

## Trinity College

### **Awareness: A step towards abolishing chhaupadi**

Digesh Chitrakar (Project Leader, Trinity College), Arnav Acharya (University of Maine), Swaroop Poudel (Beloit College)

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### **Background and Importance:**

*Chhaupadi* is a traditional practice in the far-western region of Nepal where women are forced to leave their homes and live in sheds when they menstruate. This practice is followed because of a superstitious belief that a menstruating woman brings misfortune to anything or anyone she comes in contact with.

Even though *chhaupadi* was outlawed nationally in 2005, the practice is still prevalent.[1] A study on *chhaupadi* in the Achham district of Nepal, published in December 2018, surveyed 107 adolescent girls from two local schools in Achham. Findings showed that 77 (72%) girls reported that *chhaupadi* was still practiced in their households. The study also reported that only 23 (30%) girls had access to proper toilets. In addition to the lack of sanitation, the menstruating women were also deprived of food with 75 (97%) girls deprived of dairy products and fruits.[2]

The practice of *chhaupadi* has impacted educational institutions in Achham negatively. When menstruating, both menstruating girls as well as female teachers are forced to skip study or work, and because the older generation still have a conservative mentality towards menstruation, it is harder for activists to work there. In addition to this, the curriculum taught is inadequate with little to no information about the irrational superstitious practice like *chhaupadi*. Furthermore, the government has not shown any interest in this problem, as 60% of the people in the Karnali zone are not aware of the ban imposed on *chhaupadi*. [3] This practice has led to many deaths throughout the years. Women die of suffocation from carbon monoxide when they light a fire to keep themselves warm, snake bites and animal attacks, as well as diseases contracted through an unhygienic environment. In one recent case a mother and her two children passed away by carbon monoxide poisoning.[4]

*Chhaupadi* is a practice propelled by illiteracy and ignorance. One viable method to combat this is to generate awareness from a local level. This will be a slow process, but we believe that if more projects are done on this, then the tradition of *chhaupadi* will fade away. We hope that our project will be the stepping stone to other projects which will lead to the empowerment of women and will help bring equality and peace in the households and in the community.

### **Project Objectives:**

**Educating adolescent and teens on the topic of menstruation and sanitary practices.** To do so, we will develop a curriculum that encompasses topics such as menstrual health, public health, and even some classes in the arts to engage the students. For this, we will cooperate with the teachers in the school (we are targeting three schools, Chandika, Sarada, and Nawadurga), which we have already contacted. Volunteer teachers and youth will train these teachers. The teachers in the schools, after this training, will be able to empower and teach the students.

**Providing the students with solar-powered lamps/flashlights and hygiene kits.** These solar-powered lamps will provide a way for the children to study during the night. The hygiene kit provided will include reusable menstrual pads, soaps, and hand sanitizers. Along with this, we will be demonstrating proper handwashing techniques and other hygienic activities.

**Taking a general survey of the village to understand the beliefs and traditions.** By doing so, we will be able to figure out why families practice the tradition, but more importantly, why some families have abandoned it. By doing so, we can help mobilize the people against *chhaupadi* to help alleviate the situation, and by analyzing the data from both sides of the spectrum, we will communicate with the people and minimize the effects of *chhaupadi*.

**Conducting activities with the community that promote menstrual health.** Since menstrual pads are only available in the bazaars, which are not easily accessible, we plan to conduct activities to teach women how to make their menstrual pads. We will also hold talks about how *chhaupadi* impacts health (malnutrition, psychological trauma, physical dangers). With this, we plan to normalize the topic of menstruation within the community and ease the unrest caused by the stigma surrounding it.

**Building libraries in the schools.** Throughout this project, we will be working with Shiksha Nepal. The organization aims to help the children in the remote areas of Nepal by using education as their tools. Our project will help them make inroads into this region of Nepal, and in turn, we will use some portion of our budget to buy books and some shelves so that we can donate these to the local schools.

**Qualifications:**

We are born and raised in Nepal, so we will not have a problem with communication as we can speak the language fluently. Furthermore, we are familiar with the culture and tradition, making us relatable to the villagers which makes them more comfortable towards us. During our high school, we were also a part of the Interact Club through which we conducted social service activities on a regular basis, such as building a library in rural parts of Nepal and collaborating with orphanages to conduct activities with the children.

**Timeline:**

April: Work on a curriculum which will include menstrual health and practices that can help improve it. We will also design pamphlets and brochures with educational materials to distribute.

May: Finalize purchases for solar lamps, books, additional awareness materials and sanitary materials.

June - Mid July: Travel to Nepal and train the volunteers to make reusable sanitary pads as well as be well versed on menstrual health, manage transportation to and from Achham, and manage the logistics in the Achham area as well by communicating with the teachers on what the students need at that time.

July 14 - July 17: Travel to Achham and prepare to start the project.

July 18 - July 24: Conduct icebreakers with the students as well as the teachers and carry out a survey with the community to get a better grasp of the situation.

July 25 - July 27: Distribute solar lamps and get to know the community better by interacting with them and interview a random sample and understand the general connotation of *chhaupadi*. Distribute the books and shelves so that a library can be assembled within the school. Distribute brochures and sanitary materials at local health care facilities so that people are more well informed.

July 28 - August 11: Conduct activities with the school children which will educate and empower them. Manage workshops such as making reusable menstrual pads, informing them about the risks of *chhaupadi* and what is necessary to have a good menstrual health. Implement a system where women feel safe to discuss their issues relating to *chhaupadi*. Engage in a conversation with the community and persuade them to reduce the harms of *chhaupadi* with the help of the locals who have abandoned this tradition.

August 12 - August 15: Finish up the project.

**Sustainability:**

We are working with Shiksha Nepal, a nonprofit organization, and the organization will assist in our project by donating books as well as providing volunteers we need. This project also gives them a connection to Achham, from which they can provide continuous support even after we complete the project. Shiksha Nepal is making a difference by organizing book drives and fundraisers, and they have recently started a program called "Ek Kitab - a book for every child" through which they aim to donate 10 million children's books to the kids of Nepal. The success of the project will provide Shiksha Nepal with a point of access to Achham, and from there on further projects targeted towards to the socio-economic uplifting of the lives of thousands of families from underprivileged backgrounds can be initiated.

**Bringing it back to Trinity:**

We will document the important parts of the project and make a presentation highlighting this tradition. Once made, we will present this to various organizations at Trinity, such as WGRAC which deals with women's empowerment. Bringing more attention to traditions like *chhaupadi* is important as it can lead to more involvement in that area, which will help in destroying such traditions and thus enhancing peace.

**References:**

1. Mangalsen. (2013, August 03). Emerging from menstrual quarantine. Retrieved from <http://www.irinnews.org/report/93404/nepal-emerging-menstrual-quarantine>
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3. The Kathmandu Post (2017, July) REPORT: 60 percent people in Karnali unaware of Chhaupadi ban. The Kathmandu Post. Retrieved January 22, 2019.
4. Sharma, B., & Schultz, K. (2019, January 9). Woman and 2 children die in Nepal menstruation hut. New York Times. Retrieved January 23, 2019.