

## **Abortion Based on Sex**

- Laxman Adhikari

In the present context, when the world is raising voices on equal rights to children, the trend of aborting babies through gender discrimination is on the rise in Nepal and the South Asian countries. According to a 34 year old father who went to Delhi to check the sex of his second child since his first child was a daughter, *"A nursing home in Delhi proclaimed that the second child was also a daughter after doing amniosynthesis. Since abortion is costly in Delhi, I have taken an appointment in a clinic here and the cost is Rs. 4000. Daughters have to be married off and sons are the ones who look after us in old age. Therefore, I have decided not to have any more daughters."*

Similarly, a woman who came for sex test through ultrasound of her baby in Alka Polyclinic in Jawalakhel said that she already had three daughters and another daughter would mean criticism from her family members and on top of that the burden of marrying the daughters. Therefore, she decided to abort the child if it was a daughter. According to her, sons are the ones who carry on the ancestral line and conduct rituals after death. She paid Rs. 1500 to do the ultrasound.

A young man from Rajbiraj visited a nursing home in Biratnagar together with his pregnant wife in order to check the sex of his baby since he already had a two year old daughter and he did not want to have any more daughters.

A pregnant Brahmin woman from Jhapa conducted an ultrasound in Anand Clinic of Biratnagar. After the test, the woman questioned the doctor as to the sex of the baby. Instead, the doctor asked her who she had at home to which she replied that she had two daughters. When the doctor said that no matter what the sex of the child, it is in good health, the woman started arguing with the doctor that she had already paid for the test and she had the right to know the results of the test.

It has been found that at present, many pregnant women, especially from the terai and the urban areas of Nepal, conduct ultrasound and amniosynthesis to check the sex of the baby and most often they abort the child if it is a daughter. This trend has given rise to unsafe abortion which may result in the death of the mother, unnecessary expenditure and encouragement of discrimination among sons and daughters in the society.

According to Dr. Anand Acharya, amniosynthesis is a process where the test is conducted after taking out the water of 8 to 9 weeks of pregnancy. It is a process done to find out the health situation of the child through the test of genetic situation and chromosomes. The process has been misutilized in testing the sex of the child and aborting the child in case it is a daughter. According to Dr. Acharya, amniosynthesis process is not available in Nepal and a few medical shops, clinics, nursing homes, etc., act as agents in sending pregnant women for testing to Siliguri, Gorakhpur, Kolkatta, Delhi, Mumbai and others go to these places by themselves.

According to a study conducted in India, the process is not hundred percent foolproof in identifying the sex of the baby. At present in Nepal, the trend to conduct ultrasound to identify the sex of the baby and to abort the baby if it is a daughter is on the rise. According to Dr. Sudhar Prasad Adhikari of Bir Hospital who conducts ultrasound, approximately 20-25% of the women coming to Bir Hospital request for such tests. Similarly, approximately 70% in Kantipur Hospital and 95% in Janakpur Hospital request for ultrasound tests. Ninety percent pregnant women visiting Radiologist Dr. Anand Acharya in Biratnagar and approximately 50% pregnant women visiting Radiologist Dr. Mukund Raj Panthi request for ultrasound tests. On an average 2-3 pregnant women come up with such requests on a daily basis at the Koshi District Hospital and 4-5 at the Birgunj Sub-regional Hospital.

Besides the above, other radiologists who were contacted pointed out that most of the pregnant women visiting the clinics wanted to know the sex of the baby with the aim of aborting the baby if it was a daughter. It has been found that a maximum of 10% of these radiologists do not identify the sex of the child but most of them confirm the sex of the child by overcharging and some of them confirm the sex of the child at the same rate. The test results of ultrasound is not totally foolproof and it has been found to be 3% unsuccessful in the United States. According to Radiologist Dr. Mukund Raj Panthi, "*In most of the cases, the sex of the child can be determined after 4 months of pregnancy but in some cases when the baby is in an awkward position or when there is plenty of water or when the baby is a daughter, it is difficult to confirm the sex of the child.*"

People, especially living in the terai and the urban areas, have more interest in identifying the sex of their child. Most of the families which identify and abort daughters are more male dominated, believe in the superstition that heaven cannot be reached without a son, take sons as property and daughters as burden and in families where the tradition of dowry and *tilak* is very strong. Registrar of Nepal Medical Council, Dr. Anilkumar Mishra says that the identification of a baby in the pregnant stage is against medical ethics. He points out that guardians and doctors should discourage this practice since it destroys the right of birth of daughters and gives rise to discrimination on the basis of sex in the society.

Sociologist Dr. Krishna Bhattachan is of the opinion that such kind of practice is a very big criminal act. The government and the civil society must put an end to such practices. These kind of practices enhances the patriarchal power and the strong roots of patriarchy in our society. Since such practices bring deterioration in the society, the culprits must be punished.

Dr. Meena Acharya is of the opinion that such heinous crime must be stopped at once. Member of Human Rights Commission, Prof. Kapil Shrestha feels that the right of birth of girl child must not be destroyed. He is of the opinion that the certificate of those doctors who confirm the sex of the child must be annulled. Such practices brings imbalance in the society. Member of Council of Representative Population and Social Committee, Dr. Bansidhar Mishra is of the opinion that those doctors identifying the sex of the child are committing moral and social crime and this practice should be considered illegal and stopped at once.

Courtesy

Sancharika Lekhmala/Sancharika Samuha Nepal

### **Nepal's Law on Girl Child's Rights**

- *Anantaraj Luintel*

Eighteen year old Agwani Darego of Nigeria declared that she would spend U.S. \$ 250,000 from her award for the benefit of disadvantaged children of the world after she was proclaimed Miss World. This declaration by the Miss World, although she had just passed the stage of childhood, portrays the bitter truth of the situation of children around the world. In the context of Nepal, the international treaties that the state has ratified, the laws and the conventions that it has passed and the protocol guarantees the legal status and the rights of children. Except for a few special categories, the laws on girl child rights are very specific and clear. However, the rights granted to them are not being implemented in reality.

Nepal Children Act 2048 and various other acts have made provisions for various rights to children. These acts guarantee the right to birth and the right to live as citizens of the country. Besides, the acts also guarantee their right to education, health, treatment as well as the right of opportunity of hearing if accused in some way and the right to keep a lawyer for the hearing. The

acts also guarantee the right to children of freedom if imprisoned without a clear offence. Each child is granted the right to live as an independent citizen. However, the government and the non-government sectors have been publishing reports from time to time on children who are imprisoned because of the crimes that their parents committed. These children have lost their rights to education, health, etc. The Children Act has made provisions to keep such children in juvenile homes and provide opportunity for education. Nepal's law states that children under 16 years old should not be imprisoned and they should be provided an opportunity of hearing through the formation of a juvenile court.

Since Nepal is also a party to the Convention on Child Rights 1989 which it ratified on 14th October, 1990, the government should take steps towards controlling the activities that the Convention prohibits. The above Convention guarantees children the right of freedom of speech, the right to form organizations and the right of appropriate hearings in case of accusation. The Convention has provisions to respect children without any discriminations as an independent citizen. It also dictates that children should not be given death sentence or lifelong imprisonment; if any of their rights are discriminated, they should be provided an independent and competent court hearing; and, it has also made provisions for a separate juvenile court. At present, all the 75 districts of Nepal have established provisions of juvenile court.

Although, the 2047 Constitution of Nepal has made provisions of developing special acts for the development of women, children and the disabled, it has not been used till date. The government had the responsibility of establishing special provisions for the backward children which is lacking till date. Clause 11 of the Constitution has guaranteed equal rights to all as well as special provisions for the benefit of women, children and the disabled. The government has not been able to utilize this provision for the benefit of women, children and the disabled.

In Nepal, although education has been taken as a constitutional and basic right, it has not been able to be implemented effectively. The government has not taken any positive initiatives in this direction. In order to fulfill the clauses in the Constitution, it is necessary to implement compulsory education to girls and not only free education till the secondary level. There are a few democratic countries which have still not taken education as a basic right whereas Nepal's Constitution has already guaranteed it as a basic right. However, the level of education has still not increased. India has not taken education as basic right but it is already accepted as a right to survival since 1993 when the High Court made the decision. This decision has been taken as a historical decision in India. The court also dictated to the government that the government should provide free education till the age of 14. Clause 18 of the present Constitution of Nepal guarantees equal rights to education but the government has not been able to provide education to all due to its weaknesses.

Clause 22 of the Nepal's Constitution dictates that a Nepali citizen cannot be discriminated in any form and that a minor should not be employed in hazardous work conditions such as factory, mine, industry, etc. Clause 38 of the Convention on Children prohibits the use of children in armed struggle but the Maoists have been using children massively since the last six years. Many children have lost their lives in this struggle which denotes that children are not in a situation to utilize the rights that they have.

Courtesy

Sancharika Lekhmala/Sancharika Samuha Nepal

**Women Participation in the Peace Process**

- Babita Basnet

The Fourth World Women Meet held in Beijing, China in 1995 passed 12 issues related to women among which one issue was 'Women and Armed Conflict'. At that time, the issue was not relevant in the context of Nepal. The other issues such as women and health, poverty, education, politics, economy, environment, media, were much more relevant to Nepal. The present scenario of Nepal has changed since the last six years. The Maoist armed struggle has affected the lives of people of all sectors of the society and more so, the women and children. At present, most of the villages in the rural areas do not have any youths. Thus, a situation has been created where the elderly, the children and women are the ones who have to look after all the work in the villages. Until a few years back, our society frowned upon women touching dead bodies, climbing up a house or working in the fields. But, the present situation has forced them to do all these and more. This has created additional burdens on them. They also have to bear the agony of their near ones departing to other places and the fright of hearing bad news about them.

The Declaration Letter of the Beijing Convention mentions the following strategies: increase women participation in the decision-making level in order to end conflict; provide shelter and protection to women living in violence prone areas; control human rights violations in violence prone areas and give encouragement to peace; and, provide support and protection to women refugees who were forced to leave their homes. Nepal has committed itself to all these clauses but nothing has been implemented so far. Therefore, it is necessary for the government to play an active role in order to stop violence against women and children in an armed struggle. Office In-charge of UNIFEM, Sangita Thapa mentions, "*UNIFEM believes that the participation of women is very important for the establishment of peace in any country and that the peace process should be looked at from women's perspective. Women should not be deprived of the right to decision-making against weapons and the peace process. The world has accepted that conflicts can be resolved without violence and that women give importance to peaceful demonstrations.*"

Keeping in view the fact that there can be no development without peace, UNIFEM has been giving importance to the role of women in establishing peace. The meeting of the UN Security Council in 2000 gave priority to women and peace and security. The Council had requested UNIFEM to provide support for the meeting and to address it as well. UNIFEM has started working worldwide on the 18-point proposal which was passed during the historical meeting. Alongwith this, the proposal passed by the UN General Assembly in 1999 stressed on the need to include gender perspective in all activities of establishing the peace process. Sangita Thapa adds, "*UNIFEM publishes a booklet every two years on the situation and the progress of women worldwide. The 2002 edition will also include the effect of armed conflict on the lives of women. The booklet will also discuss on how to increase the participation of women in the peace process and in controlling the conflict.*"

According to President of Human Rights and Peace Society, Krishna Pahari, women should also be included in the talks for peace while talking about women participation in the peace process. The women organizations must bring this up as their agenda.

Sangita Thapa also pointed out that UNIFEM has been taking steps in establishing 'South Asian Women's Institution for Peace Studies' in the context of increased armed conflict in the South Asian region and to include women perspective in the peace process. The same applies in the context of Nepal therefore the concerned parties must try to establish peace through women perspective.

Courtesy

Sancharika Lekhmala/Sancharika Samuha Nepal

## **Why was Sobha unable to continue her education ?**

- Tara Aryal

Seven year old Sobha Adhikari wakes up early in the morning alongwith her mother. She has four brothers and sisters and her mother in her family. Her father migrated to some other place to earn money. Her daily routine is to carry her one year old sister on her back and to look after her other three year old sister. Her mother, Subhadra Adhikary's morning passes away in providing water to the cattle and doing other household chores. After she finishes her morning work, Subhadra sits down on the patio and quickly breast feeds her youngest daughter after which she hands over her daughter to Sobha and hurries away to collect fodder.

Shailaja also has the responsibility to send Sobha to school by 9:30 am and sometimes it is already 9:30 by the time she comes back from collecting fodder. She quickly lights up the fire and cooks some food for Sobha but she does not have time to cook vegetables. She hurriedly makes some tomato pickle after which Sobha quickly finishes eating her food and by the time she reaches school, the teacher is already entering the classroom. The teacher questions Sobha on why there is no light in her home. Sobha lowers her head and all her friends start giggling. Thereafter, the teacher starts collecting the homework. All the students hand over their homework but Sobha who is in the last line meekly sits back. The teacher then calls Sobha to the front of the classroom and questions her about her homework. She answers that she has not done her homework in a lowered voice.

The teacher starts shouting at her in a raised voice. Sobha does not reply back, she just stands there with lowered head. Then the teacher starts slapping her in the meantime shouting, "*It is not one day or two days, if this happens everyday how can you study.....if this is the case you may stop coming to school from tomorrow*". Sobha trembles from the beating and the abuse from her teacher. Then the teacher asks her if she is going to do her homework the next day to which she just nods her head. After this the teacher tells her to take her seat and she slowly goes back to her seat with eyes and head lowered. Sobha has to face this agony in all of her classes.

After school is over in the evening, Sobha reaches home recollecting all the incidents that happened during the day. All her friends have also started daunting her. Therefore, she is usually all by herself. Sobha reaches home with all the pain reverberating in her mind. Meanwhile, Sobha's mother is looking out for her arrival. As soon as she comes, her mother starts scolding her for coming late although Sobha comes straight home after school. Her mother Shailaja is already late for cutting grass, fetching water and conducting other household chores. As soon as Sobha gets home, her mother hands over the children to her and tells her to eat something from inside. Thereafter, Sobha looks after her sisters.

She puts her younger sister to bed and starts doing her homework when all of a sudden her other three year old sister tears up her notebook. Panicking after that, her sister starts running away and spills the food that had been meant for Sobha. Sobha has a hard time saving her notebooks and at the same time her other sister starts crying. Sobha's mother hears the younger baby crying and scolds Sobha for not carrying her around. Then Sobha carries her younger sister on her back to pacify her. By the time her mother finishes her work, it is already 9 pm and after eating dinner and washing the dishes it is already 10 pm. Only after that Sobha is able to handover her sister to her mother. Sobha cannot bear the beating at school and the tiredness that creeps up after looking after her sisters. Although she wants to finish her homework, she cannot do so as sleep catches her up. And, again in the morning she has to do the daily routine and her homework stays.....

Sobha Adhikari, the eldest daughter of Shailaja Adhikari, who resides in Ward No. 1 of Madanpur VDC, Nuwakot District which is adjacent to the capital Kathmandu has to face violence both at home and at school. Sobha is studying in kindergarten at a nearby school which does not charge any fees and she has to face the abuse of her teachers and sometimes beatings as soon as she enters school and to face her mother as soon as she comes home. The teachers have never tried to find out why Sobha is not doing her homework.

Shailaja is helpless in not being able to provide time for Sobha to do her homework. According to her, her husband left to do small business in the footpath due to the poor situation at home. If Sobha does not look after her sisters, there will be chaos in the house. She is also aware of the beatings that Sobha gets in school for not doing her homework. But, again she is helpless because if Sobha does not help out, she may not even be able to attend school since Shailaja is busy trying to gain something to feed her children.

Sobha does not have any options to create a studying environment. Due to this, she has been facing violence both at school and at home. Sobha is just one example of such an environment in Nepal. There are hundreds of other examples where the bright future of a girl child is squashed due to illiteracy, superstition and lack of awareness in the society. Madhav Pradhan, General Secretary of CWIN - an organization working for children at risk, says that girl child are first of all discriminated at home by their parents and the society discriminates again in an extreme form. Girl child are forced to work at home as well as attend school and they face extreme forms of violence in both the places. Mr. Pradhan expresses his concern that children are even forced to eat grass as punishment with the teachers not even trying to find out why they did not do their homework.

According to statistics, out of 60% of school going children, 29% drop out without completing their primary education out of which two thirds are girls. The main reason for this is the agony of violence both at home and at school. According to President of LACC, Shanta Thapaliya, teachers should first try to find out why children are not doing their homework.

Former Minister, Kamal Pant points out that girl child in the well-to-do family are much more discriminated. The discrimination in a literate family has been very clear in our society. Our society is always poor because of the discrimination on the basis of sex.

Courtesy

Sancharika Lekhmala/Sancharika Samuha Nepal

Juvenile Court for Girl Child's Rights

- *Gagan Bist*

In Nepal, the implementation aspect of prevalent laws for the overall development and legal protection of children is very weak. The prevalent law does not have a separate legal provision for the protection and development of basic rights of children. The society now feels the need for a separate legal provision in order to guarantee the overall development and legal rights of children.

The Constitution of 2047 has made clear provisions of protection of children against injustice, oppression and domination. As per the Constitution, the state has established Children Act 2048 and Children Regulation, 2051 in order to end all forms of discrimination against children. But, the Constitution or the law does not have a separate legal provision for girl child. The present law has made provisions of equal status of children without discrimination between girls and boys. The prevalent law has taken the oppression and discrimination on girls as a criminal behaviour.

Although 191 nations have reached an agreement on the UN Worldwide Declaration Letter regarding the protection of child rights, the oppression against children have not diminished. It has already been ratified by Nepal as well. But, incidents of child oppression and discrimination still occur due to the weak implementation of the legal rights of children.

According to legal experts, the laws established to develop the physical and mental being of children lack effective implementation. Moreover, the provisions in the laws have not been able to bring changes in the lifestyle of children.

Since the prevalent law states that boys and girls should be treated equally, it has not been possible to look at the two separately. Girls are forced to suffer more discrimination than boys. The role of the civil society is very important to increase the reach of these girl child and to protect their rights.

Boys are provided quality education whereas girls are deprived of it. Boys have to do less household chores whereas girls are forced to do all the housework. Therefore, a girl child is not provided with appropriate environment for education. The situation of social and domestic violence against girl child is in its extreme form. Girls are also the victims of labour discrimination and sexual harassment. The end of social malpractices and the effective implementation of prevalent laws rests on the shoulders of the literate society and the state.

According to State Minister of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Sushila Swar, *"The state has not developed a separate law for girls till date and it is not possible to do so immediately. But, the main law and the Children Act 2048 has made provisions of equal legal rights to children. If the prevalent laws can be effectively implemented, discrimination against girls will automatically end."*

Nepal was also a party to the treaties of the UN Millennium Meet held in September 2000 and it also committed to the protection of children's rights. But, the state has not been able to provide overall development and legal rights to children as per the commitments it has made in the international arena.

The government has already established laws for the safeguard of children ten years ago as per commitments made to the Declaration of UN. The workplan developed for the safeguard, development and protection of children clearly point out that Nepal is committed for child rights. In the past year, 'National Women and Child Development Council' was formed under the Chair of the prime Minister for the overall development of children. But, the Council was unable to change the society in ending discrimination against children and to develop equal behaviour in the society.

According to legal expert and senior advocate, Basudev Dhungana, girls are deprived of opportunities in all sectors in comparison to boys in the Nepali society. He stressed on the need for a specific law for the safeguard of girl's rights adding that the government must take steps to end discrimination as per the commitments made in the SAARC level and UN Declaration.

Various research and studies conducted on the situation of girls show that approximately 80% girls are discriminated at home as well as the society and lack opportunities in every sector. Boys lack opportunities only because of poverty and backwardness but girls are also discriminated due to the social and family environment.

According to State Minister Swar, there are laws in the country which safeguard girls rights but the social traditions cannot be changed right away. She stressed on the need for social awareness on the issue.

The government has made provisions of all district courts to conduct hearings on oppression to children. At present, the cases which come for juvenile court are taken care by district court. But, the demand for a separate juvenile court for children has been continuously coming up.

Most of the cases of girls are on trafficking, sexual exploitation, labour, deprivation of education, etc., whereas in the case of boys it is mostly labour related.

Therefore, the effective role of the juvenile court formed for the preservation of legal right of children can only ensure the protection of their rights. According to President of CWIN, Gauri Pradhan, child rights can only be guaranteed after the end of oppression against children. According to experts, it is very important first to identify the root causes of why the girls are being victims. On one hand, there is a need to bring changes in the deep rooted mentality of the society and on the other hand, there should be positive improvement in the outlook of children by the society in order to end discrimination against children.

Courtesy

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### **Girl's Right: Society's Responsibility**

*Suvecha Pant*

The start of the new millennium has brought about many changes in the lifestyle of humans. We have come a long way from the past centuries and yet, in some parts of the world, life has just been left untouched. Girls in Nepalese villages in comparison with boys have no equal rights, no legal and fair family and community status, no equal food, no proper education, no decent health services and no just and honest information but the society provides her daily with misinformation of her inferiority towards her male counterparts.

The types of discrimination towards a girl in Nepal are: not being able to access quality education, unsuitable learning environment, gender and cultural violence, sexual abuse and child labour.

Discrimination towards a girl starts from the time she is born. Even in urban areas, many parents prefer to bear a boy as their child rather than girl because our society is structured in such a way, that the boy is the one who carries the family name, performs religious ceremonies, and is believed by society to earn the bread for the family. Due to such beliefs in society, it has been hard to eliminate the notion that giving birth to a girl is shameful. In some places, the discrimination is to such extent that if a mother bears only girls than she is considered to be unworthy. It is very sad to see this kind of discrimination present throughout the country as it still shows how far behind we are compared to other places in the world.

Girls have been looked upon with such thoughts and it is no wonder their future lives seem to be full of unfairness. The first socialisation a child gets is with her family and if the family behaves towards a child in such a way, her initiation into this world will be a negative one. It is therefore necessary for the community to realise that both girls and boys are equal and they need to be treated as such. Treating sexes as equal has to begin at an early age so that girls will get a positive attitude towards life and realise that they are as important as boys.

There are many instances in the papers (almost daily) of an under aged child being raped. In so many cases, it is the uncle, brother and cousin of the victim who abuses the girl. If a man rapes a girl child, it is seen that he either is placed in jail for a few years or has to pay a fine. The secondary position of women in society, her economic dependence, her ignorance about rights,

her over-commitment in duties towards others and her family - all these factors have a compounding negative impact of a girl standing up for herself in the case of rape. If a girl is a rape victim, it is more her fault than the rapists. It brings shame to both the girl and her family. We need to realise that in such cases, it is the offender who should be punished and brought to shame.

It is necessary to spread awareness in the community of the impact of sexual abuse of a child. Organisations need to provide girls with sexual education so that they can identify when a man is sexually harassing them. In many instances, a girl is sexually harassed and even tortured and she is not able to stand up for her right because she is unaware of what is happening.

In the context of rape, girls need a lot of emotional support and the community needs to help with the process. It is the responsibility of the society in helping victims in leading a normal life so that they do not see themselves as evil. It is by bringing such rapists to justice that other girls will be saved from being raped.

Using a girl child in the field of prostitution is also one growing difficult situation. In rural villages, where there is not enough to eat and a girl child is considered useless, parents seem to be engaged in selling their daughters for money. In many cases, men posing as job finders talk to the parents convincing them that if their daughter works she will be able to send money. Living in poverty, these poor villagers are instantly agreeable to anything that will bring money.

Taking advantage of such situations, many girls are smuggled into brothels in India and the Middle East. Organisations need to focus on the development of villages so that the roots of selling of a girl child can be eradicated. The problem cannot be solved by just telling the villagers not to sell their daughters, because they see the girls as a source that does not generate daily income to the family. Parents believe that girls are an everyday burden rather than an invaluable asset. Programs can be undertaken where products made by girls in the villages, can be sold so that the locals are able to be self-sufficient and realise that keeping their daughters in the family will generate more income than selling them.

One such project, which shows how prostitution can be eliminated by working in the community, is the BADI COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATION, NEPAL. The establishment of a Community Based Organisation (CBO) in the Badi community of Satti District has proved to help young girls in this community who were previously prostitutes because the men were dependent on their earnings. A group of youths have formed this organisation with the aim gradually improve the socio-economic status within the Badi community of Satti, Kailali District- providing health, educational and income generation opportunities so that there is no need for prostitution. The ways in which this organisation conducts its aim to eradicate child and women prostitution in this community is mentioned in the steps below:

- Involve members of outside communities with the CGS (Community Support Group) programs and ideals.
- Develop links and coordination with NGOs, GOs, INGOs and other concerned line agencies and mobilise maximum local resources.
- To establish appropriate community initiated and based programs.

Another aspect where the discrimination towards a girl child is evident is education. In the rural areas, a young girl is seen washing dishes while her brother skips off to school. It is especially hard to convince the mothers about equal rights between girls and boys, when they believe a female is born in this earth to serve her husband and family. The mothers believe a girl should be an obedient wife and daughter in law and therefore, there is no need for them to be educated as learning household chores that will be more helpful to her in the future. Not yet touched by modernisation, these villages are so far behind compared to the world we live in. It is necessary

for us to realise that we have to put ourselves in the mind of these people. A mother in these villages will not understand about women empowerment and independence. It will not be easy to convince these people to educate their daughters but it is not an impossible task. With patience and by earning their trust, the mission can be achieved. As the famous saying goes 'Rome was not built in a day', so is changing the minds of these villagers, which is not a task that can be completed in a day or month or a year. If we want the coming generations of these villagers to be educated and slowly improve, it has to be a process in which several volunteers from various organisations need to participate. These people need to live and adapt to the lifestyle of these people and then gradually change their minds.

Programs need to be organised by the education department, various organisations and groups in providing scholarships to girls, especially in such places where the poverty level is low. It is by educating girls that the foundation is laid for the future generations to follow.

The crucial position of girls in the population, environment and development (PED) triangle has been identified by international agencies. According to UNFPA (United Nations Populations Fund), the role and status of girls affect each point of the triangle and are in turn affected by them. By performing their daily tasks of fetching water, fodder, firewood collection, etc., and managing their family resources, girls influence the environment. Girls affect development through their economic roles in the family and society. UNFPA observes 'Women's access to labour market brings multiple benefits. it works to lower fertility by delaying the age of marriage. After marriage it provides women with an independent income which will, improve their power and status in the family' (UNFPA 1992 a&b). This is important in the concept that educating a girl can weave a network in which their future as women can be much better and in turn contribute to the development of the status of a girl child.

These educated girls, through scholarships provided by the government, can go back to their villages as successful women and gradually change the minds of the villagers. Once these girls are seen to achieve vast skills, mothers will want their daughters to gain education. Although these girls will someday have to be married, the knowledge that they have gained will help in their daily lives.

A girl has as much right to access of quality education, an ideal learning environment, achieving a goal in life, treated with respect as much as a boy does. The people who live in villages have no idea about equal rights so it is the duty of us, who live in the urban areas, to change their minds. We need to eliminate the injustice that is present in the lives of these girls so that they can be able to develop their communities. Many NGO's and non-profit organisations are working in this field but it is not enough, each individual needs to be involved and then only can something be achieved.

Therefore, the society's responsibility in protecting and promoting the rights of a girl child is in many fields. Parents, families, communities, institutions, organisations, government bodies and the state needs to provide an environment for these girls so that they grow up and become a extremely important aspect of this country, instead of a discarded piece of paper.

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**The Harsh Reality as Against the Undying Hope and the Vision**

- Moheindu Chemjong

The whole set of harsh realities lies in these real-life examples. Eighteen year-old Sanu Maya had come to Kathmandu with the dream of making it big in the central city. Within two weeks, she was cajoled and convinced by her relative to go to Mumbai promising her a grand, well-paid job in the huge, cosmopolitan city. It was only after another two weeks that she realised that she had been sold off to a brothel-owner for twenty thousand rupees. The innocent, cherub-faced Meena is a child worker who works as a labour in a garment factory. She gets a meager amount to eat and she slugs day and night just to be able to afford two decent meals a day. Her senior fellow-workers sexually harass Meena. At the birth of Kamala, her mother had to suffer an acid assault for not having begetted a son. Sabitri was nearly burnt to death by her in-laws for not bringing a comely dowry. Every night, her drunkard husband beats up patali because he thinks his wife is worthy to be beaten. Juneli had to stop going to school at the age of ten because her parents thought it was a waste to spend money on the girl child who would after all be married off someday. The well dressed and pretty Sunita who's walking down the street is stared at as if she's just descended from some alien planet, she is winked at, whistled at and verbally harassed. Mentally and emotionally tough women are looked upon and called, "un-womanly", and "unapproachable". Sundar gets more nutritious food and more milk than his sister, Renu because Renu is a girl. When women drink, or visit discotheques, they are not said to be enjoying life but they are taken to be fast or cheap. Even derogatory metaphors like *Bokshi* or *Kitchkane* (witch) and *Potne* not *gotne* (the house-cleaner and not the worker) that exist in the Nepalese society humiliates womanhood. The numerous beliefs in the Nepali culture like *Mardako Dashwati* (a virile man has plenty of women) have been handed over from generation to generation. Women suspected of witchcraft are thrown stones at or burnt to death. If the husband dies soon after marriage the blame falls on the woman- she is said to be a *Poi Tokua* (a woman who kills her husband because of her bad star). A huge number of women lag behind in access to property, justice, credit and education.

From times immemorable, women have silently suffered. I call upon every women to feel proud of being a woman, raise her head high above the ordinary, to live life fully as it comes, fight injustices done to her and live a heavenly life on earth for women too, are the children of the Universe who have a divine right to soar high above and live life completely.

If we think candidly, a man is born out of a woman, the mother. If we look at the word MAN and WOMAN, we can see that even the word MAN is carved out of the word WOMAN itself. A woman is not only a daughter and a sister but also a mother from whose womb a man is born and who gives him love, teaches him love and first teaches him the lessons of life. But it is ironical that the same woman is beaten up, raped, abused sexually, mentally and psychologically by men. Disregard for girls rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind. Everyday, stories are heard of bride burning and how innocent, celestial girls become a victim of abhorration, oppression and being treated as animals and cheap commodities. Women are repeatedly molested and have been victims of incest. Girl trafficking, assaults and polygamy are just other examples of violations of women's rights. Women need to be protected against all these deadly entrapments of society, women need to be respected more, and women need to be given rights, more decision- making powers, and more freedom.

The scenario in the case of Nepalese women is the patriarchal society where women have been stolen of their basic rights. They have been denied good education and good learning environment. Even literate women in some rural areas lose their skills because they have fewer job opportunities. Surrounded by a film of unreasonable superstitions and blind beliefs on womanhood which insults womanhood itself, a woman plays the role of a submissive woman ready to put her husband's needs first before hers and kill her individuality. Generation after generation, women have been deprived even the fundamental right of education. It is said women

should not learn too much or they might go wild and not obey their elders. It is a must for every girl to be educated, to utilise her intellectual and productive capacities, and to learn to make her god-given gift of life a fulfilling experience.

Likewise, the carpet factories, cement kilns, stone quarries, domestic households all have their own uniqueness but the only sad underlying story that is common to all above is the employment of young female child workers. The little girl children who instead of enjoying their childhood are managing their childhood for two meals a day. These child workers live in cramped, dirty houses which are health wise hazardous, too. These little girls bear their pain in their tender hearts. Many of the girl child workers working as laborers are often abused and sold off to brothels in India. Their lissome charm, innocent grace, and purity are monkeyed upon.

Similarly, every minute, girls are being stolen of their virginity, they are being victims of physical assault, sexual abuse, emotionally hurt, crushed and broken into many pieces. The number of mentally disturbed women who have been victims of lust is rising at an alarming rate. Many women are taking their lives out of ignorance, guilt or out of shame and a fear of rejection. Women have long endured pain and their youthfulness has been fiddled upon.

Culturally speaking, women are placed at a position lower than that of men. Women are looked upon as second-class citizens who do not get to enjoy many human rights and amenities as men. If the husband dies soon after marriage, the woman is blamed. The widow is forced to lead an empty, vapid life. If she carries on a conversation with a member of the opposite sex, she is labeled as being an immoral, promiscuous woman. Childless women have low status in the communities, and are regarded with suspicion and fear. In many cases, childlessness is not attributed to male sterility but to female barrenness. Women want cultural changes that encompass the basic human rights. Women are crying out for justice! Is there anybody to listen?

It is, however, encouraging to know that times are changing. A girl is now freer to live an independent life. She is slowly rising above from the ashes of inhumanity and injustice and she is getting educated. She carries an air of confidence and new found liberty where she dares to dream and fulfill her ambitions. Her aspirations pronounce her individuality and freedom. She has to be supported by the society in coming out of the chains of societal evils that had been tied up for a million years. Shelters, houses, counseling facilities, respect and right to proper education to arm her with, justice and a decent attitude towards them is what women require. The social structures should be re-made, revised and revamped so that women too get equal rights and opportunities to rise above and make a difference in the society. It has to be accepted that women are mentally, psychologically and mentally power-giants women should never be denied of rights for a denial of such rights is cardinal sin. It is for the society to bring about changes in the cultural traditions so that women are not discriminated in any sense and to balance the imbalances between the rights of men and women in the legal provisions and in the implementation of law. The society and the state has to ensure rights of the girl child without discrimination of the girl child, check infant and child mortality, recognise the right of the girl child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Finally, I strongly believe that the dismal state in which many are living today will have to change and will definitely change.

I urge every human being in the society to think about girls rights. I request everyone to sit down and think what would happen if women disappeared just for one day? A girl symbolises and epitomises love, courage, talent, compassion and incessant power. It is high time people shed off the outrageous and tainted prejudice and take off the blindfold through which women have been looked upon. It is pertinent to understand that women are the indispensable, pivotal factors of the society. The full and complete development of the country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields. The civil, economic, political and social and development rights are universal, indivisible part of

universal human rights. The full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom by women and girls must be the priority of the governments. These should be clear guidelines and strategies to translate the policy objectives regarding girl rights into concrete action.

If the woman is not protected and given rights there will be an adverse impact on the socio-economy and the running of the world as whole. Help the girl child, protect her, be there for her and let her live with the spirit of peace, tolerance, dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity. In return, she will do the same- she'll help you, support you, love you and make you realise your dreams. Help her realise hers and you could spin fabulous dreams together and from there, you'll reach utopia free from injustice and the various callous facets of society.

Courtesy

Sancharika Lekhmala/Sancharika Samuha Nepal

### **Business Services Help Women Entrepreneurs Grow**

- Jamuna Ulak

Nanu Rajbhandary, manager of LN Chemical Industry Private Limited, Baneshwor produces detergent liquid soap. She started her enterprise in 1999 without any professional consultation with an initial investment of Rs 350,000. She employs 6 people. Recently, she took training in working capital management, financial plan, production and productivity management. She says that these courses improved her capacity to run her business. Rajbhandary relates, "I had to depend on hired accountant for keeping accounts and making financial plan. But no longer. Now I am able to calculate required working capital and review my financial plan".

She says that in a competitive environment, entrepreneurs need business service in the area of market information, marketing and purchasing raw materials, professional advice and loan from banks, to survive and grow.

Owner of Apsara Fashion Lady Tailor Laxmi Pandey, views that customers' taste is ever changing. One has to update with business training, skill and information on new designs in the fashion market in order to cater the changing taste of clients. Training in costing and pricing and marketing gave her guidance in professional dealing with customers and calculate actual cost of services. After receiving training in 'costing and pricing', she realized that she has to calculate cost of her time spent in business while costing of her service. She showed interest in other business services like registration of business, acquiring loan, training in finance management, among others.

Similarly, Chandrawati Tuladhar of 'Surya Pickle' producer, of packed food and pickle, has been running her family business for four years. She sells her food products through retailers. She had always problems in preservative techniques, packaging and bottling. Many times her products were returned from retailers due to problem with preservatives. Recently she got training in food preservation - especially pickle and mayonnaise products from Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal (WEAN). She says the training has taught her to preserve pickles and mayonnaise. Now she is confident that her products are hygienic, well preserved and bottled. She

also says that participation in various product exhibitions helped promoting products in the domestic market.

Lily Aryal of gift and stationary shop, Kalimati, echoing others says that after receiving training in business literacy, book keeping and marketing she has built up confidence to open a business on her own. Such courses are more beneficial especially for women who do not have much confidence in dealing with customers and operating a business on their own, she says adding, if such business services and soft loan are provided to the unemployed educated youth, they will be motivated to start business instead of looking for a job.

Tripura Joshi, from fashion wears enterprise - Joshi Tailoring Center, Bhotahiti has greatly improved the quality of stitching and finishing. She learned some new designs of women wears through course on design diversification and quality stitching of women wears from Namuna Fashion Institute. There are almost no complaints from her customers these days. Now she is planning to take courses on general business management and marketing.

Nanu Rajbhandari, Chandrawati Tuladhar, Lily Aryal, Laxmi Pandey and Tripura Joshi have purchased business services and have realized that such services are beneficial for them to improve, widen their business horizon and grow. They emphasize that in order to motivate and guide women in business such service is even more essential for women entrepreneurs.

Still many women entrepreneurs do not know that business services are beneficial for them. There are many women entrepreneurs like Tripura Joshi and Laxmi Pandey who are seeking for business consulting service but do not know where to go to get the customized services. Many of them do not know about organizations other than WEAN, providing the business services.

Chndrawati Tuladhar came to know about training through her relative who is a member of WEAN. Lily Aryal was informed by her friend for the first time and later she got information on training on marketing from WEAN. Laxmi Pandey herself inquired WEAN about business services they were offering. Tripura Joshi was briefed about the business services offered by WEAN by one of her friends from WEAN. Nanu Rajbhandary, being a member of WEAN, had easy access to information on business services.

Such a growing trend of purchasing business services by entrepreneurs has encouraged professionals to open professional business service centers at the private level. There are some semi-government and private organizations that provide such trainings to women entrepreneurs, but the number of such institutions and the courses they offer are not enough.

Semi-government organizations such as Department of Cottage and Small Industries (DCSI), Cottage and Small Industries Development Board (CSIDB) and Industrial Enterprise Development Institute (IEDI), there are quite some private consulting firms, business membership organizations and training institutes offering business services to small and micro enterprises such as Center for Business Development (CEBUD), Bizport/ Lotus Holdings, Busi Net, Group of Business Consultants (GBC), Micro Enterprise Development Center (MEDEC), Institute for Technical and Management (ITAM), Manushi Arts and Crafts, Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal (WEAN).

However, these organizations need to render their marketing more aggressive and there are business service providers that do not see women entrepreneurs as potential buyers of their services as they think women entrepreneurs have limited capacity to pay for services. A recent study of Swisscontact/Small Industries Promotion Program (SIP-P) shows that this is not always true. There are many entrepreneur women who are seeking for customized business services but do not know where to go. It is just a matter of identifying the demand for business services,

offering right business services and aggressive marketing of the same highlighting the benefit of such business services.

Business services such as business management and occupational skill training and counseling, consultancy, marketing, design and technology support, business information, access to finance are equally important for entrepreneurs as capital, human resource and appropriate policy.

Receiving consultancy from experts, professionals and taking professional training is not a new trend in the case of big industries. This trend is growing in small and micro enterprises too. Entrepreneurs have slowly started realizing the benefit of such business services and are seeking for the same.

A survey of SwissContact/Small Industries Promotion Program (SIP-P) on 'initial impact of business services' carried out by interviewing 46 women entrepreneurs showed that majority of them have asked for services on marketing, business information, design consulting, management skills, accounting and finance. They are ready to pay for these services. Out of those 46 women, 26 have purchased business services more than 3 times.

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