Land ownership
Case Study 1	60	Illiterate	No
Case Study 2	39	Illiterate	Yes but not sufficient for survive
Case Study 3	70	Illiterate	Yes

Case Study 4	73	Illiterate	No
Case Study 5	35	Illiterate	No
Case Study 6	60	Illiterate	Yes but not sufficient for survive
Case Study 7	46	Illiterate	No
Case Study 8	32	Illiterate	No
Case Study 9	65	Illiterate	No
Case Study 10	56	Illiterate	NO
Case Study 11	42	Illiterate	Yes but not sufficient for survive
Case Study 12	56	Illiterate	Yes but not sufficient for survive

Source: Field Survey, 2019

All the respondents were illiterate. They did not get opportunity to go to school. Of twelve, eight families have not sent their children to school and it is because of poverty. Two respondent's families have better economic life but both families are migrated from other places. In my study, I found all the allegations were to women, especially poor and majority of them were from dalit community.

The victims and the accusers are of same village. They used to have nice relationship. However, later, their relationship becomes bitter because of borrowings. In all the cases, the lender has blamed the borrower as a witch. In majority of cases, disputes begin between borrower and lender and later lender blames borrower as witchcraft and lenders becomes offensive.

No accused women told me that they believe in witchcraft, black magic or any unseen power although all of them are illiterate. They do not have any political relation and they do not trust police administration and any government institutions. They have their own opinion that

government institutions (they referred police administration) and political parties work only for rich people. This type of opinion is constructed by their own experiences. Of the total, five of them reported to police against accuser but none of them are punished yet. Likewise, in all the cases except Sanawati Sadaa (Case Study five), were offended by male. However, in the case of Sanawati Sadaa, six women attacked her. All the victims were physically tortured, tried to feed human excrement and fed human excrement by the offenders and all the offenders were neighbors and villagers.

Of the total twelve respondents, three victims (Case Study-2, Case Study-8 and Case Study-11) had borrowed some amount from the offender. The offender had charged high interest rate and asked them to return the money earlier than the stated time. This had increased the distance between the borrowers and the lenders. According to them, normal dispute is natural but the lender behaved them very inhuman. All the victims reported that they could not forget the moment in their lifetime and can't forgive the offenders.

According to them, prior to accusation, they were enjoying their life. Although, their poverty had become integral part of their live, they were living happily. However, after accusation they could not face with the society. The perception of their neighbors to them has become negative. Even helpful neighbors stopped to support them. The society boycotted them. There are no provisions for any relief, rehabilitation or any form of remuneration to women after they have been branded as witches. Subsequently, women are left to suffer the brunt of her wounds, or the social shame. Some of them even tried to commit suicide. In the word of Kusuma Devi Yadav (Case Study Nine) – "I could have worked if I weren't blamed and tortured. The wound of outer body is now recovered. But the pain in my heart will remain painful as long as I live". The committers in the

witchcraft violence consist of family members, local villagers/neighbors and witch doctors and undisclosed kind and number of people.

In addition to conducting interviews with victims of witchcraft accusations, I engaged in discussions with the local law enforcement authorities at the research site. The police informed me that numerous instances of witchcraft accusations and subsequent acts of torture have occurred, yet only a limited number of cases are reported to them. The police further suggested that the prevalent belief in witchcraft may be attributed to a lack of education and awareness among the populace. Moreover, they highlighted that the accusation of witchcraft has been manipulated as a means to exploit the economically disadvantaged. It is disconcerting to note that certain political leaders in the area also subscribe to the belief in witchcraft and black magic. The points received from the discussion with police officers and local political leaders are presented below:

- i. The primary cause of accusations of witchcraft is attributed to a lack of literacy.
- ii. A minimal number of cases have been reported to law enforcement, thus, it is imperative to encourage individuals to report such incidents to the police.
- iii. Witchcraft allegations have been utilized as a means of retaliation, conflict resolution, and addressing social and economic disparities within society.
- iv. The perpetrators of sorcery-related violence are not strangers, but rather individuals who share biological or social ties with the accused.
- v. Local youths, social workers, and political leaders can play a pivotal role in eradicating such malevolent practices. The Nepal police is always prepared to provide support.
- vi. Beliefs in witchcraft have been deeply ingrained for an extended period, therefore, immediate elimination is not feasible.

Numerous instances have gone unreported to law enforcement authorities due to individuals' fear of endangering their own lives. Those who have attempted to report or defend the accused often find themselves at risk of being accused of supporting witchcraft or being labeled as witches themselves. Consequently, relatives and family members are hesitant to report or seek justice, as they fear for their own safety. Social and political leaders operating in Bhangaha have expressed that the police response has been severely inadequate. Not all incidents of violence related to witchcraft have been addressed or followed up by the police. There are several factors contributing to this insufficient police response. Firstly, there is apprehension associated with the accusers, as the majority of cases involve affluent and influential individuals within the community. Secondly, the victims primarily come from impoverished backgrounds and may encounter difficulties in effectively lodging complaints with the police. Lastly, the police have been observed to display reluctance in combating such malicious practices.

4.2 Illiteracy and Witchcraft Accusation: The Constitution of Nepal guarantees equal rights to individuals regardless of their gender, caste, race, or ethnicity. However, the antiquated tradition of accusing individuals of practicing witchcraft, which has persisted for centuries, remains prevalent and not uncommon (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Women continue to suffer mistreatment and torture as a result of these allegations, with a majority of the victims coming from low-income backgrounds. The accusation of witchcraft represents a form of violence that specifically targets women, stemming from the unequal power dynamics between genders. Once accused, these victims often endure physical and psychological torment. Extensive research has established a clear connection between illiteracy and accusations of witchcraft. Typically, it is illiterate women with limited financial resources who are targeted, subjected to physical assault, and even murdered. In my study, all the women surveyed were not only impoverished but also

lacked basic literacy skills. Many of these women silently endure pain and suffering due to their limited access to authorities. The prevalence of such practices can be attributed to factors such as superstition, illiteracy, social and economic disparities, and a lack of public awareness.

The mistreatment and torture of women as a result of witchcraft allegations is a deeply rooted issue that continues to persist in many societies, particularly among those from low-income backgrounds. The accusation of witchcraft is a form of violence that specifically targets women, highlighting the unequal power dynamics between genders.

Once accused of witchcraft, women often face unimaginable physical and psychological torment. They are subjected to physical assault, torture, and even fatal consequences. Extensive research has consistently shown a strong correlation between illiteracy and accusations of witchcraft. It is typically the illiterate women with limited financial resources who become the primary targets of these accusations.

In my study, all the women surveyed not only lived in poverty but also lacked basic literacy skills. This lack of education and knowledge leaves them vulnerable and unable to defend themselves against false accusations. Many of these women silently endure pain and suffering due to their limited access to authorities and support systems.

The prevalence of such practices can be attributed to various factors, including deeply ingrained superstitions, widespread illiteracy, social and economic disparities, and a lack of public awareness. Superstitions and cultural beliefs often perpetuate the idea that women possess supernatural powers and are responsible for misfortunes within their communities. Illiteracy further exacerbates this issue, as it limits women's ability to challenge these accusations or seek legal protection.

Moreover, social and economic disparities play a significant role in perpetuating the mistreatment of women accused of witchcraft. Women from low-income backgrounds are more likely to be marginalized and lack access to resources and support networks. This makes them easy targets for scapegoating and violence.

The lack of public awareness about the extent and consequences of witchcraft accusations also contributes to the persistence of this issue. Many people are unaware of the severe harm inflicted upon women accused of witchcraft and the underlying factors that perpetuate these accusations. This lack of awareness hinders efforts to address and eradicate this form of violence.

In conclusion, the mistreatment and torture of women accused of witchcraft is a grave issue that disproportionately affects those from low-income backgrounds. The unequal power dynamics between genders, coupled with illiteracy, social and economic disparities, superstitions, and a lack of public awareness, contribute to the persistence of this violence. It is crucial to address these underlying factors and raise awareness to protect the rights and well-being of women in these vulnerable situations.

These beliefs are deeply ingrained in rural areas of Nepal, particularly among community members with lower levels of literacy (WHRIN, 2014). In the case of Bhangaha Municipality, the overall literacy rate is 57.2 percent, with male literacy at 67.1 percent and female literacy at only 48.3 percent (National Statistics Office, 2021). It is important to note that all victims accused of witchcraft are illiterate. Illiteracy acts as a barrier to social interaction, preventing victims from engaging in discussions about their issues and speaking out against their perpetrators. Based on this evidence, we can conclude that there is a direct correlation between illiteracy and accusations of witchcraft.

4.3 Class and Witchcraft Accusation: The accusation of witchcraft and the subsequent acts of violence against those accused can be seen as a reflection of the societal class structure and economic production. In sociology, three classes are commonly recognized: the upper class, middle class, and working class. In this particular investigation, all the individuals accused of witchcraft were from the working class. The victims were mainly elderly women who lived in poverty, widows, and women from lower castes, or a combination of these groups. The accusation of witchcraft has been used as a way to gain economic advantage and exert power and control over vulnerable individuals. This can be seen as a form of exploitation of the lower class.

The allegation of witchcraft and the subsequent acts of violence perpetrated against the accused can be seen as a reflection of the social hierarchy and economic dynamics within a society. In many societies, including historical contexts and some contemporary settings, there exists a clear division of social classes: the upper class, middle class, and working class.

In the specific investigation being discussed, it is notable that all individuals accused of practicing witchcraft belonged to the working class. This suggests a correlation between social class and the likelihood of being accused of witchcraft. The victims, on the other hand, were predominantly elderly women living in destitution, widows, and women belonging to lower castes, or a combination thereof. These individuals were already marginalized and vulnerable due to their economic and social circumstances.

The accusation of witchcraft, in this context, can be understood as a tool used by those in positions of power to attain economic advantages and exert control over the lower class. By labeling certain individuals as witches, the accusers could justify their actions and further exploit the vulnerable

members of society. This exploitation could take various forms, such as seizing their property, forcing them into labor, or subjecting them to physical violence.

The act of accusing someone of witchcraft and subsequently perpetrating violence against them can thus be interpreted as a manifestation of the societal stratification and economic production. It highlights the power dynamics at play, where the upper and middle classes exploit and oppress the working class for their own economic gain and to maintain their social dominance.

Overall, the allegation of witchcraft and the violence that follows it can be seen as a form of exploitation targeting the lower class. It serves as a means for those in power to maintain their economic advantages and exert control over vulnerable individuals, further perpetuating the societal inequalities and injustices that exist.

Several respondents had borrowed money from others, such as Parmila Devi (Case Study Two), who had borrowed fifty thousand rupees from a neighbor at a high interest rate of 20%, but was unable to make regular payments. Consequently, her neighbor accused her of witchcraft and subjected her to physical and psychological abuse. Similar difficulties were experienced by Sanawati Sadaa (Case Study Five) and Urmila Sadaa (Case Study Seven). While not all of the respondents in the sample had borrowed money, they were all impoverished and lacked access to educational opportunities, struggling to survive and becoming victims of witchcraft accusations made by neighbors and relatives without any evidence. Therefore, the accusation of witchcraft can be interpreted as a form of economic exploitation perpetuated by the existing class structure within society.

4.4 Patriarchy and Witchcraft Accusation: Patriarchy is commonly defined as a social system characterized by the dominance of men, who hold power and exert control over women, resulting

in their oppression and exploitation (Lerner, 1986). The present study involved the examination of twelve case studies, all of which involved women who were victims of witchcraft accusations. These women suffered physical and mental torture under the pretext of witchcraft, being unjustly blamed for various misfortunes. It can be concluded that witchcraft accusations represent a form of violence against women and are a problem perpetuated by patriarchal systems.

The belief in witchcraft has been deeply ingrained in many cultures for centuries, and has often been used as a tool to control and subjugate women. In patriarchal societies, women are often seen as inferior to men and are therefore more likely to be accused of witchcraft. This is because witchcraft is often associated with female sexuality and power, which are seen as threatening to male dominance.

The accusations of witchcraft often result in brutal punishments, including torture, imprisonment, and even death. These punishments are not only a form of physical violence, but also a form of psychological violence, as they instill fear and terror in the minds of women. The women who are accused of witchcraft are often ostracized from their communities, and are left to suffer alone.

The persistence of accusations of witchcraft is a clear indication of the continued existence of patriarchal systems. These systems are characterized by the belief that men are superior to women, and that women should be subservient to men. This belief is deeply ingrained in many cultures, and is often reinforced by religious and cultural traditions.

In order to address the issue of accusations of witchcraft, it is important to challenge patriarchal systems and promote gender equality. This can be done through education and awareness-raising campaigns, as well as through legal and policy reforms that protect the rights of women. It is also important to provide support and resources to women who have been accused of witchcraft, and

to work towards ending the stigma and discrimination that they face. Only by addressing the root causes of this issue can we hope to create a more just and equitable society for all.

Baruah and Thakur's (Thakur, 2019) study on witch-hunting in Goalpara and West Karbi Anglong Districts of Assam and West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya supports this conclusion, as it revealed that witch-hunting serves as a strategy to maintain patriarchal control over women in rural and remote areas of Meghalaya and Assam, hindering their progress (Thakur, 2019). Similar findings were observed in the present study. Priyanka Bharadwaj's (Bharadwaj, 2019) study discussed how witch hunting, as a gendered form of violence against women, plays a significant role in the contemporary treatment of women and contributes to their subordination in India. Kelkar and Nathan (Kelkar, 1991), who examined cases of witch-hunting in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh, noted that women, particularly those from Dalit Bahujan castes, are the primary victims in most instances.

The phenomenon of witchcraft accusations disproportionately impacting women is not limited to Nepal, but is a global issue. A study conducted by Katherine in 2011 (Katherine, 2011) reveals that gendered witchcraft accusations are prevalent in other parts of Africa as well. In South Africa, for instance, both genders are involved in witchcraft, but women are twice as likely to face accusations. It is important to note that gendered witchcraft accusations are not exclusive to Africa. Historical records show that during the witch-hunts in Europe from 1450 to 1650, around 75 to 80 percent of those accused were women, particularly impoverished and elderly widows. Furthermore, women were the primary targets during the Salem witch trials in colonial Massachusetts from 1692 to 1693. This pattern of gendered witchcraft accusations persists in various regions worldwide, including Papua New Guinea, India, West Bengal, Nepal, and the Andean regions of South America (Katherine, 2011). The findings of these studies align with my

own research, which consists of 12 case studies, all involving impoverished women as victims. Based on the aforementioned studies, it can be concluded that there is a clear correlation between gender and witchcraft accusations.

4.5 Impact of Legal Provisions against Accusation of Witchcraft in Nepal

Nepal has implemented a number of legal measures to address the issue of witchcraft accusations. The Witchcraft-related Accusation (Crime and Punishment) Act of 2015 criminalizes the act of accusing someone of practicing witchcraft and subjecting them to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment (Nepal Law Commission, 2014). Depending on the severity of the offense, the offender may face imprisonment, a fine, or both. Furthermore, the Act mandates that the perpetrator provide compensation to the victim. Section 168 of the National Criminal Code states that violence resulting from witchcraft accusations is punishable by law, with a potential prison sentence of up to five years and a fine of up to 50,000 Nepali Rupees (Nepal Law Commission, 2014).

This lack of legal representation further exacerbates the issue, as survivors are left without proper guidance and support to navigate the complex legal system. Additionally, cultural and societal norms play a significant role in perpetuating the problem. Deep-rooted beliefs in witchcraft and superstitions often lead to the stigmatization and marginalization of individuals accused of practicing witchcraft. This social stigma not only hinders survivors from seeking justice but also creates an environment where perpetrators can act with impunity.

Moreover, the lack of comprehensive education and awareness programs addressing the issue of witchcraft accusations further contributes to the problem. Without proper education, communities remain susceptible to misinformation and continue to believe in the existence of witchcraft, leading to the continued victimization of innocent individuals.

Furthermore, the issue of witchcraft accusations is not limited to a single region or community. It is a widespread problem that affects individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds. However, marginalized groups, such as women, the elderly, and those belonging to minority communities, are disproportionately targeted. This highlights the intersectionality of the issue, as it is not only a matter of gender-based violence but also a violation of human rights.

To effectively address this issue, a multi-faceted approach is required. Firstly, there is a need for comprehensive legal reforms that not only criminalize witchcraft accusations but also ensure the protection and support of survivors. This includes strengthening the enforcement of existing laws and holding accountable those who perpetrate violence based on witchcraft accusations.

Additionally, efforts should be made to improve access to justice for survivors, including the provision of legal aid and the establishment of specialized courts to handle such cases. This would help ensure that survivors have the necessary resources and support to seek justice and hold their perpetrators accountable.

Furthermore, education and awareness programs should be implemented at both the community and national levels. These programs should aim to debunk myths and misconceptions surrounding witchcraft, promote gender equality, and foster a culture of tolerance and respect. By addressing the root causes of witchcraft accusations, such as illiteracy and cultural beliefs, these programs can help change societal attitudes and reduce the prevalence of such accusations.

Lastly, it is crucial to invest in the training and capacity-building of human rights lawyers and activists. By equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge, they can effectively advocate for the rights of survivors and provide them with the legal representation they need.

In conclusion, while legal provisions exist to address the issue of witchcraft accusations, their effectiveness is hindered by various factors, including illiteracy, inadequate enforcement, cultural norms, and

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Theoretical Reflection

5.1 Conclusion

However, my research indicates that these legal provisions are not effectively addressing the issue at hand. One potential reason for this is the prevalence of illiteracy among the affected individuals, as they may lack awareness of the legal protections available to them. Another contributing factor could be the inadequate enforcement of the law. Respondents have reported instances where the police administration has shown support for the perpetrators rather than the victims. Despite the existence of specific laws criminalizing accusations of witchcraft and ensuring protection and access to justice for survivors at the national level since 2014, their practical implementation has been slow and problematic. Additionally, there is a significant shortage of human rights lawyers in the country who possess the necessary expertise and willingness to handle such cases.

Furthermore, cultural and societal norms play a significant role in perpetuating the problem. In many communities, beliefs in witchcraft and supernatural powers are deeply ingrained, leading to the stigmatization and marginalization of individuals accused of practicing witchcraft. This stigma often results in the victims being ostracized from their communities, further exacerbating their vulnerability and hindering their access to justice.

Moreover, the lack of education and awareness about the harmful consequences of witchcraft accusations contributes to the persistence of this issue. Many individuals, including community leaders and law enforcement officials, may hold onto traditional beliefs and fail to recognize the human rights violations and violence associated with witchcraft accusations. This lack of

understanding and empathy perpetuates a culture of impunity, where perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions.

In addition to these challenges, the limited resources allocated to addressing witchcraft accusations pose a significant obstacle. The government's focus and funding are often directed towards other pressing issues, such as poverty alleviation and healthcare, leaving little room for addressing the specific needs of survivors of witchcraft accusations. This lack of resources hampers the implementation of comprehensive support systems, including counseling services, shelters, and rehabilitation programs, which are crucial for the recovery and reintegration of survivors.

Furthermore, the lack of coordination and collaboration among different stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and international actors, further hinders progress in addressing witchcraft accusations. There is a need for a multi-sectoral approach that involves all relevant actors working together to raise awareness, provide support, and advocate for policy changes.

In conclusion, while legal provisions exist to address witchcraft accusations and protect the rights of survivors, their effectiveness is hindered by various factors. Illiteracy, inadequate enforcement, cultural norms, limited resources, and lack of coordination all contribute to the persistence of this issue. To effectively address witchcraft accusations, it is crucial to address these underlying challenges and work towards comprehensive solutions that prioritize education, awareness, and the empowerment of survivors. As Pavanello (2017) concluded, 'witchcraft' is a broad term encompassing beliefs and practices related to supernatural powers and objects, which vary significantly across communities, regions, and time periods. One of the main factors contributing

to the prevalence of these wrongful practices could be superstition, lack of education, and insufficient public awareness.

Accusing women of practicing witchcraft constitutes an act of violence perpetrated against them, a phenomenon that is not uncommon in societies governed by patriarchal systems. In my research, nearly all female participants reported enduring physical torture and being subjected to the degrading act of being fed or forced to consume human waste by male perpetrators. There are multiple underlying factors that contribute to such forms of violence against women in relation to witchcraft. These factors encompass societal attitudes, social behavior, a patriarchal mindset, superstitious beliefs, and class struggles. Additionally, the lack of education or illiteracy, limited awareness, poverty, a lack of understanding of legal rights and human rights, and a lack of social protection all contribute to the perpetuation of witchcraft practices. Moreover, the high prevalence of gender inequality, particularly in terms of access to education and property rights, further exacerbates the violence inflicted upon women.

Beliefs and accusations surrounding witchcraft predominantly revolve around local interpersonal matters, with the concept of community gradually expanding over time. There are three primary factors that drive instances of witchcraft allegations. Firstly, the belief system, or superstition, which pertains to a widely held yet irrational conviction in supernatural influences, particularly in relation to fortune or misfortune, or practices based on such beliefs. This also applies to accusations of witchcraft. Through a conducted survey, it was discovered that the accuser often suffered from health ailments such as cancer, diabetes, or kidney problems, yet wrongfully accused their innocent and impoverished neighbor. Superstitions are deeply rooted in irrationality, and the interplay between individual agency and societal structure is evident in this case. It illustrates how a single individual can easily influence a society, and how society can magnify the impact of that

individual. The perpetrators of witchcraft violence encompass family members, local villagers/neighbors, witch doctors, and an undisclosed number of individuals.

Furthermore, the issue at hand pertains to gender inequality perpetuated by the patriarchal system. Patriarchy refers to the social structure in which men hold dominance over women. It encompasses the power dynamics through which men exert control over women (Veronica, 1979). There exist varying perspectives on the extent and impact of patriarchy. Some view it as a reflection of familial structures, while others perceive it as a comprehensive system of oppression rooted in misogyny, exploiting and subjecting women to brutality. The majority of those accused in cases of witchcraft are women, with a few instances involving men (Kelkar, 1991). Notably, the victims primarily belong to the Dalit Bahujan castes. In my research, I discovered that all the accused witches were women, with a significant proportion hailing from the Dalit community. Similar to other countries, Nepal has witnessed a rise in incidents resulting in the death of women accused of witchcraft. However, it is crucial to highlight that these women often do not seek legal or police assistance.

Thirdly, the accusation of witchcraft can be comprehended as a phenomenon that is socially constructed. A social construct denotes something that lacks existence in objective reality, but rather arises as a consequence of human interaction. Its existence is predicated on the collective agreement of humans. In the course of my research, I have ascertained that all the accusers attributed misfortune to these unfortunate women and subsequently subjected them to punishment. While certain contemporary studies acknowledge witchcraft as a social construct, it is also acknowledged as a concept that furnishes individuals with a meaningful representation of the intricate dynamics of their society, encompassing power dynamics, inequality, individual and collective interests, as well as the allocation of resources.

Moreover, the phenomenon at hand is significantly influenced by the society and its hierarchical structure. As emphasized by Urmila Sadaa in Case Study Seven, "the crux of the matter revolves around property." Sadaa further elucidated that individuals who possess authority, political affiliations, land, and wealth are shielded from being implicated in witchcraft accusations. In my research, I observed that out of twelve families, ten belonged to underprivileged and marginalized backgrounds, grappling to make ends meet. These families lacked land ownership and relied on daily wage labor for their sustenance. Conversely, the culprits hailed from comparatively affluent families. They wielded influence within local governmental institutions and political parties. The political landscape is volatile, lacking a well-established and steady system, which enables the upper class to exploit the lower class by manipulating state mechanisms. The study found that in such societies, individuals were more likely to make false accusations against others as a means of gaining power or settling personal scores. This was particularly true in societies where there was a lack of trust and cooperation between individuals, and where social norms and values were not well-established or enforced.

Furthermore, the study found that allegations were more likely to be made against individuals who were perceived as being different or deviant from the norm, such as minorities or those with unconventional lifestyles. This was often due to a fear of the unknown or a desire to maintain the status quo.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of social stability and cohesion in preventing false allegations and promoting a fair and just society. It also underscores the need for individuals to be aware of their own biases and prejudices, and to work towards building stronger and more inclusive communities.

The study conducted by Grigaite in 2018 sheds light on the alarming issue of witchcraft accusations and persecution in Nepali society. According to the study, women, especially those who are widowed, divorced, living in poverty, or belonging to a lower social caste, are the most vulnerable to being accused of practicing witchcraft.

The findings of the study highlight the intersectionality of gender, marital status, socioeconomic status, and caste in determining the likelihood of being accused of witchcraft. Women who have lost their husbands or have gone through a divorce are often seen as threats to the social order and are more likely to be targeted for witchcraft allegations. Additionally, women living in impoverished conditions are more susceptible to being accused, as they may be seen as desperate and resorting to supernatural means for survival. The study also reveals that financial disputes can act as a catalyst for witchcraft accusations. Perpetrators may exploit these allegations to deprive women of their property or inheritance rights. This highlights the underlying power dynamics and gender inequalities that contribute to the persecution of women accused of witchcraft.

The alignment of my own investigation with Grigaite's findings further strengthens the credibility of the study. It suggests that the issue of witchcraft accusations and persecution in Nepal is a widespread and deeply rooted problem that requires urgent attention and intervention. Efforts should be made to raise awareness, challenge discriminatory beliefs and practices, and provide support and protection for women who are at risk of being accused of witchcraft. Numerous legal provisions have been established to address allegations of witchcraft. The Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act of 2009 provides a comprehensive definition of domestic violence, encompassing physical, mental, sexual, and economic harm inflicted by one individual upon another individual with whom they share a familial relationship. This definition also includes acts of reprimand or emotional harm. Similarly, the United Nations defines Violence against Women

as "any act of gender-based violence that leads to, or is likely to lead to, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

Despite the presence of stringent legislation, allegations of witchcraft persist as one of numerous societal perils. The inefficacy of the law has posed a formidable challenge to the provision of social protection. Various factors influence social perils, including witchcraft accusations. Without identifying and addressing these factors, the assurance of social protection cannot be guaranteed.

In contemporary societies, the issue of witch hunting remains an exceedingly perplexing problem that has garnered significant attention in the media. Witch hunting is a traditional practice prevalent in rural communities and a grave violation of human rights. Urgent measures must be taken to devise a strategy that ensures protection and justice for the victims and their families.

This issue is not limited to Nepal, as witchcraft-related violence is prevalent in many parts of the world, particularly in rural areas where superstitions and traditional beliefs are deeply ingrained. Women are often the primary targets of such violence, as they are seen as vulnerable and powerless in these societies. The accusations of witchcraft are often based on trivial or arbitrary reasons, such as a sudden illness or death in the community, or a personal grudge against the accused.

The consequences of such accusations can be devastating for the victims and their families, as they are ostracized from their communities and subjected to physical and emotional abuse. In some cases, they are forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in other areas, where they face further discrimination and marginalization.

To address this issue, it is essential to work with local communities and leaders to challenge the myths and superstitions that underpin witchcraft-related violence. This can be done through

education and awareness-raising campaigns, as well as through legal and policy reforms that protect the rights of victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

In addition, it is crucial to provide support and assistance to victims of witchcraft-related violence, including legal aid, counseling, and medical care. This can be done through partnerships with local organizations and community leaders, as well as through international aid and development programs. Ultimately, the goal should be to create a society where women are valued and respected, and where superstitions and harmful traditional practices are replaced with evidence-based knowledge and human rights principles. Only then can we hope to eliminate the scourge of witchcraft-related violence and ensure that all women are able to live free from fear and discrimination.

5.2 Suggestions

The suggestions provided by a study by INSEC (INSEC, 2012) in order to minimize this kind of violence, could be relevant after 10 years too:

- Implement legislation with precise definitions and stringent penalties
- Initiate a comprehensive public awareness campaign addressing the superstitions surrounding witchcraft practices
- Notify civil societies and promote their proactive involvement
- Establish specific policies aimed at educating women on matters pertaining to witchcraft-related violence
- Conduct women empowerment and skill development programs, particularly in rural regions.

Finally, the issue at hand is one that stems from social class distinctions and is inherently political in nature, thus necessitating a political solution. It is imperative that the discriminatory tendencies of the state be rectified. The onus lies with the state to initiate the necessary actions, with the full support and cooperation of all state apparatus and civil society, in order to effectively implement government policies. By directing these policies towards the impoverished and marginalized segments of society, and ensuring their integration and upliftment, the problem will gradually diminish. It is crucial to extend proper education and other social security programs to these individuals. The state must strive to create and maintain an environment wherein all citizens feel secure and are able to lead lives of dignity.

The issue at hand, which revolves around social class distinctions, is deeply intertwined with politics. It is not merely a matter of personal prejudice or individual actions, but rather a systemic problem that requires a political resolution. In order to address this issue, it is crucial for the state to acknowledge and rectify its discriminatory tendencies.

The responsibility for initiating the necessary actions lies with the state, as it possesses the power and authority to implement effective policies. However, this cannot be achieved without the full support and cooperation of all state apparatus and civil society. It is essential for all stakeholders to come together and work towards a common goal of social equality and justice.

To effectively tackle the issue, government policies should be directed towards the impoverished and marginalized segments of society. These policies should aim to integrate and uplift these individuals, providing them with the necessary resources and opportunities to improve their lives. This can be achieved through targeted social welfare programs, access to quality education, and other forms of support.

Proper education plays a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty and social inequality. By providing marginalized individuals with access to quality education, they can acquire the skills and knowledge needed to improve their socio-economic status. Additionally, social security programs should be extended to ensure that these individuals have access to basic necessities and are protected from economic hardships.

Creating an environment where all citizens feel secure and are able to lead lives of dignity is paramount. The state must strive to eliminate discrimination and create a society that values and respects the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their social class. This requires not only legislative changes but also a shift in societal attitudes and norms.

In conclusion, addressing the issue of social class distinctions and discrimination requires a political resolution. The state must take the lead in implementing necessary actions, with the support and cooperation of all stakeholders. By directing policies towards the impoverished and marginalized segments of society, providing them with education and social security programs, and creating an inclusive and secure environment, the issue can gradually diminish. It is imperative for the state to prioritize the rectification of discriminatory tendencies and work towards creating a society where all citizens can lead lives of dignity.

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Annex: Case Studies

For this study, altogether twelve case studies of witchcraft accusation victims were conducted. All the victims were from Bhangaha Rural Municipality of Mahottari district.

Case Study One: Deuli Devi Danuwar

Deuli Devi Danuwar, a woman of 60 years, lives with her husband. She is an illiterate. Not only Deuli but also her daughter and son couldn't get opportunity to go to school. She still feels it was a big mistake. But it was such a mistake of which there was no solution. According to her, going school and getting opportunity to get education was impossible to her. But why? She spoke- 'God has made them to live in such sorrow'. In fact, there were no schools nearby her village and people didn't send their daughter to school.

She works at local farm on daily wage basis. But the work is not regular. She goes to jungle to bring grass for goats. She has 4\5 goats; it was her property. She doesn't have any land to cultivate. Being an uneducated woman, she doesn't have any idea about political changes in Nepal. She doesn't know about fundamental right, about constitution etc. She casted the vote in past election hoping that it would bring change in her life. But it wouldn't bring any change and now she doesn't have any trust on political parties.

She has a panic wound in her heart and its causes were her neighbor. This incident was happened on July 2016. One of her neighbor's son had problem of mental health. They took their son to a doctor and sometime to the witchdoctor (Jhakri) for treatment. They blamed that it was because of her. They accused her that she is a witch and her black magic resulted their son's health problem. It was a rainy day and the villagers not only physically tortured her but also fed human excrement.

Some were torturing her and remaining others were watching silent. No one helped her at that time. From that incident, she always questions herself that where are human? Where is humanity? Does her neighbor not have heart? Is there only darkness around her? Where she can find light?

She doesn't know what her fault was. She does not believe in the existence of boksi (witch). Even after such painful incident she didn't complain to the police. In fact, she doesn't have any idea about police and what do they do for the common people. She has painful heart; she is unsatisfied with the incident; but she doesn't have any idea about how to fight against this type of injustice. She speaks with god and she believes only god knows that she is not a witch. But sometimes she questions herself that if there exist a god how can s/he be a silent observer of such inhuman activities. She suspects in existence of God. If it was possible, she wanted to show her heart and let them to check whether there exist any evil or witch craft in her heart.

Her economic condition shows her social status. Her house was made up of mud. Her two sons work in brick factory and it is a seasonal work. They stay at factory and it is far away from her home. And it is obvious that, poor, uneducated person Deuli doesn't have any political as well as power connection. But the accuser's family is educated and has better economic condition, they have better relation with local leaders as well as police administration.

Case Study Two: Parmila Devi

Bhangaha -2, Parmila Devi-39 lives with her husband, two daughters and a son. Her husband works at farm on daily wage basis. They have their own farm but production from this land is insufficient to them. The production from their farm can feed them only three months. They had bought this land five years ago; otherwise, they were landless. They have a small house made up of mud and thrash.

Parmila Devi is an illiterate because she didn't get the chance to go to school. Not only Parmila Devi but also her teenage daughters don't go to school. And it is because of her economic status. when I asked about her childhood and about her education she did not answer. She knows the importance of education but she couldn't afford for her daughter's education.

One day, her daughter and neighbor's daughter were quarreled each other and the issue was about using the public tap. When Parmila saw, she asked them not to quarrel. But the next day, the neighbor and others came, accused her as witch, physically punished and tried to feed human excreta. At that time, her husband had been to work. When her husband returned to home, they decided to report to the police. They reported to the police but the accuser also reported against them in the police. Now, their case is in district court of Mahottari.

What could be the reason of witchcraft accusation to her? She answered that she had borrowed Fifty Thousand Rupees at 20 percent interest rate. She was paying some installments. But sometime it couldn't be on time and it became the cause of dispute between them. She wanted to pay the whole amount and she was trying. But what her neighbor did to her was truly inhuman. Her neighbor and other villagers were forcing to return his money but Parmila demanded justice first. There seem little bit political issues. In the last election, the victim and the accuser had casted

the vote to different parties. The economic condition of accuser was far better than Pramila's economic condition. The accuser's family had asked her to vote for a political party in which the accuser's family were closed. But Pramila's family rejected and casted vote for different political party.

Parmila's family is economically deprived, uneducated and they don't have any relation and connection with political parties that could be supportive in this hard time and this seems natural in the Nepalese society. Apart of that, Parmila and her husband were hopeful in getting justice. It is because the police station is located nearby their house.

Case Study Three: Siya Shah

Siya shah, a 70 years old woman lives with her husband Pariksha Shah. Pariksha is a farmer, works at farms, they have enough land for their family. They have two sons and they are well settled. One of her sons is a carpenter and he has a nice furniture shop in the village. The other son has been abroad for foreign employment. Her grandchildren are studying in private school. In view of family and their possession Siya is happy with her life. But she has a deep wound in her heart which cannot be treated by any medicine or by a doctor.

She was attacked by neighbors accusing her witchcraft and they tried to feed human excreta. Accuser was her neighbor and they weren't happy with Siya's family status and their economic prosperity. Siya's husband was an active and laborious man. Her sons are also doing well. And accuser and some of other villagers were jealous with her family.

She can't read and write. She does not have knowledge about the legal system, public administration and police. She did not know about CDO office and she hadn't been too police station before that incident. But now she knew about these institutions. Even she knew how these institutions works. By experience, she does not believe to such government institutions.

That was a cold and cloudy winter day. She was staying alone at her home. At that time, they abruptly arrived and fed her human excreta. She couldn't do anything except than crying. After sometime her husband arrived and they went to the police office and reported them. The incident was covered by the national newspaper. But, the accuser and the offender are not arrested yet. Now she thinks justice to her has become imaginary. She lost hope for justice.

She does not believe on witchcraft. People use to ask her about witchcraft but she doesn't have any answer. She knows nothing. She doesn't have any idea why they accused her. She often thinks-

Could it be the reason of competition with her family of accuser's family? Could human be such inhuman in the name of rivalry? They went to the police station and talked with many officers. They visited to CDO office and pleaded for justice but nothing resulted. Now she doesn't have any trust to the CDO and the police. She said that those government institutions are made only for educated and high class people.

Case Study Four: Parbati Sadaa

Parbati Sadaa, a 73-year-old widow lives in a remote area of Bhangaha Rural Municipality. Her husband had died two years ago. She has 3 sons and 4 daughters in her family. Daughters and sons are living their life in their own way. They are struggling for survival. Her sons work as a daily wage labor. She categorized her family as a poor family because all the family members are struggling daily for hand to mouth. They don't have their own land and other property. Being a poor family, her sons and daughters didn't get opportunity to go to school for education.

Not only Parbati Sadaa is an illiterate (it is quite obvious in Nepal that she was 73 years and from a poor family of Terai) but also her sons and daughters and even her grandchildren are illiterate. Because of her poor economic condition, she couldn't send her children to school. Parbati feels that education is important in human life but doesn't have option to get it. She wishes if she could read and write life would become different. She further added if she had been able to send her children to school the life would have been different.

Some 6/7 years ago, one of her neighbor's son age of 10/11 became sick. She didn't know about his health problem. But the villagers blamed her that it was because of her black magic. They accused her a witch. It was the day of mid-winter of 2071 BS, a group of villagers led by an ex-police officer came to her house and attacked her. They tortured her physically and forcedly fed human excrement. They accused her a witch because a local shaman pointed her as a witch. She reported to the police but the police couldn't take an action against him. It could be the reason that the main perpetrator was ex-police officer. Later, other villagers gathered and went to police office and registered the case against him but till then, the main perpetrator was vanished from the village.

After some time, the perpetrator returned back but police didn't take any action and she doesn't know any progress in her case.

Does she have any idea why they accused her? 'It could be the reason that I am poor'-she answered. According to her, the perpetrator was rich a person. She has seen all colors of sadness and sorrows that has been created the by the poverty. There is no one to help such poor- she thinks. The government, the police is for rich man- she concluded. If she had sufficient land, sufficient property no one could blame her. She has not any confession to any ones and no hope from government or others social groups. Finally, she told me that she didn't believe in any unseen power like black magic. She opined that such kinds of all accusations are to exploit the poor.

Case Study Five: Sanawati Sadaa

Sanawati Sadaa, 35 years married woman lives with her husband and four children in Birta village of Bhangaha. They don't have their own land to cultivate. She and her husband both work as a labor on daily wage basis. Mr. and Mrs. Sadaa both are illiterate. Their all children go to school. Mrs. Sadaa had never been to school but she had heard and experienced that living without education in this time was very hard. And now she realized. She regretted that she couldn't attend school in her childhood age. She couldn't attend school because her parents were very poor and she has seven sisters and brothers. It was very hard to get sufficient food for them that they couldn't even imagine to afford for school.

According to her, without education she has lost her confidence and her life has become vain. She has dissatisfaction with the society, she has anger with society, she has so many questions with the society, but she couldn't ask anything with the society. She feels her voice has been lost because of lacking education and because of poverty. So, she is trying to provide education to her children. Sending school to her children is not easy but overcoming such obstacles their school education is continuous. she has not good income, proper food and good resident because of her birth at poor family and married with poor and uneducated person, it was her experience.

It was about two years ago, a group of her villagers consisting of five or six women forcibly fed human excreta accusing her a witch. Sanawati couldn't even imagine that her villagers would behave such inhuman practices to her but they did. They were her neighbor she had such bitter past. After facing such criminal humiliation by her neighbors, she once thought that she would quit her life but she has small children and she stopped herself. Her neighbor accused her witch craft. Does she belief in existence of witch? "No" she replied, "I don't believe in any unseen

power". According to her "witch accusation is just a propaganda created by powerful person to get benefit from poor people. They themselves create god and devil." She further added witchcraft is a kind of imaginary devil that created by ruler.

'It is a problem constructed by upper class people. That's why police and government man don't support the victim.' It was her own word. She found guilty to Sadaa herself and her husband because both of them are uneducated. If they weren't uneducated they could have earned more. And no one could blame and punished her in a false charge. Being poor and uneducated they couldn't raise their voices loud so that police can hear them. It had made her pessimist towards life and government mechanism.

Case Study Six: Dulari Devi

Dulari Devi, a 60 years old women lives her husband in Bhangaha Mahottari. Her daughter and her husband both live with them. Dulari's son in law (daughter's husband) is very laborious man. He has cultivated offseason vegetable and sells in the market. In the free time he works as daily wage labor. He has earned well by his hardworking nature. Dulari was happy because her daughter and son in law works daily, earn good income and her grandchildren go to school for education. Life was running smoothly and she was happy with life.

But one day, some of her neighbor accused her of witchcraft and physically tortured and tried to feed human excreta. They blamed her that she was a witch and her black magic made her neighbor's son sick. That day, three of her neighbor came to her house and did such inhuman act. Dulari's husband tried to stop them but he got injured. When they returned she was taken to a medical for treatment after being rescued with the help of other villagers.

After that they had gone to police station and police promised to take action against perpetrator. Now, the case is in District Police Office. It has been long time that she hasn't heard any progress in Police station.

After that incident, she eats, she speaks, she walks but she couldn't forget that day. She has a deep wound in her heart. Her husband cares her, her grandchildren give special attention and all the family member support her but she scares with life, afraid with the villagers. She thinks how such inhuman faces could be human. She asks why the police couldn't give her justice in time. If she has more property and a good power relation, could anyone accuse her?

Many villagers of her village believe on witchcraft. But she doesn't believe in such unseen power and magic. According to her there is no god or evil outside man's heart. It's all about man way of thinking. It is because lack of education or it could be some act of revenge. If she has got the opportunity to go to education she wouldn't get face such accident. She thinks education can give power to everybody. Now a day when she sees school going children she becomes very happy.

Case Study Seven: Urmila Sadaa

Urmila Sadaa, a 46 years old woman lives with her two daughters and one son. She is a widow. Her husband had kidney problem and he died some years ago leaving all the responsibility of their children to her. Right after the death of her husband some of her goats were also died with unknown disease. And it is enough to villagers to blame her a witch. They blamed her that her black magic was the reason in the untimely death of her husband and her cattle. For a poor woman like Urmila Sadaa, the death of husband and some goats was a great tragic. In addition, her neighbor added extra pain blaming her as a witch. Not only accused the villagers but also physically tortured her. Even they tried to feed her human excrement.

While her villagers were torturing her some women activist came and supported her. At that time, people were beating, some were trying to feed her human excrement and her six years' young daughters was crying besides her. She felt uneasy, headache, body-ache and vomiting. Woman activist took her to the hospital. She stayed hospital for some days. When she recovered she didn't want to return to home. She left the home and now working in a small city nearby.

I asked about her property and land ownership. She replied me if she had land or some property she would not be accused as a witch. According to her, the issue is all about property. She further told that if you have power, political relation, land, and money no one can blame you a witch.

Case Study Eight: Laxmi Lohar

Laxmi Lohar a 32-year-old dalit women lives at, Bhangaha Mahottari. In Mangsir 2072, she was attacked, physically tortured and repeatedly assaulted her accusing as a witchcraft. The offender were the villagers led by a political leader from the same village. One day of that Mangsir, she was returning home from her work, a group of villagers led by one of the political leader tied her with a rope in a tree. They had repeatedly beaten and fed her the human feces and left.

When she got free, she went to the police station and reported against them. Woman group of the village helped her in this process. But latter, they didn't help her. Even the police didn't support her and later she stopped to go to police. Now she doesn't believe police and she has no hope in getting justice.

What could be the reason in accusing her as a witch? According to her she had borrowed RS 6000 with a neighbor two years ago. He had asked to return all the amount. She couldn't return but she was returning the amount with interest in small installment as per their previous agreement. She concluded that the loan amount was surely the reason in accusing her as a witch.

Case Study Nine: Kusama Devi Yadav

Kusama Devi yadav, a 65 years old woman lives with her family at Bhangaha Rural Municipality, Mahhottari. She has husband, one son and a daughter in law in her family. They all worked as agriculture labor on daily wage basis. These days, she has left to go to work because of weakness.

She was accused as witchcraft and was attacked by her neighbor and relatives. Her husband was also injured when they attacked. She was taken to a medical center for treatment after being rescued with the help of some other villagers. She was blamed because one of neighbor's daughter was sick at that time. And they were blaming her that it was because of her witchcraft. The police promised to take action if the victim lodged a complaint.

She could have worked if she wasn't blamed and tortured her. The wound of outer part is now recovered. But the wound in her heart will remain painful as long as she lives; she ended.

Case Study Ten: Rita Devi Das

Rita Devi Das, a 56 years old widow lives alone. She has small house made up of thrash and mud which shows her class status. Her husband's brother's houses are nearer to her house but seem very different to her. Because their houses were bigger and made up of brick and cement.

She was accused witch because one member of her neighbor got sick and a local shaman blamed her that it was because of her black magic. When the witchdoctor blamed her, villagers physically tortured her, fed human excreta and tried to burn live.

When she got married some years ago, her husband got sick. They visited to local shamans many times and went to hospital too. But he never got better. Her husband died, she became a widow and her poor days started. She fought in every step. When I talked about her widow-life, living with witch accusation, she couldn't speak anything but there was a reflection of her sorrow and struggle.

She asked what actually the justice is for her or how the government mechanism works. After that incident, she felt that god has punished her and the same god would give her justice. One-day ex-chairperson of local Village development committee had come to her to talk about the incident. He had talked so kindly with her that she thought as if he was a god. She became happy and hopeful in getting justice. But there is problem. Her home and the accuser's home are located nearby. So she can't speak against him. If she speaks against him he would definitely attack her. So, she has remained silent. The ex-chairperson tried to report in the police but she couldn't speak a single word in front of the police because of the fear of her neighbor.

Case Study Eleven: Chandan Devi Danuwar

Chandan Devi Danuwar is a 42 years old women and lives in Bhangaha, Mahottari. Her husband is in abroad for foreign employment. They have a son and he works in Nepal police. His duty station is in Kathmandu. Her husband comes home once in every two years and the son comes twice a year. She lives alone at home. She works as a labor on daily wage basis. They have a small piece of land which they had bought some years ago. Prior to buying this land they were completely landless. This land was purchased with the income of foreign employment of her husband.

Her husband is somehow literate and gentleman. He has been in foreign employment for 15 years. As working abroad, he has improved his economic status but he has lagged the social relation in village. Income of her husband has made their life easier. She has deposited some amount in the cooperative and she is also a member of cooperative in village.

As other Terai woman of her age, Chandan Devi had not got the opportunity to go to school. Because no schools were there nearby and no parents used to send their daughter to school. Her brothers were also illiterate. But she knows the importance of education. She regrets that she didn't get the chance to study. And, the reason behind it was their poverty. She thinks if she was literate, no one could suppress her.

Some years back, one fine evening she was returning from her farm working all the day. One of her neighbor accused her witch and fed human excreta. There were other villagers too. She had borrowed Rs. 50 thousand from the accuser. The interest rate was 30 percent and they had little dispute on this transaction. Though she was paying the installment but she hadn't been able to pay

in time. When the neighbor attacked and fed human excreta, she reported to the police with the help of some social activist. Police arrested two of them but released after some days. But the case has been filed in the District Court of Mahottari. She still has hope for justice.

She lives alone in home. She works, talks with other villagers in the day time. But it's very difficult in the night. She remembers and frightens with incident. She fears of repeating the same incident. She knows, when her husband or son stays at home no one can do anything to her. She feels secure in presence of her son and husband but she can't stop her.

Case Study Twelve: Samundra Devi Thakur

Samundra Devi Thakur, a 56 years old woman lives with her husband, son, daughter in law and grandchildren. Her family was migrated to Bhangaha Mahottari from Dhanusha some 20 years ago. When they migrated to Bhangaha, their children were small and growing. They didn't have enough money and survival was also a great challenge for them. Her husband is laborious and they worked tirelessly. They started to work at other's farm. They planted unseasonal vegetable and made little bit profit. Then, they brought a small piece of land. As a result, they don't have problem for hand to mouth. Now, they have installed a rice mill. Their son works in mill. Samundra devi and her husband work in their farm.

Samundra Devi sent school to her son. He was obedient and hard working. When he completed his school education, they sent him college for further study. After completing his college education, he came back and they installed a rice mill in village. Her son married a beautiful wife and now they have a son and a daughter. These achievements have made them satisfied and proud.

Samundra is an illiterate woman and her husband too. When they were child they didn't have any idea of education, benefit of reading and writing. And the other reason of being illiterate is their poverty. Her parents were poor and they were not able to afford for education. She sent her son to school and now her grandchildren have started to go to school. She feels nice in sending school to her grandchild. While her grandchildren are reading and writing, Samundra Devi smiles watching this. Now she knows the importance of reading and writing and she wants to give better environment to them. But she feels poor when she sees children are not going to school. She has not any hesitation being an illiterate because of her time, there were no schools nearby and there was no trend of sending school to children.

Her life was going smoothly. But ten years ago, one day her neighbors gathered and they accused her a witch. One of her neighbor was suffered from kidney problem and they blamed her that it was because of her black magic. The villagers collectively blamed her. There were 50/60 peoples gathered. They physically tortured her and tried to feed human excreta.

Now it has become ten years but she couldn't forget the incident. She feels there is a deep wound in her heart. She had heard about witchcraft and witch hunt but she has not any idea about what exactly the witchcraft is.

Some weeks ago of the incident, she had heard that some of her neighbors were talking about witch. They were talking that she had extra power, magical power. Because of such power her family is well managed, economic status is good; they were saying so on. She didn't say anything. She didn't want to quarrel with the neighbor and ignored what they blamed. But later she had faced such inhuman accident. She reported to the former village chair person, and to the police. The police didn't try to justice her because the accuser was politically influenced person. But the former chairperson tried to help her but he couldn't. Now she is living silently with the deep wound in her heart.

END Notes

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