

## CHHAUPADI IN NEPAL AND IT'S DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Debi Kumari Shah  
Surkhet Multipal Campus  
Surkhet,  
shahdebi2077@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

Chhaupadi, the restrictions of menstruating women and girls in Nepal. It is a harmful practice with severe consequences for their health, safety, and dignity. It is a detrimental practice that seriously jeopardizes their safety, dignity, and well-being. This paper explores the multifaceted nature of Chhaupadi, examining the religious justifications used to defend it, alongside the arguments of critics who condemn it as a violation of human rights and a public health crisis. By analyzing perspectives from proponents and opponents, the paper highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to eradicate Chhaupadi. This includes demolishing harmful myths about menstruation, promoting menstrual hygiene education, empowering women and girls and addressing the underlying gender inequality within Nepali society. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of integrating the voices of Chhaupadi victims and prioritizing their well-being in the fight for a future free from this discriminatory practice.

*Keywords* : Chhaupadi, menstruation, Nepal, women's rights, women health.

#### Articles information

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### INTRODUCTION

Nepal is a poor country with the multi diversity in language, tradition, cast, tribe and etc. In Nepal's Karnali and Sudurpashchim province, the well-known and illustrious Chhaupadi Partha poses a significant threat to women's safety, health, and life due to religious and superstitious beliefs. Chhaupadi, a centuries-old tradition practiced in remote regions of Nepal, mandates the isolation of menstruating women and girls. Confined to rudimentary huts ("goth") for days, they are restricted from family life, religious ceremonies, and even basic necessities. This practice, while outlawed by the Nepalese government in 2005 (Human Rights Watch, 2017), persists due to a complex interplay of cultural beliefs, religious interpretations, and social norms. Examining Chhaupadi from a variety of perspectives is necessary to fully understand it. Proponents often cite religious justifications, claiming menstruating women are "impure" and can potentially anger deities (Nilima & Tandon, 2011). Conversely, critics emphasize the violation of human rights and the adverse effects on health including malnutrition and

exposure-related illnesses (Amgain, 2012). Additionally, feminist scholars highlight the patriarchal undertones of the practice, emphasizing the control it exerts over women's bodies and mobility (Bhadra & Thapa, 2007). This paper will dive into the different perspectives surrounding Chhaupadi in Nepal. We will explore the historical and religious justifications used to defend the practice, while also examining the arguments of activists and organizations working towards its eradication. By analyzing these viewpoints, we aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of this persistent tradition and the ongoing fight for women's rights and well-being in Nepal. Chhaupadi Partha, a religious tradition in Nepali Hindu families, is a severe form of restrictions on women's life due to menstruation. This practice is based on superstitious beliefs that staying at home during menstruation will anger the gods and negatively affect the family. Women who touch livestock or fruit trees during their period are expelled from their homes, forced to live in cramped huts, and are forbidden to enter temple premises or attend religious ceremonies. They are also denied access to essential nutrients like milk, meat, fruits, and vegetables, and are forced to rely on rice, salt, and dry food.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This article aims to shed light on Chhaupadi, a harmful Nepali tradition that isolates menstruating women and girls. It explores the reasons behind the practice, including religious beliefs and cultural norms, while highlighting the devastating impact of it on women's health, safety, and dignity. The author argues that eradicating Chhaupadi requires a multi-pronged approach that tackles not just the immediate consequences but also the underlying social structures that continues it. This includes education, empowerment of women and girls, dismantling harmful myths, and addressing gender inequality. The voices of those directly affected by Chhaupadi must be central to this fight. Finally, the article emphasizes the public health risks associated with the practice and expresses hope for change through collective action from the government, NGOs, and communities.

This paper will employ a qualitative research approach, utilizing a comprehensive literature review to analyze the different perspectives surrounding Chhaupadi in Nepal. Scholarly articles from academic journals relevant to anthropology, sociology, gender studies, and women's health will be the primary source for understanding the social, cultural, and historical context of the practice. Additionally, reports by human rights organizations and books by Nepali scholars and activists will be consulted to explore the legal and human rights dimensions of Chhaupadi. The analysis of language used by proponents and opponents of Chhaupadi will reveal their ideologies, power dynamics and justifications. Thematic analysis will identify themes such as health risks, religion, tradition, and efforts to eradicate the practice.

### **CHHAUPADI AND WOMEN HEALTH**

Chhaupadi has a number of health effects associated with it. Menstrual women are forced to endure freezing temperatures in winter and sweltering summer temperatures inside to rudimentary huts ("goth"). This can lead to life-threatening health problems such as pneumonia, diarrhea, lung infections, choking and respiratory infections (Nilima R, Tandon S 2015). Despite the absence of nutritious food and comfort, they are compelled to perform more physically demanding tasks outdoors, such as lifting, digging and gathering grass and firewood. As a result, the rate of uterine prolapse was high in this group (Gautam J 2011). Even mothers who have just given birth are confined to Goth. After giving birth, the mother's body is thin and weak, even worse, she has to take care of her newborn baby alone. Due to poor nutrition and vulnerable living conditions, infant and maternal mortality rates are high in areas where Chhaupadi is prevalent (PHASE Global 2015).

Chhaupadi also has an impact on the psychosocial health of women and girls. Isolation from family and social exclusion leads to depression, low self-esteem and loss of self-control in women and girls. In addition, they have fears about being sexually abused, being attacked by nocturnal creatures (i.e. creatures that hunt at night), getting bitten by a snake, and more. Most wildlife deaths go undisclosed and so are rapes, out of fear for the future of unmarried girls (Amgain B 2015). For example, a husband whose wife died of Chhaupadi, in the Achham region Kanchha Chhetri's wife gave birth with the help of relatives and soon after she was sent to the Chhaupadi barn because the birth made her 'unclean'. Then the newborn baby died and his wife suffered from severe hemorrhage and high fever, but he had no one to help. Kanchha Chhetri said he did not know about his wife's illness until Thursday; "I defied family pressure to bring her to Nepalganj. As we reached the rough roads, his condition worsened. She couldn't be saved.

## **CHHAUPADI : A MULTIFACETED ISSUE IN NEPAL'S SOCIO-CULTURAL LANDSCAPE**

Chhaupadi, the practice of isolating menstruating women and girls in Nepal, exposes a complex interplay of socio-cultural factors, religious beliefs, and human rights concerns. Proponents often cite religious justifications, drawing on interpretations of Hindu scriptures that portray menstruating women as "impure" (Bendle, 2008). These beliefs restrict women's participation in daily life and religious ceremonies, reinforcing their perceived state of impurity and social exclusion.

Critics vehemently condemn Chhaupadi as a violation of fundamental human rights. The practice isolates women from their families and communities, forcing them into cramped and unsanitary huts ("goth") lacking basic amenities (Human Rights Watch, 2017). This isolation exposes them to a multitude of health risks, including malnutrition, respiratory illnesses, and even death from animal attacks or exposure to the elements (Amgain, 2012). The psychological trauma caused by fear, shame, and isolation adds another layer of suffering.

However, the issue extends beyond mere religious justifications. Deep-rooted cultural beliefs associated with menstruation further perpetuate Chhaupadi. Understanding these beliefs and how they intersect with social norms in Nepali society is crucial (Shah, 2014). Often, menstruation is viewed as a time of weakness or potential contamination, leading to social stigma and restrictions on women's activities. Examining media portrayals of Chhaupadi can also reveal how these beliefs are perpetuated or challenged in the public sphere.

Eradicating Chhaupadi requires a multifaceted approach that tackles not just the immediate consequences but also the underlying social structures. Evaluating the effectiveness of government initiatives and NGO interventions is essential in identifying what works and what needs improvement. Promoting menstrual hygiene education alongside dismantling harmful myths surrounding menstruation are crucial steps. However, education needs to be comprehensive. Educating communities about the human rights violations inherent in Chhaupadi is vital for fostering empathy and challenging traditional beliefs.

Furthermore, empowering women and girls through education and economic opportunities can dismantle the power structures that perpetuate the practice. More control and ownership over their lives gives women the ability to deal with discriminatory practices. Additionally, addressing gender inequality within Nepali society is crucial. Chhaupadi can become less prevalent in a more equitable setting if patriarchal norms that limit women's movement and social involvement are eradicated. Finally, integrating the voices of women and girls directly impacted by Chhaupadi is paramount. Including excerpts from interviews or documentaries in your research can illuminate the human cost of this practice and the urgent need for change. Their lived experiences can inform more effective interventions and highlight the importance of prioritizing their dignity and well-being.

By examining these diverse perspectives, potential solutions, and the complex interplay of social, cultural, and religious factors, we can move closer to ending Chhaupadi. A holistic approach that addresses the immediate consequences, dismantles underlying beliefs, and empowerment of women is essential to ensure the dignity, health, and well-being of women and girls in Nepal.

## **CHHAUPADI : A COMPLEX WEB OF TRADITION, RELIGION, AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN NEPAL**

Chhaupadi, the ostracization of menstruating women and girls in Nepal, exposes a complex web of tradition, religion, and human rights violations. Proponents often ground their beliefs in religious interpretations that depict menstruating women as "impure" (Bendle, 2008). These interpretations, derived from Hindu scriptures, restrict women's participation in daily life and religious ceremonies, reinforcing their perceived state of impurity.

However, critics vehemently condemn Chhaupadi as a blatant violation of fundamental human rights. The practice isolates women from their families and communities, forcing them into cramped and unsanitary huts (often called "goth") lacking basic needs (Human Rights Watch, 2017). This isolation exposes them to a multitude of health risks, including malnutrition, respiratory illnesses, and even death from animal attacks or exposure related diseases. The psychological trauma caused by fear, shame, and isolation adds another layer of suffering.

Beyond the religious justifications, a deeper analysis reveals the underlying patriarchal norms that perpetuate Chhaupadi. The practice reinforces the control that men exert over women's bodies and mobility, restricting their participation in social and religious spheres (Sharma, 2018). This patriarchal structure serves to maintain the existing gender hierarchy within Nepali society.

Understanding the cultural beliefs associated with menstruation is crucial for unpacking Chhaupadi's existence. These beliefs, often intertwined with social norms, play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards menstruation (Shah, 2014). Examining media portrayals of Chhaupadi can also shed light on how public opinion is shaped and influenced .

A diverse strategy is required to eradicate Chhaupadi. Finding gaps and developing more effective methods need assessing how well government programs and NGO interventions are working. Promoting menstrual hygiene education alongside eliminating harmful myths surrounding menstruation are crucial steps towards achieving gender equality in Nepal (Sen, 1999).

The role of education extends beyond menstrual hygiene. Empathy must be encouraged and deeply held views must be challenged by educating communities about the human rights violations that surround Chhaupadi. Additionally, empowering women and girls through education and economic opportunities can dismantle the power structures that perpetuate the practice.

At last, it is critical to include the perspectives of the women and girls who were directly impacted by Chhaupadi. By examining these diverse perspectives, potential solutions, and the interplay between tradition, religion, and human rights, we can move closer to ending Chhaupadi and ensuring the dignity, health, and well-being of women and girls in Nepal.

## **CHHAUPADI : A LINGERING SHADOW IN NEPAL'S JOURNEY TOWARDS EQUALITY**

One major problem hindering social and gender equality in Nepal is chhaupadi, a discrimination faced by women and girls due to menstruation. The practice is rooted in socio-cultural factors, deeply ingrained religious beliefs, and a disregard for human rights. Critics argue that Chhaupadi violates fundamental human rights, as it isolates women from their families and communities, leading to health risks and psychological

trauma. To eradicate Chhaupadi, a multifaceted approach is needed, including evaluating government and NGO interventions, promoting menstrual hygiene education, and addressing gender inequality. Emerging strategies for change include community engagement, economic empowerment, engaging men and boys in discussions about menstrual health and hygiene, strengthening legal frameworks, and integrating the voices of women and girls directly impacted by Chhaupadi. By acknowledging the complex interplay of social, cultural, and religious factors, and implementing a comprehensive strategy, Nepal can move closer to eradicating Chhaupadi and upholding the human rights and dignity of all women and girls.

To address Chhaupadi, it is essential to highlight the challenges faced by victims and the support systems they envision. This includes social stigma, lack of awareness, fear of repercussions, and the need for safe and sanitary spaces. Victim-centric solutions include providing safe shelters, involving women and girls directly impacted by Chhaupadi in discussions, and enforcing existing laws prohibiting Chhaupadi. Encouraging community engagement and advocating for stronger legal frameworks are also crucial. Maintaining a respectful tone and focusing on solutions and empowerment can demonstrate the importance of understanding the experiences of Chhaupadi victims for lasting change.

## **CHHAUPADI AND PUBLIC HEALTH**

Now Chhaupadi becomes a public health issue and not the setting for philosophical debates. This philosophical debate brings us to a point where one might want to take one side of an argument based on one's belief that goals and priorities should come first. People in the community have certain beliefs about this issue or women are affected by this practice, which for them is a matter of oppression and alienation from individual freedom. Chhaupadi is considered a public health issue, one that is directly linked to the health and life and death of thousands of helpless women in some of the poorest Chhaupadi area and the most remote in the world. This goes beyond a simple philosophical argument about the centrality of community goals to individual freedom (Khhanal V, Gavidia T, Adhikari M, Mishra SR, Karkee R 2014). The effects on women's health as a result of this practice are varied. Isolated women are at increased risk of hypothermia in the winter and dehydration leading to heatstroke in the summer. The lack of running water in these huts led to poor sanitation and subsequent infections. Long-term fear and depression can arise from menstruating women and girls being alone for an extended period of time and having no one with whom to communicate or share their emotions. Prolonged isolation after childbirth is severe in areas with relatively high maternal and neonatal mortality rates. It should also be noted that infection and hypothermia are major factors in infant mortality in Nepal. Coupled with poor nutrition, the risk of animal attacks, snakebites, and attempted rapes make it very difficult for women to overcome the challenge of isolation posed by Chhaupadi (Rhee V, Mullany LC, Khatri SK, et al. al 2008).

Therefore, there are a number of justifications for ending this practice from a public health standpoint that highlight how harmful it can be for women's and girls' health and wellbeing as well as how it affects many infants. It has been made illegal, but it still goes on because of ingrained customs, strong community beliefs, and the fear that a family will face rejection if they choose to stop the practice.

## CONCLUSION

Chhaupadi casts a long shadow on Nepal's journey towards social and gender equality. This destructive practice has terrible effects on women's and girls' health, safety, and dignity. It has its origins in a complex interaction of sociocultural influences, religious beliefs, and contempt for human rights. A comprehensive strategy that addresses both the immediate effects and the underlying social structures is needed to eradicate Chhaupadi. Promoting menstrual hygiene, education, dismantling harmful myths, and empowering women and girls are crucial steps. Furthermore, addressing gender inequality and fostering open communication about menstruation are essential for creating a more equitable environment. The lived experiences of Chhaupadi victims must be at the forefront of this fight. Understanding the challenges, they face, such as social stigma, lack of awareness and fear of consequences is vital for crafting effective solutions and support systems. By integrating their voices and prioritizing their well-being, Nepal can move closer to ending Chhaupadi and ensuring a future where all women and girls are treated with dignity and respect. Public health concerns also necessitate the end of Chhaupadi. The practice puts women and girls at danger for a host of health problems, including as respiratory illnesses malnutrition, and even death. It's a public health crisis demanding immediate intervention. While Chhaupadi remains a persistent tradition, there is hope for change. By acknowledging its complex nature, implementing comprehensive strategies, and prioritizing the voices of victims, Nepal can move towards a future free from Chhaupadi. This journey requires a collective effort from the government, NGOs, communities, and individuals to ensure that all women and girls can live with dignity, safety and bodily autonomy.

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