BORN FROM DEATH
DISPLACED WAR WIDOWS IN NEPAL ON THE WAY TO REMAKING THEIR LIFE

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Acronyms

FGDs  Focus Group Discussions
I/NGO  International/Non-Governmental Organization
MVA  Maoists Victims’ Association
NGO  Non-Governmental Organization
NHRC  National Human Rights Commission
WHR  Women for Human Rights
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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research was to analyze how the health and well-being situation of displaced war widows living in Kathmandu valley has been affected; and to explore the ways they make sense of and cope with their altered situations. This study was both exploratory and descriptive in nature. This was a micro level study. I investigated the consequences of macro level forces to the life situation of individuals, the displaced widows. This ethnographic study employed unstructured in-depth conversations, observations, focus group discussions and key informant interviews as research methods to collect primary qualitative information.

This study finds that these widows are affected more by the loss of their husband than that of the process of displacement and often the former has been the cause of the latter. Loosing a husband is not just to lose loved one but it has been the beginning of multifaceted problems in their life.

It was found that they have nominal problems related with physical health in comparison to mental health and social well-being. They have undergone severe grievances. Their social connectedness has been adversely affected. The prevalence of stigma and the shame of living in widowhood, which are intertwined in complex manner, have contributed significantly for that.

Living in difficult situations, these widows have devised some mechanisms to cope with the altered situation. They have acquired knowledge, experience and skills to adjust to unfavorable situation. Realizing that that they cannot find the world in a way they want, they have begun to change themselves in different ways.
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CHAPTER - ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Background

Since the end of the cold war the most prevalent forms of violence have been civil wars and local and regional conflicts, often referred to as "low intensity conflicts" (Haaken 2002). This new category dominates the contemporary political environment and covers a multitude of phenomena, such as civil wars, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism and counter insurgency operations. Unlike sustained conventional conflicts, low intensity conflicts do not necessarily require a declaration of intention; outbreaks of fighting may occur sporadically and unpredictably; and one or more of the actors engaged in the conflict are likely to be non-state actors.

The Maoist\(^1\) insurgency in Nepal is a low intensity conflict. With the direct cost of more than 13,000 lives, it has been going on for ten years. Begun in the remote rural far western region, the most poverty stricken area in Nepal, it has now reached every part of the country, including the urban centers.

During the process of insurgency and the responses from the state security forces, many people and especially men lost their lives. The result is that many women lost their husbands, regardless of their affiliation to security forces, Maoists, other political parties or simply the general population. For various reasons, when they were widowed, these women were also compelled to flee from their native homeland. Most of the causes behind their displacement are often related to or resulted from the conflict. Some of these widows are currently living in Kathmandu valley.

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\(^{1}\) A popular term, which refers to The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).
Through competing discourses, both the government and the Maoists claim they are acting for the betterment of the people. Lecomte-Tilouine (2004) discusses how Maoists are creating the discourse of “sacrifice” through which people are persuaded to be ready to achieve emancipation. To present the loss as nominal, they are claiming “for a revolution of this kind sacrifice of 13,000 people is not much” (Prachanda 2006). In contrast, the government claims that it is working for “peace and security” in the country. Regardless of changes in the government, whether it was led by different political party leaders or by the King, the discourse of peace and security was the dominant discourse of the government until recently\(^2\). Similarly, when King Gyanendra sacked the elected government on February 1, 2005, for failing to conduct parliamentary elections on time, he then formed a new government under his chairmanship promising people for ‘peace and security’.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Trapped in contrasting discourses, citizens have to bear the burden of living in a context of armed conflict. Conflict often leads to deteriorating impact on public health. Toole et al. (1993) have done a public health assessment during March 1993, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the areas of Serbia and Montenegro hosting Bosnian refugees. Extensive disruption to basic health services, displacement of more than one million Bosnians, severe food shortages, and widespread destruction of public water and sanitation systems have been explored as some of the consequences of war.

Armed struggles have had disproportionate impacts on different sections of the society. As El-Nagar (1992) states, during armed conflict women and children

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\(^2\) By the peaceful movement of the people, on 24 April 2006 king Gyanendra was compelled to reinstate the parliament and returned the country into multiparty democratic system. Following this new political development, Maoists also have called for unilateral ceasefire for three months from April 26, 2006 onwards.
suffered the most. United Nations’ (2006) assessment showed that women are the prime victims of war in Nepal. In this context, this research aimed to analyze how the health situation of displaced widows living in Kathmandu valley have been affected; and to explore the ways they make sense of and cope with their altered situations.

Avis et al. (1991) have found that following the death of the spouse the percentage of widows reporting psychological symptoms increases. The widows, I have talked with, did not report an increase of physical symptoms or declining health. However, we can assume that widowhood in Nepal affects the health of women in a complex manner. For the purpose of this research, I consider health in the wider sense as defined by the World Health Organization (1946:100) – “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

When a husband dies, then a woman becomes “Bidhawa”, the widow. “We need to see widows not as a category in themselves, but as embodying a stage in most women’s life cycle—a stage which is often coterminous with old age (Agarwal 1998:1). Many authors (Barrett 1977; Lopata 1970; Chen 2000) have analyzed bereavement considering widowhood as old age phenomena. However, in this study, the situation of the widows is more complex than what these authors assume because of the younger age of widows.

The state of widowhood in Hindu society has passed through a long way from the practice of the “Sutee” system. As Stein (1978) portrays, Sutee is a system in which wives were burnt alive in or on the funeral pyre that consumed the husband’s body. The logic behind Sutee was also that married women were considered the property of their husband often called Swami (the master). Only a woman who had been faithful to her husband was allowed to burn herself. Therefore, it also functioned as a kind of proof of her faithfulness to him. It was primarily based on the belief that women are by nature sexually unreliable and
incapable of leading chaste lives without a husband to control them. Burning herself confirms her loyalty to her husband and simultaneously it proves the legitimacy of her children as continuation of the patriarchal lineage. Although 
Sutee is no longer a formal practice and forbidden by law since 1920 A.D. (Adam 1950), nonetheless, many of the values and norms underlying Sutee are still valid for present day Nepal.

Parkes (1972) has distinguished between two phases of widowhood and the consequent degree of bereavement during these phases. During the first phase--the crisis loss phase--the recently bereaved person feels as if the most important and central aspect of herself is gone and what is left and thus life itself is meaningless and irrelevant. Thus newly widowed pay little attention to secondary losses like role change issues and stigma problems. In the second phase--the transition phase--the intensity of the grief lessens and reorganization and rebuilding of social relations begins.

Bereavement is a social experience. Social support can have a crucial contribution for their adjustment in the society. Bankoff (1983) has found that social support and relations with their significant others contribute in different ways in widowhood adjustment process and is influenced by many factors. However, widowhood itself is a stigmatized status curtailing many socio-cultural networks and imposing rigid social rules ever reminding the loss of a husband. Often their roles are reduced (Lopata 1970) and they experience different kinds of loneliness (Lopata 1969) in their society. This hampers the process of social adjustment.

In losing a husband, in most of the cases, a woman looses the family breadwinner. Often unequipped with skills to generate income, these women must also take care of other family members. If they are also displaced from their home, they usually cannot rely on property. For their survival, they have to find other means.
In addition to being widows, the women that my study focuses upon have been compelled to flee from their home and homeland. Desjarlais et al. (1995) argue that migration (fleeing) alone does not necessarily lead to poor mental health; rather various forces such as employment status, housing conditions, traumatic events before, and during or after dislocation can lead to psychological distress. War related traumas and other consequences are socially constructed (Haaken 2002). People experience them and give meaning to them in relation to their interactions with other people.

In the light of the above, the aim of this study was to analyze how widows in Nepal themselves have experienced their health and well-being. In line with this I chose to focus on those areas which the widows who participated in my research wanted to dwell on more. During this study, I have looked at the despair associated with a husband predeceasing the woman and “meaning and complexities of lived experience” (Green 1998) of these women.

To sum up, the following research questions had been devised for the purpose of this study:

1. How are displaced widows in Kathmandu experiencing widowhood and displacement?
2. How are they coping as displaced widows? What makes them keep on going?
3. Are there any significant differences among widows? What are those differences based upon?
4. How do their social networks contribute to their adaptation? Are certain kinds of support critical than others depending upon the phase of widowhood?
5. Does being displaced and being a widow affect their grieving/bereavement patterns and/or adaptation strategy? How?
1.3 Theoretical Perspective

The overall analyses of this study primarily rely upon the information provided by these widows. To analyze the impact of widowhood and the process of displacement/fleeing on their life situation, I have employed the concept of “body politic” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1998), focusing on an examination of how powerful political bodies influence powerless/less powerful individual bodies. The powerful bodies in this case are the two opposing institutions, namely, the state and the Maoists.

I have examined the health situation of these widows from a critical medical anthropological perspective, which “understands health issues in light of the larger political and economic forces that pattern human relationships, shape social behavior, and condition collective experiences including forces of institutional, national and global scale” (Singer 1986: 128). I took into account only those dominant forces at national and institutional scale, including the armed activities of both the security forces and the Maoists, which have affected not only the widow’s health related ideas, behavior and practices but also have influenced their overall life situations.

These widows have found that they are living in an altered situation. This has affected various facets of their life. In such a changed context, I have examined their “social connectedness” (Kohut 1984:200; Lee and Robbins 1995; Lee et al. 2001) with their significant others. Their relationships with their significant others have been affected by the prevalent stigma of widowhood in Nepalese society. Throughout the study, I have assessed the situation and role of “enacted stigma” and “felt stigma” (Scrambler & Hopkins 1986; Jacoby 1994) towards widowhood.

Individuals as members of the society acquire experience. They are intersubjective; individuals gain them through interaction with their fellow members in
the society. People learn to give meaning to events and practices within a certain socio-cultural context. In the process of research, I have explored how these widow’s relationships with other people have contributed to the acceleration, to the perpetuation or to the decline of their sufferings.

Either of the warrior sides has not heard the voices of ordinary people, including the voices of war widows, because such voices oppose what the warriors desire. This study portrays the relation between conflict (macro level political forces) and its consequences for affected widows (micro level). Thus, the research elicited stories and lived experiences from the very people who had suffered from and endured the conflict. Analysis required an interpretative approach to ‘dig out the layers of meanings’ (Geertz 1973) these women assign to their varied traumatic experiences. The objective was to determine how such meanings were linked with widows’ own understandings of their health situations.

Above all, despite the multiple hardships imposed exogenously, these women are continuing to live their lives. They are remaking their lives within and against the situation imposed on them. Throughout the research, I have explored the agency and mechanisms they have been using and inventing to adjust to their altered situation. In response to the process of structural influence on them, these widows have also devised some strategies, made some spaces for them and coped with the emerging situations, not only as combination of ‘acts’, as Giddens (1984:3) opines, but also as a durée, a continuous flow of conduct.
CHAPTER - TWO
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

At different points of this study, various methods were adopted to dig out and generate information, which will be described in this chapter. Additionally, the study type and research design will be discussed here.

2.2 Research Design and Study Type

This is a micro level study. I investigated the consequences of macro level forces to the situation of individuals, the displaced widows. During the study I focused on how those widows perceived such influences and acted accordingly in changed situations. Likewise, I dug out the layers of meanings lying behind their experience.

Being in touch with Women for Human Rights (WHR), a national level Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) working with the widows in Nepal, from the period of formulation of the research questions has helped the study immensely. I got some ideas for the formulation of a research question from WHR professionals. To some extent, then, I consider, this is a “participatory research” (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995).

This study is both exploratory and descriptive in nature. It describes the emerging situations, as perceived by the widows, and their consequences on their health. On the other hand, this study departs from the existing studies on widows and displaced people in that it explores their coping mechanisms in altered circumstances.
2.3 Data Collection

This research was carried out in an urban setting in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. It was conducted from May through July 2006 among the high caste Brahmin and Chhetri widows. The women involved in the research have lost their husband during a ten-year long conflict in Nepal and have been compelled to leave their home and community due to various reasons. Since the women concerned were living in different parts of Kathmandu valley, I decided to select the whole of Kathmandu valley as a research site.

In many respects these women were heterogeneous. They were from different parts of the country, especially from central hill regions of Nepal. They were of different economic and social strata. Their age varied from twenty-five to sixty years. Most of them were literate.

To get access, I contacted and visited the Maoist Victims Association (MVA) several times. Likewise, to increase the heterogeneity of informants, I made use of the network of WHR as well. Information was acquired from a total of thirteen widows.

Considering the situation of widows, the researcher chose the snowballing sampling procedure to contact them. The first informants whom I got to know from my own network provided information about other potential informants. I found that these widows were quite suspicious, anxious and worried to share information about themselves and their personal experiences. To remedy this, I have requested children of widows to accompany me to the next informant, my informants directed me to. This has helped a lot to gain their confidence. Nevertheless, their role was limited only up to the rapport built up process. In this way, I used the existing networks of these displaced widows and their children to acquire information.
I was constantly in touch with both the WHR and the MVA where often these women used to inquire about me before agreeing to meet me. Both of these organizations facilitated me to develop rapport with the informants. I also found key informants in these organizations. Among the four key informants, two of them are from MVA and two of them are from WHR. One of the key informants from WHR is also a conflict-affected widow. I talked with key informants from MVA about the situation of displaced people in general and that of conflict affected widows in particular. Whereas, WHR professionals provided me with information about the situation of widows in general and that of conflict affected displaced widows in particular.

“Life stories” of the informants were collected to determine the context of displacement and their life situation (Linda 1993). In-depth unstructured conversations were employed to acquire their emic views on most aspects of the research questions. Follow up conversations were also held up to two subsequent times. While collecting life stories, agreeing with Crandon-Malamud (1991), what really happened was considered secondary to people’s perception of what happened. How they perceive an event, phenomena or a process affects their social environment leading to the consequent alterations in their ideas, behavior and practices.

I decided to apply unstructured interview technique considering its strength of ‘minimum control over informant’s response, to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms and at their own pace’ (Bernard 1994:209). Moreover, no surprise to me, these women also did not show any interest to be interviewed and rather they wanted to have Kurakani. Therefore, while contacting potential informants I always persuaded for Kurakani (conversation) instead of Antarbarta (interview).

The conversations were dialogical in its true sense. During the conversations, some of the informants used to ask me some parallel questions that I was asking
them. I answered their queries honestly. The conventional power of asking questions by the researcher only, as in case of interviews, was challenged in the conversations. It facilitated the process of “various forms of power constantly shifting back and forth” (Nunkoosing 2005) between the researcher and the informant leading to an increasing confidence of the latter with the former. It also helped a lot to develop rapport between the two and facilitated the opening up of informants with the researcher.

I observed the present living conditions of widows, some aspects of their everyday lives and their social interactions with their significant others. Through the process of observation, the differences between what they said and what they really did were identified. Following this, I probed into the causes of differences between them.

I also conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) among the members of “existing groups” (Krueger 1988) of widows and their significant others in two settings to acquire information on what it means to be in widowhood and displacement. I used two opportunities to focus discussions in groups which already existed there. One group of widows I chose for that was some of the participants who had attended the celebration of Second International Single (Widows) Women’s Day held at WHR premises. After completion of the formal meeting, during the snacks time, I held discussions for half an hour with three widows and two WHR professionals. Another FGD was held when I had been to a potential informant along with a son of the previous informant. I found two other widows in her place. They were there to see the host who had been suffering from fever. Taking this gathering as an opportunity, I decided to held discussions with all of them, in group, instead of talking with the host only.

All the conversations were held in Nepali language; later on I translated them into English. In most cases, with the permission from the informants, I recorded
conversations. Few others, who did not like to record their ideas allowed me to note down the major points of the conversations in front of them.

During information collection, I used a checklist to support the process of generating relevant data. Fieldnotes (Emerson et al. 1995; Lederman 1990), in the form of “scratchnotes” (Clifford 1990), were the part of information collection during observation, focus group discussion and conversation. Sometimes, when the informants were reluctant to record their ideas, fieldnotes were the only way of recording their ideas.

The place where conversations were held also affected the quality of information. In a few cases, when the informant was a daughter-in-law who lived together in a house with her in-laws, I found that their home was not the appropriate place to discuss issues related to her social relations with her significant others, living conditions, work burden and health status. Therefore, the rest of the conversations were held in their office or in a public place.

2.4 Data Analysis

During the field research, in line with Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:174), I did not separate data collection from its analysis process. However, the final description, analysis, and interpretation were done after coding the data. The coding was done mainly considering the research themes and variables applied in the research as well as paying adequate attention to inductive emerging concepts. Likewise, before starting analyzing data, I checked their consistency.

After gathering data, they were analyzed to make sense out of them. The task of analysis was “…to bring order out of the chaos of your notes, to pick out the central themes of your study” (Baker 1994:250). Although the analysis was inseparable from data collection, nevertheless, post collection analysis helped to make order out of turmoil of scattered data in different forms.
2.5 Ethical Considerations

For the purpose of this study, some ethical issues were considered as relevant and indispensable. The issue of confidentiality is most important in a study that deals with sensitive issues in post war time. I, therefore, took adequate precautions to maintain confidentiality. Agreeing with van der Geest (2003) for the need of ‘cultural variation in ethics’, I am using pseudonyms (Bernard 1994) considering the context of the fieldwork and the situation of informants. Moving further from Pettigrew et al. (2004), I am using pseudonyms in transitional post war period. Since the truce has recently begun and not materialized in the full scale, disclosing the identity of informants can be counter productive to the security of the informants. Thus, I have been paying ample attention to protect their confidentiality. Pseudonyms are used whenever someone has to be quoted or referred to regarding sensitive issues. Pseudonyms are used basically to refer to people and their place of origin.

I was particularly aware of the possibility of likely negative consequences of talking on and thus, reminding the widows about their sorry past. For that, I took utmost care during the process of interview; no interview began without obtaining their informed consent. In addition, at the beginning, I always told them about the possible areas I would look for information.

While talking about the difficult issues, I made use of soft native terminologies to refer to them. Similarly, considering the severity of the grievances, I did not approach women who had lost their husbands in recent past. Likewise, for the privacy and thus safety of the informants, I used codes to denote their demographic information and place of origin.

In different phases of the research, I got some appreciative remarks from the informants personally and through WHR and MVA. They told me that they liked the way I had approached them, through the person whom they know and who
was more or less in a similar situation with them. Ms. Shanta Sharma told me that had I not been to her place along with her neighbor, my nice, she would not have agreed to talk with me. I approached some informants for the conversations up to second/third time. They were willing to share their situation repeatedly with me. I found some of them were more open and relaxed during the second/third conversations.

Some of the informants said that they liked the way I talked to them. Some of them were tired of facing interviews. They were sure that it was not an interview but a conversation. Ms. Karki told me that she had not shared her grievances and burden for a long time with anyone. It was not easy to find someone whom she could express her feeling confidently that it would not be used against her or leaked it out. Following the first conversation, she told me that she felt comfortable by articulating her grievances, got relief from those burdens, and experienced relaxed.

2.6 Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted only among conflict-affected widows, so, it may not reflect the situation of widows in general residing in Nepal. Obviously, this study cannot represent the situation of all the conflict-affected people as well. Even among the conflict affected widows, this study deals only with those who were displaced and taking refuge in Kathmandu. The situation of others who were living in their home or had fled to another part of the country may differ, since, people leave for certain area often for specific reasons or people have to live in different circumstances in different places.

Likewise, among the displaced widows in Kathmandu, only Brahmins and Chhetris could be interviewed during this study. The state of other widows who are taking refuge even in Kathmandu may differ from the one I am describing and analyzing here. Thus, although the findings are derived from in-depth exploration, they cannot be generalized.
CHAPTER - THREE
DISPLACEMENT

3.1 Introduction

The widows, who participated in this study, have been compelled to leave their “habitual residence” (Deng 1999; Ibeanu 1999). They thus are rooted out from their socio-cultural and economic resources. More than any other category, civilians have become the innocent victims of the war. They are forced to choose between disastrous alternatives: if they flee, they lose their homes, their livelihoods, and their communities; if they stay, they watch these things being destroyed around them. In addition, as El-nagar (1992) argues, the war has resulted in cultural deprivation as the displaced people lose their sense of identity.

Sometimes, these widows have been displaced along with their family members but in many instances they were compelled to flee as an individual. This chapter deals with the context and causes of displacement, the way these women have experienced displacement, how it has deprived them from using their property and how it has affected their social relationships with their significant others.

There are some factors, which exacerbated these war widows’ displacement. Some factors compelled them in such a way that they could not stay in their habitual residence and consequently moved away. There are some other aspects which persuaded them to come into Kathmandu.

In most cases, it was external political power that made these widows leave their home and community. Often the women were compelled by the very political force that was responsible for the killing of their husband, to leave their home and the community. They had the choice to either leave or face unwanted consequences. Since they had lost their husbands from the same political force,
often without having justifiable reasons, they did not dare to resist such a threat. In such a context, fleeing was the only one option they were left with.

**Case- 1**

I was born in a remote village in an eastern hill district of Nepal. I finished my High School in the area. Ten years ago, when I was eighteen, I defied my parents’ proposal to marry a man twice as old as I was. My parents were angry with me for not marrying such a good candidate, an officer in a Nepalese civil service. However, I chose to have a love marriage with another man from a neighboring village.

My husband was the youngest among his three brothers. Both of his brothers were working with the Nepalese security forces. Because of that, Maoists compelled my husband’s family to leave the village. Following this event, the family had been deprived of using the property in the village. My parent-in-laws went to a town where their first son had a house.

I went to Kathmandu to live with my husband. After two years, we had a son. Until then my husband did not have a good job. He was interested to go to abroad for earning more money. He borrowed a significant amount of money from his relatives and paid in advance to the agent who was supposed to arrange his entry and employment in the United States of America. That agent turned out to be a fraud. He did not arrange for the job. After a year of payment, my husband finally caught him and asked the man to return his money.

Along with a friend, my husband went to the specified place next morning to get back his money. Contrary to what had been agreed, that agent had (mis)informed the security forces implying that a group of
Maoists had asked him for a ransom. When my husband and his friend came there, security forces shot him in his chest and he died on the spot.

After my husband’s death, I went to my brother-in-law’s house for the completion of his funeral. The funeral procedure was completed on the thirteenth day. The next day, my first sister-in-law, the house owner, asked me not to live there because I was younger and charming which might tempt her husband. I felt very hurt. I could not stay there anymore. I now regretted not having accepted an arranged marriage in the traditional way, for I would have conventional and social rights to fight for my privileges in the family and would not have had to flee from home.

In contrast to my first sister-in-law, my second sister-in-law and her husband agreed to let me and my son stay with them, but this did not last for a long. Within twenty days, my second brother-in-law was shot to death in a battle with the Maoists.

People began to gossip—it was because of my misfortune that my sister-in-law with whom I was staying also became widow. However, unlike me my second sister-in-law was allowed to stay in the family. It is because of the pension that my second sister-in-law gets whereas I do not have any pension because my husband was unemployed.

Sometimes, widows are compelled by multiple forces to leave their homes. Karuna Gautam’s life story presented in Case-1 portrays how people in one family are affected in different ways and were ultimately compelled to flee from their home, community and property. In addition to the direct influence of political power, sometimes, they are affected by the macro level social structure.
In the case of Ms. Gautam, because of her defiance to her parents’ wish and by marrying for love, an unconventional form of marriage, she did not have the appropriate authority to fight with her family members for her due share in the family property after the demise of her husband.

Besides directly asking them to leave their homes as illustrated in case-1, some young widows opined that their in-laws attempted to create situations in which they could not live. Their in-laws did not want them to share family property. They were afraid that one day she might marry someone else and leave the family, taking the property with her. To exert pressure to leave home widows were deprived of adequate and nutritious food and clothing, accused of having affairs with other men and of beating their children. In this way, intra-household power relations forced them to move away from the family.

The role of rumor about a potential threat to the rest of the family members, and especially to the widow, is also significant and inevitable. Some displaced widows told me that they heard about the threat through their neighbors and relatives and left their home. Presently, they are not sure whether it was a genuine threat from the perpetrators or not. One of the displaced widows said, some of their neighbors who did not like them might have created such rumors. When she heard the rumor that the Maoists had threatened her family to make them leave the house, she did not have enough strength and courage to verify the threats. Therefore, her family left their village.

In some instances, their husbands were killed in the presence of family members inside their house, whereas, others were killed in their village. In such situations, these women left not only their homes but also their villages. Besides, there were some instances of rumors turning into reality, which forced them not to ignore such rumors. Ms. Rama Gyanwali, a sixty-two years old woman’s story portrays this-
My husband had already heard about a possible attack from the Maoists. He did not pay any attention to such words since he was convinced that he had never committed any offense. However, they killed him brutally at our home. After that incident, I am very much scared. I just do not like to live in that village. When I heard a rumor that they also want to attack me, I left the village immediately. Now, I do not like to return into my village forever.

Sometimes, even if they were not threatened directly by the perpetrators who had killed their husband, family members, including the widows felt afraid of the perpetrators. If a man had been killed because of his social standing then the rest of his family members also felt strong threat for them.

I found that some of the widows had moved out from the area ‘territorializing problems’; relating the problems with the area per se. Once they had left that area, they felt secure. They felt relieved from the burden of feeling unsafe. Expanding the meaning of territory, from the local to the national level, Ms. Bhandari, wants to go out of the country.

The perpetrators have exerted power not only on the deceased but also on the remaining family members. They have tried to affect the deceased and his family in such a way that it would create ongoing terror around the area and across their social networks, thereby making even more people fearful of them. The way murder was committed also threatens them.

Societal pressures resulting from the loss of a husband coerces them to leave the home and the community. People often gossip about a woman after she loses her husband. Usually people talk to a third party about the widows. Sometimes, when they think that she is a helpless and cannot harm them, people talk even in her presence. She has to hear many unwanted and unpleasant things from them.
3.2 Dislocation

Dislocation, in the case of these war widows, has many dimensions and effects. Among them, deprivation from social networks, setting and resources, lack of social circle of like-minded people, living in a paradoxical situation, feeling of guilt for not being able to contribute for the household economy, and living in scarcity have made them feel that there is no respects for their life.

War widows have lived in their respective villages for years. They have not only developed familiarity with the people around them but also have internalized the lifestyle they were leading in their areas. Dislocation from the village has deprived them from all those networks, settings and resources.

At the time of my fieldwork, widows are living in paradoxical situation. They left home along with family members and simultaneously they are still missing village life. They are missing their social circle- relatives, neighbors and friends. On the other hand, they never want to go back to their village because it reminds them of their husband and the time they had spent with him.

Some of these women have found themselves less active and contributing nominally for the sustenance of their family. They are aware that their family has been passing through difficult economic circumstances and they are not able to contribute in this situation. Inability to contribute in such circumstances has increased their miseries. On the other hand, it has become tough for them to pass days in such complex situations. Were they in their village, in such time, they would have talked to their fellow villagers and shared their grievances. In Kathmandu, they cannot have such opportunities. They feel that nobody has any time to hear them here in Kathmandu.

To express their dissatisfaction, these widows are often complaining about various aspects of the goods they consume everyday which are often bought from
the market. They do not like the color, taste and size of the cereals, fruits and vegetables. They also hate to buy these things in advance and store for some subsequent meals.

Their limited familiarity with the process of commodification and associated value system has produced dissatisfaction with new living circumstances. They do not like the pervasiveness of commodification in the urban setting. For instance, in contrast to their idea of water as a free gift of nature, multiplying their miseries, they have to buy it. For that they feel to be cheated by the government, the supplier of water.

Many people visit them. Some of them are their relatives and neighbors whereas others are their children’s friends. The host can never be sure whether they are in a pure stage or not. People can be in impure stage in various situations by doing or not doing some things, for example, by not cleaning (with water) themselves after defecation, drinking alcohol, before taking bath after waking up in the morning and during the first four days of menstruation period of women. Those people will enter directly into their room polluting it, the hosts, and the goods prepared for worshipping gods and/or goddesses. Ms. Khanal regrets for being compelled to live in such condition where she cannot perform regular worships.

Moreover, they do not like the way vegetables are grown in Kathmandu. They believe that local people in Kathmandu put human shit as manure to grow vegetables. Besides worrying about the pollution that it creates, they regard such vegetables as impure to eat. Eating impure things is sinful.

They used to worship village deities when they were in their village. These days they cannot go to their village. So, they are also deprived of worshipping their village deities. Ms. Gyanwali remembers that despite her religiosity she lost her husband. After displacement she has not worshipped her village deity and afraid that some more negative things might happen in the future.
3.3 Deprivation

One of the common practices to impose pressure to the opposing side and/or enemy has been to prohibit them from using their property. Both the Maoists and the security forces have been the cause of displacement of people from their home and property. The Maoists have claimed that they were leading the war as proletariat and it was against the bourgeoisie. To weaken bourgeoisies and their networks, they have chased them from their home, community and the property. On the other side, the security forces have also rooted out many people from their native land, depriving them from using their assets.

In contrary to the claim of these powerful political organizations, most of the widows, I have spoken to, perceive it differently. They think it is due to the jealousy of some of their neighbors and sometimes relatives that they had to leave their property. For that, they blame people whom they know and with whom they have had hostile relations. They go on to claim, it was not because they were rich, crooks or exploiters. In Ms Khanal’s words, they claim that they did not have accumulated property rather Arule Khaeko laeko dekhna nasakera ho- others could not tolerate that they were meeting their basic needs.

Some widows are worried about not being able to fulfill their social obligations because of their displacement. Inability to discharge social obligations, for whatever the reasons, has degraded their prestige. It has increased negative social consequences to both the Maiti and the daughters. Experiences and feelings of Ms. Gyanwali portrays this clearly-

I could not invite both of my daughters when they had a new baby. I could not fulfill the customary duty of inviting Cheli (married daughter and sister) to Maiti for their proper care and nutritive food during post delivery period. I am sure that
my daughters understand my situation. Nevertheless, I have heard that some people are badmouthing us. I feel very bad about this.

Likewise, they have to live in small rented rooms in. They are not free to use their rooms and space in a way they want. Often they have to hear unpleasant words from the proprietor on different matters. This reminds them that they are not living at their home although they have a shelter. In addition to that, they have to live in a congested place, both inside the house and around the locality.

Even if the whole family is not deprived of using the property, sometimes, only those widows are deprived of that. Afraid of sharing property with the widow daughter-in-laws, their in-laws are creating circumstances in such a way that they cannot live in the house. Especially, many young widows left their house after the killing of their husband.

3.4 Alteration in Social Relationships: Widening Suspicions

Most of these widows have come to Kathmandu from a rural setting. Along with and as consequences of the alteration in physical space, this movement has augmented the changes in their social relationships leading to uncertainties and thus suspicions to their settings and the people around them.

Some of them have experienced that people here in Kathmandu, who are richer than they, did insult to them. This insult is reflected in their behavior and looks towards them. Often they have to hear that they are homeless. Nevertheless, these women do not agree with them that they are neither homeless nor property less. Rather, they argue that they have come here because of the external forces.

Bimala Budhathoki’s remarks regarding the people who are living in Kathmandu show her uneasiness to live in a new place along with the strangers-
In comparison to people in our village, people in Kathmandu are more selfish. The latter are indifferent to their fellow neighbors. They are more apprehensive about the immediate benefits and not bothered with cooperation. They do not care about the needy people. They are concerned only for themselves. It is not limited only to urban people but also with those who are from the rural areas and living in the urban settings. The latter have also changed greatly in comparison to their counterparts in their villages.

Their dissatisfaction in urban areas also denotes their nostalgia to their village and the community. These nostalgias are based on the cooperative social relationships, attachment to the locality and subsistence based agricultural life style, respects to the local gods and deities, and memories of local feast and festivals. They have to be away from and deprived of all those charms in their life. They are compelled to leave these habitual practices, intimate people and internalized values. They have left what they have but they have yet to adopt to a new situation. They are in a transition phase. Hardships in transition remind and increase their longing towards the village life.

It is not always possible to trace out the real culprit for the death of their husband. Some of them are suspicious about those people, whom they are already familiar with. Still, they are suspicious that people closer to them might have informed some bad things about her husband and killed him, although, mostly the strangers were in the forefront in killings. Such feeling in their mind compels them to change their behavior towards the suspected people. It also constricts their social circle.

In most of the cases, these widows have recognized some people as responsible for their displacement. They cannot blame these people directly because of lack of overt proofs. Moreover, they cannot afford the direct rivalry to these people because of their weakened social position and declined strength. However, they would consider these responsible people as their enemy.
The influences of powerful bodies, here, either the Maoists or the state, have been manifested in personified forms. They were referring to the personified forms of the political forces that have killed their husband. They prefer to recognize these people in person. Ms. Urmila, whose husband’s murder was later on regretted by the side it has killed, argues that such confession denotes the killings at personal level. Ms. Gautam, whose husband was killed by another side and has regretted later on for that “mistake”, agrees with Urmila.

The widows think the perpetrators must be punished for their misdeeds. Ms. Bishnu Khanal regretted that once she has to see that these culprits are enjoying their life it disturbs her; increases her blood pressure and tension. This makes her feel sorry for not being able to do anything to bring them into justice.

Use of strangers in the forefront to kill people has created the general sense of mistrust among the people and enhanced suspicions towards “others”. Instead of disturbance in the “social connectedness” (Kohut 1984:200; Lee and Robbins 1995; Lee et al. 2001), it has enhanced the gap among the individuals.

Case-2
Mr. Ram Karki was from Kathmandu. He used to work as a lawyer in Dhangadhi, a town in Western Nepal. Along with his two sons and a wife, he was living there decently. Three years ago, instead of taking the flight as usual, he was traveling in a passenger bus to return to Dhangadhi from Kathmandu. He was not aware that, on that day, a fierce battle was going on between the Maoists and the security forces.

The driver stopped the bus once he knew about the battle. The bus stopped there over night. After mid night, the helper of the bus found something wet at the front gate of the bus. He lit the lamp of the bus.
and found that it was coming from the forehead of Mr. Karki. They found that a bullet had entered his forehead and he was dead.

Ms. Sita Karki, his wife, told me that until then she did not know from which side the bullet came. Nor was she interested to know about that. She feels sorry that her husband was killed despite his innocence. She regrets his untimely unnatural death. Moreover, she is sad for not being present at the time of his demise and thus could not offer any help, which he might have needed.

Equipped and constrained by the quality of “socialness” (Collins 1998), people have to interact with many others in different walks of their life. Widening the suspicion, killings in a public place during the course of everyday life, as case-2 portrays, has increased the sense of insecurity among the people and especially among the family members of the deceased.

These widows have been displaced because of the direct/indirect influence of the killing of their husband. It has increased the disturbance in their social connectedness with their close neighbours and relatives. On the other hand, the contexts of displacement have provided ground for the increased suspicions towards the strangers. Moreover, they are dislocated and deprived of from their resources.
CHAPTER - FOUR
LIVING IN WIDOWHOOD

4.1 Pervasiveness of Widowhood

During the ten year long battle between the Maoists and the security forces many men were killed. Besides loosing their lives, their killings have many consequences to their close relatives and family members including their widows. Lived experience of some of these widows is the focus of this chapter.

This chapter deals with different facets of their life affected by the demise of their husband; the normative life style they have to live in, blames for the husband’s untimely demise, increased work burden, deteriorated economic situation, and a shaken social status. Moreover, these widow’s relationships with their significant others, impact of social structure on widowhood and various ways to represent body, life and future of the widows will be dealt on.

4.1.1 Normative Life Style

Among the upper caste women, one’s husband is considered as the crown. Following his death, she looses her most important adornment. Subsequently, she is expected to discard make-up, because whatever she might adorn herself will not bring back her beauty.

Red color is considered as auspicious and a symbol of good luck. Women wear red clothes and red *Tika*. It has to be a part of their everyday life. After the death of a husband, they are not allowed to wear these things forever in their life. For some period after his death, they have to wear white clothes.
Women in Nepal widely accept that red is the symbol of *Suhag*, the luck of having a husband. They are against the practice of wearing reds arguing that it cannot bring their husband back to them. Referring to her *Suhag*, Ms. Bishnu Khanal states-

*My luck has already gone. Red clothes cannot take it back. Wearing reds will not bring satisfaction in my life. My heart is burning everyday and every night. What can I do wearing these clothes?*

While using something as medicines for the face they have to be careful that people would not consider it as make-up. Ms. Bishnu Khanal had some eye problems. She had to use kohl for its treatment. She did not use it during the day. Had she used it during day light, it would have been interpreted as a cosmetic. It is because people believe that, it would brighten her face.

In addition, there are restrictions on what kinds of food they can eat. Widows are not supposed to eat any kind of meat. They have to take more fasting in comparison to *Sadhawa*, a woman whose husband is alive. According to conventional Hindu belief, these acts are considered to have Dharma, the merit. If they adopt these practices then it will help for the betterment of their dead husband in the heaven.

From this study, I have found that there are restrictions on the mobility of these widows. The obvious reason for this is that it is believed that when they move freely they would indulge into sexual relations with another man. Especially the widows who are living with other family members confessed that they are facing these restrictions. They also complained about the gossiping of some of their neighbors and relatives.

Hindus believe that a wife is *Ardhangini* of her husband; half (left) part of his body. Marriage integrates them inseparably. Therefore, living apart from a
husband, a widow is considered as an incomplete being. As they are detached from the complete system they are impure and thus represent danger (Douglas 1966). Their body is dangerousness incarnated: *Alachchhin*—ill fate.

They have experienced that people want to stay away from her *Alachchhin* to protect them. Especially married women are vulnerable to such *Alachchhin*. In relation to this, widows are excluded from active participation in auspicious occasions like marital ceremony. The idea behind this practice is that they might transmit their *Alachchhin* especially to the bride and make her soon widow. Likewise, it is believed that one has not to see a widow at the time of *Sait* (an auspicious moment to set off for a long journey or start some significant work); otherwise he/she will not be successful to accomplish the task he/she is going to do.

Agreeing with Thapa (2005), I would like to conclude that all those restrictions are directed to control women in general and their sexuality in particular. The patriarchal societal structure aims to control these women exercising repressive rules. Depriving them from nutritive food, excessive pressure for fasting and restriction on make ups and wearing attractive clothes are directed towards controlling their body and desire.

### 4.1.2 Blaming the Victims

Among the high caste Hindus, in Nepalese society, marriage is considered not only as a bond between the couples for this life but for seven consecutive lives. A woman is regarded as lucky if she dies before her husband. In case of early death of her husband, she is viewed as unlucky. Moreover, she is blamed for the demise of her husband because such untimely and unnatural death is considered as a “bad death” (Seale and Van der Geest 2004).
According to Hindu ideology, optimum life of a person is one hundred years. Usually, death at the old age--around one hundred years--is perceived as natural. If a person dies because of some chronic/severe illness in which it is clear that there is no possibility of recovery, this is regarded as a natural death. When a person dies before entering into the old age then his/her death is seen as an untimely or premature one. Likewise, if someone dies because of sudden incident like accident, shooting, flood, suicide etc. it is also considered as an unnatural death.

Among the war widows, especially the young ones are surrounded by many miseries. Some of them mentioned the contradictory expectations of other people. If they show a gloomy appearance, non-red dress and undecorated body they are blamed and people would say that she is not bright. On the other hand, if she attempts to wear make up, people would gossip that she might have an affair with someone.

When they think about their husband and become sad and worried, the family members blame her for trying to escape work. At such a time, she would be labeled as a lazy person. Whereas, when she starts to go out, work, talk to people and begin to smile they would blame that she has shown symptoms of Poila Janu, running away with another man. Moreover, they would say that she seems to enjoy her husband’s demise and that she is enjoying freedom after his death.

Case-3

After getting threats from the Maoists, my husband got shelter in a nearby military barracks. He stayed there for two years. Thinking that it would be secure to go out, he left the military barracks. Next day, he went to meet me in my natal home in the nearby village. The following day a group of Maoists came at my Maiti and ordered him to go with them. The Maoists promised that they would not harm him. Therefore, we did not protest their taking him away. After two days, the Maoists
sent us a message that my husband was found guilty on spying and given the death sentence on the very day they had arrested him.

Immediately, my Maiti informed my in-laws about his killing. They blamed me for his demise and accused me that I had informed the Maoists about his arrival in my Maiti. Nonetheless, I continued to stay along with my in-laws. They used pressures to move me out of the home. I was compelled to leave the house with my son. Moreover, I was not given any share in my husband’s property. It was not because my family was poor but because I was a widow and they perceived me as a culprit for that.

Presently, I have to take care of my son on my own. Instead of giving me proper share, they asked me to leave my son with them and go away. I did not like this idea. For me, presently, he is the only reason that I want to be alive.

To get justice and a fair share of the property, I did Samaj Jodne--called an assembly of local elites for justice--against my in-laws. Unfortunately, majority of the elites were with them. I could not get impartiality from them as well. I am frustrated with the local community for their partiality against me. Deprivation from the family property and disappointment with the local people made me leave the village. I came into Kathmandu with the support of my elder sister to look for a job.

As is evident from the narrative of Uma Thapa as mentioned in case-3, sometimes, war widows are accused of direct involvement in her husband’s killing. The context of death—here, place of killing--of her husband also augmented the degree of blames to these widows.
4.1.3 Work Burden

Most of the widows, regardless of their various social standings, have maintained that after the demise of their husband, the burden of work they have to accomplish had increased. It ranges from tasks within the household to tasks outside of it and from a subjective burden to an objective increment.

Most of the widows I have talked with are living with their children. As usual for other Nepalese women, they have to cook food for the family and clean the clothes of their children. Almost all of the widows I spoke to have small kids studying in different grades. They have to take them to the school and bring them back to the home from the school.

In addition, after the demise of their husband, some of the widows were forced to find a job. After completion of all the works at home they have to go to the office. They have to labor hard at their work. Inexperienced to look for jobs and unequipped with education and skills required for office jobs, most of the widows I spoke to were landed with menial jobs which their relatives and friends consider as lower level of work.

Some of those widows who are still living with their in-laws have to work more than those who are living only with their children. They think it is because of their helpless situation. In his absence, taking advantage of her vulnerable situation, she is compelled to work more.

In addition to an objective condition of increment of work burden there are some instances in which these women feel that their work load has increased. In comparison to previous amount of the works, after their displacement, some widows opined that actually the load of work they have to accomplish has reduced significantly because of their displacement from the property. Nonetheless they feel that the burden of work has increased.
These widows are aware that their social situation has increased dissatisfaction in their life. Once you are extremely dissatisfied, argues Ms. Bishnu Khanal, you feel burdened by your work. It is not work *per se* but rather the life situation that makes you feel over burdened.

One of the widows suggested that these days she feels weaker than before. It is not easier to identify the reasons for becoming weaker. This might be the reason that she is feeling over burdened. Therefore, complex situations complicate the possibility of categorizing the factors into objective and subjective typologies.

### 4.1.4 Economic Situation

In losing a husband, in most of the cases, widows loose the family breadwinner. Often unequipped with skills to generate income, these women must also have to take care of other family members. Simultaneously, displaced from their home, they usually cannot rely on family property. For their survival, they have to find other means.

### Case-4

Diwa Thakuri, 25, was from Western Terai in Nepal. She was married to a son of a landlord from the area when she was seventeen. He was the only one son in the family. They were living with his two sisters and his parents. Ms. Diwa was leading a very happy life with him. After two years of marriage, they had one daughter.

He was studying at undergraduate level at the nearby college. Two years ago, a group of Maoists came into their house and wanted to know his whereabouts. Unaware of their intention and not suspicious of any bad things, they let the Maoists meet him. Without saying anything, they brought him at the courtyard and beat him severely. They threatened the neighbors not to take him to the
hospital. In the end, the family members took him to the hospital. He died on the way to the hospital.

When I met her, Ms. Diwa was yet unaware of why they killed him. She was shocked by his murder and felt that she fell down from the sky. She was very much depressed by that incident. She could not stay at her home and lived at her Maiti for two years.

Her parents-in-law had already moved to Kathmandu because of the threat of the Maoists. They had begun to stay in a relative’s house where they had not to pay any rent. She went to them after two years of staying at her Maiti. Earlier, her parents-in-law used to love her as her parents did. This time she found them totally changed. They still blame her Alachchhin as the cause of her husband’s death. They have begun to scold her and shout at her frequently. Sometimes, they beat her. On top of that, following his death, her parents-in-law had secretly transferred the property to their daughters to deprive her of her share in the family property.

Now she is worried about herself and her daughter. Everyday she has to hear that she is Alachchhini. She regrets that she discontinued her studies before completion of her matriculation. Had she completed her matriculation, she would have found a job and started to live alone, in peace, away from the in-laws. She is totally excluded from the day-to-day affair of the family. She is of the opinion that lack of economic resources is the major problem that troubles her everyday.

Some widows, especially young ones, are in economic crisis due to the intra-household unequal distribution of power and resources (Whitehead, 1981 and Young, 1992). Control to resources or simply access to them are determination of how much power is shared by men and women in the household. After loosing a husband, some of the widows are further marginalized in sharing intra-household resources.
The experience of these widows while looking for work and going out to work is generally not pleasant. An experience of Ms. Gautam illustrates this-

*A friend of a relative guaranteed me that he would find me a job. Following this, he revealed the secret that he would be willing only if I would be ready “to go out with him”. I found that he wanted to take undue sexual advantages of me, so, I cut-off the contact with him. Fortunately, later on, I found a job at an NGO.*

Not all the widows are as lucky as she was. After her displacement, Ms. Gautam used to stay with her brother and his family. She did not have problems to meet her ends at least for the time being. Otherwise, she could not have rejected the offer “to go out”. Many displaced widows could not get support even for some time when they have to look for income earning opportunities. Underpayment is another form of exploitation that displaced widows are facing. Ms. Budhathoki’s case shows this clearly-

*After the demise of my husband, I looked for a job for few months. Finally, I got a job as a security guard at a garment company. I am not getting a proper salary in comparison to my male counterparts. I know this very well. Despite this, I have to work there. It is because it will not be easier to find alternatives. Compelled to look after my two kids, I have to stick to the underpaying work.*

*I think this world is full of people who want to take advantage from others’ weaknesses. I told my potential employer about the need of job, thinking that it would help me job hunting process. Fortunately, I got the job. However, he told me that he could not offer me as much salary as my male counterparts were earning. Had not I told him about my situation, later on I realized, I would have gotten the proper salary.*

For various reasons these widows reveal their socio-economic situations to their potential employers. Knowledge of the reality of their situation helps the
employer take undue benefits from them. Therefore, these widows are underpaid for their jobs in comparison to their counterpart colleagues.

Some young widows who are forced to leave their home after the demise of their husband and were not in touch with supporting organizations like WHR could have compromised for their stomach. They are working in cabin/dance restaurants. Often such restaurants are widely known for sexual exploitation of the “waitresses” working there. One of the key informants who is affiliated with an NGO working with displaced people told me that her condition would not have been different had not she been in touch with that organization.

The emerging economic crisis has compelled them to stay away from their basic needs. From the available resources, even if they are in-charge of them, they have to prioritize for their family members and especially to their children. With limited resources, often they have to choose to exclude themselves. In stead of using her money to meet her basic needs, Ms. Uma Thapa prefers to use it to send her two kids to school thinking that with proper education they would be able to come out of this vicious circle of poverty in the future.

Living in poverty and deprived of basic needs, they often have some health problems. Some of them cannot afford nutritive and sufficient food. Because of this, they are loosing their weight. Most of them do not have access to health care services. However, the widows of security forces have such access, which are provided by their husband’s employer.

4.1.5 A Shaken Social Status

The stage of widowhood contains different forms of “stigma” (Goffman 1963:3; Link and Phelan 2001) as discussed in this chapter. To get rid of this, with the initiation of WHR, some widows have started to use the term single women instead.
However, a few widows, including one key informant, maintained that they are not happy with the idea of using the term single woman. They argue that, they would like to maintain their association with their late husband. They are enjoying the privileges related with their husband even after his death. Therefore, they want to be identified as his widow. They think if a woman does not like to associate herself with her late husband, then for her it would be better to get married to someone else.

Most of the widows were leading decent lives in their respective villages. Once they got widowed and displaced, it has been difficult to keep on their prestige in the society. To maintain their prestige, they have to be able to fulfill their social obligations like celebrating festivals, inviting people in different festivals, visiting people when they are invited, maintaining the family properly, providing proper education to their children and so on. All of these require money which often they do not have. They perceive that, such situation has degraded their status in the society.

After the death of a husband, people who were in touch with him began to behave differently to his widow, in a way latter do not like. A man, who always used to call Ms. Sita Karki madam, began to summon by her first name following the demise of her husband. Grown up in an upper middle class family, she considers it as an insult to her.

Death of a man affects the situation of his children. Most of the widows have experienced that people think that their children are helpless and would not be capable to do anything significant in the future. People think one has to have a father to protect, direct and support him/her. Otherwise, a child cannot progress in his/her life. People often tell this in front of their children making the widows feel sorry.
In some cases, following the demise of a husband, their sons are making major household decisions. This is not regretted by the widows, since they consider this a normal development. Nevertheless, I have found that these women have not taken this easily. Therefore, for their son’s upper hand in decision-making, some of them argue that their health situation is causal whereas others consider it due to their lack of knowledge and experience of making decisions.

The widows I talked with perceived that, largely, their status in the society was related with their husband’s standing in it. Loss of a husband has affected and shaken their social status both within the household and outside of it.

4.1.6 Nature of Social Relationships: On the way to Adjustment Process

Losing a husband has affected their relationships with their significant others including the family members. These women have realized that sometimes their attitude towards other people and their life and consequently their behavior has changed significantly. All these emerging situations are creating new grounds for the alterations in their relationships with the people with whom they have to interact in the course of their everyday life.

From the study, it has been revealed that losing a husband curtails one’s social networks, which are based on the social relationships developed through his connections. Bimala Budhathoki’s life story as shown in Case-5 reflects this scenario.

Case-5

I was from central hills of Nepal. When I was fourteen, I left the school to get married. My husband was a junior civil servant. He used to work in a government office at a district headquarters outside Kathmandu valley. Four years ago, when the Maoists attacked the
district headquarters he was killed leaving his parents, our two kids and me.

He was the only one breadwinner in our family. After his death, we were supposed to get some money as compensation from the government. The rift emerged between me and my parent-in-laws over the money. They were claiming that I was young and could leave my children and run away with another man anytime, therefore, they had the right over all money. Whereas, I was arguing that, I loved my kids and there was no question of ignoring them.

We could not settle that dispute among ourselves. We had to seek mediation from our neighbors and relatives. The dispute was settled in such a way that I would get half of the money. Although it was agreed that my parent-in-laws would look after the kids, however, I did not like to leave my children with them. Following this, I did not like to stay in the village and came into Kathmandu along with my two kids.

My parents-in-law and some of their relatives are still angry with me. They accuse me that I am having affairs with a low caste man in Kathmandu. I feel sorry that they are attempting to assassinate my character. Fed up with their attitudes and behavior, these days I do not like to go back to my village.

Loosing a husband is not only to loose love and care of him but also that of other family members. As case-4 shows, after the demise of her husband, her relationship with her in-laws also breaks down. Dispute over the property has been the major factors for deteriorating relationships with the family members. In-laws do not like widows to be in-charge of the property which she is to inherit from her husband’s share. Instead of providing support, family members blame her and are suspicious of her.
Many widows have experienced that altered attitudes and behavior of the in-laws affected negatively in their adjustment process. Some informants told me that, their in-laws have begun to speak with them in irritation without any reasons. This was the major source of their anxiety. Similarly, contrary to their expectations, the in-laws are creating obstacles to them.

Likewise, some of them have undergone mood changes after loosing their husband which had affected their social relationships. Ms. Shanta Sharma is aware of her negative mood that had developed after her husband’s death and is increasing. People do not understand her altered behavior and they only react to that. She feels sorry that she cannot help stopping irritation.

In case these widows suspect specific people, especially their relatives, for the demise of their husband, then they do not like to contact them anymore. However, they cannot accuse them explicitly since they do not have overt proof. These widows reach to their conclusion on the basis of their indifference to their husband’s death. Sometimes, the widows blame that they celebrated their husband’s death.

Most of these widows are tired of hearing back-biting. It is not only their in-laws but also many other people who would like to do that. What Ms. Budhathoki reiterates, points to the severity of disturbed “social connectedness” (Kohut 1984:200; Lee and Robbins 1995; Lee et al. 2001) –

One has not to look for them they come across you every time. They are around one. I have found that most of those who hate widows are women. I still wonder why there are many women against other women. As a woman, you can have harmonious relations only with your mother.

It was not only Ms. Budhathoki, who opined that other women are against them in different walks of their life. Those women can be in-laws or colleague in the work
place. It hurts them a lot that women do not understand their sufferings. Instead of supporting, they assassinate their character and create barriers on their way. Universalizing their nature of relation with other women, some widows argued that as a woman you can have harmonious relations only with one woman, the mother.

Some of the widows have experienced that along with their deteriorating economic situation, they have experienced a curtailment in their social relations. Once people know that there is no one in the family to make money, they want to stay away from you. Her elder sister-in-law did not allow Ms. Gautam to stay at her home whereas another sister-in-law, who was getting her late husband’s pension, was welcomed in the family.

Contexts of death have also altered their attitudes and behaviors towards their family members and neighbors. A case of Ms. Srijana portrays disturbances in her social connectedness with her in-law:

_The Maoists thinking that he was his younger brother killed my husband. Later on, they apologized for that “mistake”. Whenever, I see that brother-in-law, I think he was guilty for the death of my husband. Besides Maoists, I cannot forgive him for my husband’s death. I do not like to speak with that brother-in-law at all._

Often, their husbands were killed brutally by the perpetrators in the middle of the village. They were expecting some kinds of support from the neighbors at that time. Afraid of the perpetrators, no villagers could visit to help them. Such incidence creates deep frustrations in their mind towards their fellow neighbors.

There is a saying and practice in different locality that people consider each other as companion to both in time of miseries and in time of joys. This conflict has altered this scenario drastically. Fellow neighbors could not offer any kinds of help to them because they were frightened of the perpetrators. They feel guilty
that even they could not dare to take the victims to the hospitals because of the direct threat from the perpetrators. This has severely affected social connectedness at the micro level of the society.

They are getting support from their children who are working and running the household. Regardless of their age, children are assuring their mother that they would look after her in the future. They feel glad and relaxed when their consoling and promising kids are very small. Despite their willingness, married daughters are less likely to support their mothers unless the mother has bitter relationships with her son or she does not have a son at all. Ms. Adhikari, who lives along with her daughter, told me that her son was good but she could not stay with her daughter-in-law. She found shelter at her daughter’s home.

Likewise, usually, their *Maiti* provide them monetary support and assure them for further support in the future as well. These widows have found that their parents and brothers are quite supportive to them. Whenever their relationship with the *Maiti* gets into trouble, for that, often they blame their brother’s wife. However, in case of unconventional form of marriage they are getting less support even from their *Maiti*.

Friends of these widows are found to have contributed positively to the process of their adjustment in their widowhood. Some of them contact the widows regularly. All widows are quite supportive to them. They do help them in different ways. While talking to widows at WHR, I came to realize that they share their grievances with each-other. Whereas, they have found that *Sdhawa* women are not supportive to them. It seems they have mixed experience with their female friends. They are hesitant to meet their male friends unless they are their relatives thinking that it would provide grounds for the assassination of their character.

The relationships of these widows with their relatives and communities are deeply disturbed and that from the viewpoint of the widows the negative attitudes of the
community, their neighbours and relatives are the cause of this. People struggling to feel “social connectedness” (Kohut 1984:200; Lee and Robbins 1995; Lee et al. 2001), as Lee and Robbins (1995) argue, begins to feel different and distant from other people. Somehow, these widows are relating themselves with their significant others but are getting frustrated and disappointed by the failure of others to understand them.

There are some instances of “enacted stigma” (Scrambler & Hopkins 1986; Jacoby 1994) in which they are restricted to participate in religious and public occasions. On top of that the “felt stigma” (ibid.) of being shameful on one’s widowhood and over concerned with what people will think towards them have affected their ideas and behaviours with other people around them.

The external political forces and their personified manifestation have negatively influenced mutual supporting practice at the local level. This might have a long-run impact in the society at large leading to the situation of indifference to the fellow people. It has also circumscribed the social nature of life events which used to assist in the healing process of tragic events. Increasing the plights of the people, they have been reduced, in many cases, to family concerns only.

The ten years long conflict has created, deepened and exposed the “social cleavages within the society” (Warren 1993:1). It has severely affected the social connectedness in Nepalese society. Stigma related to widowhood and the shame of being a widow has widened the gap between the widows and their significant others.

4.2 Social Structure and Widowhood

Patriarchal social structure, the most dominant structure in Nepal at the micro level, has shaped women’s life and their bodies in different ways. On the one hand, like other members of the society, widows have to mould themselves
following the expectations of the society. On the other hand, there is resistance for widows when it comes to the question of her privilege as an *Ardhangini* of her late husband.

In Nepalese society, as per patriarchal ideology, women are considered *Abala*, the fair sex, thus, they need protection from their male counterparts in different stages in their life. When they are young, they have to be protected by their father. After getting married, their husband should be the protector. During their old age, their son has to protect them. Most of the young widows, thus, are undergoing the situation of insecurity because of the demise of their husband.

To a certain extent, early marriage of a girl child is also responsible for their presently miserable situation. Most of the widows were saying that after loosing their husband, the major problem they had to face was the economic crisis. Earlier, they were completely dependent on their husband for their survival. After his demise, in most of the cases, there is no one to support her. Neither can she go out to work, because she is married earlier and had not acquired some education and/skills.

Various social and cultural factors have been found responsible for the early marriage (Thapa 1996) of these women. Some of them were married earlier because their parents were worried that if they were not married on time, they might run a way with someone and their honor in the society would diminish. Likewise, although this idea is declining rapidly these days, some of the widows were married before their first menstruation thinking that in this way by gaining *Dharma* their parents would be able to go in the heaven. Others were compelled to marry out their daughters because of their poor economic situation; to reduce the number of mouths to be fed.

Discriminatory practices against widows, as cultural patterns, as Geertz (1973:93) opines, function both as “model for” and “model of” in the society.
Discriminations against women have been institutionalized in Nepalese society. It guides widows how they have to live in the society as its members. For other people, it guides how to behave with widows. Therefore, it is a model for them to live in the society. On the other hand, prevalent discriminations against widows function as “models of” the high caste people in Nepalese society. They are based upon the practices, ideas and attitudes towards the women and especially towards the widows among high caste people in Nepal. Together, these two models are creating the continuation of vicious circle of discrimination against the widows.

The war widows have to bear most of the miseries as women. Therefore, “we need to see widows not as a category in themselves, but as embodying a stage in most women’s life cycle—a stage which is often coterminous with old age (Agarwal 1998:1).

4.3 Body Metaphors, Perception Towards Life and Future

With lived experience of living in widowhood, these widows have construed their “social body” (Turner 1995). They use different metaphors to reflect their situation and present their image which they have perceived as reality. Metaphors configure how we perceive, how we think and what we do (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) and then ultimately affecting our life and the future. Thus, as Van der Geest and White (1989) opine, metaphors are useful to grasp “reality” and to see the world in a certain way.

Immediately after the demise of a husband, a woman will feel as if the most important and central aspect of herself has gone and what is left and thus life itself is meaningless and irrelevant (Parkes 1972; Parkes and Weiss 1983). This is confirmed by the widows I spoke to. Most of the widows felt that after the death of their husband their life has become worthless, incomplete and unlucky. Therefore, most of them had wanted to die.
They felt that as if they had been cast down away from the sky or had rolled down from the hill. They have been widely using the metaphor “falling down”, to elaborate their experience of loosing a husband. It denotes the process and consequences of widowhood they have experienced. As a process, it indicates the short span of time in which they became widow. Whereas, consequentially, it refers to the baseless stage one has to live in after loosing a husband and the feeling of broken heart.

Most of the widows think that they have lost everything in their life in the form of their husband. Their life became empty. Referring to their body and pointing towards its uselessness, they claimed they are left as Mudho, a huge piece of unused/useless wood. By using this metaphor, they were comparing their body with dead things.

In Nepalese society, people in general use this metaphor to denote a body, which have not been used in a way as they have wished. With the use of this metaphor, they are pointing to the need of meaningful life. For them, life is not only absence of death rather it should be meaningful and with quality.

Grown up in agro-pastoral society, sometimes these widows compare their strength with that of animals without horns--Sing Nabhaeko Janawar Ra Logne Nabhaeko Aaimai Ustai Ho--a woman without a husband is equal to an animal without horns. Widows are considered as weak as hornless animals.

Some widows compare their life with that of Bharkhako Bhel- the surged floods in the rainy season. Their life was moving smoothly. Along with the demise of their husband, unexpected changes flooded into their life suddenly. Most of the young widows who were married recently and their husband was in search of employment or about to have stable source of income opined that their “life has been destroyed before getting started”. They have experienced and witnessed that
their life situation has gone beyond their control. They are uncertain about how it will end.

Moving ahead from the rests, some others argued that presently they are “living as the dead”. They cannot consider their life, at present, better than that of a dead body. Ms. Karuna Gautam went on to claim that, physically they are alive but in essence, they are dead because of the hatred towards them. The political forces, the powerful bodies, have thrown them into a situation in which they are comparing themselves with dead body.

Unnatural, untime and unexpected events in life compels them think that life depends not on their choice and planning but upon the forces outside them. Therefore, whatever comes in their life they would accept it. Over the passage of time, they began to feel that they will remain alive. It is not for enjoying their life but for the sake of their children. Moreover, they think that they cannot differentiate between their life and the future of their children.

They link their children’s future, presently with their education and later on with the employment possibility. One needs to have  

3 Aafnumanchhe (Bista 1991) to get a job. Since they do not have any Aafnumanchhe in power, they think it will be difficult for their children to get employment. In this way, they are not assured about the future of their children as well.

Somehow, they think, they will manage at present when they are physically capable to work. However, they live in paradox about their future. Despite their efforts for their children, they are not sure whether they will get proper care from the latter or not.

Some of the widows, especially from the lower economic class, were unable to meet their everyday needs even when their husbands were alive. After his demise,  

3 Own people who are supposed to cooperate, coordinate and uplift when needed.
the degree of miseries has increased to them. Ms. Gyanwali whose family was
grown up in poverty opined that when they just had completed educating children
and were waiting for the good days then the disaster came in to her life.

Living in crisis and passing through the grievances, however, these widows
expect some smoothness in their everyday life. They want to be able to live on
their own. Furthermore, they want to have a decent life which they used to lead
when they were in their home and community with their husband.
CHAPTER - FIVE
COPING STRATEGIES

5.1 Introduction

These widows have realized that they are not capable enough to change the world in a way they want it to be. Instead, they have begun to transform themselves as per the demand of the circumstances, within the permissible limit of the society. In this process, they have profoundly remade their everyday life.

After the death of their husband, they do not consider that they have got this survival situation as granted in life. To maintain this, they have used various agencies and mechanisms. Either they have invented these strategies on the basis of their experience or they have used them for the first time in their life to adjust to their altered situation.

5.2 Alterations in Life Style: Expanded Social Sphere

When their husbands were alive, they were dependent on them in many respects, although they were doing various jobs at household level. That dependence on their husband had created difficulties after his death. Realizing its consequences, they decided not to be dependent anymore to anyone.

They have started to come into the public sphere, challenging the age long practice of confining themselves in the private domain. They have begun to go out of their households. Earlier they were not thinking of going outside their closed boundary. They were not concerned about what was going on around. Presently, some of them are becoming more active and dynamic.
For many things, they have to go outside frequently. Constrained by the social circumstances, they feel insecure to go out. However, they think there is no problem to go out during the day and public places. Whenever, they have to meet people they arrange it in public places. Ms. Urmila Tiwari, who preferred to meet me at the play-ground of her daughter’s school, told that public places are safer than any private places to meet strangers, where, if needed one can ask people for help. Likewise, they do not go outside after the day break even in highly demanding context.

Learning computer skills and English, the symbol of modernism and advancement, has also improved their status and enhanced their mobility. Earlier, Ms. Diwa Thakuri’s mother-in-law did not allow her to go out. Later on, when she was informed by an NGO personnel that she would learn some computer skills and English language then she allowed her daughter-in-law to go out.

Looking back, currently, most of them realize that earlier they were not concerned even about their future and life. They had accepted their life as granted. They rarely thought that it was their concern. Rather, they used to think that it was their husband’s concern. Regardless of their socio-economic situation, they had some sorts of sense of security while living with their husband. Once they have been shocked by the demise of their husband then they realized the need of thinking about themselves and the future.

Along with the increment in the participation in wider areas, they have also become more talkative. They have realized that one has to be able to express their ideas and feelings to get things done. They came to know that talking to many people is also not enough rather it is essential to talk to people in strong voice.

These widows have undergone grief over the years. Such grief has caused them headache, burning of stomach and heart pain. They “articulate grief through the body” (Das 1997:68), in which as Desjerlais (1992:123) argues, it is transformed
into pains that clings into different parts of the body. Most of the widows are saying that when they have grievances then they need to share them with someone before getting pain in different parts of the body. To get relief from such disturbances they have to find some reliable persons whom they could share their grievances.

It is difficult to find people to share their miseries. People do not have time and patience to listen them. Even if they find someone to hear them, they are not sure that whether the person would use that information against her not. WHR has provided them a platform to meet many widows who are also suffering from loosing their husband and having consequent traumas.

Some of these widows are living in the same area with other displaced widows and their relatives. It has helped them to share their joys and grievances. They want to enter into the network of people with whom they can get support in the course of their everyday life, for that they choose particular locality to stay.

Confirming the saying of widows I have talked to, key informants from WHR told me that the fundamental logic behind its formation was to find the opportunity to share grievances with like minded people. When I was there at WHR on the Second International Widow Day on Friday, 23rd June 2006, one of the common things that I have heard from the speakers was that it had provided them platform to know each other and share their miseries.

From my observation and conversations with widows in their various contexts, I have found that all of them have learnt “to make the loss that has occurred public and utterable” (Langer 1991:79). The process of making loss public as a social action has crucial social functions; it shows that they are affected and concerned with it. It also helps them to get social recognition of their love towards their husband.
Uttering loss in public among like minded people facilitates the healing process. Through this, as Langer opines (ibid) “grief is objectified” in the form of social problem. Ultimately, this opens up the ways for possible support and assurance. Some of them are able to find job through their networks after sharing the necessity of employment.

Presently they are concerned with every aspect of their life. It is another fundamental change they have adapted, after the demise of their husband. Ms. Sita Karki’s remarks on this elaborates the situation-

*Earlier, I was concerned only with certain aspects in social life, which were considered as feminine domain. My husband was responsible for the rests. Following his demise, I had no choice but to pay attention in other aspects as well. Actually, I have taken rebirth after his death.*

Likewise, some of them claimed that these days they have become courageous and are ready to accept, bear and handle whatever comes on their way. They have experienced the greatest tragedy in their life. Successful outlet through that tragedy has given them such bravery. Nonetheless, they have not become courageous overnight. Ms. Gautam’s experience portrays it- “I have had limited choices. Either die or bear and endure. I choose the latter one”.

Earlier they were not resisting any insults thinking that they were not in a good position to tackle with other people. It was not because they were not offended rather it was a conscious process of “resistance through silence” (Abu-Lughod 1990). But when they realized that tolerance is not the remedy to repeated offense then they have begun to be aggressive. Almost all of them, regardless of their age and social standing, expressed that after loosing their husband they have become aggressive, intolerant and quarrelsome. Frustration of loosing a husband fueled with their experience of humiliation has forced them to become like that.
Interestingly, once they have begun to protest, they have found that people have become hesitant to humiliate them.

5.3 Not Remembering

All of the widows I have talked with maintained that it is just impossible to forget the incidence of his killing and the memories with the husband. But if they keep on remembering, then it would disturb and upset them deeply. For that they have devised their own way of coping mechanism-not remembering.

The idea of not remembering is that one cannot completely give up and delete what had happened to beloved one and the kind of disasters has it brought in her life. One cannot delete/forget them absolutely from her/his hard disk memory rather what one can do is not to remember it frequently. I would like to use the term and concept not remembering instead of “active forgetting” (Nietzsche 1983; Anderson 2001). The term “active forgetting” conveys as if people do attempt and can forget what has happened to them. However, in reality, so far I have been able to inquire with these widows, neither have they thought of forgetting nor can they do it. Only they can attempt to do not remembering.

Likewise, based on a cultural practice, family members cannot forget the dead person. Every year, on the death anniversary, family members have to perform a ritual called Shraddha\(^4\). Through this ritual they remember him/her. The performance of Shraddha is obligatory for both cultural and social reasons. To support the departed soul on its journey to the heaven they have to do this. On the other hand, inability to fulfill this is looked upon by the significant others who are aware of this.

\(^4\) In performance of Shraddha, they have to be offered a ball of rice. This practice goes for up to three generations.
They have devised various mechanisms for *not remembering*. One of the widely used mechanisms was to talk with people. For that, consciously, they are increasing the amount of conversations with other people. To forget, the issue of the chat should be anything other than the incident of his demise or about him.

They have learnt this technique of *not remembering* on their own. For that, they think *(Afno) Chitta (Aafaile) Bujhaunu*--self-convincing-- is the best way. They have adopted self-convincing mechanism thinking that their remembrance will not get him back to the life. Once they realized this over the years, it was easier for them to practice *not remembering*. To convince oneself one has to look towards others who are also in similar condition. Once she realizes that it is not her personal problem then she can convince herself.

They know that people tend to assume whatever has happened to them is the biggest problem. People are inclined to overlook other’s situation. It could be because people know only the surface reality of other’s situation but not the under current going on within themselves. Understanding and experience of this makes them feel that others could be in the similar situation and that everyone is undergoing some kinds of sufferings. It helps the widows to universalize and naturalize the sufferings and accept their inevitability. Such realization ultimately encourages them not to pay too much attention towards the sufferings and their causes and facilitate the process of *not remembering*.

Other widows like to watch television to divert their attention from remembering. Besides, they spend their time with their children. While playing with one’s own kids instead of remembering the past they would like to dream about the future. They think about their kids’ studies and life. Some of the kids who are aware of their mother’s situation also console them assuring that they will take care of her in the future.
However, the process of not remembering is full of obstacles. They come from different sources emerging in the course of their everyday life. They attempt to tackle with these situations in many ways. Failure to tackle such situations reminds them their husband. Ms. Urmila Tiwari’s story exemplifies the situation in which they cannot forget their husband:

_Often we have to face food scarcity in our house of four persons. When there is no rice to feed my daughters my elder daughters are ready to sleep without eating. But the younger daughter, who is three now, cries for food. In such a time, I cannot not help myself remembering my husband who used to earn for our living._

### 5.4 Challenging the Normative Patterns

Widows in Nepal have begun to challenge the age long ideologies, values and practices which have constantly provided basis for their discrimination. They are challenging these normative patterns sometimes personally at the micro level and often collectively. They have begun to challenge the dress code and especially prohibition to wear red clothes. It has provided ground for further discrimination and sufferings.

### Case -6

In October 2001, WHR has initiated “red color movement” campaign from Bardia, a far Western Terai District in Nepal. To increase its significance and symbolic value in Nepalese society, they commenced it from Dashain, the greatest Nepalese festival when people wear Red Tika from their seniors.

To the surprise of the organizers, many widows from around the area came there. Almost all of those widows were accompanied by their family members. Those widows got red Tika and red clothes from their
senior family members. For their acceptance in the family, WHR had initiated this program in such a way.

Over the last five years, this movement had reached every corner of the country. It had become so popular that many I/NGOs who are working for women, have also started to move forward with this campaign.

Such collective actions have threatened the patriarchal society and its associated values which have restricted women to possess their body. It had raised enthusiasm among the widows. “When I wear non-red clothes thinking that I have not to wear red clothes it always reminds me about the demise of my husband”, says a key informant whose husband died fifteen years ago while talking about dress pattern and make-ups.

Some of the young widows have experienced unwanted attention, discrimination, isolation and insecurity. Once they realized that it is because of their non-red dresses they have started to wear red clothes and red Tika. They did it because they do not like to be identified on the street as a widow and discriminated on that basis.

Some of them have begun to use red clothes and Tika very strategically. They wear red clothes and Tika when they are in Kathmandu and other places where there is no one who identifies their situation. Whereas, when visiting to their Maiti and in-laws, they still wear non-reds. On the one hand they do not want to hurt their significant others and on the other hand they want to maintain their decent status in the society where they live.

Those widows who were wearing red clothes and doing make up argue that they have not got these dresses and make-up after getting married. They have started wearing them from their childhood. Therefore, for them, it is not logical to give
up all those things. However, they are not wearing any kinds of make-up, which they have started after getting married.

5.5 Learning New Skills

After loosing their husband, they wandered into many places and requested various people for jobs. They were disappointed to know that they do not possess proper skills to get a job. Then, they have realized that it is essential to have adequate skills. They found that unskilled jobs not only pay insufficient for their survival but also there are numerous insecurities in unskilled jobs. Moreover, to maintain their dignity in the society they cannot do menial jobs which will degrade their status.

Some NGOs are providing them skill development trainings in different fields. Those widows who have attended high school education are learning basic computer operation skills and English language. They are learning these things considering the demand of the job market and advice of these NGOs. During such training period, they get some financial support as well. Other widows, who are illiterate or who have not completed their high school education, are learning different skills like driving, sewing and cutting, beautician training and so on, which do not require formal education or knowledge of reading and writing.

5.6 Weapons of the Weak: Safest Ways of Releasing Grievances

These widows have learnt to formulate effective means of adaptation to cope with some situations and behavior of people. Aware of their social circumstances, they have chosen various ways. They have used different kinds of strategies as per the situation in such a way that they will not create further problems in their life.

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5 Upper caste married Hindu women wear vermillion powder on Siundo (the parting of their head) and Pote (a kind of beads) on their neck.
Over the years, they have realized that they can tackle only some problems in their life, but not all. For those problems, which they can tackle, they are trying their best whereas for others they have begun to handle them differently. In fact, they have devised “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985) to handle such problems.

5.6.1 Avoidance

I have found that the weapon of avoidance attempts to tackle with some aspects of ‘body politic’, which influences their life situation. By avoiding some powerful exertion, they are creating their own ‘perceptual world’, which is safe from those who want to harm them in many ways. In their perceptual world, they reject the existence of perpetrators who harm them or are attempting to harm them.

They have been hurt by the behavior of many people who did back biting and their character assassination. Although they hear those things from other people in their circle but they did not protest these perpetrators. When they assess that the particular person is against them they avoid talking to, contacting, meeting and listening to that person in stead of debating. They think they do not have courage and social sympathy to make that person not say anything wrong to them.

To avoid hearing what people say about killing of the husband and its aftermath they left their community and went to Kathmandu. Once they are in Kathmandu, they have not to hear anything directly from these people. However, they hear something through others time and again which they can easily ignore questioning its reliability.

Living in a big city has some advantages which they cannot acquire otherwise. One can hide her/his miseries from the relatives and the earlier neighbors. On the other hand, once they are in a big city, they can do even menial jobs which they would not have done in the area where there would be people who know them.
Some of them have adopted displacement as a coping strategy. By leaving such places they feel safe both at the objective and at the subjective level. Objectively, in the new place, the chances of availability of perpetrators whom they often identify in personified forms, is null or at least they can hide themselves in urban anonymity. On the other hand, territorializing the problems, they feel safe and relieved by leaving the place where their husband was assassinated.

5.6.2 Privacy

Knowing that people will insult them, some of the widows who are not living around their circle have not told the people, living around the area, that they are widows. They can hide their identity easily among the people whom they are strangers. Through this means they could save themselves from different kinds of discriminations practiced against widows. They are maintaining privacy consciously to achieve some goals.

To maintain their secrecy, they have not altered their overt life styles, e.g. dress patterns, which might denote that they are widows. Living in a big city like Kathmandu, provides them protection through urban anonymity in which their identity is not revealed to everyone. In urban anonymity, they find a “form of secrecy as a resistance” (Abu-Lughod 1990) against the oppressive social structure, which helps them cope with the present circumstances.

Once people know that they are widows, then these widows are in trouble. Many people insult them. On top of that, they feel insecurity. These widows argue that when people know that there is no one to protect her; they might attempt to harm her. By harm, they were referring to sexual violence. Basically, widows in urban areas are vulnerable to sexual violence. Men tease them, attempt to touch them unnecessarily, and sometimes even they propose abruptly for sexual relation. Especially, young widows feel unsafe to sexual violence.
They have realized that it is not a good idea to complain about their life situation to everyone. They have found very few people are sympathetic to them and rarely anyone will be willing to assist them. Instead of getting sympathy, by telling their feelings, they think, only others will know about their situation which ultimately could be harmful for themselves. Not to provide others any room to take undue advantages of their situation they do not share things with many people. For that living in a big city also supports through urban anonymity.

For the sake of privacy, sometimes, even they are ready to lie to people. Often some of them do not tell people about the real causes of death of their husband. Usually they say that it was because of an accident. Saying the reality that their husband was killed during the conflict, they think, might create problems from the side of perpetrators. Therefore, they would construct stories in such a way that it portrays the incident as if it was a natural one. Usually, they maintain consistency while telling such stories to people.

5.6.3 Diary Maintenance

Some of the widows have told me that they have started writing some matters regularly. Basically, they write some unpleasant things, which are said against them. To avoid increasing tensions and headache, they wanted to express their feelings in such secret form.

Maintaining a diary provides them the opportunity to express their feelings safely. It has numerous advantages over telling the story to someone. One has not to be afraid of whether the counterpart would like it or not. Moreover, they have not to be anxious that that information, some of which could be their weaknesses, will not be used against them in the future. In this way, they have developed diary maintenance as a “form of secrecy for resistance” (Abu-Lughod 1990) against the unfavorable oppressive social context.
They want to remember some things with context and want to remind their children. Whenever, they have to convince their children for the hard work often they show some pages from the diary. They are sure that it has inspired their children. It also serves as a tool to control them. Ms. Karki said that those writings inspire to move forward not only to herself but also to her sons. She is doing this for privacy, documentation and security from exposure/leakage.

One of the informants said that she wants to make such ideas public. She cannot confine them inside herself. Maintenance of a diary is adaptive also in a sense that these documented ideas will not be made public at present but may be only in the future. Even if people will know in the future, it will not harm them, as it can do at present.

5.6.4 Belief in Gods

Most of these widows were annoyed with the god/goddess that their husbands were killed despite their innocence. They believe that the gods should punish the perpetrators. In contrast, they have seen that these perpetrators are not punished. Neither are the widows in a position to punish them. In response to that, they gave up worshipping the particular god/goddess whom they used to worship earlier. By giving up worshipping for their incompetence to save her husband, at symbolic level, they are taking revenge to the god/goddess and through them to the perpetrators as well.

Already they have lost their intimate partner whom they could have shared their grievances. After giving up worshipping that particular god/goddess, it is hard for them to share their grievances. To remedy this, they started to worship other gods/goddesses. In addition, visiting temples to worship has given them opportunity to meet different people in many ways. Temple visit is socially accepted and usually nobody would make backbiting for this mobility.
Sometimes they relate their husband’s killing with their fate. Considering his innocence, they could not find any other logic for his demise. While blaming their fate, they are also denying the power of those “powerful bodies” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1998), the two opposing political forces; it is not due to powerful bodies but because of their misfortune that they had lost their husband.

Most of the widows think one has to lose his/her beloved ones because of his/her wrong planetary situation. Planetary situation which determines one’s luck, they know that, is not under their control. Ms. Sita Karki reiterates that her husband tried to came home by bus in stead of by plane. It is the matter of bad luck that there was a battle on the very night between the Maoists and the military on his way to home. By chance he was shot on his forehead. All these circumstances of traveling by bus, battle on the way, and misfiring to him instead of anyone else and at his forehead, for her, denote that it is the matter of fate.

Unnatural, mistiming and unpredicted death of a husband forces them to believe that life depends not upon their choice and planning rather upon the forces outside them, luck and on the wish of the god. In this way, linking personal problems with supernatural forces helps them in the process of healing that what had happened was inevitable beyond their control and not due to their or their husband’s faults.
CHAPTER SIX
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

Based on the above-mentioned analysis, I have reached some conclusions, which I would like to present as a summary of findings. I think these recommendations will be helpful for organizations/people who are involved in the academia and in providing support to the people living in a (post) war situation.

6.2 Summary of Findings

I found that these widows are directly affected by the perpetrators who have used various means to make them leave their habitual residence. Increasing the sufferings of these widows, killing of their husband has provided the ground to open up cleavages at different levels in the society.

Their displacement has often resulted from the loss of a husband. Besides this, some other factors like looking for security and employment opportunity, avoidance of mental stress of staying at home, the changed attitudes and behavior of the family and the wish to lead an independent life are the prominent causes of their leaving the home and the community. They were compelled to leave the home; however, they have chosen to come into Kathmandu considering various factors.

For them widowhood means loosing many things in their life. Once a woman becomes a widow, she has to struggle hard in her life in an unprecedented way. In most of the cases, it has been found that widowhood is a major problem than that of displacement; they may be able to return to their home but they will not get him back forever. Widowhood is the beginning of economic, social and
psychological problems. These facets of their life are closely intertwined with each other.

Not all displaced widows are living in similar conditions; their situation varies as per their economic condition, age, status in the family (Mother or daughter-in-law) and previous dependence to the husband. Elder widows are found to be worried more for their children and especially about their employment whereas young widows are affected by and concerned more about fair share in the family property, employment at present and about the future of their kids.

Living in displacement and widowhood has exacerbated disturbances in the social connectedness at micro level in the society. They feel more isolated, and neglected from their significant others. Existing enacted stigma towards widowhood and the felt stigma of these widows are responsible for the weakened social connectedness.

It has been revealed that events, even terrible events are given meaning within the context of people’s daily lives. Although the macro level political cleavages were the major cause of their problem but people tend to understand them and interpret them in their context. Micro-factors, therefore, might be considered much more important than the macro-factors that we can discern.

Their health situations have been found to be affected in different ways. Transformation of grief into pain that has clung into their body has been their common situation.

Survival in such sufferings has not been granted to them; they have devised various mechanisms to cope with the altered situation. Their coping mechanisms seem to be carefully selected considering their circumstances. They are coping basically individually, collectively and sometimes also with the help of the third parties. Most of the widows opined that they are aware of the influence of their
emotional status on their mental health and social well-being. Most of their coping strategies were thus directed towards maintaining emotional balance and remaking everyday life.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the study, I would like to make some recommendations.

6.3.1 Recommendations to the Government

◊ Most of these widows and their family members are currently in economic crisis. There is an urgent need to make provision of employment opportunities to the widows and/or their children.

◊ Displaced people should be repatriated to their habitual residence and reestablished in their community by returning their land and property. Identifying their present economic need, they should be provided with some money to restart and normalize their living.

◊ Widows want proper recognition of their husband’s identity during the post-conflict situation. Recognition of their voice could be crucial to maintain peace and order in the post battle situation. On the other hand, it will console them and will be helpful in the healing process. Otherwise, the feeling of revenge could emerge which could be counter productive to the peace process and may engulf into the vicious circle of conflict.

◊ Considering the context of displacement, it seems there are some other conflict affected people in their respective areas who might have been unable to move out. Government has to find them, investigate their present situation and provide them proper support.
While providing support to these displaced widows and their family members, the government should pay adequate attention to the intra-household dynamics. There could be unfair power relation within the household which should be assessed and provided support in such a way that all the dependents will get justice.

6.3.2 Recommendations to Civil Society and I/NGOs

◊ Facilitate the government on the returning process of displaced people.

◊ Make these widows aware of different laws, which are relevant to their everyday life as a woman, consumer and worker.

◊ Provide them with appropriate skill development trainings which will be helpful to earn their livelihood. Before starting any skill development training they should better understand the perspectives of widows about their situation and expectations. For that, considerations of locally available resources and the situation of market could be helpful. Only a culture friendly, socially acceptable and economically viable program can be helpful to them.

◊ Most of the widows are suffering from post-traumatic stresses. NGOs could help their healing process through counseling and other appropriate means.

6.3.3 Recommendations to the Community

◊ Displaced widows and their family members should be welcomed into their respective communities without any prejudices. They should not be humiliated and insulted for what had happened to them.
◊ Local community could provide some support to the returnees as per its capability and the need of the latter. This will help to revitalize the social harmony and social connectedness among the people.

◊ Most of the widows are young. If they want to get married again, society should not restrict it, rather they should encourage them for that.

6.4 Directions for Further Research

In this study, I have explored and analyzed the lived experiences of war widows displaced in Kathmandu; how their life situation has been affected by the conflict mainly due to displacement and loosing a husband. Strategies devised to adapt in such situation by these widows are another facet that I have tried to explore in this study.

As a cumulative process, the following elements could be taken into consideration, while carrying future research.

1. This research is limited to a certain segment of the displaced people, namely to the upper caste widows living in Kathmandu; a comparative study of displaced people living in different parts of Nepal will be able to present a comprehensive picture of the displaced people.

2. A comparative and/or comprehensive study of widows living in different parts of Nepal will be crucial to depict their situation.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY

*Aafnumanchhe* Own people who are supposed to cooperate, Coordinate and uplift when needed

*Abhagi* A person having bad luck

*Alachchhin* Ill fate that could be transferred to others

*Alachchhini* An ill-fated woman

*Antarbarta* Interview

*Ardhangini* Wife

*Bharkhako Bhel* The surged floods in the rainy season

*Bidhawa* Widow

*Bisthapit* Displaced

*Cheli* Married daughters and sisters

*Chitta Bujhaunu* Self-convincing

*Hepai* Insult

*Kurakani* Conversation

*Maiti* A married woman’s parents, brothers or their house

*Mudho* A huge piece of wood or timber

*Poila Janu* To run away with another man

*Pote* A kind of beads women wear on their neck.

*Sadhawa* A married woman whose husband is alive

*Sait* An auspicious moment to set off for a long journey or to begin some significant work

*Siundo* The parting of hair at the middle of the head

*Sutee* A practice in which wives were burnt alive in or on the funeral pyre that consumed the husband’s body

*Swami* The master

*Tika* Rice mixed with red or yellow color widely used to worship gods/goddesses and put on the forehead
APPENDIX 2: PROBLEM ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

To understand the research problem clearly and see linkages among different aspects of the phenomena, the following problem analysis diagram had been developed during proposal development phase as conceptual framework of the proposed research.

![Problem Diagram: Impact of Widowhood and Displacement on Women and their Coping Mechanisms](image)

The straight lines in the above diagram denote the strong relations between/among themes/variables whereas that of dot line denotes that they are not directly, entirely and always affected by those factors.
REFERENCES


