

Nepali Women as Victims of Violence

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Gender-based violence (GBV) has been rampant in Nepal. This has pushed women and girls, the main subjects of GBV, further backward in many ways in their lives. They have been the victims of heinous crimes at home as well as at the workplace. Nowadays women and girls are also the key targets for illegal human traffickers. The GBV data in rural communities indicates that above 80 percent of women have been the subjects of recurring domestic violence.

Many studies have cited the social taboos and discriminatory values emanating from patriarchal beliefs as the root cause of violence against women in Nepal. Besides, there are life-threatening traditionally biased practices such as Chhaupadi. Chhaupadi is a social tradition mainly practiced by Hindu families in western Nepal. Under the Chhaupadi beliefs, a woman shall be prohibited from taking part in her all normal family and community activities during her menstruation period, and shall rather be confined to an isolated shed. Women are considered impure during their periods and are forbidden to touch men or enter the courtyard of their own homes. They are barred from consuming nutritious food and drink like meat, butter and milk, and are forced to survive on rice, salt and water. Such discriminatory practices will have negative effects not only on women's physical health, but also on their overall emotion. Women are forced to feel that they are inferior to men. It will be a mammoth task for these innocent women to overcome this kind of oppressive feeling and get on with their lives. It is very unfortunate that the Demographic Health Survey of Nepal (2006) reported that 23 percent of women and 20 percent of men consider GBV as acceptable. There is no doubt that this belief emanates from the deep-rooted patriarchal values.

Education is very important to have such filthy traditions uprooted forever from the Nepali societies. Nepali men and women have to be made aware about the basic human rights of people, and about the principles of equality. Although the constitution of Nepal, promulgated in 2015, establishes equal rights for all citizens regardless of their gender, gender equality is a far cry unless the people are educated enough to respect the human rights of fellow citizens.

These days Nepali women and girls have been subjects of trafficking. They are trafficked to India, Middle East, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. A study indicates that between 5,000 to 12,000 girls and women aged 10 to 20 years are trafficked every year, 75 percent of whom are below 18 years of age and majority of them are sold into forced prostitution. They have also been forced into begging, domestic work and adult entertainment industry. The government's efforts towards eliminating trafficking of women are minimal. Due to lack of effective mechanisms to hold the traffickers accountable for their crimes, criminals are usually at large. Due to illiteracy and lack of income-earning opportunities in villages, girls from rural areas are an easy prey for the traffickers.

According to a report authored by the Asia Foundation, GBV is the leading cause of death of women between the ages of 19 and 44 worldwide, which is more than deaths caused by cancer or car accidents. The same report cited a research carried out in Surkhet and Dang districts of western Nepal highlighting 81 percent of women facing domestic violence frequently. These data indicate how alarming the threat of GBV is and how disturbing the situation could be in some communities of Nepal. The common nature of domestic violence in Nepal includes physical abuse (such as beating, slapping, hair pulling, kicking, burning, bashing with a stick, even

using sharp objects like knife, etc.) and mental torture (such as threats, verbal abuse, neglect, hatred, etc.) by spouses or other relatives, early marriages, dowry-related violence, sexual-abuse within and beyond households, polygamy, marital rape, etc.

The government needs to urgently introduce stronger measures against the perpetrators of any mental, physical or other natures of violence against girls and women. Although Nepal is a party to 16 international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the country needs to demonstrate remarkable actions towards protection of people's rights.