

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The *Newars* distinguish themselves from the dominant *Brahman-Chhetri* culture in the performance of two rituals called *Ihi* and *B rh* . These rituals address two critical junctures in the lives of women, in particular those which involve their sexuality and their relation with men. While *Ihi* and *B rh* reflect the influence of Hindu patriarchal responses to widowhood and menarche, they also provide a ritual embodiment of a distinctly *Newari* attitude toward women (Kunreuther, 1994).

The first initiation ceremony of a *Newar* girl is *Ihi* or *Ihi-Munke*. *Ihi* literally means marriage. *Ihi* is the unique ritual performed only in the *Newar* ethnic group. With the exceptions of the *Deo-Bhaju* and *Du(n)-yee-ya Newars*, all *Newar* girls observe this ritual. Girls, when they are normally between the ages of four and eleven, undergo marriage with God *Narayan*. A girl must undergo this ceremony before her puberty. It is also known as *Suvarna Kumar Vivah*. More popularly, but quite erroneously, it is called marriage of *bel*-fruit (*Aegle marmelos*). After this marriage, it is believed that a *Newar* girl will never be a widow (Nepali, 1965).

The ceremony of *Ihi* is functionally related to marriage and divorce. It is the ground on which the marriage of girl with her social husband is not recognized as sacrament, since the ceremony of *Ihi* is taken to mean with God *Narayan* who is immortal. A *Newar* girl is, therefore, never believed to be a widow, even if her social husband dies. She can, in theory, remarry as many times as she chooses to. This custom of *Ihi*, in addition, vests in her the right to divorce (Nepali, 1965).

Within the series of many complex rituals which make up the cycle of religious and social obligations among *Newars* society is *Ihi* ceremony (Monteleone, 1988). The *Ihi* ceremony is looked upon with high veneration by the *Newars*. It is regarded as the most strenuous and sacred of all the domestic rituals. No other ceremony, perhaps in the life-cycle of a *Newar* individual, is worked out so minutely as this one (Nepali, 1965).

Ihi is also considered as a status among *Newar* women. Unlike in other caste, widow and divorced *Newar* women will not lose status if she remarries. This uniqueness contrasts the *Newar* women from that of other Hindu women such as *Brahmins*. It is a customary belief that, by performing the '*Ihi*', *Newar* women are never widows because of their eternal marriage with an immortal deity (Vergati, 1995).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

There have been many attempts made by the researchers to study the *Ihi* ritual. Nepali and foreign scholars have studied *Ihi* and its symbolic meaning to *Newar* community. But there is a lack of comparative study between *Ihi* and single womanhood.

There is a customary belief that *Newar* woman who have gone through *Ihi* will not be a widow even if her human husband dies. But in reality it is observed that there exists a paradox between the ideal situation and a real lived-life of *Newar* woman. In a preliminary study in *Panga Des* (Kirtipur Municipality is situated in the southern belt of Kathmandu which is 8 km away from the down town Kathmandu. *Panga Des* is one of four wards of the Municipality. Locally it is called *Des* (country) before Kirtipur as converted into Municipality. *Panga Des* encompasses ward numbers 9, 10, 11 and 12. The area is predominantly inhabited of *Newars*. *Ihi* is performed only in *Newar* community) it showed despite undergoing *Ihi* ritual, it is found single women performing widowhood. The factor which drives them to follow widowhood has not been explained sufficiently.

Different scholars and researchers, who studied about '*Ihi*', have tried to interpret '*Ihi*', its symbolic meaning and practices of remarriage. Prof. Nepali has done an ethnographic study of *Newars* in *Panga Des*. His explorative study touches the '*Ihi*' ritual (Nepali, 1965). This study was undertaken quite long ago. Many things have changed since then. He has not showed the paradoxes between the ritual, its meaning and the reality of single women in the *Newar* community. Thus, the study is conducted to show the ideological aspects of *Ihi* and the present practice of single women of *Panga Des*. The study has incorporated the real situation of the *Newar* woman whose husband has died, whose husband abandoned her, whose husband

divorced her and who is unmarried over 35 years. The study has shown some paradox with respect to the myths and day to day life of single woman in *Newar* community.

Given the existing situation of single women in *Panga Des*, the research envisages to elicit the paradox inherent in the *Ihi* ritual vis-à-vis the real lived situation of single woman in the context of *Panga Des* through Geertzian model of "Ideological ritual situation and the real ritual situation."

To guide this research, some research questions have been set as follows:

- 1) What is the general perception on the myths and symbolic meaning of *Ihi* in *Panga Des*?
- 2) What is the connection between *Ihi* ritual and women of *Panga Des* in particular and *Panga Des Newar* community in general?
- 3) Why paradoxes exist between ritual significance and the real life situation of *Newar* single women in *Panga Des*? And what are the factors behind it?
- 4) What is the existing situation of single women of *Panga Des*? How do they exist in the community?

1.3. Research Objectives

The overall objective of this study is to examine the paradoxes between ideological aspect of '*Ihi*' and real situation of single women of *Panga Des*. To meet this general objective, following specific objectives have been framed:

- a) To explore the myths, symbolic meaning of *Ihi* and how it structures the lives of the *Newar* community in general and women in particular.
- b) To assess lives of single women of *Panga Des* in order to identify their current situation.
- c) To assess the paradoxes existing between the symbolic perception of *Ihi* and the real status of single women in *Panga Des* in relation to their real situation.

1.4. Rationale of the Study

Among many complex *Newari* rituals, *Ihi* has a significant place among the lives of *Newar* woman. *Ihi*, which is performed before puberty, allows them to divorce or

remarry after their marriage. So, there is a unique perception about the symbolic meaning of *Ihi* among *Newar* society and especially among *Newar* single. However, it is not easy for *Newar* women to give a divorce with their husband even if the situation arises. Similarly, remarrying after the death of her husband is beyond her imagination.

So, the study has focused on paradoxical situation of the symbolic aspects of *Ihi* and the real lived situation of *Newar* single woman of *Panga Des*. Besides that, it has also attempted to discover the existing socio-cultural and economic situation of the *Newar* single woman, which helps to explore the realities of *Newari* woman.

3.8. Limitations of the Study

-) The study was confined only on *Newar* single women of *Panga Des* from *Kirtipur* Municipality. So, the study was limited to *Newar* women of *Kirtipur*.
-) The findings might be non-conclusive to single women of other parts of the country and other castes/ethnic groups since it focused only to the single women from *Newar* community of *Panga Des*.
-) The objective of the study was not a detail ethnographic study of the *Newari* ritual *Ihi*. It only encompassed the paradoxes existed in the lived life of *Newar* single women in reference with *Ihi*. So, the findings and recommendations might not truly applicable to other parts of the country.
-) The results of the study might be non-conclusive but would simply be a small building block and insight into the *Newar* community in *Kirtipur*.

Despite these limitations, the study could provide valuable example and initiation point for other studies on *Ihi* ritual and its social meaning.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Newars*: Going Back to the History

Throughout Nepal, one finds an abundant array of ritual expressions reflecting multiple Hindu, Buddhist and indigenous forms. It is said that the greatest civilization in the whole of the Himalayas with the exception of Kashmir, was the Valley of Nepal, that is, the Kathmandu Valley, the dwelling place of *Newars* (Regmi, 1956). The *Newars* constitute a community whose ancestral home is the Kathmandu Valley (Per, 1998). The *Newars* are a heterogeneous mixture of the racial types, speaking a Tibeto-Burman language and with religious and cultural practices, amongst the *Jyapus* in particular, which resemble those of the ancient Aryan civilization (Pradhan, 1981).

If we go through the history of Nepal, we found the term '*Newar*' which reflects the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. When we refer to Nepal in association with just the *Newar* people we usually mean only the Nepal Valley, Kathmandu Valley (<http://www.geocities.com/newanepal/details.html>). Thus the word '*Newar*' was derived from the Valley to indicate the people of Nepal. "The origin of the term '*Newar*' is not yet fully established." According to D.R. Regmi(1956)., "...*Newar* is a comparatively new term. It came to be used for the inhabitants of the Valley about the 17th century. The Jesuit and Capuchin visitors used the word in the same context. The first Nepalese record to use the term is one of *Pratap Malla's* inscription [sic] which is dated NS 774". However, Regmi also point out that it only refers to the use of the term in preserved records and that the term probably was used much earlier and then "...meant one who lived in Nepal". Then, it should have meant simply an inhabitant of Nepal. As the first syllable in both the words – Nepal and *Newar* is same, it is generally assumed that the word *Newar* has been derived from the word Nepal

During the Medieval period of Nepalese history, *Malla* dynasty ruled over Nepal. The *Mallas* started ruling towards the end of the 12th century and continued till the first-quarter of the 14th century. As Gopal S. Nepali mentions Wriht, D., "However, during the reign of *Ananta Malla*, the nominal suzerainty of the country passed on to

the *Karnatakas*. The powerful chief, *Nanya Deo* who called himself a *Karnatic* prince is said to have brought with him the *Newars* as soldiers in his army” (Nepali, 1965).

Similarly, Bista assumes that *Newars* are the oldest inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley. "The word '*Newar*' does not denote a single tribe; instead their predecessors were *Kiratas*, *Lichchhavis* and others, who were migrated from different places. It is believed that Aryans, Mongols and indigenous Australoid races were mixed up to form '*Newar*'. The proof can be seen in the *Newari* language too. Though *Newari* language itself falls on the Tibeto-Burmese lingua-franca, it is highly influenced by the Indo-European lingua-franca, especially by Sanskrit and Nepali languages. Similarly, complex caste-hierarchies within *Newar* society in terms of occupation, also proves the fact since “*Newar* social and cultural systems are a product of a fusion of Tibetan-Burman and Indo-Aryan traditions” (Bista, 2002).

The favorable climatic and geographic condition of the Valley was always the cause of gathering of people from different region for trading and agricultural purposes. The Valley, with its fertile land and ideal location on the Indo-Tibetan trade route, was a meeting place for people from all over the area (Monteleone, 1988). Furthermore Monteleone excerpts Bista (1980) and Lewis (1984) as Bista says, “during the course of history, a considerable amount of cultural influence has been exerted on the *Newar* culture by various immigrant groups” (Bista, 1980 as quoted in Monteleone, 1988). Similarly Lewis adds, “Both of these (fertile land and trade) attracted outsiders and provided the resources that fostered extensive settlement, intensive socio-cultural mixing and underwrote elaborate cultural expressions” (Lewis, 1984 as quoted in Monteleone, 1988).

These types of cultural contacts helped *Newar* community develop a society with unique characteristic of co-existence and conglomeration. The *Newars* were able to give continuity to their identity; at the same time they were able to maintain the relationship with other communities in the Valley.

This is because; they always give priority to consensus rather than conflict with the rulers and other communities. As Nepali also says: “...the local inhabitants, the *Newars*, had no interest in the quarrels among their rulers. Since the fall of the *Newar* kings, they were merely content to lead a peaceful life with employment in many of

the high civil post. They accepted the life as a matter of fact. This characteristic of *Newars* to accept a new conqueror without any express protest had always marked their history in the past” (Nepali, 1965).

The earlier rulers, who conquered over the Valley, adopted the *Newari* culture and assimilated within it. So, the *Newar* society and the *Newari* culture were marked as ideal and dominant. It was at the time of Gurkhas, *Newar* civilization of the Valley was dominated. As Nepali, further, continues: “.... But there is one significant difference between the *Gurkhas* and the earlier conquerors. The earlier conquerors who were the political masters were themselves assimilated in due course into the *Newar* culture; the *Gurkhas*, have however, continued to maintain their separate entity. They have, at the same time made *Newar* culture as a part of the greater Nepalese society” (Ibid).

During the *Shah* and *Rana* period, *Newar* society met a continuous influence of orthodox Hinduism. The *Shah* rulers and later, their *Rana* prime-ministers, exerted pressure for adhesion to orthodox Hindu standards, and after 1900 BS the *Rana* autocrats discriminated against the *Newars* (Lewis, 1984 as mention in Monteleone, 1988).

After the revolution of 1950 AD, *Newars* regained their cultural freedom. But, residing at the heart of a developing nation, they were not out of contact of modernization process and other cultural influences. So, *Newars* also examined the changing aspects of the Valley and made themselves assimilated in such circumstances.

Demographically, the *Newars* total nearly 400,000 people, of which fifty-five percent live in Kathmandu Valley. The rest are spread almost equally through the eastern and western hills and adjacent Terai plains. In their movement away from the Valley some *Newars*, unlike other of Nepal, have made an exception to an otherwise general rule of migrating Eastward; they have settled in the Western towns of *Pokhara*, *Tansen*, and *Butwal*, and even in the far Western *Silgarhi Doti*. The differences in migration trends reflect specialization of professions. *Newars* have always traveled for trade and business, while all other groups, *Thakalis* excepted, migrate in search of

land for farming or for other employment. There have been very few *Newars* living in these outlying districts who have taken to agriculture as their sole occupation, whereas in Kathmandu Valley great numbers of *Newars* are strictly farmers (<http://colorfulnepal.com/culture-and-religion/Newars-of-the-valley.html>).

2.2. Newari Rituals

Newars possess a highly complex cycles of rituals from birth to death that are carried out as a matter of both religious and traditional importance (Pandey, 1985). *Newar* community of the Valley has been practicing 12-13 rituals formally (Pandey, 1985). The rituals can be grouped into three categories as Pre-birth ritual, Life ritual and Death ritual (Tamot, 2053 BS).

Pre-birth rituals are those which are followed to that person who has not come to the earth. *Punsawon* is the first ritual performed when a pregnant woman reached her three months. The pregnant women purify her-self and take yogurt from her husband. The yogurt here is taken as a seed to son and believed this will birth a son. When a pregnant woman steps nine months feeding *Dhoubagi* (a mixture of yogurt and bitten rice) to her is performed. This ritual is performed by her natal family. In this ritual either the pregnant women is invited to natal family or the natal family themselves go to her home to feed *Dhoubagi*. This ritual is carried out in a belief the pregnant woman will not face any difficulty during delivery and the child would be healthy (Bajracharya, 1120 NS).

Once the woman gives a birth, a series of life rituals will then take place. Just after a day of a delivery, the information is transmitted to the woman's natal family which is called *Sichupalu Keney* in *Newari*. This means the happiest information is conveyed to the woman's natal home with an arrangement of some pre-defined ingredients. The arrangement of ingredients varied between the sub-castes. If there are full ingredients it conveys the newly born child is a boy. If there are half of the items, then it conveys a baby girl. Normally, after four days from the delivery *Byannke* is performed this is very auspicious and performed all over *Newars*. A newly born child and the mother is purify in this ritual. The child is made a bathe, removed all the used clothes and mattress and wore it a new soft clothe. The mother is fed with special portentous

items. Name giving to the child, caring visit to child and mother from the natal family and relatives, inviting mother and child to stay in the natal home for a month, rice-feeding to the child, piercing of ears, two years birthday celebration, introducing learning, shaving of a head for the first time, educating regarding health and sex, marriage and celebrating as a stage of God, these all rituals are performed at different stages of lived-life (Bajracharya, 1120 NS). The rituals are performed differently for male and female. *Ihi* is the only ritual performed for female.

The third category of the ritual is the death ritual. It is Believed, the person is composed of soul and body. When they die only his body is dead. The soul takes birth in another world. So keeping in consideration the soul will step in happy world, death ritual is performed in *Newar* community.

2.3. *Ihi* ritual from the literature

In *Ihi* ritual, we find lots of research and studied being done. We find many aspects of *Ihi* in literatures. According to Anne Vergati (1995) *Ihi* laterally know as marriage of *Newari* girls with the God *Narayan*. In *Newari* the ceremony is called *Ihi*: the literal meaning of this word is marriage and it is synonymous with the Sanskrit word *vivaha*. The *Ihi* as marriage before puberty and compare with Indian community with follow like this type of ritual.

According to Laura Kunrenther's (Kunrenther, 1994), *Ihi* and *Bhara* two pre-pubescent rituals address two critical junctures in the lives of women, in particular those which most dramatically involved their sexuality and their relations with men. In this literature, Its reflect the influence of Hindu patriarchal responses to widowhood and menarche and deals with changing practices of performing these rituals.

Ihi can be called a progressive and revolutionary approach of marriage performed before a girl reached her puberty stage basically done not to be a widow. In this literature deals existing *Ihi* practices all over the Nepal is explored and importance of this ritual (Shrestha, 1088 NS).

According to Bajracharya (Bajracharya, 1120 NS), *Ihi* is ritual to life cycle ritual of *Newar* girl. *Ihi* is called as *Bel Bihah*. It is entrance ritual, which give membership for the girl with in community. In this literature study area is how a *Newari* girl ritually get the membership within the *Newar* community.

2.4. Defining Single Womanhood

The structure of Nepali society, if we observed from the gender perspective, is totally patriarchal. That's why; Nepalese women are always dependant upon men in every spheres of life. It is almost impossible for a female to live an independent life. Women in Nepal are brought up by their father at their childhood, are under the direct care of husband at their marital age and at their old age, they are taken care by their son. So, Nepali women are always linked with any form of male at their different span of life. Being double a happy married life is considered merriment for a woman in the society. In contrast to it, single womanhood, whatever the cause may be, for a woman is a curse for her existence in Nepalese society. But before entering into the single womanhood in context to Nepalese society, it is noteworthy to discuss about the 'Single womanhood'.

Generally speaking, a woman is considered 'Single' after the death of her husband. So, general conception about single hood of a female is her widowhood. The term "Single woman" is a newly emerged conception to denote the widow women. As Gotame explains "Single women" defined by WHR (Women for Human Rights): WHR (Women for Human Rights) defines "widows" as "single women". WHR passed a national declaration to use the word "single women", instead of widows in Nepali. The change in terminology has been effected since the word "widow" in Nepali is viewed with disdain, inducing humiliations and agony (Gotame, 2006).

Further, Gotame says, "...however, over the time, the definition of single women has undergone change to include Divorcees, Unmarried women over 35 and other single women" (Gotame, 2006).

In the Nepali context, women are counted by their marital status. A woman's status is supposed to be better and respected by all, only if her marital status is prosperous.

This is because, women are considered to be protected and cared by their husbands. So, if a woman becomes widow, she is given the tag 'single' and her social status becomes more difficult and peoples' attitudes towards her turn biased.

According to culturally defined ideals, getting married and producing children are the ultimate goal for the women (Acharya, 1997). So, remaining single without marriage for a woman is also considered the 'single' situation of a woman. Parents always want to handover their daughters to the in-laws, since daughters are considered as they are the properties of others and sending them to their marital house is a big responsibility for the parents. Nepali girls are generally sent to their marital home at their late teen or early twenties. If a woman crosses the age of 35, there is very rare chance of her marriage. So, women above the age of 35 are also considered single women in Nepal.

Another type of single women is those who have divorced and lived alone. They have to face all kinds of economic, social and other burdens and obstacles alone.

Similarly, women who haven't divorced with their husbands yet but are living separately are also considered single women. It doesn't matter either they live separately or at their natal-home, they are tagged single women.

The position of single women is always challenging in the context of Nepal since it's a patriarchal society, although this may vary in different castes and ethnic groups. The overall status of single women whose background is from the orthodox Hinduism is harder than that of other ethnic groups.

The *Newar* female not only is free to divorce, separate and remarry and have her children by a previous husband accepted into her new husband's dewali group, but even if she is pregnant by her previous husband, both she and the child subsequently will be fully accepted into her husband's dewali group. A woman can leave her husband if he fails to satisfy her material needs. Similarly, a woman simply dislikes her husband's behavior and ends the marriage. Whatever the reason, however, there is no loss of status for the *Newar* woman and she is free to marry again (Pradhan, 1981).

2.5. Symbolism: Theoretical Overview

Relations between supernatural and humanity are essential to cosmic order, where rituals play important roles. Rituals are the interpretations and perceptions of the entire cosmic phenomena, on the basis of which people maintain order within the social system. The reshaping of consciousness of experience that takes place in ritual is by definition a recognized of the relationship between the symbol and what may for convenience be called reality. Ritual always operates on both element reorganizing (representation of) reality and at the same time reorganizing self (Ortner, 1968).

Geertz, an anthropologist, has used the terminology, the relationships between social phenomena and ideological structures. He defines the anthropological study of religion as “first, an analysis of a system of meaning embodied in the symbols which make up the religion proper and second, the relating of these systems to social structural and psychological process” (Benett, 1983). Those are referred as ‘model for’ and ‘model of’ respectively.

In Geertz’s understanding, ethnography is by definition “thick description”—“an elaborate venture in.” Using the action of “winking,” Geertz examines how—in order to distinguish the winking from a social gesture, a twitch, etc.)—we must move beyond the action to both the particular social understanding of the “winking” as a gesture, the *mens rea* (or state of mind) of the winker, his/her audience, and how they construe the meaning of the winking action itself. “Thin description” is the winking. “Thick” is the meaning behind it and its symbolic import in society or between communicators. (<http://academic.csuohio.edu/as227/spring2003/geertz.htm> (18:00, 10th March 09)

Culture is public because “meaning is,” and systems of meanings are what produce culture, they are the collective property of a particular people. When “we,” either as researchers or simply as human beings, do not understand the *Beliefs* or actions of persons from a foreign culture, we are acknowledging our “lack of familiarity with the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs”. We cannot discover the culture’s import or understand its systems of meaning when, as Wittgenstein noted, “We cannot find our feet with them”.

Therefore, when faced with “a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit,” the ethnographer must attempt to grasp and interpret them, striving to understand how and why behavior is shaped in such and such a way (as opposed to another). Thick description is, thus, much more than mere data collection although this is an inherent part of anthropological work as well.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study Area and Rationale for Selection

Kirtipur Municipality is situated in the Southern belt of Kathmandu which is 8 km away from the down town Kathmandu. *Panga Des* is one of four wards of the Municipality. Locally it is called Des (country) before *Kirtipur* as converted into Municipality. *Panga Des* encompasses ward numbers 9, 10, 11 and 12. The area is predominantly inhabited by *Newars*. *Ihi* is performed only in *Newar* community. Thus, *Panga Des* could be one of the reasonable places for the study.

On the basis of pre field visit the preliminary research found that *Newar* women though stay in the capital, they are normally reserved-type and do not feel comfortable to talk with the externals. Besides that most of the aged-women speak only *Newari* language and do not understand other languages. So they less prefer to speak to strangers. The case of single women is quite obvious.

The reason of selecting *Panga Des* for the study was based on a good relation of the researcher with the community. Another reason was as there was a time limitation for the study it could not be wise enough to spend most of time in building rapport. As the researcher was familiar to the community, it could create a friendly environment for the respondents to share their experiences, views, happiness and sorrows. Thus the area was selected.

3.2. Research Design

The study is fully based on a single community i.e. *Newar*. The research is an ethnographic study. The descriptive, explanatory and explorative study has been employed for this research work. The descriptive research design has been chosen because it will be helpful for studying, religious practice and real situation of *Ihi* ritual among *Newar* in relation with the practice of single womanhood. The explorative and explanatory research design has been adopted in order to figure out the current status of single women. It aims to explore and explain the affecting factors that cause the *Newar* women to practice single womanhood.

3.3. Sampling

Multi stage sampling was carried out as a sampling method. Single women were taken for the study. As defined by Women for Human Rights, single woman are widow, divorcee, unmarried (age over 35 years) and woman abandoned by her husband (cited in Gotame, 2006). The single women of the study area were listed out first from the Voters Name lists with the consultation of Key Informants. As per the voter list, there were 184 widows, 5 divorcees, 26 unmarried and 9 abandoned by her husband in the study area. Out of these, 52 widows, 7 unmarried and 3 abandoned women were selected randomly. Though there were 5 divorcee identified in the study area, some had died and some had moved out from the study area. So there were no respondents in the divorce category. As per the resource availability, 25 % of the respondents were planned to select during the proposal formulation but during the study 28 % were carried out.

3.4. Nature and Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data were used in the research work. However, the study was almost based on the primary data. The primary data were collected from the field visit. Major sources of primary data were the single women from Panga Des. Whereas, the secondary data and information had obtained from various sources such as published and unpublished literatures, previous study reports, occasional papers, government document, etc. The data collected were qualitative in nature and some were quantitative.

3.5. Data Collection Technique

As far as possible various techniques were used for the study which is discussed *Below*.

I. Primary Data Collection Technique

a. Interview Schedule

Single *Newar* women were interviewed with this technique. The semi-structured questionnaire was used for the interview to collect in-depth information. The interview-schedule was mainly based on the general information of the respondents,

performances and their perception towards *Ihi* ritual and social status as being a single. The technique helped to explore the ideological ritual situation in contrast with the existing practices within society.

b. Key Informant Interview

Key informant interview was used as a tool to generate the information on various mythological and symbolic aspects of *Ihi* ritual in the study area. The *gurjus*, *thakalis*, person respected as a leader basically in culture by the community were selected and interviewed as the Key Informants.

c. Case Study

For a deeper understanding of the lives of single women, case study assessment was undertaken. The in-depth study would provide a detail insight into single women. The key persons were selected as per the cases observed during the study. Widow, unmarried, abandoned by husband and remarry cases were taken to disclose the various aspects of single women.

d. Observation

The researcher closely observed the *Ihi* ritual ceremony for better understanding. During the *Ihi* ritual ceremony performed in the study area, the researcher herself attended and observed the entire ceremony. This type of observation would be helpful for the researcher to give an opinion during an analysis.

II. Secondary Data Collection

Statistical reports, district annual reports, ward report, district profile, previous research findings and other published and unpublished materials were reviewed as a secondary data. The researcher visited to different libraries, book stores and resource persons for secondary data.

3.6. Data gathering instrument

An interview schedule, check lists were developed in line with the objectives of the study. The process and development of this instrument was guided by the relevant

literature review, researcher's own experience and exposure, and professional experience of the supervisor.

The questionnaire survey was the major research instrument for the study. It consisted semi-structure and structure questions. Besides that, few open ended, semi-structured checklists were also developed for administering key informant interview.

3.7. Data analysis and interpretation

All the data gathered were uploaded into the computer software MS Excel for the analysis. The data were simplified into the simple tables, so that the interpretation could be easier. On the basis of gathered qualitative and quantitative information, draft report was prepared as per SIRF format and submitted to the supporting partners. And as per their constructive comments/suggestions the final report was prepared.

CHAPTER IV

DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

This Chapter deals with the analysis of data and their interpretation. The data were collected through interview method. All obtained data were first arranged in skeletal frame using computer software (Ms Excel), analyzed and then interpreted thoroughly on the basis of research objectives.

4.1 General Information

Out of 224 single women, 28 % of them (i.e. 62) were interviewed. Among the single women interviewed, 7 were unmarried, 3 were abandoned and 52 were widows. The other general characteristics of the respondents are mentioned in different sub headings as follows.

4.1.1. Age Distribution

The randomly selected respondents had ages ranging from 31 to 90. They were grouped into 4 (four) age-groups. viz. age-group less than 34, age-group between 35-54, age-group between 55-74 and age-group above 75. The single women such as unmarried, abandoned, widow and divorced were grouped into different age-groups. Unmarried single women were fall into 35-54 age-group and 55-74 age-group. Abandoned women were fall into less than 34 age-group and 35-54 age-group. Widow women were fall into all the four age-groups while there were no any divorced respondents found in the study area. The table given below shows the detail information.

Table 1: Distribution of the Category of Respondents according to their Age

S. No.	Respondents	Age group					Percentage
		<34	35-54	55-74	>75	Total	
1	Unmarried	-	6	1	-	7	11
2	Abandoned	2	1		-	3	5
3	Widow	1	7	33	11	52	84
	Total	3	14	34	11	62	100

Source: Field Survey (2007)

The above table shows the maximum numbers of single women fall under the age-group of 55-74 while the age-group 35-54 encompasses all the categories of single women i.e. unmarried, abandoned and widow. The age-groups less than 34 and more than 75 have less number of single women. The table also shows widows are in maximum number (84 %) while unmarried (11 %) and abandoned (5 %) only.

4.1.2. Educational Status of the Respondents

Education broadens ones thinking power. It is one of the key factors that develop the knowledge level and also directly affect on livelihood. In the study conducted, 45 of the respondents were illiterate while only one had completed the SLC. The detail educational status of the respondents are given below.

Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents as per the their Educational Status

Educational Status	Respondents			Total	%
	Unmarried	Abandoned	Widow		
Illiterate	4	0	41	45	73
Literate	0	0	10	10	16
< SLC	2	3	1	6	10
> SLC	1	0	0	1	2
Total	7	3	52	62	100

Source: Field Survey (2007)

The above table shows 73 % of the respondents are illiterate while 10 % are *Below* SLC and only 2 % are above SLC. It is also revealed all the abandoned women are *Below* SLC and similarly 16 % of the respondents had received informal education.

4.1.3. Occupational Status

Occupational status shows the economical situation of the respondents. The study made an attempt to know whether the respondents were engaged with any occupation and here are the data obtained which are tabulated below.

Table 3: Distribution of the Respondents according to the Occupation

Occupation	Unmarried	Abandoned	Widow	total	Percentage
Agriculture	2		22	24	39
House work	2	1	26	29	47
Carpet labour	1		2	3	5
Sewing/Weaving	2	2	2	6	9
Total	7	3	52	62	100

Source: Field Survey (2007)

The above table shows majority of the respondents (47 %) were involved in household works while less (5 %) were involved in carpet labour. Agriculture and household works are considered as a less-valued job. It is count in cash. The respondents involving in agriculture have just subsistence income. Thus, only 14 % of the single women were involving in direct income generation. The rests were depended on their other family members.

4.1.4. Respondents' Age at Marriage

Early marriage has been prevalent in Nepal. Census data show that 75% of women aged 15-19 were married in 1971. Very early marriages have become less common in recent years but still remains high. The 1991 census data show that 46% of women aged 15-19 were married. The median age at marriage among women age 20-49 in 1997 was 16.4. Median age at marriage is younger in rural areas than in urban areas, in the Terai region than in Hill and Mountain regions, and in Far-western and Mid-western regions than in Eastern, Central, Western, and Mid-western regions. The median age at marriage varies greatly with women's level of education: 16.0 among women with no education and 19.8 among women with secondary education (Pradhan et al. 1997: 81-83).

Early marriage before age 18 among females is common in rural Indonesia and in both urban and rural areas of Nepal. Majority of rural Nepalese females marry before age 18. Early marriage among males, defined as marriage before age 20, is rare in Indonesia in both urban and rural areas and in urban Nepal but common in rural Nepal. Child marriages (marriages before age 15) are common in Nepal especially for females but rare in Indonesia even among rural females. In Nepal, 17% of urban

females and 26% of rural females marry before age 15 but in Indonesia, only 2% of urban females and 8% of rural females do so (Choe et. al., 2001).

In Nepal, the legal age for marriage for girls is fixed at 16. Of all Nepalese women, 20 percent are married before the age of 15, and 40 percent by the age of 18. As shown by these statistics, marriage at an early age is still a common practice in Nepal’s rural areas.

As per field survey, it was observed the respondents married at an early age of 10 years and lately 26 years. Separated and Widow respondents at a total of 55 were interviewed and found 9 respondents at an age-group 10-14, 30 at an age-group 15-19, 14 at an age-group 20-24 and 2 at an age-group 25-29. The highest frequency of women to get marriage lied in an age-group 15-19. The table below shows the detail description of ages at which the single women got married.

Table 2: Respondents’ Age at Marriage

Category of Single Women	Age Groups				
	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	Total
Abandoned	-	1	2	-	3
Widow	9	29	12	2	52
Total	9	30	14	2	55

Source: Field Survey (2007)

The above table shows 16 % fall into the age-group of 10-14, 55 % in 15-19, 25 % in 20-24 and 4 % in 25-29. Among the widows the maximum percentage (56 %) falls under the age-group of 15-19 while the less (4 %) falls under 25-29 age-group. At that time agriculture is the major source of livelihood. Agriculture is mainly based on manual inputs. So there is an early marriage in that time. In abandoned single women, maximum number falls under 20-24 age-group.

Generally, women married at an early age. Thus the maximum number of single women married found at an age of 15-19 age-group.

4.2. Age at Being Single

The Age at being Single was found between the age of 20 and 89 years. We categorized them into three groups one is Abandoned, another Widow and then Unmarried. We found 9 respondents from age-group 20-29, 15 from 30-39, 13 from 40-49, 11 from 50-59, 9 from 60-69, 4 from 70-79 and 1 from 80-89. The table shows the detail information.

Table 3: Age of the Women at the Time they Became Single

Single Women	Age Groups							Total
	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	
Unmarried	-	3	3	-	1	-	-	7
Abandoned	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Widow	1	7	12	16	13	2	1	52
Total	4	10	15	16	14	2	1	62

Source: Field Survey (2007)

It is cleared from the above table that the highest number (24 %) of the single women lies on the age-group 30-39 whereas the lowest (2 %) lies in 80-89. As per the definition of Women Human Rights, woman is considered as single who does not marry till 35 years. The unmarried respondents found were at the age where there were rare chances of getting married, so they became single. The cent percent (100 %) of the abandoned single women come under the age-group of 20-29. As per the respondents, they said though their husbands loved them but their families disliked them, so they were staying at their natal home. It was observed that the women were abandoned just after 1 to 2 years after they married. The widow respondents fall in all age-groups. They did not prefer to remarry as they had got their baby at the time of their husband's death.

CHAPTER V
***IHI*: EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF *NEWAR* SINGLE**
WOMEN

This Chapter deals with the experiences and perceptions of *Newar* single women of the study area towards *Ihi*. Initial part of the chapter will explain the experiences of the single women such as how they were brought about through the ritual processes. Similarly, the later part will explain their perceptions regarding *Ihi* and the meaning it symbolizes for single women. Data have been presented in tabulated form as per necessity and then described accordingly. Some data have been presented in a descriptive way.

5.1. Experiences of *Ihi* by Single Women

5.1.1. Meaning of *Ihi* as per the Respondents

All the respondents knew that *Ihi* was performed only in the *Newar* community. Some could remember their *Ihi* period while others had forgotten. The respondents did not know the symbolic meaning of *Ihi*, they had just perceived it as a tradition – which must go on. They could just say performing *Ihi* would gain a status as a grown up in the society.

Ihi was considered as an entrance to step to another stage of life; which would give recognition in the society. Once *Ihi* was performed she was considered as mature and was also expected to behave as mature person. She was now bound to follow purity during eating. While eating anything, the hand used was considered as impure and should not touch by that hand to any thing except his/her plate unless it was washed. Likewise, if she was dead after *Ihi*, she would be performed dead ritual as would be done to the mature. Otherwise, she was considered as a child and was carried on hand to the grave.

They considered the ritual as a unique ceremony and were proud to perform. They were not fully aware with the myths regarding *Ihi*. But they defined *Ihi* was to gain an identity to perform a household duties. During *Ihi*, a piece of paper printed with

Astamatrika was kept on the forehead. If it fell down due to some causes, the girl was thought to face bad luck in the future this was what the respondents believed in.

5.1.2. Age at *Ihi*

This ritual is recognized as a pre puberty ritual, so it is performed before puberty. According to key informant, *Ihi* is performed in odd year of age such as 3, 5, 7, 9 etc. The standard age for performing *Ihi* is considered as 7 years. In the study, it was found that the age was varied among the respondents. The study found the variation beginning from 3 years up to 12 years. Detail description is given below in Table.

Table 6: Single Women's Age at *Ihi*

S.N.	Types of Single women	Year										Total
		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1	Unmarried	-	-	-	-	5	1	1	-	-	-	7
2	Widow	2	-	5	4	29	-	9	-	-	3	52
3	Abandoned	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	3
	Total	2	-	5	4	35	2	11	-	-	3	62

Source: Field survey, 2007

The above table shows the detail distribution of ages of single women at which they performed *Ihi* ritual. Generally, the *Newar* girls performed *Ihi* at the age group of 7 to 10. There is not age boundary in performing *Ihi* (except 8 years). It is because year 8 is not considered as good in *Newar* culture according to key informants.

The above table also shows that the age at which the women performed *Ihi* ranged from 3 to 12. The highest frequency is found at age 7; where there are 35 (56%) out of 62 respondents. Since the ritual should be performed before puberty starts, all the respondents have experienced the ritual during the similar age groups. One of my respondents had this to state regarding her *Ihi* ritual.

Case Study

My name is Bhakti Maharjan (pseudo name). I am 32 years of old and supporting my Natal home family in agriculture and household work. It is said, Ihi is not performed at the age of 8. I did my Ihi at age of 8 because all my friends (who were less or more than 8 years) were going to perform Ihi that year. My parents tried a lot to convince me not to perform Ihi in that year, but I refused and insisted for Ihi. They forcefully accepted me and arrange all the things for Ihi ceremony.

I got an arranged marriage in the age of 20 in Chaitra. Normally Nepalese would not perform marriage in Chaitra. But I did. I was in such a condition. My man stayed and worked in India and he could arrange his leave only on that month. So, the situation forced me to marry with him in Chaitra. After marriage I went with my husband in India and stayed with him for six months. Then I came back to his home in Nepal. My life was fine for the first year since my marriage. Then my family members started to dislike me to be with them. My husband was not with me so I could do nothing.

Despite of disliking, I stayed for two years in my husband's home. Though I complained my husband could do nothing. He was afraid to say anything to his parents and other family members. Slowly my husband also started to mix with them and quarrel with me for nothing. I could not stay with my husband so I left home and started to stay at my natal family. Almost 12 years of marriage I was not taken care by them. Legally, I am still his wife but I am separated for 10 years.

Occasionally, my sisters bring a marriage proposal to me. But I can not think on that. I am afraid of remarriage because of the age of my Ihi at 8 year. I doubt the same misfortune follows in my life if I remarry. So I reject all the proposals.

5.1.3. Mental Preparation for Ihi

All the respondents were asked what they were told for the preparation before the ritual. Most of the respondents' answer was either they couldn't remember what they were told or they were not told anything except it was a tradition and they had to

follow it anyway. 45 respondents answered accordingly. Rest of the respondents answered that their elders had told them about the religious and social meaning of *Ihi*, to some extent. They had understood *Ihi* as the ritual that makes every *Newar* girl mature and helps to gain social status. Except that, *Ihi*, for them was a ritual for the purification of girls as well as orientation of household work.

5.1.4. Main Procedures of *Ihi* Observed by Respondents

Shree Panchami, Akshay Tritiya, Janko, Chaitya establishment day etc were suitable days to perform *Ihi*. *Ihi* is performed mostly in groups although it could be done individually. Early in the morning, the girl had to take bath and followed fasting for the whole day. Girls were decorated in red dress and gold ornaments. Red *tika* was put on their foreheads. Their feet and toes were painted with a red colour.

The entire house was cleaned and washed with the mixture of red-soil and cow-dung. The girls made gather outside the courtyard, where the ceremony was held. The priest then performed *lasakusha puja* (a welcoming rite).

After *lashkush puja*, the priest performs some *Vedic worship*, worshipping God *Suvarna Kumar*. Afterwards only, a long series of *pujas* (worshipping) were performed. The girl's mother or relative would be there to assist the girl during the worship. The senior most woman or female member of priest family put the *Sindoor* (vermillion) on girls' head and the *Astamatrika* was pinned on their foreheads during the *Ihi* ceremony. The priest told to girls' relatives to pin up the *Asthmatrika* carefully and do not dropped it from forehead until the worshipping.

Now, the most important event of the ritual was begun. The girl was married with the *Bel* fruit, which was called *Kanyadan*. *Kanyadan* was done by the girls' father or their male relatives. After that, the girl was wrapped with a yellow thread from her toe to head. The wrapping was done from 21 to 108 times. At the end of the ritual, girls were given new clothes, rice and other gifts from their families, relatives and others which called *Ihi Chhukegu*. At the end, girls have to pass through the route of 7 battle nuts and *Pan leaf*, and then allowed to eat food.

5.1.5. Experiences: Before and After the Performance of *Ihi*

Respondents were asked to share their experiences they faced before and after the performance of the ritual. They were requested to tell in a comparative way what differences they had experienced. Forty-two respondents answered that they did not find any changes. Their answer was either they could not feel anything or did not know anything about that. Rest of the respondents answered that they had experienced some changes in the life after the ritual in comparison with the early life. The overall change they had observed was the change in their social status. Purity and impurity in food habits (*Jutho-chokho*) was observed by their elders. They were strongly prohibited to take meal in the house of lower caste friends or neighbors. Similarly, they had faced change in dress pattern. Sari was allowed after the ritual and they had to wrap their body with skirt before taking bath. In society, if a girl would die after the ritual, she would be carried on *Khat* for the funeral process, where a dead girl before the performance of the ritual was carried on hands.

Bel (wood apple) was considered as the symbolic form of their future husband. So, they were told to take care for the *Bel*, they had married with. They were taught that long lasting of the *Bel* was the symbol of long life of husband. So, safety of the *Bel* was one of their major responsibilities.

5.2. Perceptions Regarding *Ihi* and Its Meaning

Ihi, by *Newar* women, has been accepted as a ritual with religious and social meaning. *Newar* women have perceived it as a symbolic practice to gain social status as well as to feel the physical and mental maturity. Attempts have been made here to describe how the respondents have understood the mythical meaning of *Ihi*, how they have perceived its social meaning and how they have accepted its meaning regarding single hood of a *Newar* woman.

5.2.1. Some Myths Retold by Single Women

Myths are the easiest means to understand and perceive religious orders and traditions from generations to generations. Myths explain the social values of any ideological perceptions. Some myths, related with *Ihi*, are presented here which are retold by our

respondents. These myths help to understand the perceptions of *Ihi* by the respondents.

Myth-1

Once, Goddess Parvati was traveling with her husband, Lord Shiva through Nepal. She met a Newar woman, who was weeping in agony of her husband's death. Parvati felt pity of her and requested her husband to find a solution so that the Newar woman would not live a widow life. Lord Shiva ordered the Newar woman to marry with the fruit of wood apple (Bel), symbolizing it Lord Narayana. He also told her that after her marriage with God, she would never be a widow even after her husband's death. So, after then, Ihi came in existence.

Myth- 2

It has been mentioned in Adbanal Tantra that after the performance of the Ihi ritual, a Newar woman never becomes widow. Clothes, jewelleryes and other necessary things for a woman are given at the time of Ihi. So, it is not an obligation to leave all those things except vermilion (Sindoor), at the time of husband's death. It is because, vermilion is the only thing given to her by her husband at her marriage with him. All the other things have been already given to her at the time of performance of Ihi.

Myth-3

If the Bel, used at the time of Ihi is big then her future husband will be older, and if the Bel is small then he will be equi-age. Thus a small Bel is preferred.

Even after the performance of Ihi, girls should keep their respective Bel safely. If the Bel is broken, she has to follow widowhood.

Myth- 4

The Astamatrika paper, used at the time of the ritual is also associated with the future luck of the girl. The drawing on the Astamatrika is connected with the girl's horoscope. If her horoscope is not strong the deity whose face is drawn on the paper may make her nervous and ill. During the performance of Ihi ceremony, the paper should not be fallen down from the girl's forehead. If so, it will be considered unlucky.

The respondents could say the symbolic meaning of *Ihi* to some extent did not know the wholesome meaning. The explanation of symbolic meaning of *Ihi* was only confined to *gurjus* (a *Newar* Priest). The meaning should be understood by all the general people which is still lacking.

The general people could just follow the *Ihi* ritual. They *Believed* an *Astamatrika* printed piece of paper should not be fallen down from the forehead during *Ihi*. Otherwise their daughters would have to face problems in the future. Similarly, they believed the *Bel* fruit should be small one; it is reflect the age of his life partner in future.

The society had restricted *Newar* widow women only three things viz red bangle, vermillion and *Tilhari* from using. Regarding the colour of clothes there was no restriction in contrast to other cultures of Nepal where white clothes were compulsory to wear by the widows. *Newar* widow also wore white clothes for the first year of her husband's death to pay a deep respect. They *Believed* that wearing white clothes and offering flame to different Gods and Goddess would show a path to her demise husband's soul to reach to heaven.

5.2.2. Things Used and Their Meanings

Different things used at the time of *Ihi* and their meanings as described by our respondents have been mentioned here. Actual meaning regarding the texts may differ. But these explanations are the perceptions of our respondents. So, attempts have been made here to mention the same meanings as described by our respondents, which help us to understand how they have taken the symbolic meaning of the things used.

Bel – Immortal husband (God), with whom the girl marries symbolically.

Vermillion (Sindoor) - Sign of Marriage

Cow milk – Symbol of purity

Wearing new clothes –Purification process

Sagun – Good luck

Astamatrika –A group of eight Matrikas (goddess)

5.2.3. Social Importance of *Ihi* Regarding Singlehood

Symbolically, *Ihi* is considered a marriage in *Newar* society. It is regarded as the most strenuous and sacred of all the domestic rituals. No other ceremony, perhaps in the life-cycle of a *Newar* individual, is worked out so minutely as this one (Nepali, 1965).

The ritual is functionally related to the marriage and remarriage of a *Newar* girl. Symbolic marriage with the God allows freedom to a *Newar* girl from the boundaries of her social marriage. Since this symbolic marriage is the marriage with immortal God, the *Newar* girl is never believed to be a widow, even if her husband dies. Similarly, she is free to remarry after the death of her social husband because she is allowed to leave the dead body of the husband and may seek another husband to remarry.

The performance of *Ihi* allows a *Newar* girl to remarry. So, she is also allowed to divorce if the situation comes to do so. That's why, performance of *Ihi*, theoretically, creates a society with no widows and therefore no stigma associated with single hood.

Beside these, another reason for performing *Ihi* is its function as an adult initiation ceremony. A *Newar* girl is considered an adult member and allowed to perform family rituals after she observes the *Ihi* ceremony. Involvement of the young girls in the religious activities increases the family merit. Similarly, family responsibilities can be shared to more members of the family.

Ihi is done during the pre-puberty stage. So, it helps to understand the physical and mental changes occurred at the teen age. It is a symbolic way to be prepared for the upcoming physical and mental changes as well as for the social responsibilities.

CHAPTER VI

EXPERIENCING SINGLEHOOD

This Chapter deals with the experiences of the women after being single. It tries to focus on the real lived situation of single women of the study area. It mainly tries to show the plight of *Newar* women after remaining single. Socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by them have been shown in this Chapter. Similarly, attempts have been made here to show their coping strategies to survive as a single woman.

6.1. Challenges Faced by *Newar* Single Women

6.1.1. Psychological Torture

The societal notion of looking at a single woman was the most painful challenge for her. Agony and problems of remaining single always hit them for the whole life. Most of the widow respondents told us that they were blamed for their husband's death. Though they did not have any hand on it.

Similarly, within the respondents from unmarried single women about 33 % were used to be mocked for remaining single. They were compared with their companions, who had already got married and born kids.

The plight of separated women is not different from the other single women though they were seen supported by their natal home. During the study, all separated women responded that they did not feel bias in treating to them before and after their marriage from their natal home. But, from the society they faced bitter experiences. They were treated as an example of unsuccessful married-life. A case in point is the case study of *Lasta Maharajan*, where she narrates how she experienced her widowhood.

Lasata Maharjan (Pseudo name), 17, married at 14 with a Newar boy. It was an elopement. But, after 17 days of the marriage, her husband was killed in an encounter with armies.

“I was totally blank, when I heard the news of my husband’s death. The marriage was my own decision. So, I was scared with my parents and other relatives of the natal home. I could not decide what to do further”, she shares.

“There were all total 8 members in my husband’s home. My brother-in-laws were drunkards. My mother-in-law was already dead. So, I was not feeling secure in my marital home. In the mean time, my parents came to take me back with them. But, my father-in-law refused to send me back. He wanted to re-marry me with my youngest brother-in-law, who was only 1 year older than me. My parents insisted against this decision. I, too, was confused”, she tells her story.

She further continues,” On the rite of the 45th day of my husband’s death, my father-in-law suggested me to untie all the knots of restriction, considering the possible misbehaviors by the drunkard brother-in-laws. My father-in-law was in favor of my re-marriage. All my relatives suggested me to remarry. But, I was hesitant with the society.”

“Those days, I really used to miss my husband but now I am accustomed to live alone. I do not have any children. It took me more than 3 years to be strong again. Life can not be run alone because I am just 17 now. So, I think, I have to marry now. I always think and scare of my future husband. Who will marry with a widow? Or, what if the same thing happens again? I do not want to be the wife of a widower or an old man. This is the reason, I always refused marriage proposal. Let’s see, what happens...”, she expresses her feelings.

6.1.2. Insecureness of the Settlement

Since the single women are victims of different kinds of accusations, they are not paid interest for their permanent settlement by other members of the family. A widow is not well behaved at her marital home. She has to face several stresses to grown up their babies and all responsibilities of household works. Natal home, for them, also becomes the house of strangers. Verbal abuse and maltreatment of the female members of the natal home pinches them to stay there. So, a secured permanent settlement for a widow always becomes thirst.

The unsuccessful married life of a separated woman is always cursed at her natal home. She has to face tension to settle her life, pressure of remarriage, mange babies if she has, doesn't have any other way except to live a pathetic life lonely.

Unmarried single women are considered burden at her natal home. Beside the unnecessary mockeries, she has to handle extra physical responsibilities of house hold work. Family member takes her as extra burden to settle her future. Her life always lacks a permanent settlement.

6.1.3. Presence at the Decision Level

All the respondents responded that they were consulted in the household decision in their natal home. But in the decision making of land-property buy/sale, they were not consulted at all. Most of the unmarried respondent put their voice in front of family but they were not given importance in the decisions about patriarchal property.

Newar widow and separated respondents were not provided leading role in decision makings. They were neither consulted for any kinds of family decisions nor were their opinions or suggestions taken seriously by other members. It was found as incapable in giving the appropriate decisions or suggestions in any important issues as they were considered as unsuccessful woman.

6.1.4. Problems of Economic Support

From the total respondents, 38.71 % were dependent on agriculture while 46.77 % were involved in house work. Only 14.52 % involved in income generation such as carpet labour, sewing and weaving. So still the large number of respondents was dependent on others for economic support.

6.2. Some Coping Strategies of the *Newar* Single Women

6.2.1. Agriculture as a Means to Livelihood

Most of the single women (38.71 %) of the study area were involved in agricultural works. Since, a huge mass of the *Kirtipur Newar* community is still practicing subsistence farming; these single women were also playing their supportive role as

farmers. Though not sufficiently, agricultural works have helped them to fulfill the necessities of their daily life.

6.2.2. Weaving and Sewing

Involvement in weaving and sewing was another source of income for the *Newar* single women of Panga Des. In comparison to aged single women, young were more inclined to weaving and sewing occupation. So, they seemed more sustained than aged single women.

6.2.3. Carpet Laboring

About 4.84 % respondents were found carpet labourers. They are living with the income they earned from the carpeting.

CHAPTER VII
PARADOXES BETWEEN THE PERCEPTION OF *IHI* AND REAL
LIFE OF SINGLE WOMEN

7.1. Understanding *Ihi* as a Mock Marriage

In *Newar* community, *Ihi* ceremony is seen as the first marriage while the real marriage (Marriage with a human husband) is considered as secondary. *Kanyadan* (handover of virgin girl) rite is done during the *Ihi* ritual, which is not performed again in the real marriage. That's why, as long as a girl is considered to have *kanyadan* with the deity, she is not thought as a widow even after her husband's death. Similarly, marriage with the eternal deity gives her permission to divorce and remarry. The Hindu conception of ties of marriage can be seen in significance for performing *Ihi*. In Hindu belief, once a girl is married, she has to spend her whole life with her husband. Same as that, symbolic marriage with the deity is an eternal marriage which gives her theoretical legacy not to become single, even if her social husband dies or she is also free to divorce and remarry.

7.2. Avoidance of Remarriage

Despite the general perception of *Ihi* as mock marriage, which allows *Newar* women to be free from the boundaries of the social marriage, *Newar* society doesn't practice it commonly. Paradox lies between the general conception of the symbolic meaning of *Ihi* and avoidance of its practice in the real life.

7.2.1. Paradoxes of Meaning within Religious Conceptions

The basic conception for avoiding remarriage is *the possibilities of revival of fate*. Most of the *Newar* single women had the same opinion that the same fate could also be happened with the second husband. After remarriage, the second husband could also die and the woman would again become widow. The Hindu religious ideal of *Karma (Faith)* has played an important psychological role for avoiding the remarriage. According to this ideal, it is the destiny of an individual, which determines his/her future. One has to do accordingly, what has been written on his fate to do. One can not overcome his/ her destiny. So, it is generally believed in

Newar community that the remarriage can again be a curse for the single woman due to her fate.

Despite that, the conception of *Pativrata*dharma in Hindu ideology, psychologically, forbids *Newar* women to remarry. It is said that the marriage tie has been bound in heaven. That meant to say, the life partner has been already fixed in the heaven. So, marriage is a medium to meet the same partner. It is a sacred relation which lasts not only for the present life but for the next seven lives. Husband and wife are made for each other and they have to maintain their relation even after one's death. *Pativrata*dharma is the most sacred and meritorious religious behavior for a woman. Staying within the confines of *Pativrata*dharma is a more virtuous and acceptable state for her. Most of the *Newar* single women were influenced by this view. It is the reason, they avoid remarriage.

7.2.2. Social Obligations

The most convincing conception for avoiding remarriage is the *social difficulties*, they have to face. Firstly, there is rare chance of accepting a young single woman as bride by any virgin groom. So, they are compelled to marry with widower or groom with an older age. The second marriage of a single woman is considered the matter of hatredness in the society. With such obstacles in the way, one would think that a man would not be interested in marrying a widow or a separated woman. Similarly, single women with children think of the betterment of their children's future rather than remarrying themselves. The responsibilities of guardianship don't allow them to remarry and settle a new world.

7.2.3. Barrier of Age

In the context of Nepal, generally it is practised that a girl is married at her late teen or early twenties. Nowadays, it has been increased up to late twenties. Still, there is chance of marriage of the females above 30. But, there is very rare chance of marriage of those, who become single after the age of 40. Generally, they are proposed either for widowers or comparatively older grooms.

In the context of our respondents, 33 out of 55 respondents had become single after the age of 40. This is 60% of the total married women (later, they became single). Similarly, 7 unmarried females are above the age of 35. This is one of the cause, single women are not married. Here, the social and symbolic meaning of *Ihi* becomes useless for them.

Above all, all the respondents were agreed that *Ihi* is only a ritual marriage, which can never fulfill the physical and social need of a *Newar* woman. In their opinion, it is only a mock marriage and has no further connection with the social marriage. Their view towards the meaning was that *Ihi* should be understood in terms of girl's adulthood and her status at the familial and social level.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

8.1. Summary

Within the territory of the Kathmandu Valley, *Newars*, as an indigenous group, have been residing the life of dignity and honor from the aged back. Though witnessing the political ups and downs of the Valley from very close distant, they never interfere over it nor do they fail to maintain relationship with other peoples. The consensus behavior towards other cults and cultures helped them to be recognized as rich in culture. Influence of Indo-Tibetan interface can be found both physically and culturally in *Newar* society.

Among the complex rituals, practised within *Newar* community, *Ihi* is regarded as the most sacred. *Ihi* is not only associated with the sexuality, regarding their relation with male but also reflects the changing status of *Newar* women in society. It is an initiation ceremony of a *Newar* girl that is functionally related with her future marital status. The social meaning of *Ihi* is directly associated with marriage. After the *Ihi* is performed, a *Newar* girl is free to divorce or remarry.

This study is mainly based upon the general conception of *Ihi* and its social meaning among *Newars* in general and among *Newar* women in particular. It is considered that after performing *Ihi* at her childhood, a *Newar* woman never becomes widow or is allowed to remarry even after her social husband's death or separation with him, which has been rarely practised in reality.

The lived situation of *Newar* single women of *Panga Deshas* revealed the fact that despite the social meaning of *Ihi* as legitimacy for *Newar* women to be free for divorce or separation with her husband, *Newar* women are living single lives after they became single. The religious meaning of *Ihi* has been followed by them with respect. However, its social meaning is being ignored due to social and other religious obligations. *Fate (Karma)* and *Pativrata dharma* are the obligatory religious conceptions that do not allow *Newar* single women to remarry. The paradoxical

situation that is aroused among the meaning of different religious conceptions prevents *Newar* single women to become double again.

The experiencing fact of *Newar* women after being single is pathetic. The status of the single women is no way satisfactory in many ways. Beside the identity crises faced, they also have to overcome through the social, economic and psychological bereavements. The whole life is spent in agony and sorrow of being single, a situation, full of paradoxes with the social meaning of *Ihi*.

8.2. Conclusion

The present study, carried out among the *Newar* single women of *Panga Des* from *Kirtipur* municipality in Kathmandu Valley, attempts to disclose the paradoxes among social and symbolic meaning of the *Newari* ritual *Ihi*, its perception by *Newar* community in general and *Newar* single women in particular; and the lived lives of *Newar* single women. Three categories of single women: widow, separated and unmarried above the age of 35 are the criteria of this study.

The study mostly adopted qualitative data though; some quantitative data were also analyzed to meet the objectives.

Of all the *Newari* rituals performed, *Ihi* is considered the most sacred and plays vital role in a *Newar* girl's social status as well as her sexuality in connection with marital life. The mythical meaning, however, seems paradoxical in the real lives of *Newar* women. *Newar* single women are not generally free to divorce or remarry as her will. She is obliged to do as per society's customary rules.

There are also other religious orders, which seem to be obstacles for *Newar* women to be double again. The conceptions of 'Fate' and *Pativrata dharma* forbid them to remarry after being single. That's why; *Ihi* is practiced in *Newar* community only as a mock marriage, which helps *Newar* girl to gain social as well as marital status in a symbolic way. However, it's meaning of being free to divorce or remarry has not been fully practised by *Newar* single women in *Panga des*.

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<http://colorfulnepal.com/culture-and-religion/Newars-of-the-valley.html>

ANNEX

Questionnaire for the Key informants:

1. What are rituals of Newar woman from birth to death?
2. What do you know about Ihi?
3. When did Ihi evolve and why this ritual is performed?
4. Did you hear any myths, folks on Ihi?
5. Normally, in which year Ihi is performed?
6. What will happen if Ihi is not performed?
7. Did you know any Newar woman who had not performed Ihi?
8. How Ihi is performed?
9. What is the important aspect of Ihi?
10. Whether the Newar woman gets married if she did not perform Ihi?
11. Did you hear that the woman who performed Ihi is not required to be widowhood even after her human husband died?
12. Did you know that the woman can easily remarry a second person if she had performed Ihi?
13. We hear about the practice where woman easy remarry in past but these days this practice is rear, why?
14. What a Newar woman can do in a society after her widowhood?
15. What a Newar woman cannot do in a society after her widowhood?
16. What do you have to say on Ihi at the end?

Questionnaire for Widow:

Name:

Address:

Age:

Occupation:

Son:

Daughter:

Age:

Age:

1. Have you undergone Ihi?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
2. If yes, when did you undergo Ihi?
3. If no, why didn't you do that?
4. What were you explained before you undergone Ihi? What do you know about the reasons for Ihi?
5. What difference did you find before and after Ihi?
6. Do you know why do Ihi is performed?
7. Can you please tell some myths related to Ihi?
8. Did you hear what will happen after Ihi is performed?
9. Did you hear what will happen if Ihi is not performed?
10. A Newar girl who has not performed Ihi can marry or not?
11. When does Ihi performed?

Age of girl:

Any special days:

Other any days:

12. How does Ihi performed?
13. What are the important functions in Ihi?
14. What are the important items in Ihi?
15. What do those objects represent?
16. Did you hear that a Newar woman who had performed Ihi can easily divorce her husband?

- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Any other
17. If you have heard this who told you?
- a. Mother b. Father c. Grand-mother d. Grand-father
 - e. Priest f. Friend g. Self study h. others
18. If you have not heard this did you see any Newar woman divorces her husband by herself?
- b. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Do not know
19. If her human husband and his family ill treated her, if she does not like her husband, she can divorce her husband. Do you know this?
- a. Yes (How is the tradition?)
 - b. No
20. A Newar woman who divorces her first husband and easily remarry second person. Do you know this?
- a. If yes from whom did you hear this?
 - b. No
21. Is there a tradition of handover the betel-nut to among the Newar couple?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
22. If yes how is that tradition?
23. If now how this change occurred can you tell me?
24. Literature says Newar woman does not need to stay widowhood if she had performed Ihi. Do you know about this?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
25. If no, what do you think why does Ihi perform?
26. When did you marry? How old are you when your husband died?
27. What kinds of restriction you have follow after yours husband's death?
28. After performing Ihi is it important to follow these rules?
29. What happen if these rules are not following?

30. Did you hear or see any event when one woman husband died she can divorce with her husband death body in Newari culture?
31. Haven't you received marriage proposal?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't think on it
32. If yes, who brought that proposal? (parental relatives/husband's relatives/friends)
33. If you don't think on it, why?
34. What do you want to say at the last?

Questionnaire for Divorcee:

Name:

Address:

Age:

Occupation:

Son:

Daughter:

Age:

Age:

1. Have you undergone Ihi?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
2. If yes, when did you undergo Ihi?
3. If no, why didn't you do that?
4. What were you explained before you undergone Ihi? What do you know about the reasons for Ihi?
5. What difference did you find before and after Ihi?
6. Do you know why do Ihi is performed?
7. Can you please tell some myths related to Ihi?
8. Did you hear what will happen after Ihi is performed?
9. Did you hear what will happen if Ihi is not performed?
10. A Newar girl who has not performed Ihi can marry or not?
11. When does Ihi performed?

Age of girl:

Any special days:

Other any days:

12. How does Ihi performed?
13. What are the important functions in Ihi?
14. What are the important items in Ihi?
15. What do those objects represent?
16. Did you hear that a Newar woman who had performed Ihi can easily divorce her husband?

- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Any other
17. If you have heard this who told you?
- c. Mother b. Father c. Grand-mother d. Grand-father
 - e. Priest f. Friend g. Self study h. others
18. If you have not heard this did you see any Newar woman divorces her husband by herself?
- d. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Do not know
19. If her human husband and his family ill treated her, if she does not like her husband, she can divorce her husband. Do you know this?
- d. Yes (How is the tradition?)
 - e. No
20. A Newar woman who divorces her first husband and easily remarry second person. Do you know this?
- f. If yes from whom did you hear this?
 - g. No
21. Is there a tradition of handover the betel-nut to among the Newar couple?
- h. Yes
 - i. No
22. If yes how is that tradition?
23. If now how this change occurred can you tell me?
24. Literature says Newar woman does not need to stay widowhood if she had performed Ihi. Do you know about this?
- j. Yes
 - k. No
25. If no, what do you think why does Ihi perform?
26. When did you marry? How old are you when you married?
27. Is your marriage arranged or love?
28. Where are you living currently?
- l. House of your husband
 - b. Parental house

- c. Own house
 - d. Any other place
29. With whom did you consult when you divorced?
30. Why did you choose him/her for consultation?
31. After you are single, did you feel any difference in treatment you received in your parental home?
- m. No difference
 - b. Difference
 - c. Any other
32. How do you feel your status in the decision making process in your parental home?
- n. Your suggestions are welcomed
 - o. Your suggestion are not given importance
 - p. You are not consulted
 - q. Any other
33. If you do not get married will you receive a share of your parental property?
- r. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Do not know
34. Haven't you received marriage proposal?
- s. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't think on it
35. If yes, who brought that proposal? (parental relatives/husband's relatives/friends)
36. If you don't think on it, why?
37. What do you want to say at the last?

Questionnaire for Separated:

Name:

Address:

Age:

Occupation:

Son:

Daughter:

Age:

Age:

1. Have you undergone Ihi?
 - a. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know
4. If yes, when did you undergo Ihi?
5. If no, why didn't you do that?
6. What were you explained before you undergone Ihi? What do you know about the reasons for Ihi?
7. What difference did you find before and after Ihi?
8. Do you know why do Ihi is performed?
9. Can you please tell some myths related to Ihi?
10. Did you hear what will happen after Ihi is performed?
11. Did you hear what will happen if Ihi is not performed?
12. A Newar girl who has not performed Ihi can marry or not?
13. When does Ihi performed?

Age of girl:

Any special days:

Other any days:

14. How does Ihi performed?
15. What are the important functions in Ihi?
16. What are the important items in Ihi?
17. What do those objects represent?
18. Did you hear that a Newar woman who had performed Ihi can easily divorce her husband?

- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Any other
19. If you have heard this who told you?
- e. Mother b. Father c. Grand-mother d. Grand-father
 - e. Priest f. Friend g. Self study h. others
20. If you have not heard this did you see any Newar woman divorces her husband by herself?
- f. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Do not know
21. If her human husband and his family ill treated her, if she does not like her husband, she can divorce her husband. Do you know this?
- d. Yes (How is the tradition?)
 - e. No
22. Why did not you divorce with your husband?
23. A Newar woman who divorces her first husband and easily remarry second person. Do you know this?
- f. If yes from whom did you hear this?
 - g. No
24. Is this tradition still working here or not?
- h. Yes
 - i. No
25. If yes, please describe this tradition.
26. If no, please give your view how this tradition is changing
27. Where are you living currently?
- j. House of your husband
 - k. Parental house
 - e. Any other place
28. After you single hood, did you find any differences in position, behaviors of natal home?
- l. Yes
 - m. No
 - n. Other

29. How do you feel your status in the decision making process in your parental home?
- o. Your suggestions are welcomed
 - p. Your suggestion are not given importance
 - q. You are not consulted
 - r. Any other
30. If you do not get married will you receive a share of your parental property?
- s. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Do not know
31. Haven't you received marriage proposal?
- t. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't think on it
32. If yes, who brought that proposal? (parental relatives/husband's relatives/friends)
33. If you don't think on it, why?
34. What do you want to say at the last?

Newar woman (age obtained 35 and above):

Name:

Address:

Age:

Occupation:

1. Did you perform Ihi?
 - g. Yes
 - h. No
 - i. Do not know
2. If yes, what was your age?
3. If no, why you did not perform?
4. What were you told before you performed Ihi? Can you recall?
5. What were you experienced before and after Ihi?
6. Did you know why Ihi is performed?
7. If you know can you tell me the myths, folk stories related to Ihi?
8. What did you hear the situation after Ihi?
9. What did you hear the situation if she did not perform Ihi?
10. Can a Newar woman marry if she did not perform Ihi?
11. When does Ihi perform?
 - Age of the child:
 - Special date for Ihi:
 - Other days:
12. How does Ihi performed?
13. What are the important functions in Ihi?
14. What are the important items in Ihi?
15. What do those objects represent?
16. Did you hear that a Newar woman who had performed Ihi can easily divorce her husband?
 - j. Yes
 - k. No
 - l. Any other
17. If you have heard this who told you?
 - m. Mother
 - b. Father
 - c. Grand-mother
 - d. Grand-father

- e. Priest
- f. Friend
- g. Self study

18. If you have not heard this did you see any Newar woman divorces her husband by herself?

- n. Yes
- b. No
- c. Do not know

19. If her human husband and his family ill treated her, if she does not like her husband, she can divorce her husband. Do you know this?

- o. Yes (How is the tradition?)
- p. No

20. A Newar woman who divorces her first husband and easily remarry second person. Do you know this?

- q. If yes from whom you heard this?
- r. No

21. Is this culture still existed?

- s. Yes
- b. No

22. If yes, how is the culture? Can you tell me?

23. If no, how this culture is changed?

24. Literature says Newar woman does not need to stay widowhood if she had performed Ihi. Do you know about this?

- t. Yes
- u. No

25. If no, what do you think why Ihi is performed?

26. How is the death ritual for a Newar woman who had not performed Ihi?

27. After you are single, did you feel any difference in treatment you receive in your parental home?

- v. No difference
- b. Difference
- c. Any other

28. How do you feel your status in the decision making process in your parental home?

- w. Your suggestions are welcomed
- x. Your suggestions are not given importance

y. You are not consulted

z. Any other

29. If you do not get married will you receive a share of your parental property?

aa. Yes

bb. No

cc. Do not know

30. Is there a change in the society's perception towards you as you have not married?

31. If yes, what changes did you experience?

32. What do you want to say at the last?

PHOTOGRAPHS



Plate 1: Essential things for Ihi



Plate 2: Ihi Girl



Plate 3: Performing Ihi



Plate 4: Ihi Girl with Asthamatrika



Plate 5: A Bel Fruit in Ihi Girl's Hand



Plate 6: Fathers receiving the Kanyadan



Plate 7: Researcher with Ihi girl