

Single women and unpaid care work

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1. Introduction

Though women constitute more than half of the population, their presence and access to social, economic, political, administration and all other sectors is very low compared to that of men. Due to patriarchal thoughts, norms and values, they are forced to insulate behind in all sectors of the state. They are enforced to live like a second class citizen. Nevertheless, the result of the local level election of 2017 justified that the political assurance of 33 percent at constitutional level has ensured increment in the participation of women in public sphere (Pokhrel, 2074).

However, the existing laws of the state, policies, and state's conventional mechanism and administration wrapped in patriarchal beliefs do not provide justifiable positions and identification to women. The major reason is that most of the work that women perform has been limited as unpaid care work. In fact, the works that women have been doing has contributed immensely to the country's total GDP. Women play an important role in all kinds of work related to productivity. Not only in Nepal, but in all developing countries, daily life style of a woman since she gets up in the morning till she goes to bed include domestic works such as cooking food, washing clothes, washing dishes, looking after the cattle, looking after the sick and elderly people. Women spend most of their times performing these kind of works. Despite all these, works done by women have not been recognized and honored.

Legal provisions have guaranteed equal property rights to women but it is not that easy for a daughter to inherit property easily like a son can. There are difficulties in achieving the economic rights into practicality.

In this context, problem of female headed household (FHH) is far complex. They perform the duties and responsibilities of a mother, sister, wife, sister-in-law, and daughter-in-law as well as perform the role of an absentee male member. According to Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011, FHH that was 14 percent in 2001 had increased to 25.73 percent at present that comprise 28.1 percent in urban area and 25.2 percent in rural areas.

If we observe district wise, Accham district has the lowest number with 3.4 percent of FHH and Jhapa has the highest with 41.7 percent FHH followed by Sunsari district with 40 percent FHH.¹ According to Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011, various research and studies have shown that 75 percent women are involved in unpaid care work. Women

¹ <http://ngiip.gov.np/atlas2011/view.php?chapter=Gender%20Aspects&map=Distribution%20of%20Female-Headed%20Households%20with%20%20Female%20Ownership%20of%20Fixed%20Assets>

spend their time in household chores for at least 10-18 hours in average for which they remain unpaid. Most women are engaged in baby-care, sick-care, food management and other household chores as well as few community works during the spare time. The activities hence performed are economically devalued and remain “invisible”.

As women spend most of their time in domestic work, they appear less in public domain, suffer from poor health and are deprived of desired empowerment and opportunities. Only few women have access to productive work outside the home that too in limited sectors.

- Women spend more than 4 hours in domestic works (except agriculture) whereas men spend only 56 minutes.
- Women spend most of their time in farming and agriculture for food production
- Women are able to allocate only 26 minutes of their time in community and social works whereas men spend 2 hours daily.

Source: Economic Security of Migrant Women by Dr. Professor. Chandra Bhadra, 2012

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 which is meant for economic empowerment of women has stressed on strengthening women and girl and SDG-10 emphasize on the importance of unpaid care work. SDG 5.4 stresses that all countries must recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through various provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family.

“Call upon nations to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services. Infrastructure and the promotion of shared responsibility within household and the family”

Unpaid care work and its effect on single women

Definition

In Nepal, five different categories of women have been included as single women. Single women Protection Fund guidelines 2070, issued by Government of Nepal has defined single women under the state five categories;



Thus the definition comprises unmarried women over 35 year of age, widow women, women with missing husband and/or husband disappeared more than 5 year, women who have separated but not divorced are categorized as “single women”.

In Nepal, there are women live alone or in their paternal home after marriage for various reason, second marriage of husband being one of them. A small study done by a student of Department of Women’s Studies, TU illustrated that these women suffer from social, mental and economic hindrances. (TU, 2072)

These women are entitled to property right legally but socially they are

Baikalya

*In particular castes in Terai region such as Dum, Musahar, etc there is a tradition of ‘Gauna’ before a girl goes through her first menstrual cycle. If then, the boy with whom the Gauna has been performed fails to return or dies, such girls are named **Baikalya**. Those girls face social discrimination and are deprived of legal rights. This kind of single woman are not included in the definition of single woman.*

(Woman for Human Rights, 2070 A)

discriminated. Nepalese society considers the male as sole bread winner of any household and a protector of the family. Foreign employment is one of the reasons perceiving such thought. Most of the workers going for foreign employment in foreign lands are living illegally and therefore cannot return. Though some of them have been working legally, low income bars them from family re-unification. As a result, most of the women are forced to live a life of a single woman while their status is not recognized and they are intertwined in various family responsibilities.

Sanumaya's immersion

The devastating earthquake of 2015 damaged the house of Sanumaya in Dharmasthali in Balaju and took her husband's life. The food stuffs that were stored in the house were also buried in the rubbles. Sanumaya had to collect the food storage ignoring the death rituals of her husband. She had to take out the food stuffs and grain as there was no male member to help her. She even could not go to relief package as she was more worried of food to feed her children.

(Women for Human Rights, 2074)

Following the devastating earthquake Government of Nepal, 2015 carried out necessity assessment (PDNA) 2074 which included wives of those male migrant workers under the definition of single woman and has brought similar kind of policies and programs to all kinds of single woman which is not justifiable and appropriate. There has to be proper analysis as the case of single women of male migrant family and women of dead husbands cannot be similar.

Status and condition of single woman

Woman which has a share of 52 percent in the total population of Nepal, status and condition of woman varies. Nepalese woman living in different conditions and status due to ethnicity, geographical location, social structure and on the basis of other factors have their own identity. Moreover, the status and condition of women is weak as they live without cooperation from a male member or women carrying out family responsibilities.

Single women face various insults from the society; they are taken as curse. They are ever blamed for the death of their husband, hence various religious rigidity have negative impact physical and mental both on single women. In addition they are under work burden.

Widowhood is a taboo in Nepal, although death is natural or unnatural, the women are always blamed for the death of their husband. The armed conflict and disastrous

earthquake took a lot live leaving thousands of women as single women. Single women are compelled to engage in informal sectors as they are illiterate and unskilled and fulfill the household requirements; this changes the perception of the family and the society. Government has been introducing various skilled development program but these never sustain in long run.

Single women are facing various severe death attacks, thrown out of house, death threat, and domestic violence on daily basis. Although there is amp requirement of special social security fund, single women yet not have any assurance in particular.

Access to justice for woman has never been easy as they are subject to boycott and called name if they raise voice against injustice, violence and inequality. Women are obliged to live in a state of terror even at present particularly if they decide to raise their voice against injustice and violence. Nepalese woman still face similar problem that of 19th century whereupon conservative custom, traditional thoughts prevailed; while world is moving much ahead. Even today, a single woman that has lost her husband goes through various inhumane traditions and customs with regards to religion and culture.

My work

Sabina, a permanent resident of Ramechhap worked as a dish washer to support her children for their education after death of her husband who was a driver. She worked in three different houses daily and worked in garment factory during her spare time. Even after toiling so hard, she explains that it is really difficult for her to sustain livelihood for herself and her children.

(Women For Human Rights, 2070 B)

Various reasons compel women to take up entire responsibility as caretaker and breadwinner of the family. While single women are legally and socially disregarded, status of single women, economic crisis, social allegations, religiously neglected; they are moreover pounded with over work burden as well as family, social and financial responsibilities. It is a challenge for the single women particularly to widow to deal with the death of husband as well as to intake the responsibility of family and children. In the changing society, more discussions and debate takes place on the issues of Human Rights, Women Rights, Peace and Justice, end of gender based discrimination, inclusiveness while at the

Single woman

The national census carried out in Nepal in 2068 showed that almost 6% of the total population constituted single woman among which 82% are completely illiterate. Woman for Human Rights –Single woman Group after analyzing the details of one lakh of its members found that 67% of the single woman represented 20-35 years group with 3-4 children in an average.

(Woman for Human Rights, 2012)

other side remaining sectors of our society are fighting against discrimination, injustice, torture and inequality that are imposed against them.

Single women specifically widow after death of husband encounter with legal discrimination, social accusation and domestic violence. In addition, inconsiderate society, educational and economically frail single women are on constant struggle to sustain their everyday life. They are restricted within household work without any economic backup.

Looking at social periphery, many women are leading a single life due to various reasons; armed conflict, natural disaster, foreign employment, divorce, death, or disappearances being few of them. It is very difficult and challenging for women to come forward as our society is male dominated. Nevertheless, due to any reason if women happen to be single, it is her responsibility to look after through the household but unfortunately her work remains unrecognized and unnoticed.

Single woman and unpaid care work

Nepalese women are dependent more on informal sectors due to burden of unpaid care work (WHR Nepal, 2014). On the other hand, many single women still live in joint families and after the death of their husband they are limited as domestic worker their own household.

Women of Bajura

Single women and their children in a village of Bajura collect seeds of Sallo tree. The seeds collected by single women are purchased by middle-man in Dhangadi in Rs. 100 per kg and is sold at much higher price in India.

(Woman for Human Rights, 2070 B)

Condition of conflict victim single women

Family members of those killed during armed conflict, injured and disappeared are either working in informal sectors or in other various sectors.

According to a report of International Red Cross (ICRC) in 2009, among the 1300 disappeared people, 90 percent are male among which 80 percent are married. The disappeared people are of age group 18-35 and were prime bread earner of the family. The left out families have opted for internal migration for security reasons (ICRC, 2009).

According to a statistics of Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, 2015 (2070), about 9000 women were widowed during the conflict and have received relief package from the government. Although single women (widow) received relief package, they are limited within the household as they are illiterate and unskilled. They are socially discriminated and mentally shattered, thereupon affecting their economic condition. A large mass of women are still inside the household as they do not have education qualification or any skills; the situation is not only affected the family alone but hampered the economic empowerment of the nation as whole. (Thapa, 2014)

Women widowed by the conflict, in addition to coping with the grief of losing their husband and the major breadwinner of the family, are faced with many problems relating to socio-economic, health and legal issues. They may be left almost destitute with no skill to sell in the market place. Though those women losing their husband during armed conflict did receive relief package from the government, they are forced to work as domestic helpers/servants due to lack of adequate education and skill. It was found that conflict victim women were affected not only due to economic burden but they were affected mentally too. The effects of cultural discrimination on conflict victim women have directly impact on economic condition. A big portion of conflict victim women are limited within the four walls of a house as they do not have necessary skills and educational qualifications to work and generate income. This has direct impact not only on a specific family but also has direct effect on nation's economic empowerment.

“The unpaid care work by women was not perceived as respectable work but now the issue has been raised as global concern, thus the Government of Nepal is obliged to address it on community level and policy level.”

(Dr.Meena Acharya, 2013)

Conclusion

- It is important to discuss single women's unpaid care work because it holds an impact on nation's total economic development. In order to discuss on this matter, gender role within the household must be looked upon.
- It is necessary to draw the attention towards women' unpaid care work. Unapid care work by single women ought to be reduced such that they can utilize the time on personal development and awareness raising activities.
- The major challenge is to redistribute the work to reduce the work burden on women as they can then gain positive opportunities and earn social security.
- Single women can self-sustain through economic opportunities if they are provided with proper education and necessitate skills.
- The unpaid care work performed by single women and other women must be formerly addressed and construct easy access as safe drinking water, electrical or

other devices that would aid their daily household work and save their sufficient time.

- The availability of affordable child care centre can provide them with time to do productive work.
- The major aspect is to reconstruct the gender role whereupon the household work is distributed and women can participate in economic empowerment and productive work. The male members of the family must be encouraged to participate in household chores that have long remained as female domain
- The state should respect the unpaid care work of women alongside providing employment opportunities, equal work equal pay and ensure facilities of maternity leave, workplace security and respect. Similarly, policies as social security policies, health insurance and policy to transform the informal sector to formal sector in organized manner must be introduced.

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