



Those who are weak are witches

Victimized women seek justice

In the Nepalese society, a woman, who comes from a Dalit family, is single or is advanced in years, is often accused of being a witch. As the new constitution making process makes advance, voices against the practice of inflicting degrading treatment to women by accusing them of witchcraft are becoming country-wide.

It is a matter of national shame that women are being accused of being witches even in the scientific age of the twenty-first century. Still, such incidents do take place in the Nepalese society. Every year, many women are being compelled to endure such social, mental and physical tortures. The tortures inflicted to women, who are accused of witchcraft, are very degrading. Excesses like public insult, compelling innocent women to eat human feces and attack on their identity and existence have been taking place frequently. These are by no means exceptional events. The government agencies have not been able to take effective steps even when thousands of women are suffering from such heinous injustices. The government has not shown any initiatives to enact laws to punish those who insult women by accusing them of being witches. As the process of new constitution making gathers steam, voices are being raised throughout the country for enacting harsh legal provisions against the repugnant act of inflicting degrading torture to women by accusing them of being witches.

On this background, Sancharika Samuha, Dalit Women Association and Care Nepal organized a day long public hearing program in Kathmandu in connection with the 16 day international campaign on violence against women. In the program organized on 15 December 2009, women from Kailali, Sunsari, Makawanpur, Siraha, Saptari and Lalitpur shared their painful experiences. The participants said that they were still being inflicted with violence 'for being witches' and that they were not able to get justice.

The main objective of the program was to motivate the policy-makers to enact laws against such excesses. Personages like Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare, Sarbadev Ojha, Spokesperson of the Nepal Police Bigyanraj Sharma, Spokesperson of the Supreme Court Shrikant Paudel, Chairperson of Women's Commission Nainakala Thapa, Human Rights Activist Kapil Shrestha and Charan Prasai and Joint-secretary of the Home Ministry Bhola Prasad Siwakoti answered the queries raised in the public hearing.

■ Kushewhwari Sada, Siraha

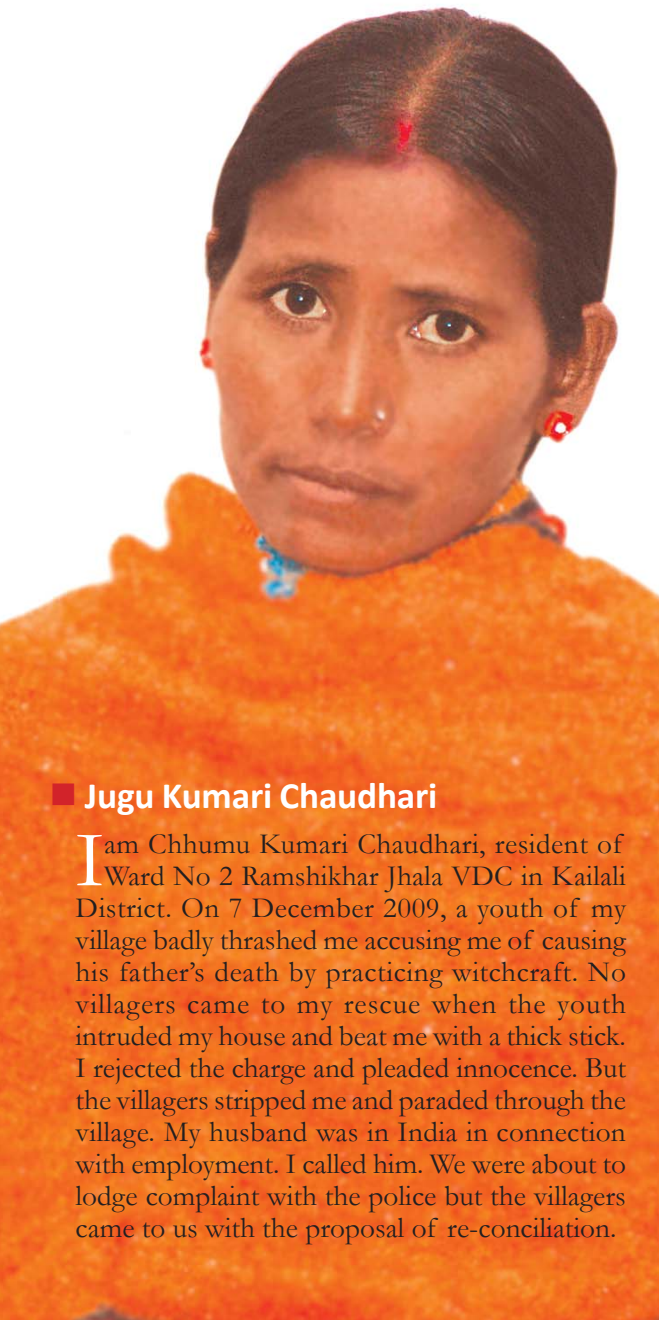
My elder brother-in-law suddenly passed away on 24 September 2009. After a short while, his son also died. After that the villagers beat and ill-treated me accusing that I had caused the death of my brother-in-law and his son by practicing witchcraft. They had planned to force me to drink water mixed with human feces but I luckily evaded that as my husband helped me to flee to another village in the nick of time. Now I have returned home. But no one knows how and when the villagers will react. I am compelled to live in great fear. Those who had accused me of being a witch also caused my daughter-in-law to run away. I petitioned with the police for justice. But did not get anything except for making my torturers pay ten thousand rupees to me as 'medical expenses'.



■ Jabarun Khatun, Sunsari

I was staying at home. Suddenly, a group of villagers barged in and dragged me away from my home. After taking me to the house of my next door neighbor, they thrashed me on the ground and tortured severely accusing me of being a witch. They kicked me on my breast. Some even sat on my chest. I found it unbearable. They had prepared a drink mixed with human feces and urine. They made me drink that. I cried and screamed but there was nobody to help me. Then they shut me away in a room locking it from outside. Later, my children set me free. The villagers asked me to call my husband. Initially, I was reluctant to call him as he had gone abroad for employment by incurring debt. But I called him after they threatened me with death. My husband is here at present. My two children are also with me. We have not been able to pay back the loan we incurred when my husband went abroad. Villagers have expelled us from the village. For lack of food and shelter, we have taken refuge with Maiti Nepal.





■ Jugu Kumari Chaudhari

I am Chhumu Kumari Chaudhari, resident of Ward No 2 Ramshikhar Jhala VDC in Kailali District. On 7 December 2009, a youth of my village badly thrashed me accusing me of causing his father's death by practicing witchcraft. No villagers came to my rescue when the youth intruded my house and beat me with a thick stick. I rejected the charge and pleaded innocence. But the villagers stripped me and paraded through the village. My husband was in India in connection with employment. I called him. We were about to lodge complaint with the police but the villagers came to us with the proposal of re-conciliation.



■ Kalli Kumari B.K

My name is Kalli Kumari B.K. I live in Pyutar VDC in Lalitpur District. On 20 March 2009, I was working in my farm. A woman of my village came to call me. She said that Bimala Lama, Head Mistress of nearby Bhanjyang Primary School had called me. When I asked the reason, she pretended innocence. When I reached there, she was waiting for me. No sooner had I reached there, than Bimala started to beat me on my head saying that I was a witch and I had caused her sick. When I pleaded innocence, she became more aggressive and called her maternal uncle, aunt and other villagers threatening that she would make me eat excreta. They also beat my husband who had come to my rescue. A mob of 30-40 people committed indescribable excesses against us.

This is not all. Bimala then took out a blade and tried to cut off my nipple. I thought that I would die a premature death. In order to save my life, I confessed that I was a witch. Then, Bimala's grandmother instructed her to make me pass stools and feed that to me forcibly. Bimala asked me to pass stools. But I said that I was not getting the call

of nature. Bimala started to thrash me more violently. Thinking that they would kill me, I went down a terraced field and passed some stools on a squash's leaf. Bimala then asked me to open my mouth. When I declined to do so twice, another woman pried open my mouth and put the feces into my mouth. I wiped the feces with my shawl, pretending that I was wiping off the blood. Bimala went further to pull off a bunch of hair from my forehead and smeared the blood flowing from there on her soles. Just as I was expecting that they would let us go home, they took both of us to a house and locked us up in a room until 2pm next day. I feel that this misfortune has befallen me because of my poverty. I pray to god to spare people like me from such a horror in the future. Bimala Lama who committed the crime against me has resumed teaching after returning to the village. No action was taken against her. Such a criminal should be meted out harsh punishment. Victims like us should be provided justice.



■ Shiyadevi Mandal, Saptari

In the past I used to work on daily wages to make my both ends meet. Latter, I opened a small shop with my savings. The shop helped strengthen my financial situation, albeit to a small extent. It was becoming easier for my family to bring hand and mouth together. Then the misfortune befell me. Some villagers bashed up my mother-in-law accusing her of being a witch. I took her to Siliguri for treatment where she died. Because of the same case, my brother-in-law was also kidnapped by the villagers. Now a days, several threats of death have been made to my son time and again. For the past ten years, I have been excommunicated by the society. In our locality, the villagers do not drink water from our well. While walking on the street, people jeeringly call us the 'descendants of a witch.' Everybody hides their children from us. If we look at some one, they say, "What do you stare at, witch? Shall I gouge out your eyes?" Of my four children, two are adults. Some months back, I was trying to give away my daughter in marriage but they did not let it happen saying, "Her grandmother was a witch, her mother is a witch and so may be the daughter." In the last Dashain, some villagers came to our house and threatened us to leave the village but I refused. Thy then said that if any body fell ill in the village, they would wrap us in a sack and throw us away. I even tried to lodge a complaint with the police but, instead, I was said that matters within one's village should be resolved within the village itself.

■ Kanchhimaya Gole Makawanpur

My name is Kanchhimaya Gole. I reside at Ward No. 8 of Tistung VDC in Makawanpur District. I was blamed of making a neighbor's child sick by means of witchcraft and was bashed up by the villagers. I was dragged out of my house, beaten severely and was forced to eat shit. I lodged complaint with the local administration at the initiative of local social organizations. Those who committed excesses against me were detained for ten days. Later, the villagers compelled us to withdraw the complaint and the offenders were set free. They gave me 510 rupees as compensation. I could not get justice.



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