

# **CHHAUPADI PRATHA: WOMEN'S CONDITION AND SUFFERING**

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**CENTRAL DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY**  
**KRITIPUR, KATHMANDU**

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**LETTER OF APPROVAL**

The dissertation titled "Chhaupadi Pratha: Women's Condition and Suffering" submitted by Nirajan Khadka has been approved by the dissertation Evaluation committee under the Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for Degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology.

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## GLOSSARY

Dhami	Traditional Healer
Deota	Gods
Jaisi	Traditional Healer
Chhaupadi	Menstruation Women
Goth	Small Shed for Menstruation Women
Suddha	Pure
Chokho	Pure
Pujari	Priest
Fulpate	Priest
Asuddha	Impure
Jutho	Impure
Brahman	Priest
Paap	Sin
Dharma	Virtue
Gai	Cow
Bhaisi	Buffalo
Birami	Sick
Parchha	Fall
Chaldachha	Come
Risauchha	Angry

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 General Background:**

In most parts of the developed world, women assume that their menstrual periods will remain part of their private lives and will not affect their ability to work, go to school or otherwise contribute to society. This is not the case in Nepal, where women are considered "unclean" and "impure" during the menstrual period prevented from taking part in many normal aspects of their lives (Kandel, Bhandari and Lamichanne, n.d.). Even in this modern day females would be sent to spend the duration of their monthly menstruation isolated in an unsanitary hut, this is a common and accepted ritualistic practice for women in Nepal (Mazzulo, 2011).

Practices and taboos surrounding menstruation vary according to the region, the community, the village, and are not confined to Nepal (Rebaud, 2011). Chhaupadi system is traditional practice in which women and girls are forbidden to touch anything and have to live in cowshed during menstruation. It is a widespread practice prevalent in Far West and some parts of Mid-West region of Nepal. In Far West it is prevalent mainly in Achham, Bajura, Bajang, Doti, Baitadi, Dadheldhura, Darchula, Kanchanpur, and Kailali and in Mid-West it is prevalent in Kalikot, Jumla, Humla, Mugu, Dailekh, Jajarkot, and Surkhet Districts. In these areas, family and society do not treat menstruation as natural phenomena (Amgain, 2011).

The practice of isolating women during menstruation is called chhaupadi pratha. Nachhunu, the Nepali word for menstruation, also translates as "untouchable". Even in modern Nepal it is common for women who are considered 'impure' and untouchable during the days of their menstruation. Everything they touch during the time of their menstruation can be considered impure (Mazzulo, 2011). Chhaupadi literally means "Menstruating woman". They are isolated from family, relatives, and society; they are kept in a small cold and dark shed where most often cattle were kept in other time. They are considered "impure" or "unclean" or



"untouchable" during menstruation period (Maharjan, 2010). The word chhaupadi is Achham's local Rawte language word. Chhau is menstruation and Padi means woman (Kandel, Bhandari and Lamichanne, n.d.).

Chhaupadi pratha is a century's old ritual of banishing Nepali women and girls during their monthly menstruation. Throughout history, many cultures have practiced the same type of rituals. Today the banishment ritual is still accepted by (Mazzulo, 2011). History of menstruation is said to be from religious practices where it was believed that Gods and Goddesses angry with women who stay in the family house during menstruating. According to religious folklore, Indra, the King of Heaven was accused of killing a Brahmin and because of the illicit acts with women that Indra committed during his quest to redeem his sin, for these acts all women were said to be punished through menstruation (Hussain, 2012).

There are clear cultural reasons for these taboos and practices. When, a Hindu woman reaches maturity, she is kept in a dark room for thirteen days during their first and second menstrual cycle and four days of every other menstrual cycle (Kandel, Bhandari and Lamichanne, n.d.). When a girl has her first menstruation, she is sequestered from her family members for 11-15 days. In the case of mature woman, she stays in shed for 5 days and married woman has to stay for only 4 days (Maharjan, 2010). This ritual regards as women "impure" during their menstrual cycle; it is known to have initially originated centuries ago from a belief that gods and goddesses become angry if any woman stays in her home during that time. Following the ritual, women are made to live in sheds outside their homes called "chhaupadi Goths" (Sharma, 2010).

This practice stems from the belief that when woman has her periods, she is "impure" and could "pollute" and "contaminate" the house by remaining there during her menstruation periods. So, once a month, during the entire length of their menstruation, women are banished to the chhaupadi goth, which they can only leave once their periods are over (Rebaud, 2011). In the strictest observance of

chhaupadi, women are prevented from looking at the sun, interacting with males and cattle, drinking dairy products and conducting their daily chores. Furthermore, if they “touch the fruit trees, the fruits will fall before they are ripe or the fruits will be dry; if they fetch water, the well will dry up; if the cattle are fed or milked by Chhaupadi, blood will come out of their teats instead of milk” (Rebaud, 2011)

A menstruating woman cannot touch anyone; if anyone touches her, the person needs to be purified by taking a bath and drinking cow’s urine. Specifically, she is not permitted to touch pregnant women or trees, because of the idea that the “fruit” each are bearing will die or will be malformed. Menstruating women are not permitted to participate in religious ceremonies, nutritious food is forbidden, and warm clothing is not allowed. Yet, they are still expected to participate in hard labor, carrying out the daily chores that they would normally do, such as working in the fields, fetching firewood, washing clothes, and so on (Sharma, 2010). It is believed that if the woman does not adhere to these practices, there could be any number of negative impacts: she could become sick or die; her bones could break; she could become infertile; others could fall ill or even die. She will become sexually dangerous and harm come to partner’s genitals person could not have sex if the seclusion is broken. If these women were unable to maintain these traditions, their community would be shattered and would no longer survive (Kandel, Bhandari and Lamichanne, n.d.).

The women in Achham are following this ritual by thinking this as the culture which all follows. In this area, family and society do not treat menstruation as natural phenomena. In Chhaupadi system girls and women are isolated from family and home during several days in their menstrual cycle. Menstrual women are not allowed to touch men, children, cattle, living plants, and fruit bearing trees. If they touch all aforesaid things it is believed that the things become polluted and it makes god angry (Bennet, 1983) Woman’s need social support, nutritious food, and warm home especially during the period of delivery, after child birth, menstruation, women of far western have to live in either cowshed or buffalo shed or in

Chhaupadi shed and eat less dietary food. At a period of transition, pain they have to follow varieties of restrictions. They are denied to eat ghee, milk, curd, etc and are forbidden to touch public tap, temple, home, and food either (Amgain, 2011). This research had been carried out in Liudsain village among Saud, Aauji, Kami and Sunar society of Duni V.D.C. of the Achham district which has presented the Practice of Chhaupadi system women suffers and its changes in the society.

### **1.2 Statement of the problem**

In the Mid and Far Western Regions chhaupadi system is considered as a major problem about women's health issues. During the period of menstruation, Women face various discriminatory practices in the context of chaupadi. The tradition is that women cannot enter inside houses, kitchens and temples, women are forbidden to touch men or even to enter the courtyard of their own house. Within Chhaupadi system (called as Chhau pratha in far west), women and girls are kept in Chhaupadisheds, which is a little bit far from residual home. Isolated Chhaupadisheds, cowsheds where women are resided during their menstruation are open and door less. Women and girls have to stay in such huts and cowsheds five to seven days in each month amidst their menstruation (Amgain, 2011). Chhaupadi practice violates women's rights because it limits their ability to live safe and healthy lives, and in some cases it deprives girls' opportunities to attend school. Further, it identifies traditional culture and power structures like patriarchy as important determinants for the continuation of the practice (Sandbakken, 2011).

According to custom, women should not be given milk or ghee while they are menstruating, but should only eat flatbread with salt. This deprives them of nutritious food during their periods. The women must survive on a diet of dry foods, salt, and rice. They cannot use warm blankets, and are allowed only a small rug. They are barred from consuming milk, yogurt, butter, meat, and other nutritious foods. They are also restricted from going to school or performing their daily functions like taking a bath, forced to stay in the barbaric conditions of the shed. Access to water taps and wells is also limited. Chhaupadi women can only

bathe or wash clothes in a 'chaupadi dhara' - a separate well, stream or small rivulet nears the village. With such a strong societal stigma attached, the impact of chhaupadi on the health of Nepali women is traumatic to say the least five days a month, the women are confined to a dark, dirty room without nutritious food in sufficient quantity. As women are not allowed in the house during menstruation, they often engage in harder, manual labor outdoors as a result, including digging, collecting firewood and grasses and farm labor. These conditions take their toll on women's health and make them more vulnerable to various health problems, including diarrhea, pneumonia and respiratory diseases.

The cause of Chaupadi tradition there is many cases of women raped, killed by wild animals, bitten by snakes or dead of cold during their stay in the chhaupadi goth. Chhaupadi women face both physical and mental hardship. As mentioned, women are often relegated to 'chaupadi goth' or cattle sheds where they stay in very basic, unhygienic and exposed conditions.

In the strictest observance of chhaupadi, women are prevented from looking at the sun, interacting with males and cattle, drinking dairy products and dealing with their daily chores. It is supposed that the scourges threatening the community and the family of women who do not abide by the tradition: "she could become sick or die; her bones could break; she could become infertile; others could fall ill or even die. She will become sexually dangerous and harm would come to any partners' genitals and person could not have sex and could be harmful to family members, village etc. if the seclusion is broken." Furthermore, if they "touch the fruit trees, the fruits will fall before they are ripe or the fruits will be dry; if they fetch water, the well will dry up; if the cattle are fed or milked by Chhaupadi, blood will come out of their teats instead of milk" (Rebaud, 2011).

As a medical Anthropological study about suffering this thesis includes all practices which are cause of the Socio psychological sufferings of women through chhaupadi. On the basis of these literature and discussion, I want to examine the

Process and experiences of the women about chhaupadi system. Therefore I want to focus my study to answering the following questions.

1. How do women perceive Chhaupadi System?
2. What is the process of Chhaupadi system?
3. How are women conditioned in chhaupadi Pratha?
4. What do women narrate their experience of Chhaupadi system?

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

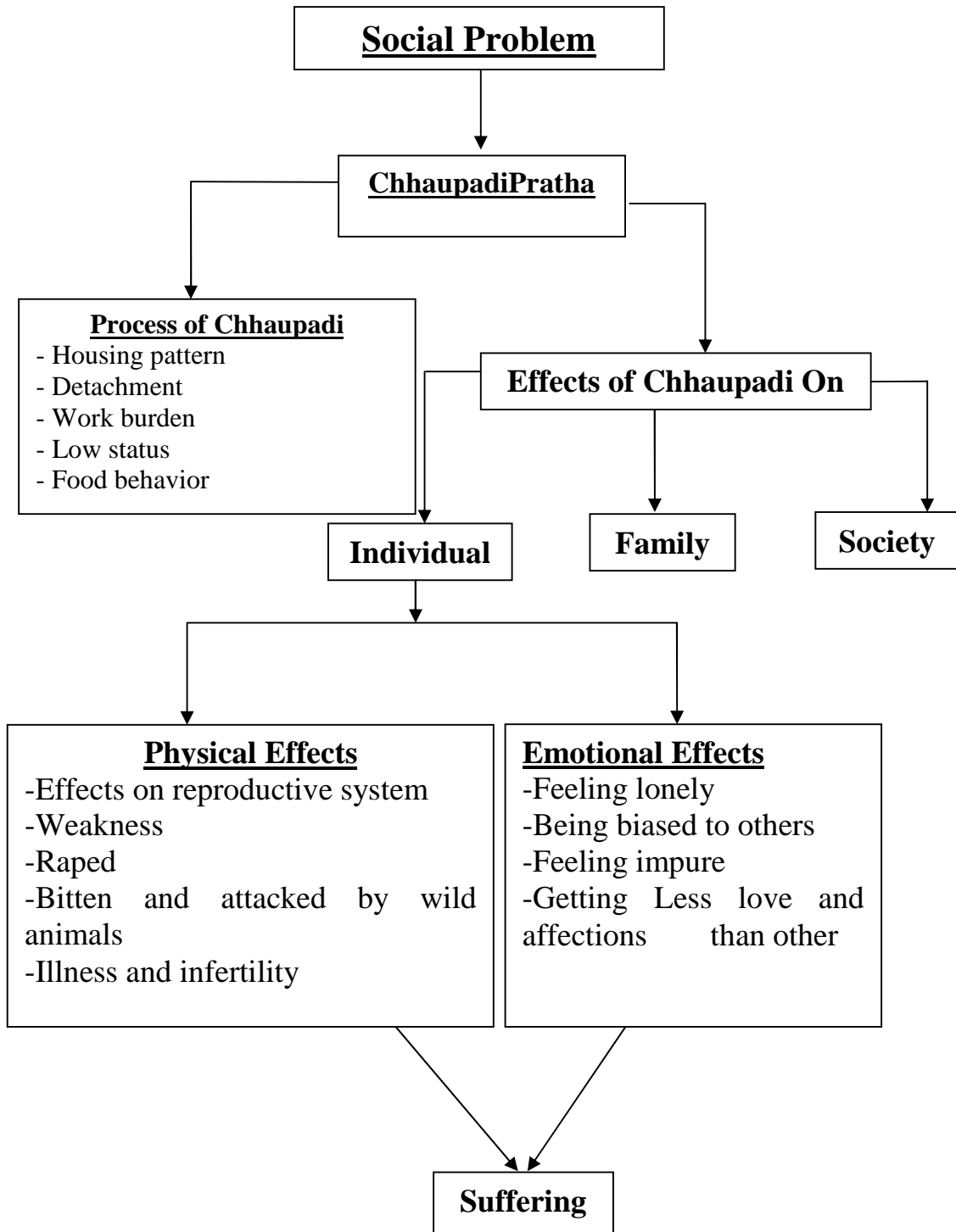
The great objective of this study is to understand and to analyze process, perception and experience of Chhaupadi System of women who practice Chhaupadi.

The following are the specific objectives of this study:

- a. To describe the process of chhaupadi system and is practiced.
- b. To explain the women's experience and this perception towards chhaupadi system.

### **1.4 Conceptual Framework**

The following conceptual model represents the key elements that shape process of the chhaupadi and experience of women and to the local context, which will make the study easier in the interpretation of the findings for the case of Duni VDC Achham. The conceptual framework of this study is given below, see figure 1.1



The figure 1.1 shows existing social problem in Achham which is known as Chhaupadi Pratha. Within the Chhaupadi Pratha women should follow such process of norms and values: should live in chhaupadi goth, should stay far from everything, should Keep busy to hard work, Should keep low voice to other, should have without nutritious food. Chhaupadi pratha affects Individual as well as family and society. Chhaupadi Pratha directly affects in individual Health. Individual affects can be divided in two types' Physical affects and Emotional affects. In individual such physical effects are shown. Weakness can be seen in women health, she can be raped, can be bitten and attacked by wild animals, can be ill or infertile and can be affects reproductive system of the women. Emotional effects are like this woman fills lonely herself, she is being biased, fills impure and gets less love and affections. The woman is suffering cause of these physical and psychological effects. So this figure shows how woman suffer from Chhaupadi Pratha clearly.

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

Anthropology is the holistic study of people and society so that based on the anthropological perspectives and principles this research has been completed. No single theoretical perspective may provide enough understanding on this practice. Keeping this in mind I have employed various theoretical approaches in the study, for example, as Suffering Theory as well as Feminism Primarily the study concentrated its focus on the suffering model approach of health and behavior.

Suffering can be defined as a state of severe distress associated with events that threaten the intactness of the person. It can occur in relation to any aspect of the person in the realm of his social role, his group identification, his relation with self or body, or in relation to family or relation with a personal or transcendental source of meaning. Suffering never affects only one part of a person but it affects the whole being; i.e. physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and social aspects (Oreopoulos, 2005). The concept of suffering in the field of health and behaviors is

widely used for the emic understanding of people about their notion and concept about health, how they are suffered from social norms, values, rituals and systems. Social problem related to women health and their existence and practices made by them in the local context. Therefore, it is important to know how people as a cultural being relate to, talk about and frame their perception and notion about existing health problem created by the different aspects in the society. People's experience is the important source for understanding adaptive strategies and their collective ideas about prevailing health problem created by social system.

While sex refers to the physical differences of the body, Gender concerns the psychological, social & cultural differences between male & females. The distinction between sex & gender is fundamental (Giddens, 1993). Therefore Chhaupadi Pratha as a social system is followed only by women but not men. Only women suffer from the chhaupadi pratha. In the same society the women follow the system and the man do not. That difference is the subject of the feminism which is trying to show in this study.

Moreover, the study has used both suffering and feminism to examine the linkage between healths and people's religious belief. Particularly, this approach has focused on the woman's practices and their experiences about social system. Living in chhaupadi goth, staying far from everything, Keeping busy to hard work, keeping low voice to other, having without nutritious foods like this work are responsible for woman suffer. This suffering and feminist framework is used for accessing the various religious system for affecting health of woman in the local context.

### **1.6 Rationale of the study**

Lots of studies have been conducted among the field of suffering sector in anthropology basically concerning with diseases and mental health, sociopolitical issues. But there is not found any study about chhaupadi pratha with suffering theory which is an interesting issue for Anthropology. It is a hidden issue. This



study can give over all information about process of chhaupadi, experience of women from chhaupadi system. The research has been conducted among the people of Duni society. There are fewer studies about the social system and suffering in the sector of health of the people of Duni.

The study will be conducted among the people of Duni VDC of Achham. There is not a study about the Chhaupadi system in anthropological perspective and its impacts on behavior and their experience in the sector of health of the women of Duni. In this condition this research will contribute for the people of this place. It helps to identify the cultural practices, norms, values, process, and experiences of the women and helps to understand local people's cultural system which is closely related with the suffering in which they practice local cultural context to maintain order in their society. So it helps to establish a tradition of chhaupadi and suffering as a medical anthropological study among the women of these places and facilitates further study on the same group.

Chhaupadi is the very interesting and hidden issues still existent in the study. It has own process and practices. It should be shown this issue in the world, because there is no more literature found about chhaupadi pratha from academic field but few empirical literatures can be found. Among these literature about chhaupadi only few literature are available therefore, in this relation, the need of more researches and studies from social science perspective in general and anthropology in particular to trace out the local perspective from micro level on chhaupadi and suffering and recognize their experiences. As these purpose study aims to access the local perspective of chhaupadi and suffering and their experiences. It will be very helpful to researchers, development organizations and organization involved in health research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, a brief analysis is presented on the theoretical approach about the study of Chhaupadi Pratha and suffering. The review of literature on 'Chhaupadi pratha: women condition in the society and suffering' provides the theoretical framework about the study of the women's problem and suffering. The review of literature is divided into different sections: and each section distinctly describes based on the mentioned sub-title below i.e. about the chhaupadi system and the relationship of women, their culture, and society that deals with women's condition, experience, the process of chhaupadi and their suffering. Similarly it deals with the women's experience to the local context in specific given society and describes the researches that have been carried out in the Nepalese context.

#### **2.1. Literature Related to Suffering**

The term "suffering" is borrowed from the medical sector. More than illness, disease, feelings of pain, stress, insecurity, etc. are called suffering. Feeling of discomfortability, feeling of insecurity, these feelings come out by many causes i.e. accident of a person, death of a person and insecurity by the society. It is a very vague term/concept because it includes different conditions of suffering. Suffering is surely a given in consciousness, a certain "psychological content," like the lived experience of color, of sound, of contact, or like any sensation. But in this "content" itself, it is in-spite-of-consciousness, unassembled. It is unassembled and "unassemblability" (Oreopoulos, 2005).

There are many explaining suffering literatures that deal with illness, disease, physical pain and mental health. Some of the suffering theories are women and health relationship and its impact on women's lives.

Oreopoulos (2005) has defined suffering as a state of severe distress associated with events that threaten the intactness of the person. It can occur in relation to any

aspect of the person in the realm of his social role, his group identification, his relation with self or body, or in relation to family or relation with a personal or transcendental source of meaning. Suffering never affects only one part of a person but it affects the whole being; i.e. physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and social aspects. Suffering can occur when one does not expect it, or the patient does not report it when it is expected. Also, a person can suffer enormously at the distress of another, especially a loved one finally, as I mentioned in my introduction, suffering is a unique personal experience and can only be defined by the person who suffers. He talks about pain and suffering. It is believed that the greater the pain the greater the suffering but this is not always the case. Thus childbirth can be extremely painful yet it is considered to be rewarding. Also patients can write from pain and not suffer if they know what is causing the pain; on the other hand, an individual may report considerable suffering from a minor discomfort if they do not know its source. The dimensions of suffering from terminal cancer are physical, i.e. pain, loneliness and isolation, psychosocial-fear, anxiety, depression, despair, and spiritual, i.e. search for the meaning of life and suffering. Suffering in a hopeless situation; when confronted with a hopeless situation, facing a fate that cannot be changed. In these circumstances, what then matters is the human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph. When we are no longer able to change a situation – we are challenged to change ourselves. The meaning of love; Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. Love enables one to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person, but even more the potential in him that has not yet been realized. By his love the loving person enables the beloved to achieve his potential.

Clara Han (2013) in *Suffering and pictures of anthropological inquiry* a response to comments on *Life in debt*; wants to elaborate a few concerns with this appraisal and the placement of his book in relation to it. First, in what way might we speak of an “ethnography of suffering”? Here, the “of” acts to create a sense that there are given agreements as to what might or might not fall under “suffering.” Yet, it is precisely

this givenness of agreements that so much anthropological work has sought to problematize. This imaginary, suffering is a (human) capacity to feel pain which is equated with or interchangeable with misery; in which boundaries between cruelty and indifference and care and generosity are secure; and in which the “suffering subject” could be read along stable axes of good and evil. Yet, far more than “simply providing descriptions of harsh lives,” anthropological attention to suffering has provided some of the most thoughtful work on the difficulty of a universally recognizable human. He might ask if indeed this anthropological work is simply describing a capacity of humans to feel pain. For, if we consider the bodily aspects of being human that are shared with other animals, He can agree at least on that basis that humans have a capacity to feel pain. This discussion is clearly missing the point: anthropological thought attentive to suffering is neither simply concerned with a capacity to feel pain, nor even an ignorance to pain or an incapacity to imagine another’s pain. Rather, anthropologists have sought to elaborate problems such as how pain gains expression in language and the stakes in the acknowledgement of pain: what is at stake when that acknowledgment is withheld? This question can be at once political and moral. Perhaps he might more fully appreciate the idea that suffering contains a notion of life. For, the caricature of humans being horrible to other humans eclipses the ways in which the very fabric of life may be frayed by violence and the work of time in reweaving life again: the very modes of relatedness that emerge from and through suffering. In attending to the ways in which life is precariously woven and showing how those conditions of precariousness may counter the official version of Chile, *Life in debt* expresses his aspiration to be attentive, watchful, and responsive to the suffering in this world.

Kapil Dahal (2010) in “widowhood, Life Situation and Suffering: A Medical Anthropological Perspective” has shown how Maoists lead war put the people specially widow women in the situation of suffering from their society itself and ultimately impacts occurred in the life hardship of the widow women as well as physical health and created socio-psycho stress on them. Dahal has discussed the

coping strategies followed by displaced widows of the war. He has mentioned that these widows have altered the ways of their lives to cope with their newly emerged social, economic and cultural situations. He has described that many men were killed during this battle and their killing had several effects on the lives of their relatives, family members, and wives. And the culture- untimely demise of husband cause a woman to be a guilty of her husband's death and often is called Bokshy or Allachhini in hindu social context- is tied to our society which claiming a woman as misfortune to her husband make them compelled to leave their family, relatives and society.

The factors include the patient's psychological and emotional state, especially his or her past experiences, extant mood and anxiety about anticipated consequences. Physicians should not rely on a simple 'disease model' when treating low back pain but should try to identify the bio-psychosocial factors involved and should understand that pain and suffering are not always synonymous. This paper focuses on the problems presented by non-specific low back pain to health care providers and to disability management. Non-specific low back pain refers to complaints of low back pain with no evidence of associated fractures, sciatica, a surgically correctable condition, or systemic disease. It is imperative to distinguish between pain and suffering, and thus to separate 'pain as a signal' from the reactions and emotions displayed by individuals who 'have pain'. Pain and suffering are distinct, and that there can be pain (or other dire symptoms) without suffering and suffering without such symptoms'. He characterizes suffering as an emotional state triggered by anticipation of threat to one's self or identity. Budd has added to our understanding of the concept of suffering. He noted that present mood, as well as the anticipated future, influences responses to body states. He characterized suffering as occurring '... when we assess ourselves in a situation and don't like where we are, where we have been, or where we are going and we can take no actions to close this gap'. Suffering may be the ambient mood state of the person at the time the alleged or reported pain problem began or was first perceived and labeled. Alternatively, when

there is nociceptive stimulation, the prevailing mood may become suffering when the future is anticipated (Fordyce, 1994).

Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman (1996) describe in *The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in our Times*; Suffering is one of the existential grounds of human experience; it is a defining quality, a limiting experience in human conditions. Images of suffering are appropriated to appeal emotionally and morally both to global audiences and to local populations. Indeed, those images have become an important part of the media. As "infotainment" on the nightly news, images of victims are commercialized; they are taken up into processes of global marketing and business competition. The existential appeal of human experiences, their potential to mobilize popular sentiment and collective action, and even their capability to witness or offer testimony are now available for gaining market share.

This globalization of suffering is one of the more troubling signs of the cultural transformations of the current era: troubling because experience is being used as a commodity, and through this cultural representation of suffering, experience is being remade, thinned out, and distorted. It is important to avoid essentializing, naturalizing, or sentimentalizing suffering. There is no single way to suffer; there is no timeless or spaceless universal shape to suffering. There are communities in which suffering is devalued and others in which it is endowed with the utmost significance. The meanings and modes of the experience of suffering have been shown by historians and anthropologists alike to be greatly diverse. Individuals do not suffer in the same way, any more than they live, talk about what is at stake or respond to serious problems in the same ways. Pain is perceived and expressed differently, even in the same community. Extreme forms of suffering? survival from the Nazi death camps or the Cambodian catastrophe? are not the same as the "ordinary" experiences of poverty and illness. We can speak of suffering as a social experience in at least two ways that are relevant to this essay:

1) Collective modes of experience shape individual perceptions and expressions. Those collective modes are visible patterns of how to undergo troubles, and they are taught and learned, sometimes openly, often indirectly.

2) Social interactions enter into an illness experience (for example, a family dealing with the dementia of a member with Alzheimer's disease or a close network grieving for a member with terminal cancer). As these examples suggest, relationships and interactions take part, sometimes a central part, in the experience of suffering.

Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman (1997) in “Suffering and its professional transformation: toward an ethnography interpersonal experience” define experience as an inter subjective medium of micro cultural and infra political processes in which something is at stake for participants in local worlds. Experience so defined mediates (and transforms) the relationship between context and person, meaning and psychobiology in health and illness and in healing. Building on this theoretical background, an approach to ethnography is illustrated through an analysis of suffering in Chinese society. The embodied memory of a survivor of serious trauma during the Cultural Revolution provides an example. From there, Kleinman & Kleinman go on to describe a framework of indigenous Chinese categories for the analysis of experience - mianzi (face), quanxi (connections), renqing (situated emotion), bao (reciprocity). The paper concludes with a discussion of the existential limits of this and other anthropological approaches to the study of experience as moral process.

Suffering engendered by the socially constituted nature of illness through the delegitimation of illness experience in chronic fatigue syndrome. Cultural meanings of physical and mental illness are shown to be reflected in interactions with others to construct an illness reality in which chronic fatigue syndrome is defined as either nonexistent or psychosomatic. Disconfirmation of the subjective experience of illness leads to suffering arising from the threatened stigma of psychological disorder, the alienation resulting from a decision to keep the illness secret, and the

shame of being wrong in one's definition of reality. Patients also develop strategies for contesting the definition of chronic fatigue syndrome as "not real." Delegitimation merits further exploration as a category for experience-near analysis of suffering in medical anthropology (Ware, 1992).

*Suffering and Transcendence* by Eugene Thomas Long (2006) explores the experience of suffering in order to see to what extent it can be understood within the context of the human condition without diverting the reality of suffering or denying the meaning of human existence and divine reality. Particular attention is given to describing and interpreting what he calls the transcendent dimensions of suffering with the intent of showing that in the experience of suffering persons come up against the limits of what can be accounted for in ordinary terms and point towards transcendent reality. In religious faith the transcendent dimensions of suffering may be understood to come together with other transcendent dimensions of experience in a more distinctive or focused encounter with transcendent reality. The conception of God that is suggested by the transcendent dimensions of suffering, however, differs from the model of God in western theism as an absolutely transcendent, all powerful, immutable and impassible being.

Suffering is frequent in life, often ensuing when a wished-for state cannot be realized. One common response to suffering is mourning. Mourning may take problematic forms, and this can lead to chronic denial or embitterment or despair or stagnation. On the other hand, mourning may occur in such manner as to facilitate meaning in life, empathy, caring, and perspective. One's "myths" and beliefs often affect the mourning process and may themselves be influenced by that process. Different myths accompany or influence different identity patterns and life-styles. The core concepts of religion are often associated with certain myths and beliefs that may inspire meaning and courage, caring and wisdom (Schmitt, 1988).

These literatures deal with the Meaning and definition of suffering and qualitative analysis of various phenomena within the society. These articles explain how



different phenomena suffer human. In these articles suffering theory is used. According to these articles I have analyzed the Chhaupadi system through suffering perspectives. After the review of these literatures I have analyzed the issue chhaupadi Pratha through suffering Theory from micro level. Like this I have done my research complete using the methods of qualitative research methods to collect information from inner side of respondent.

## **2.2 Woman's Social Situation**

Lynn Bennett (Bennett, 1983) had conducted anthropological study on the status of High caste Brahmin-Chhetri women in a village named as Narikot which is proximate to Kathmandu. Using field work method such as life history, participant observation, and genealogical analysis, Bennet has tried to explore zstatus of high caste women in different social setting such as in husband and their natal homes connecting it with Hindu Patrilineal ideology. For Bennet, position between men and women cannot be understood in isolation from Hindu culture. Her study shows that women have different social status in affinal and consanguinal relationship. Due to patrilineal Hindu values, high caste Brahamin-Chhetri women have low social status, they are underneath of their husband, and treated as impure or polluted in their husband's home while in their natal home they are treated as pure or sacred or the mythic form of Goddess. In their affinal relationship women have to be obedient, and dutiful to their in laws and family elders. They are bounded by so many responsibilities and observance of practices. They have to be observance of strict fast of Tij, menstrual taboos, and strict kitchen purity. Different behaviours and practices in different homes have root on the myth that celibacy as pure and procreation as impure. In addition to it they do have concern to control women's sexuality. For Bennet, observance of strict ritual practices such as Tij fast and menstrual taboos as substitute of control and oppression.

For Bennett, behind the low status of women, it has root on patriline Hindu culture. The swoshthani vrata katha, other traditional Hindu texts, and deep seated patriline Hindu values result hierarchy, status, and power differentials of women. Bennet has

looked status of women from the stand point of patriline Hindu ideology. She has followed the line of Domount. She has not connected the lower status of women with economy and power. She did not analyze the issue associating it with property inheritance system. Women do not have right to property even up to now. And they do not have access to power. These may be the other causes that led that lower status of women. So Bennet has very less concerns with the dynamics of economy and political power (Bennett, 1983).

Dr. Sunil Kumar Joshi and Jagannath Kharel (2008) explain in Violence against Women in Nepal – An Overview: historically, violence against women and girls has been in existence and Widespread in Nepali society but still unreported problem in Nepal. Violence against women has started being openly discussed and addressed only in the last decade. The lens of looking at women has changed significantly that shifted from being child bearers and providers of health care in the 60"s and 70"s to a slow realization of their critical productive role in rural economy in the 80"s, and to the recognition of women as citizens in need of equal legal and political rights in the 90"s. Without comprehensive, carefully documented research on violence against women, it is impossible to know whether women are experiencing more violence in some countries than in others, or whether they are reporting it more often. In the absence of proper research, it is difficult to compare and assess the scope of violence as well as the effectiveness of programmes to end it. With research, advocates can better understand obstacles and develop appropriate methods for combating them. Research can motivate government and civil society to take action once the extent of a problem is proven.

These literatures deal with the women and menstruation as social problems. Chhaupadi Pratha is a also social problem about women's health. Similarly chhaupadi pratha described social problem like these article. After the review of these literatures I have analyzed the issue chhaupadi Pratha as a social problem

from micro level. Like this I have done my research complete using the methods of qualitative research methods to collect information from inner side of respondent.

### **2.3 Chhaupadi Pratha: An Overview**

The word chhaupadi is Achham's local Rawte language word. Chhau is menstruation and Padi means woman. Chaupadi Pratha generally prevails in Far Western region of Nepal. There is only few literatures can be found related to the chhaupadi pratha among them few of the literatures I found.

Nirmal Kandel, Amar Raj Bhanddari, Jaya Lamichhane analyze in their article "Chhue, Chhaupadi and Chueekula Pratha" (n.d.) – Menstrual Sheds: Examples of Discriminatory Practices against Women in the Mid- and Far-Western Regions of Nepal: analyze Women as "Impure" or "Unclean" During Menstruation and Post-Partum Periods" "Chhue, Chhaupadi and Chueekula Pratha" are discriminatory practices against women during their menstrual periods and the post-partum period in Nepal. Observational and open discussion studies were carried out in areas of the Mid- and Far-Western Regions of the country. These practices are continued through cultural norms, social taboos and superstition. During these periods, women are considered "impure" or "unclean" and are prohibited from taking part in many normal aspects of their lives. These women believe that any breach in such practice will bring bad omens upon their family, community or society. These practices are a violation of human rights and are a form of gender discrimination against women and children, in turn leading to negative effects on health, education and the country's socioeconomic development.

Chhau Padi literally means "Menstruating women". They are isolated from family, relatives, and society and kept them in a small cold and dark shed where most often cattle were kept in other time. They are considered "impure" or "unclean" or "untouchable" during menstruation and postpartum periods. According to this practice, when a girl has her first menstruation, she is sequestered from her family

members for 11-15 days. In the case of mature woman, she stays in shed for 5 days and married woman has to stay for only 4 day. The most disturbing fact is that the confined women do not get nutritious food. They believe that they should not drink and eat milk, curd, yogurt, and ghee (clarified butter). In addition, they will make their bed on some hays and do not get proper care. It is reported that many infants die during their stay in the shed. Even if those infants escaped their fate of death, they had serious health issues and complications that developed on account of hypothermia. Some women have pneumonia and other viral infections due to cold and unhealthy food. Others are killed by snakebite (Maharjan, 2010).

“Chhaupadi pratha” is a social practice followed by people in some regions of Nepal. This ritual regards as women “impure” during their menstrual cycle; it is known to have initially originated centuries ago from a belief that gods and goddesses become angry if any woman stays in her home during that time. Following the ritual, women are made to live in sheds outside their homes called “chhaupadi goths.” A menstruating woman cannot touch anyone; if anyone touches her, the person needs to be purified by taking a bath and drinking cow’s urine. Specifically, she is not permitted to touch pregnant women or trees, because of the idea that the “fruit” each are bearing will die or will be malformed. Menstruating women are not permitted to participate in religious ceremonies, nutritious food is forbidden, and warm clothing is not allowed. Yet, they are still expected to participate in hard labor, carrying out the daily chores that they would normally do, such as working in the fields, fetching firewood, washing clothes, and so on (Sharma 2010). Sharma mentioned the process of Chhaupadi and how is it practiced. In this article Sharma also mentioned the challenges which are the Chhaupadi women faced.

Bimla Amgain (2011) in Social Dimension of Chhaupadi Systema Study from Achham District, Far West Nepal: Mention that chhaupadi system limits women's capability to live a safe, healthy, and educated life forbidding women from anything to touch during their menstruation period. Women are considered as impure during

the period of menstruation. It is a violation of women's human rights. It restricts women's human development such as capabilities to be survived, to be well nourished, capability to be safe, educated capabilities to get health facilities, and longer life, capability to be free from social servitude and superstitions. In the name of tradition, the practice is being continued since generation to generation. Local agencies such as local Devi-Deveta system, Jaisi system, family elders, local socio-political system, regional social system, caste system, poverty and the overall situation of human development in the region transmit the tradition from one generation to another.

This practice stems from the belief that when she has her periods, the woman is “impure” and could “pollute” and “contaminate” the household by remaining there during her menstruations. So, once a month, during the entire length of their menstruation, women are banished to the chhaupadi goth, which they can only leave once their periods are over. Sometimes the goths welcoming the chhaupadis are former cowsheds. Often, they still shelter cattle and the women have to coexist with the buffaloes, separated from them only by a summary partition. In the strictest observance of chhaupadi, women are prevented from looking at the sun, interacting with males and cattle, drinking dairy products and dealing with their daily chores. Even if all communities do not force isolation upon their menstruating women, the discrimination and prejudice against them remains strong, even in Nepal’s capital city, Kathmandu. During a study conducted in Nepalese schools by Water aid in 2009, only 11 percent of the respondents declared not practicing any form of restriction or exclusion during menstruation. For instance, during their period women are often banned from the kitchen and eat separately. Mothers may instruct their daughters not to walk near a temple or not to look at herself in the mirror to avoid bad omens. The impact of chhaupadi on women’s health is obviously devastating. Five days a month, the women are confined to a dark, dirty room without nutritious food in sufficient quantity. Every year, newspapers report stories of women raped, killed by wild animals, bitten by snakes or dead of cold during their stay in the goth. In addition to the sanitary consequences, such discriminatory

traditions slow down women's emancipation process, which Nepal has embarked upon with tremendous difficulties since the end of the conflict. On one hand, the girls' education, key to the empowerment of Nepalese women, suffers from their absence five days a month, including during exams. On the other hand, by stigmatizing women's natural cycle as impure, society locks them up through numerous restrictions controlling their bodies and restraining the scope of their engagement in the community. Their potential for action, participation and innovation is constrained through this stigma and shame. Locking up women's bodies is also an attempt to lock up their minds (Rebaud, 2011).

Its history is said to be from religious practices where it was believed to that Gods and Goddesses were angered at women staying in the family house at such a time. According to religious folklore, Indra, the King of Heaven was accused of killing a Brahmin and because of the illicit acts with women that Indra committed during his quest to redeem his sin, for these acts all women were said to be punished through menstruation. In some cases women are instructed to live in a separate area of the house, however commonly women are forced to live in a mud hut that is completely separate to the house and in some case hundreds of yards away. There are often cases of women becoming seriously ill from the cowsheds. The worst case scenarios involve suffering from diarrheal and respiratory diseases and also malnutrition. Whilst in sheds, the women are not able to wash or even comb their hair. In some areas, women are not even taught or aware of the use of sanitary towels and so are forced to bare the "condemned" stains on their unwashed clothes. Furthermore girls are restricted from even going to school during such a time. The psychological effects are just as shocking, as the young women often live in fear as well as physical pain and discomfort. Exposed to the dangers of assault and sexual abuse many women are too afraid to even sleep whilst in the shed at the risk of being attacked by men in the village. Such acts signify the misogynistic nature of certain regions of Nepal and the constant fight that women face (Hussain, 2012). This article emphasis on the process of chhaupadi and what is the cause of the women suffering.

The taboo of menstruation: Chhaupadi pratha is a centuries old ritual of banishing Nepali women and girls during their monthly menstruation. This ritual is also practiced during and after childbirth. Throughout history, many cultures have practiced the same type of ritual and today the banishment ritual is still accepted and affects females from all levels of Nepali society. A chhaupadi shed or hut is a simple stone, grass, or stick shelter. These chhaupadi sheds are also commonly used to shelter cows and goats; many have dirt floors, no windows, and no water making the conditions inside the huts the epitome of unsanitary. During winter months, temperatures can drop to 11 degrees Fahrenheit and in the summer months can reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit. In conjunction with the brutal temperatures and unsanitary conditions, women are left completely isolated which brings about issues of life threatening situations. The taboo associated with this natural process for women has contributed to a widespread lack of knowledge about physical hygiene and female menstruation, especially in the rural areas of Nepal. “Nachhunu,” is the Nepali word for menstruation and also translates as “untouchable.” In Nepal it is common for women who are menstruating to be considered impure and untouchable. This superstition includes everything that a woman touches during the time of menses (Mazzulo, 2013)

Line Djernaes Sandbakken (2011) in *The Practice of Chhaupadi: Links Between Local Cultural Understanding and Women’s Rights in Rural Nepal*: Explain in this thesis how women’s lived experiences are shaped by traditional culture and power structures, through examining the case of chhaupadi and its implications on women’s lives. The practice of chhaupadi is widespread in the far western region of Nepal, and it can be seen as a violation of women’s rights. This thesis argues that having a local cultural understanding is crucial for the adaptation of women’s rights in the local cultural context. This thesis finds that the chhaupadi practice violates women’s rights because it limits their ability to live safe and healthy lives, and in some cases it deprives girls’ opportunities to attend school. Further, it identifies traditional culture and power structures like patriarchy as important determinants for the continuation of the practice.

These all article emphasis on the process and challenges faced by chhaupadi women. There is the missing thing is how women feel and explain the process of chhaupadi and how it is perceived? This is the main theme of study. In these articles the data were collected by macro level but there is not mentions how chhaupadi women perceived and described this. So this study focus on the chhaupadi women themselves to collect information from them inner side.

#### **2.4. Women Health: Menstruation**

The Chhaupadi is related to women health. There are some literatures which I talks like this:Despite major developments in the hygiene and sanitation sector in recent years, the menstrual requirements of women and adolescent girls have been ignored. Overcoming this gap is vital. Menstruation is normal and natural, but many women suffer and die because of widespread ignorance and shame (Ahmed and Yesmen, 2005). In the practice of Chhaupadi there is also ignorance of sanitation and hygiene. That's why women become suffer. This article focus on the sanitation which is also related with Chhaupadi Pratha.

A Neglected Condition for the Achievement of Several Millennium Development Goals: The problem concerning menstruation and participation in the higher forms of primary (grade 4 & 5) and secondary education has several aspects. Sanitary facilities and waste management at schools, including the hygienic disposal of sanitary napkins and other protection alternatives, are so poor and unsafe that girls and female teachers prefer not to use these during their menstruation period. Moreover, safe and effective protection alternatives, such as sanitary napkins, tampons, etc., are not available, and/or not affordable 41, because they have to be imported or because of the high taxes being levied on these products (they are classed as luxury goods instead of necessary items). These problems are reinforced by local customs and cultural and/ or religious traditions and taboos concerning menstruation, especially in rural areas (Ten, 2007).



Kumar and Shrivastava (2011) attempts to find out the existing social and cultural practices regarding menstruation, awareness levels, and the behavioral changes that come about in adolescent girls during menstruation, their perception about menarche, how do they treat it, and the various taboos, norms, and cultural practices associated with menarche. Cultural and social restrictions associated with menstruation, myth, and misconception; the adaptability of the adolescent girls toward it; their reaction, reaction of the family; realization of the importance of menstruation; and the changes that have come in their life after menarche and their resistance to such changes. The article also suggests the strategies to improve menstrual health and hygiene among adolescent girls. The study concludes that cultural and social practices regarding menstruation depend on girls' education, attitude, family environment, culture, and belief.

Priti Koirala and Sona G.C. (2013) in Menstruation among Nepalese Adolescent Girls explain Main purpose of this study is to find factors like what, when, where and how do Nepalese girls get information about menstrual practices. Other purposes include identification of cultural practices about menstruation. This study aimed in providing information to Dynamic education institute and helping them to plan and formulate new plan. It acts as an approach to solve menstrual problems and issues which are embedded in Nepalese society. Other main objective is also to identify and promote the positive factors which are practiced by adolescence girls, and to find suggestive approach to the concerned body including family, school and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations. A qualitative approach was used in this research and data was obtained through written essay from volunteer female participants (15-18) of Dynamic educational institute. Data was analyzed by using content analysis method. The results shows that menstruation cycle physiology, sanitation habits and its management are introduced to adolescence girls and females are major informant to them like Mother, elder sister at home and female teachers or friends at school. However, Internet access is the next option for the source of information. Majority of participants seem to get the

information at the age 10 to 13. There were several misconceptions about menstrual practices and cultural taboos which directly affected the quality practices about menstrual hygiene and sanitation. This research provides information about how the adolescence girls experience and understand their menstrual cycle from the beginning of adolescence life. This research can be used by participating educational organization for raising awareness program within the school settings and to the concerned families or other concerned educational stakeholders.

The articles about women health are related with menstruation hygiene which is also known as chhaupadi period some part of Nepal. There is only mentioned about health and hygiene from health perspectives. But this study analyzed social and cultural process of menstruation system also related with health. How these menstruation system become women suffer and how they perceive it is the main theme of this study.

## **2.5. Menstruation in Hindu Sastra**

Women are the suppressed group in Nepali society their status is low rather than men in the society. About women status in society are written many literatures but some of them according Hinduism among them are mentioned here.

In general, in each society there are socio-cultural norms and prescriptions regarding the knowledge, attitude, preference, behavior of people, etc. In Hindu culture, menstruation (a reproductive health element) is considered religiously impure and ceremonially unclean. There are many socio-cultural taboos being practiced by females during menstruation. Apart from validity, these taboos help women maintain menstrual hygiene as a prerequisite to avoid reproductive health problems. Therefore, this paper attempts to examine such practices in the study area and the factors influencing the practice of social taboos. The Socio-cultural taboo Index developed is to classify women into three categories as low, moderate and high practice of social taboos. The results show that a very strong practiced attitude among the women is clearly evident in keeping them away from religious and

ceremonial participation. Surprisingly, this practice is comparatively high among urban respondents. Except religious and ceremonial related taboos, women do not seem favorable to practice of other social-taboos. Conclusion: At least a strong belief in “menstruation is religiously impure and ceremonially unclean” makes them practice menstrual hygiene (Selvi & Ramchandran, 2012).

Although menstruation is a biological process that occurs for women of a sexually mature age, many cultures associate it with symbols that shape and affect women's lives within these societies. This thesis examines orthodox Hindu beliefs about the origin and meaning of menstruation, which is fundamentally viewed negatively (i.e., adharmically). Drawing upon sources from the earliest to more recent Dharmasastra literature, the thesis demonstrates that orthodox Hindu menstrual taboos derive from menstruation's adharmic associations, which in turn affect attitudes towards women. The Dharmasastras also attempt to realign women with dharma by prescribing appropriate roles for them and act in tandem with the Hindu goddess tradition. Orthodox interpretations of Hindu goddesses configure these deities to serve as dharmic models "for" “and” of women, thereby transmitting dharma to women in ways that are perhaps more meaningful, accessible, and effective than the sastric literature alone (Hembroff, 2010).

In the case of the Melmaruvatur temple, there is the traditional category of "revelation;" this time, by the Goddess herself to a male devotee. In other cases, it is male or female leaders who wanted to see reform'. The reform itself is not understood as anything new or innovative; there are ample narratives in the more than three millennia of texts which provide precedents. These stories are retrieved, valorized and used as precedents for current changes. One can also see the very diversity, plurality, and lack of centralized authority in Hindu traditions as a way in which changes happen. The many traditions -- Sanskrit, vernacular, Brahmanical etc, interact constantly. While the Sanskritization elements are well known, the vernacularizing of the many traditions have allowed for a lot of innovative practices. These spaces have allowed women to take on various leadership roles

including that of sacerdotal functions. And, finally, one may point to the Sanskrit sources -- the sources of dharma given in the various dharma sastras. These four different sources allow for innovation. Many texts point to the Vedas and the smriti literature as sources for dharma. A third source is the exemplary behavior (sadachara ) of the righteous people. The last source is considered atma tushti. While this is frequently translated as "conscience," it is also seen as that which gives peace or contentment to one's soul. Seen from this perspective, there is plenty of room for change, room to negotiate gender and sacerdotal functions, room for the contentment that comes in making right what many perceive as centuries of gender or caste inequality (Narayanan, 2005).

In Hindu sastra menstruation system is considered as dominating practice. That is why Hindu followers keep it according to sastra and it became cause of suffering for women. This thesis focused on how society takes menstruation which are cause of women suffering.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Rationale of the selection of the Study area**

Chaupadi is a long held and widespread practice in the Far and Mid-Western Regions of Nepal among all castes and groups of Hindus. There are many societies which are still in practicing chhaupadi system that is why; society of Duni is also one of them. So that like other society, women of Duni are suffering from such system. So Duni VDC of Achham district have been taken as research site. The field work in research site conducted two times, first time starts since 30 July, 2013 to 09 Aug, 2013 and second time 05 December, 2013 to 30 December, 2013. The participants were 20 women within the age group of 14 to 49 and their groups and Chhaupadi women, family elders, the mother-in-laws, the shamans (Dhamis), Fulpates (the worshipers Dhami), traditional healers (jaisis), village politicians, and anti Chhau campaigners etc.

Achham district is located in the Seti zone and Far western region of Nepal. And Duni VDC is located in the border of Achham and Doti district. Duni is situated across the Pahalman Shing Swar Highway. The other adjoining VDCs nearby with Duni are Patakot, Marku, and Sokat. It is culturally very important place where various festivals and customs can be seen among of them are Dashai Hori, Bhuwa, Gaura, Putala, deuda Khel, Shiva Ratri, etc. It is also environmentally beautiful place because there are Khaptad National Park, Bara Banda Athara Khanda Ramaroshan and Budhi Ganga River located.

#### **3.2. Research Design and Process**

The descriptive research attempts to describe, explain and interpret conditions of the present i.e. "what is". The purpose of a descriptive research is to examine a phenomenon that is occurring at a specific place(s) and time. A descriptive research is concerned with conditions, practices, structures, differences or relationships that exist, opinions held processes that are going on or trends that are evident (Creswell, 1998).

This study has been used the descriptive design based on the nature and source of data and information. Qualitative technique- It is a term with varying meaning in different kinds of research. For example, suggest that the term is often used interchangeably with terms such as naturalistic, ethnographic, subjective, and post-positivistic. Qualitative research studies typically include ethnographies, case studies, and generally descriptive studies. They often are called ethnographies, but these are somewhat more specific. Qualitative research methods typically include interviews and observation but may also include case studies, discussion, and historical and document analyses.

Therefore, qualitative data have been collected for making the research study comprehensive. Qualitative data has been generated directly from meeting and talking with the respondent and documenting their experiences whose narrative accounts about Chhaupadi Pratha and rituals contribute to this research for making valid. Observation of the chhaupadi goth and Discussing with women group have been conducted to more understand Chhaupadi Pratha and effects on women health.

As I reached at Chaukhutte Bazar, I met with my Friend and searched the house for my field stay. I made a plan to stay some days at Bazaar to build the rapport with entire VDC, because it was the meeting point of all the villagers. I stayed there for three days to meet various kinds of people that were useful to me and made a research plan for the villages. So I stayed at Chhaukhutte Bazaar to break the ice and build the rapport with entire village. Although I was very familiar for most of the villagers, but at that time I was there for different purpose which I had to tell them. As I told them that I was there to talk and take interview with people about Chhaupadi system, some of my friends started to tell that I don't have need to go to the village for that purpose because they can tell what I need. They told that why I need to bother to go with the villagers and what they will tell, they know nothing. One of my friend suggested me better to listen him rather than to bear a nuisance to go with the villagers, But I had to go to the villages to interact with the Chhaupadi women, family elders, the mother in laws, the shamans(Dhamis), Fulpates(the worshipers Dhami), traditional healers(jaisis), village politicians, and anti Chhau campaigners etc. To know the myth, stories that justify the practice.

At first during my initial field work days with whom I encountered, they became very fearful assuming me as a reporter. They annoyed for the coverage of Chhaupadi news in national newspaper and radio. They thought that they might be insulted by the news coverage of Chhaupadi system. On my initial encounter, and even entire field work period, they thought me as an opponent of Chhaupadi system. Very few local activists became happy perceiving me as the opponent of tradition, while at the same time strict followers of the tradition became unhappy perceiving me as the eliminator of the tradition. The proponents of the system were being fearful for the suspicion of news coverage in national and international media about the system. They do not want to be coverage and matter of discussion due to this odd practice. They perceived me as reporter from any established national media.

They took Chhaupadi as prestige issue, and at my first informal conversation, they seemed very reluctant to share the fact that they are abiding by the practice. I tried to make clear to many of them before the interview, telling that, neither have I belonged with any NGO/INGO nor with other change activists, nor with the agencies who want status-quo of the system, I have come here only to know the tradition from the perspective of different actors. I clarified my side to all the pros and cons agencies of Chhaupadi system before to conduct interview. I had to tell that neither I am a reporter, nor a staff of any NGO, neither I am here to change the practice, nor to keep the practice as it is, I am here to know what different people say about the practice. After two days ice break, and rapport. I made a plan to go to the village to observe the practice and to interact with the people. I applied in-depth interview, except oral histories and focus group discussion. So basically I used qualitative techniques to generate the data. I have taken the interviews with the members of women's group, the old mother in laws, daughter in laws, Dhamis(considered as local deity), Fulpate(the worshipers of Dhamis), Jaisis, Brahamans, local health workers, educated girls and anti Chhau campaigners.

Chhaupadi Pratha is social problem related to woman reproductive health. It is very difficult get information from woman for a boy. So I got help from a lady Ramana

Kunwar to collect information. Through her women experiences come out which I want to explain.

### **3.3. Nature and Sources of Data**

Primary data have been used in the study to make the study qualitative rather than the quantitative and secondary data has been also used in need. The required primary data has been generated through the field study and the research has explored and documented the local perspective and rituals followed by the community to reduce the impacts of social problem on health and the cause of suffering.

Primary data have been used in the study to make the study more qualitative rather than the quantitative according to the nature of data collection tools. The required primary data have been generated through the field study. Qualitative data have been used and major concern will be paid on the qualitative information, as of the research is to explore and document the local people's experience. Qualitative have been collected for making the research study reliable and valid comprehensive. Qualitative data have been generated from directly observing, meeting and talking with the respondent and documenting their experiences whose narrative account about Chhaupadi system and their experience will contribute to this research for making valid.

### **3.4. Data Collection Techniques**

In earlier days my field visits I used Interviews. The main purpose of this interview was to build rapport and to find out the issues of In-depth interviews. I had conducted 20 In-depth interviews I went through pleasing chitchat and ended accordingly. All interviews were recorded and transcribed later.

Therefore I have applied following tools and techniques to collect the information of women experience about Chhaupadi system from the study area. Like in-depth interview, observation, group discussion and oral history were the main tools to collect information for the study.



### **3.4.1. In-depth Interviews**

In a qualitative research, the interview is constructed more as a discourse between two or the more people which is not so fully controlled by the interviewer's questions but is in fact constructed by both interviewer and respondent over the course of discussion (Baker, 1999).

The Age of 15 to 49 women and girls were the respondents for the study so that through the interview method with them, I have got to know the major social problem related to women health in Duni society. I have collected the information on the Chhaupadi Practice, religious norms customs and impacts on health.

### **3.4.2. Observation**

Observation is a qualitative method frequently used in social science research. It is based on a long tradition of ethnographic study in anthropology. In participant observation, the observer becomes "part" of the environment, or the cultural context. In every form of qualitative research, nearly all qualitative researcher use observation as one of their central data-gathering methods (Baker, 1999).

The observation method has been applied to get the primary data and relevant information. Despite the fact achieved from respondent's reply, the researcher himself has observed the Chhaupadi goth and chhaupadi dhara which were made for chhaupadi women. Moreover, have also observed the behavior of chhaupadi women in the society. Within this scenario I have also observed the social and cultural behaviors of the people and process of every walk of life of people.

### **3.4.3. Oral History**

Storytelling is a natural part of the human experience. Human beings communicate meaning through talk. Oral historians have harnessed this tradition of transmitting knowledge and created an important research technique that allows the expression of voice. While storytelling has a deep history, the adaptation of this human process into a legitimated research method is relatively new (Portelli, 1991).

The researcher has documented the oral tradition-women's 'hear' and 'say' as sources of primary data about practice and experience about chhaupadi system. Chhaupadi system is running since centuries and its own practice. The women that they have for a long time who have spent their few decades facing the chhaupadi tradition. So I have applied this tools to get information about how this Chhaupadi system was before and how is now, how this is transfer generation to generation and what is it values.

#### **3.4.4. Group Discussion**

Group Discussion sessions were conducted among a women group which was gathered to discuss about sanitation programme which organized by a NGO SEWAK Nepal. When I was first time in the field to get data and information I also participated in that meeting. I kept my issue with this group to discuss. From the discussion I have better understood about concept of chhaupadi, existence, effects on health and process of chhaupadi pratha.

#### **3.5. Data Analysis**

Analysis is necessary for the data interpreting and analyzing so that Analysis a continuous process of reviewing the information as it has been collected, classifying it, formulating additional questions, verifying information and drawing conclusion (Baker, 1999).

Collected data from the field is not well managed and interpreted so that I have managed, interpreted and analyzed all the raw data generated from the field study. I have put all the data with specific topic and context where it suits and based on nature and sources of collected data. I have analyzed all the collected data through the respondents orderly which has described their notion on the social and health problem related to women and also described their ways of using multiple cultural practices in the local context. Based on the findings from the field and analysis of the data finally I have drawn summary and conclusion.

### **3.6. Ethical Considerations**

The research enterprise is built on a foundation of trust. Researchers trust that the result reported by others is sound. Society trusts that the result of research reflects an honest attempt by scientists and other researchers to describe the world accurately and without bias. But this trust will endure only if the scientific community devotes itself to exemplifying and transmitting the values associated with ethical research conduct (Cassel, 1980).

I have used the pseudo name of respondent during my data analysis if they are not supposed to expose their name and I have not done any work that may be harmful to the respondents. I have not used unpublished data, methods, or results without permission and paid credit where credit is due, I have given proper acknowledgement or credit for all contributions to research and never plagiarize as well as try to avoid discrimination against the respondents on the basis of sex, ethnicity, or other factors.

### **3.7 Limitations of the Study**

Every study has its own limitation and more than one particular person bonding in certain time, perspective and sources cannot possible to study whole aspect. So, there is some limitation in any research and this research is no exception either. The limitations of the research area are as follow: This study is about a village and women age group of 15 to 49 living in western part of Achham District. The finding from the study may be not generalized other place than Far and Mid-Western Regions of Nepal. This study emphasis on mentally, physically, psychologically, socially and religiously effects on women health from chhaupadi pratha. There are many cases of resistance which hold vary significant to document and I could not concentrate on it because my primary focus was on how and what women suffer from the Chhaupadi system. The Chhau reality, food taboo and other restrictions might be entirely different beyond the far west region.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PHYSICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SETTING**

#### **4.1. The Place and People**

It takes around 1 hour by bus to reach at Duni VDC from Sanfebagar, the nearby Chaukhutte Bazar which is located in the corridor of Pahalmansingh swar highway and connect Doti and Achham Districts. Duni VDC is situated in the boarder of Doti and Achham district and joined the other neighboring VDCs such as Patakot, Marku and Sokat. From district headquarter; it takes 3 to 4 hours travel to reach at the field village. Duni is Village where most of the government's offices are established targeting to provide service it's neighboring five VDCs. So it consist government offices like health post, police post, and cooperatives including small Bazar. One secondary school is located in Duni. Geographically it is diverse, and scattered. Somewhere it takes nearly two to three hours walk to reach from one ward to another. During my field stay I observed these two parts separately focusing on Liudsain and Selpakha and the rest of the cluster and wards.

#### **4.2. Social Cultural Landscape**

There are the mixed settlements in which Khas Chhetris such as Khadka, Saud, Thapa and Dalits live in the village. Thakuri families who were the local Rajas despite being very population have ruled over many VDCs in eastern Achham due to their connection with the king and Rana rulers during Rana and Panchayat regime have now been migrated. They were the rulers in many VDCs in this region. They used to claim them as the successors of princely local king. Though the ordinary Khas Chhetris such as Khadka, Saud and Thapa were great in numbers, they were considered as the subjects of one or two Thakuri family in this village. The scenario was not unlike in the case of other villages. Though the majority population is of Chhetris and Brahamans, they used to be governed by one or two Thakuris or Shah Families. Shahas or Thakuris were the bearers of most of the tradition that was created considering their economic and political interests. Now Shah ruling families have not been in the village but some of the Thakuris or Shahs have been living at Bazar area of Chhaukhutte from neighbouring VDC. But

Thakuris or Shahs have some large populations in other surrounding VDCs. In terms of caste they rank the top level in local hierarchy. They have been and still being treated as rajas. They don't marry with ordinary Khas Chhetris and Brahamans. Brahamans are considered as priest of Thakuris and ordinary Chhetris. There is a different kind of hierarchy between various castes and Dalit lies in the bottom of that echelon. In Far West Region there is also hierarchy between Chhetris and between Dalits. So the Far West Region is a segregated type of society and the Duni is also not different from that.

The village follows the Hindu tradition and worship so many god and goddesses (Shiva, Shree Krishna, Ganesh, Indra, Nawa Durga, Laxmi and Saraswoti etc.) in local level. In each VDC they have their own deities which are also named as shamans (Dhami/Deota in local vernacular). In addition to believe on local deity or shamans (Dhami), the village also believes on traditional healers (Jaisis). Many superstitions, myth are associated with this local deity or faith healers and traditional healing system which are linked also with the Chhaupadi system. So the local social cultural system is constructed with these multiple institutions, actors and agencies such as caste system, local myth, superstition, values-norms, local deity, and traditional healing system. In house hold level family holds and bears this system and tradition. The village social and cultural system constructed by multiple institutions does not treat Chhaupadi as natural phenomenon. It associates some unlucky happenings with the violations of Chhau rules during the period of menstruation.

#### **4.3. Chhau Scenario**

In the case of Chaukhutte Bazaar the some women did not stay at the chhaupadi goth during my field work period. But in the case of villages, if anyone goes ten minute far from Bazaar towards the village, then the practice is prevalent in each village, and settlement. On entire nine wards except small Bazaar, I found only four houses that were not abiding by the norms of Chhau system through the observation. In terms of caste, the practice is more rigid among lower caste Dalits, and upper caste Thakuris. Though, Thakuris who were very few numbers and currently have migrated at Terai were the strict followers of the tradition. Thakuris were the rulers, who used to claim themselves as local

king; live in other many neighboring VDCs strongly followed the tradition. Thakuris live in large numbers in its neighboring villages such as in Patakot and many other VDCs. It is reported that the Thakuris from Patakot as of other VDCs are more rigid in bearing old customs and tradition. Most of the women from Thakuris families go home only after seven days menstrual cycle. This also applies in the case of local deity or shaman, traditional healers (Jaisi), and Brahmins, and the worshipers of local deity from other various castes. The living status of Chhaupadi women is more worsening and quite complex among Dalit community. However relatively educated and well off families from abovementioned castes are resisting the practice. They treat Chhaupadi system as the tradition of shame which is lowering their status.

#### **4.4. Housing Pattern for Chhaupadi**

A chhaupadi goth is sometimes built within the household premises, but in other cases, they are isolated from the homes, up to a 100 yards away from the houses. Most sheds can barely fit two people: they tend to be around six feet wide and four feet high and made of mud, stone and wood with no windows. A chhaupadi shed or hut is a simple stone, grass, or stick shelter. The sheds are very unhygienic, unventilated and poorly built. During their seclusion, women have to remain within the shed, often without sufficient clothes or blankets. In some places, there are small sheds built specially for the purpose of seclusion. These tend to be very small and unventilated. Women and girls are barely able to stand up inside them.

These chhaupadi sheds are also commonly used to shelter cows and goats; many have dirt floors, no windows, and no water making the conditions inside the huts the epitome of unsanitary. When it has been built, the lower floor is used as the menstrual shed, whereas in a single storied hut, a side room or even the main area is used. In front of the shed, dung and other wastes are collected. In conjunction with the brutal temperatures and unsanitary conditions, women are left completely isolated which brings about issues of life threatening situations. If a woman were to have any physical distress during monthly periods, she would have no little chance of getting help. This dangerous practice has led to mortality. About Chhaupadi goth Narpata Saud (name changed) says,

*“Goth ghar dheki para saguro adhyaro hudochha naap thauma pana tin char jana sutta chhau”.*

### **Case-1**

*Rambha Auji from Duni shared her bitter experiences. Each month during menstruation, she has to stay in her family’s cattle shed, which serves as the menstrual hut. She has asked herself why god has given this torture to women. Staying in the shed is horrible; smelling because of its function as a cattle shed. She is even obligated to take her meals in this unclean environment. During menstruation, she is considered to be “impure” or “unclean” during these periods and is regarded as an untouchable by her family members. She has had bitter experiences, rooted in these practices. She once went to clean herself and her clothes in a nearby stream, but villagers and family members accused her of making the stream impure. After several weeks, the problem was rectified, but not until she had assured her fellow villagers that she would not repeating her actions in the future. Elderly people and others in the community hesitated to use the stream water for a long period. She doesn't have hope that her situation will change after marriage, saying, “My own family doesn't consider or support us during that period, even though we are their own daughters and sisters. Why would the in-laws give us support, when the daughters-in-law are considered secondary?” She believes that this practice is a result of traditional beliefs, taboos and practices. Mrs. Dhankala Kami also has to stay in her family’s cattle shed and menstrual hut during her monthly periods. Members of her family and the people of the community consider the time of a woman’s period as very “impure”. The women have to remain secluded in a separate area and cattle sheds are used for this purpose. Because the village is stricken with poverty, the community cannot construct another shelter for use as a menstrual shed. The community believes that if anything is touched by a menstruating woman, it will become impure and may cause harm to others. If they touch something accidentally, then the item should be cleaned immediately to make it reusable. If the women touch their husband or other family members, then those touched must bathe in order to cleanse themselves of impurities. During these periods, she feels as if she was an animal and, for this reason, wants to share her experience. Even during the winter season, her family’s beliefs wouldn't change.*

*She was forced to stay in the shed without a proper warming mechanism. She had to sleep on the floor with only a layer of straw and a thin blanket for a bed. Her meals were also supplied in the shed and she had to walk a long distance for cleaning early in the morning. On one occasion during the winter season, she fell sick with a high fever, later diagnosed as pneumonia. For her treatment, the family had to bear the high costs, though it was difficult for the poor family. Though the family members were aware of the reasons for her illness, they remain unwilling to change their traditions because of conservative beliefs and social pressures.*



Picture No. 1 Chhaupadi Goth

#### **4.5. Work Burden**

Most of the Chhaupadi Women I have talked with were living at the small shed far from the home. Like other Nepalese women, they don't have to cook food for the family. Menstruating women are not permitted to participate in religious ceremonies. They have to bath everyday and wash clothes using cold water. Answering my question what types of works should you do in your chhaupadi periods Raju Luhar (name changed) says,



*“Aba Chhau bhayaka bela hamle ghar bhitrako sajilo kaam harna millaina, ghar bairako ghas katnya, दौरा lyaunya, khannya, syaula lyaunya jasa kaam harnu paddo chha”.*

They have participated in hard labor out of the house, such as working in the fields, fetching firewood, washing clothes, and so on.

#### **4.6. Food Behaviour**

All chhaupadi women I have talked with were not allowed to eat dairy product food. They were not allowed to eat meat of sacrificed goats, buffalos, hens and ducks in temple during any festival. They did not touch fruit trees. The chhaupadi women only ate rice, daal, vegetable and chapatti during her monthly period. In the monthly period the women need more Dietary food but in case of Duni the chhaupadi women have prohibited to eat such dietary food (Milk, Curd, Ghee, Butter and meat). About food behavior of chhaupadi in her periods Surja Saud says,

*“Chhau bhyaka bela dud, dai, chhai, ghuu kei khana millaina sukhkha bhat daal tarkari matrai khana paido chha, kasai deota lai chdayaka kukuda bakhra ko masu pana khana millaina”.*

Answering my question why do not you get drink milk? The Narpata Saud (name changed) has said if they drink milk, the cow or buffalo leave to give milk. And answering my question why do not you get eats meat of sacrificed animal? The Champha Sunar (name changed) has said if they eat sacrificed animal, the god will be angry so bad acts happen in their life.



Picture No. 2. A woman eating food within Chhaupadi Goth

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IDEOLOGY, CONCEPT AND PROCESS OF CHHAUPADI SOCIALIZATION

#### 5.1. The ideology of pollution and purity

The ideas of pollution, purity, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are central concerns of caste and gender. The concepts of Purity (*suddha, Chokho*), and impurity (*asuddha, Jutho*) are found in Hindu culture. The ideology of purity-pollution is related with states of peoples, objects, and actions. Caste and gender interactions in far west region are governed by the concepts of pollution and purity (Cameron, 1998). In the society purity and danger both are existing. Purity makes social order and danger brings danger in social order. Sometimes danger needs to keep social order. After disorder the order comes or after pollution the purity comes (Douglas, 1966).

The prevalent ideology of purity and pollution treat certain states of people, objects, and actions as impure and particular things as pure. Particular events such as birth, death, and miscarriage are treated as impure and contacts between people during these periods are prohibited from impure to pure. Bodily substances such as saliva, phlegm, semen, and blood are considered as impure. Women are treated as bodily polluted during the period of menstruation. Lower caste people are also considered as bodily impure and which is directly associated with their occupational impurity. They are treated as impure because they handle the leather work, eat beef, and remove the dead animals. So the bodily impurity of lower caste Dalits is coterminous with occupational impurity. Most of the social transactions between people in everyday practice in the region are dictated by this ideology of purity and pollution. Agricultural work such as digging, ploughing, and fertilizer bringing and the household work such as washing, cleaning, and child caring activities are considered as impure. In most cases, women are involved in household, child caring, and agricultural related impure work. About impurity Dipa Saud (name changed) says,

*“Chhau bhayaka bela baikini ka hada bati ragat aaudo chha tei ragat le nachhunya banaunya ho, chha din ka dini ragat aauna raya pachhi baikini chokkhini chhan”.*

Most of the daily interactions and behaviors are directed by the rules of impurity avoidance. The supposed pure such as shaman (*Dhami*), the regular worshiper (*Pujari*, and *Fulpate*), the priest (*Brahaman*), and Jaisi have to be strictly abided by the norms of impurity avoidance. The persons who have ascetic life have to follow the rules of impurity avoidance. Guiding and governing by the ideology of purity-impurity and auspicious-inauspicious in everyday life society discourage contact with bodily impure people permanently to Dalits and temporally to women during their period of menstruation. Considering as polluted women tend to be secluded or excluded from normal life from five to seven days during menstruation period and ten to twelve days during child birth. Menstruation is considered as absolutely impure while child birth as both impure and pure.



Picture No. 3. Standing chhaupadi women

## 5.2. Dharma and Paap

I once asked with a woman of a Chhetri family, what would happen if menstrual women entered into their home. She told that it is sinful (*paap lagchha*), cows and buffalo will get sick (*Gai, Bhaisi birami parchha*), and shaman started to shaking (*Dhami Chaldachha*). So, impurity avoidance during menstruation and childbirth is also associated with the concept of Dharma and sin. Most of the girls and women bear the Chhaupadi tradition in the name of Dharma. If they do not abided by the existing

Chhaupadi rules, then it is considered as sinful act (*paap*). Answering my question why you follow chhaupadi rule Deva Luhar (name changed) says,

*“Chhaupadi gotha nabasi khera gharai basya pachhi padani deota ko than hudo chha taludi chhaupadi basya pachhi deota risauda chhan, paap lagdo chha, chhal hudo chha, gotha ka goru madda chhan bana bakhra lai bag khado chha, ghara ka maisa birami padda chhan”.*

It is believed that, violation of Chhaupadi laws might harm to their bodies, families, and the community as a whole. If any girl or women entered into a temple of local deity, then it is believed that personally she might lose her eye, or goes mad or may die and in community level it might bring sandstones, and cholera in the region. Something that is abiding with the Chhaupadi norms is considered as Dharma and not following the tradition as sinful act (*paap*). If milk, curd, and ghee are given to a girl and women in the menstruation period, if they come in contact with home, fruit bearing trees, then it is considered as sin (*paap*). Violating the Chhaupadi rules most of the women and girls do not want to be sinful and other family members do not want to take the risk. The concept of Dharma and Paap embedded in local social structure also is a driving force to operate the Chhaupadi practice in the region.

#### **Case-2**

*Tulsa Luhar (name changed) told we should face various difficulties and happen bad acts in our life not following the chhaupadi system. It is sinful (Paap Lagchha) not following the tradition. She shared me a story which had she seen. A woman was not following the system in the village. In the menstruation period she lived inside the home, drunk dairy products, went anywhere through the way of temple. Then after one day her son had gone to jungle to gather fire wood. Then the tiger attacked her son and he died. It was considered cause of sin (Paap Lagyo) of not following the chhaupadi pratha.*

### 5.3. Shamanism (*Dhami/Deota and Fulpate*)

Once I asked with younger girls, and other senior women what would happen if you do not follow the tradition, then they told that god will be angry, Buffalo will not give the milk, and other unlucky things might happen at their home. They follow the tradition because of the fear of local deity (*Dhami/Deota*). Many lives are depending up on the power of local deity if cholera and other social and natural disaster broke out in the region. Most of the people believe that they will be saved from many unlucky happenings because of the power of their local deity. The practice is that if anybody becomes ill, if any unlucky things happen in some body's family then they go with *Dhami/Deota*. If cow or buffalo did not give the milk, if somebody died suddenly in any family, if somebody's health is not good and frequently fall sick, then they go first with their *Dhami* to ask what happened to them and for the treatment.

In Achham and in far west there are many forms of local God and Goddesses. *Dhamis* are the form of their God. They are known as *Masto* and *Bandali* in the Duni region. The people in the region overly believe on *Masto* and *Bandali* deity. *Masto* and *Bandali* is the hope of the hopeless and power of the powerless. The person whom some supernatural power made shacking becomes the *Dhami* through the means of some public function and gatherings. The person, who exercise the power of deity and shack if some unlucky things happen are called as *Dhami*, the bearer of *Masto* and *Bandali*. They are considered as pure people and have to remain far from the contact of bodily impure people such as Dalits and *Chhaupadi* women. The supposed pure people *Dhamis* and *Phulpates* are not allowed to eat the meal made by others.

In the case of *Chhau*, they even do not walk the way from where the women during the period of menstruation have walked. I once asked with a woman about *Dhami* of *Masto*, what would happen if any girl or woman touches him during the period of menstruation, she told,

*“chhaupadi baikini chhau bhyaka bela dhami ka hada lagya pachhi deota risaуда chhan tabai dhami birami padda chhan, tei baikini lai pana baulyaudo chha”*.

The god becomes angry (*Deota risauchha*), Dhami might fall sick, and Dhami's neck bent in the opposite side and sometimes he might be faint. It promotes the belief that menstrual women should not come in contact with the supposed holy things once set by in processes of evolution of different socio-political system. If somebody is suffering by any illness, if somebody's buffalo did not give the milk and then he or she go with Dhami to ask that what happened to them, then Dhami shack and associate it with the transmission of Chhaupadi and delivery women. In other cases some time Dhami suggest that it is because of witchcraft. So Dhamis, the symbol of local deity who exercises the power of deity, associate some miss-happening with the not abiding with Chhaupadi norms, and the cause of witchcraft. So many people in the village have believed with local deity, which also work as a centre of myth and superstition. So, the Chhaupadi system is being continued along with this Dhami/Deota system.

### **Case -3**

*The local women Dipa Saud (name changed) shared me an incident. There was a big stone in front of her house in which the god (Deota) lived. It was bared to touch and go near for chhaupadi women. It was the thing only before two days when I talked her. I was bringing the grass for cattle then in the way. There was raining and the grass had been wet. After that her sister taking the grass put side of the big stone. The grass touched the stone in which the god (Deota) lived. Then the god (Deota) had been angry. The big snake was standing in front of the house cause of god's anger. Then after her mother in law came there and told to the snake "Please god forgives us! It was our big fault! We will never do such acts!" Then the snake went slowly far from the house and disappeared.*

#### **5.4. Local Belief System of Chhaupadi Pratha**

If women touch forbidden things during their menstruation period then it is believed that it brings disaster. It brings cholera, diarrhea, sandston, landslides, heavy rain etc. Not abiding with Chhaupadi norms some time it is believed that it cause premature death and sudden accident. Local belief system associates health, illness, and death with the abiding

and not abiding the Chhaupadi tradition. There are many stories of snake bite, death of buffalos, premature death of girls and other harm due to the cause of not abiding Chhaupadi rules. Deva Luhar (name changed) says,

*“Chhaupadi pratha lai namanya pachhi hunya nahunya biram lagda chhan, saap katto chha, deota risai anikaal lagdo chha, gai goruko nuksan hudo chha”.*

Like this in Patalkot, one of the neighboring villages, the higher secondary school Jalpadevi is located nearby the temple of local deity named as Sannitkot. Before ten years, none of the girls used to come at school during the period of menstruation because of this sannitkot. Dalit also never go nearby this temple. The area is strictly prohibited for lower caste Dalits and women. If they go nearby area or entered into the temple, it is believed that then they can be mad, and even can be reached into the mouth of death. Some time they can be faint if they go there. But nowadays, even during the period of their menstruation, girls go school. They do not stop their school because of their menstrual cycle. The belief system is changing since the period of 10 years. Despite that some girls still drop their school during the period of menstruation. Still there are some girls in many villages in the far west region who are dropping their school during the period of menstruation. If they go there, it is believed that, they can be faint on the spot, their eyes can be broken, they can go mad; and even they can be reached into the mouth of death. In Jalpadevi higher secondary school often in the summer season sometimes girls become faint during praying national anthem and many people associate it with the violation of Chhau restrictions. The taboo is more followed by Dalit families. Dalits are also barred from the temple except menstruated girls and women.

### **5.5. Women’s Perceptions**

These practices are driven by culture, its taboos and superstitions, in particular. A Hindu girl or women are secluded, believing that it will not bring any harm to community and the family. If the custom is breached by any means then it will create problem both on women and other member of the community like becoming sick, infertile and even the death. During this period they defer from the sex believing that the period is dangerous and may harm the genitals of the partner and making him sterile or impotent. It is



believes that if women don't maintain this tradition, the community would no longer be able to survive. Partly as a result of these beliefs, menstrual huts were built in the patriarchal societies. Tribal men of the west are frightened of menstrual blood and believe that a single drop could kill them. Even the gaze of a menstruating woman could mean death. If touched by her hands, they could come to great harm in the hunt. Menstrual seclusion rites, as recorded over the last few centuries, typically include the following practices.

Menstruating women must not see light. She must not touch neither water nor earth. When a girl gets her period for the first time, she is separated from her community and is not allowed to see light. At the end of her bleeding, she reemerges and is taken around and shown the earth, water, flowers and friends as if seeing them for the first time. Girls are secluded in a darkened section of the house and forbidden to look upon men and allowed to go outdoors only on a dark night. At the end of the cloistering, the family and villagers celebrate with a feast. The sheds are very dirty and unhygienic, having cattle excreta on the floor. They are also very cold during the winter. The women sleep on the floor, with only straw and a thin blanket for bedding. They have to take a bath every day for seven days, but they are not allowed to clean themselves at the common tap. They have to go to a separate tap built for Chhaupadi or to a nearby river for bathing and the washing of clothes. Frequently, "Chhaupadi" are not allowed to enter the household compound and are not allowed to touch other people.

There are also strong traditional beliefs that their family would become sick and bad things would happen in the house if the "Chhaupadi" stayed at home. The women are unable to touch fruit trees, fetch water, water plants or milk the cattle. It is believed that if they touch the fruit trees, the fruits will fall before they are ripe or the fruits will be dry; if they fetch water, the well will dry up; if the cattle are fed or milked by Chhaupadi, blood will come out of their teats instead of milk. There have been many cases of deaths and serious illnesses due to these practices. They are regularly suffering from infections like pneumonia, diarrhea and other chronic diseases, including mental disorders. It is a culturally driven gender discrimination against women. These beliefs and taboos continue

to be practiced in this country, in even in the Twenty-first Century. Women are considered "impure" or "unclean" and are prevented from taking part in many normal aspects of their lives during these periods. They believe that any breach in such practices will bring bad omens to their family, community and society.

### **5.6. Continuation of the System**

I interacted with a Deusari, a local woman, who is working as maternity and child care worker in the village health post. Knowing her as the change activist, who was also involved in the anti Chhau campaign, I had chosen her as my respondent to know the scenario of change and the struggle of change activists. Mrs Deusari is working in the local health post since 15 years. She was the opponent of Chhau since the very beginning. Being a health workers she know the natural causes of Chhau (menstruation). As I asked the scenario of Chhau at the village how many people are abiding by Chhau norms and what about the educated girls and women? My concern was to know the fact that whether or not educated girls and women follow Chhaupadi system? She told what to say and how to say, there are so many complexities. She told one example. Once she asked one of the Bachelor's degree holder high school teacher Mrs Shital, where you live Shital, you are the educated girl. Whether you live in Chhaupadished, or inside the home during your menstrual cycle, she asked with Shital. Mrs Shital says what to do, and how to do? She ignored her three menstrual periods and lived inside the home after she returned village from Dhangadhi after finishing her Bachelor's degree. But in each cycle her own and one of her elder mother gathered at corridor in her home and started to say, what happened to this Shital. Is she going to be ill? She is going to be ill. Please bring her to the Dhangadhi for the treatment, the nearby hospital from Achham district. In each her menstrual period as her mother and her elder mother started say like this; she obliged to return back in the buffalo shed to follow the chhaupadi norms.

The most of the educated girls and the women have the same situation like that of the Shital. During Maoist movement and emergency Maoist launched the campaign to stop the ill practice. Maoist cadres destroyed the Chhaupadisheds, and gave the speech that not to follow the tradition. They said people from Europe and America who do not follow

the Chhaupadi restrictions reached the moon and other planet. We the followers of Chhaupadi system have not food to eat, no clothes to wear, no medicine to be cure while we become ill. Even we don't have the sandal to wear on our foot. We are reaching nowhere following the tradition. So the tradition should be break. They have threatened that those who do not live inside the home, leaving cowsheds and buffalo sheds will face the punishment.

During their campaign many people say yeas, but did not follow except very few cases. But as peace process began in 2006, the tradition and the practice shift in the same state as it was in the previous period. The tradition and the practice become restored after the beginning of the peace process. In the case of Deusari, she was not following the practice since 13 years. As her neighbor sister knew that she is not holding the Chhau tradition, they asked with her, is she not abiding by the system. She lied in front of them, telling first that she is using a tablet. She bought that tablet from Paliya, India which cost 10000Rs. She used that tablet which caused stop her menstrual cycle. Later as they doubt her that she is lying, again she started to tell that she has thrown out her womb, as a result her menstrual cycle have been stopped. But her neighborhood did not stop to tell her that if she is not holding the system, then local deity might harm her, and something wrong doings might happen to her life. I asked weren't you be afraid after listening this?

During this question Deusari revealed another side of her story. She said she also become terrified, as an unlucky thing happened to her life. The mother of already four daughters Deusari, was 10 months pregnant at that time when incident occurred in her life. It was the baby boy that was growing in her womb, which they have already known checking it in Luckhnow hospital, India. She was in near of her delivery date. In the meantime she met an accident in which she fell down from the upstairs of health post to the downstairs. She and her baby got badly hurt. Her baby got died after some minutes on the way to her home. At night she was brought to Dhangadhi reserving a jeep up to Chaukhutte bazar. After reaching Dhangadhi hospital she was taken in to surgery ward, she had operation, her dead baby been removed, and finally she had been saved.

During that incident she became terrified whether it happened because she violated the Chhau rules or something like that. Her neighborhood associated that incident with the phenomenon of not abiding with the Chhaupadi system, though, Deusari associate with it or not. Deusari shared her experience how deep seated Chhaupadi stereotypes affect the behaviors of many women. Even up to some four or five years ago, the menstrual women did not come inside the compound of health post, even if they were being ill. Ill women, in their menstrual cycle, used to ask for the medicine, very far from the compound of the health post. They used to say that they cannot come inside of the health post compound because; it is nearby with the temple of local deity. But Mrs. Deusari used to deny giving them the medicine until and unless they come to the hospital. After many persuasions, and counseling, women started to come the inside of the compound of the health post during their menstruation period. So the sudden accidents are associated with the local deity and with the following and not following the Chhaupadi tradition. Social surrounding and the laymen interpreted any miss-happenings and the unlucky things with the abiding and not abiding of the existing Chhaupadi tradition and myth.

#### **Case-4**

*When Mrs. Tulasa Saud, a Community Mobilizer, came to understand the negative effects of "Chhaupadi Pratha", she gave up such practices and stayed in her home during menstruation. However, during this time, her goats were killed by wild animals. All of her family members believed that, because she refused to adhere to tradition, she had brought a bad woman upon their family makes anger the god. This reinforced her belief in such practices and she felt that the "god and goddess were not happy with her". She continued the practice again, despite some reluctance. After she became a Community Mobilizer for a local NGO, working on empowering members of the community, she learned more about women's and children's issues. Now, she, along with her family members, does not believe in such practices and does not follow the tradition. This is the story of a mother from Duni who had been practicing "Chhaupadi" since her first menstruation, even continuing the practice during the post-partum period, following the birth of her child.*

*She had many difficult experiences since she began the practice, but also she agrees with the traditional cultures and practices. She believes that if she doesn't follow them, her family will blame her for all harm that may come to the family. Because of this practice, she had lost her baby. To her surprise, however, no one in her family developed a negative attitude towards such practices and so they continue the tradition.*

## **CHAPTER-SIX**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **6.1 Summary**

This study has considered the social problem related to women health of Far West Region in the Duni VDC in Achham district which is conducted through suffering perspective. Local people and culture of creating the social problem related to women health in the local cultural context were the primary concern of this study. How are women feeling suffering from chhaupadi system is the major issue of the study? Through chhaupadi system this study explores the psychological and health sector of women. Health is the general condition of person in the minds, body and spirit usually meaning to be free from illness, injury or pain (in “good health” or “healthy”). Health in its broader sense is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1946). Although this definition has been subject to controversy, in particular as having a lack of operational value and the problem created by word use of “complete” so that the most enduring.

The practice of isolating women is called chhaupadi pratha. Nachhunu, the Nepali word for menstruation, also translates as “untouchable”. This ritual regards as women “impure” during their menstrual cycle. Following the ritual, women are made to live in sheds outside their homes called chhaupadi Goths. Chhaupadi Pratha are discriminatory practices against women during their menstrual periods. These practices are continued through cultural norms, social taboos and superstition. During these periods, women are considered “impure” or “unclean” and are prohibited from taking part in many normal aspects of their lives. They are isolated from family, relatives, and society and kept them in a small cold and dark shed where most often cattle were kept in other time. In the strictest observance of chhaupadi, women are prevented from looking at the sun, interacting with males and cattle, drinking dairy products and conducting their daily chores. Furthermore, if they “touch the fruit trees, the fruits will fall before they are ripe or the fruits will be dry; if they fetch water, the well will dry up; if the cattle are fed or milked by Chhaupadi, blood will come out of their teats instead of milk”. The cause of

Chhaupadi tradition there is many cases of women raped, killed by wild animals, bitten by snakes or dead due to cold during their stay in the chhaupadi goth. Chhaupadi women face both physical and mental hardship. These women believe that any breach in such practice will bring bad omens upon their family, community or society.

## **6.2. Conclusions**

"Chhaupadi" in Duni VDC Achham is practiced in which women are kept in a small shed during menstruation period. Chhaupadi system limits women's capability to live a safe, healthy, and educated life forbidding women from anything to touch during their menstruation period. Women are considered as impure during the period of menstruation. It is a violation of women's human rights. It restricts women's human development such as capabilities to be survived, to be well nourished, capability to be safe, educated capabilities to get health facilities, and longer life, capability to be free from social servitude and superstitions. In the name of tradition, the practice is being continued since generation to generation. So these practices contribute significantly on the health status of the people of the region and poor socio-economic development of the society and the country. These culturally driven gender discrimination has made people to believe that any breach on practices will bring harm to their family, community and society even in the twenty first century.

Chhaupadi system limits women's capability to live a safe, healthy, and educated life forbidding women from anything to touch during their menstruation period. Women are considered as polluted during the period of menstruation face various restrictions. In terms of capability to be educated, well nourished, healthy and longer life, access to health facilities, and capability to be free the region lies in the bottom rank in comparison with eastern and western part of Nepal. So, the Superstitious practice Chhaupadi is also connected with abovementioned dark situation. The food denial during their menstrual cycle is a part of the overall food deficiency situation in the region. Above mentioned Chhaupadi practices are cause of suffer for women of Far Western Region. In the name of religion, tradition, rules, norms and values the women of Far Western Nepal suffer from social problem as a Chhaupadi Pratha.

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## ANNEX-1

### **Checklist for In-Depth Interview**

#### **❖ Cultural Context of Chhaupadi**

- What is Chhaupadi system?
- Immergence of Chhau.
- What you have to do when you have chhau?
- From which age do you start to perform Chhaupadi process?
- Why do you perform chhaupadi process? (Probe religious and social signification)
- Where should you stay during the chhau?
- Do you Perform rituals during chhaupadi period like worshiping god/goddess, marriage ceremony, death ritual, birth initiation and festival etc?

#### **❖ Experience and Perception about Chhaupadi**

- How do you perceive Chhaupadi system? And what do you think about it?
- What type of problem do you face in Chhaupadi periods?
- What type of problem do you face in chhaupadi goth?
- What type of food do you eat during chhaupadi period or not? And Why?
- Do you think you are impure during chhau? Why?
- Why you restricted from are touch the things like cow, fruits plant, temples, performing rituals and eating foods etc?
- What kinds of effects of chhaupadi system occur in you, your family and your society?
- What kinds of work should you do while you are in chhaupadi? And is it different than other times?

- How do you feel living detached from family members, collective works and specially your child?
- What do you want for existence of chhaupadi system in your society? Why?
- Do you have any movement have you ever faced during chhaupadi which you want to share with me?
- Do you think any changes in chhaupadi system? What types of changes have you seen in chhaupadi system till now? What is the cause of changes?
- How many days do you stay in chhaupadi Goth?
- Do you perform rituals during chhaupadi period like worshiping god/ Goddess, marriage ceremony, death rituals, birth initiation, festivals etc?
- Do you have any idea about from when did the chhaupadi system and how?

❖ **Health Consequences of Chhaupadi**

- Does any kind of problem during chhaupadi periods affect your health?
- How much burden of work do you have during chhaupadi?
- What kinds of health problem have you faced by burden of work in your health?
- How much burden of work do you have during chhaupadi?
- Do you take treatment for health problem during chhaupadi period? Any restriction to visit health facility and meet health personnel?
- What type of treatment do you take?
- What are the consequences of the problem of chhaupadi system in health have you ever seen to other?