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Widows' Support Systems in Nepal: The General Situation of Nepalese Widows and a Case Study of Widows in Rural Chitwan

ネパールにおける寡婦のサポート・システム ― ネパールの寡婦の生活状況とチトワン郡の農村における寡婦の事例研究

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Widows' Support Systems in Rural Nepal: General Overview and a Case Study – Abstract

This study is based on Helena Znaniecka Lopata's concept of widows' support systems as a central tool to understand and analyze the life situation of widows. However, the life of Nepalese widows is strongly conditioned by the customary practices in Hindu-caste society, although traditional beliefs, customs, and practices have silently been overlaid with influences from global and internal modernization. Therefore, I will discuss the situation of women in Nepalese Hindu-caste society in the introduction. In chapter two I will discuss how Lopata developed the concept of support systems based on a large-scale survey in Chicago in the 1970s, and how this concept was further developed and adapted to a diversity of life situations in the course of studies in eleven countries in North America, the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific in the 1980s. I will also assess which factors are important for the adaptation of this concepts to contemporary Nepal. The next chapter gives a general overview of the lives of widows in Nepal. It starts with a review of previous literature, and then it discusses the demographic background of Nepali widows based on census and survey data from 2010 and 2011, which until now have been the only quantitative data on widows in Nepal. The next section describes the general situation of widows in Nepal based on previously published literature and reports. It also makes clear that this situation is fluid and has been changing considerably and continuously since the 1990s. The fourth chapter deals with my own case study on the support systems of the widows in contemporary rural Nepal. The conclusions are: 1) The concept of the support systems, which was developed by Lopata and her collaborators in the 1970s and 1980s, is also a useful and effective theoretical tool for analyzing the life situation of widows and its changes in Nepal. 2) Through complementing my case study with a general outline of the life situation if widows in Nepal since the 1990s it becomes clear that while the life of Nepali widows is still to a large degree conditioned by traditional Hindu beliefs and customary practices, these have become less strict and more lenient and tolerant in family and community life. 3) Widowhood in Nepal is not a static stage in live, but a process which includes several stages and evolves over the life course of widows. 4) Relations with the affinal and natal family are complicated and cannot be categorized in a binary way. The relations of both are instead mediated through single persons, and in both cases the people can have either a positive or a negative impact on the widows' support systems. 5) The current lives of widows is strongly influenced by modernization processes in the villages that are related to international labor migration. 6) NGOs and women's cooperative unions strongly influence the support networks of rural widows. 7) A disturbing finding is the deep-seated fear of widows of the possibility of sudden changes in the behavior of people in their social environment that was evident in the narratives of many of the middle-aged and older widows, despite the apparent changes in the customs and treatment of the widows in contemporary rural Nepal.

Contents

Preface

This study is concerned with the lives of widows in Nepal. Reflecting on the past, I now believe that the journey to my doctoral research on widows' life situation in contemporary Nepalese society took several deviations before it arrived at this topic. In 2008, I wrote my undergraduate thesis at Kathmandu University on the life of widows in Nepal, although when I submitted it, I never thought that I would do doctoral research on widows in the future. The motivation for my undergraduate thesis stemmed from three years of work experience as volunteer staff of the non-governmental organization *Women for Human Rights – Single Women Group* in Nepal that has been working for the improvement of the life situation of widows since 1994. Through this work as a volunteer, I recognized for the first time the oppressed situation of women, and the vulnerable situation of widows in Nepalese society. Strict cultural norms in the Hindu community placed these widows at the bottom in terms of living conditions and social status. This work experiences motivated me to choose widows' issues as the topic of my graduation thesis, but then my life course took a turn in another direction.

Immediately after my graduation from Kathmandu University I came to Japan and enrolled in a Japanese language school to prepare for further university study in this country. In 2010, I enrolled in the Department for Environmental Management of the College for Business Administration of Nagoya Sangyo University, but because of my prior graduation from Kathmandu University, I was admitted to the master course of the same university in 2012, and graduated from there in 2013.

My master thesis focused on solid waste management and related problems in Kathmandu valley, more because I was enrolled in a graduate school of environmental management than because of a strong interest in the topic. And even during my years at this graduate school, I could not completely forget my keen interest concerning problems related to women and widows in Nepal. Actually, after arriving in Japan, I was surprised by the lack of any cultural or customary barriers and discrimination against widows in urban Japanese society.

This became important after I decided to continue my postgraduate studies and to pursue doctoral research.

In 2015, I was admitted to Chubu University's Graduate School in Global Humanics, after having audited Prof. Möhwald's classes on sociology in the College of International Studies in 2014. Initially, I prepared my first research proposal on the relation between women and waste management in Nepal, but my advisor found it uninteresting and quite outdated in the Japanese context, because many research papers are available concerning the field of waste management in Japan, and because of the poor development of waste management in Nepal outside of the metropolitan area around Kathmandu. My advisor recommended that I do research about something new, which could be more interesting to the Japanese academic community. Because he was a specialist on family sociology, we started to talk about my deep interest in widows' issues. He was quite interested in the topic and as a first step for deciding the topic of my research he advised me to do bibliographic research concerning social science research on widows in order to acquire a comparative point of view and a theoretical approach for the analysis of empirical material on widows' lives.

At that point we were surprised when we found out that although widows face a multitude of problems in highly developed countries as well as in Third World countries around the world, there were very few systematic academic studies on widows in the social sciences. Widows are a neglected field even in family and gender studies. When the topic appears, it is mostly related to problems of old age after retirement or to problems around the remarriage of younger widows, with the exception of specific traumatic experiences due to war or natural catastrophes that are of psychological interest and several cultural anthropologists' case studies on widows. In sociological studies, the topic has largely been neglected since the efforts of Helena Znaniecka Lopata and her collaborators from the 1970s and 1980s, which became the basis for my theoretical approach in analyzing the empirical materials that I collected during my fieldwork in Nepal.

Since the beginning of my doctoral studies my advisor insisted that I read extensively on social science studies concerning family, gender, and widowhood worldwide. In the beginning, this was an excruciating and time-consuming task for a Nepali student who was not accustomed to the easy availability of books and the reading culture that exists in the academic world in Japan and in Western countries. But in the course of these studies not only did my command of the English language and my understanding of the social sciences as well as my understanding of Japan and the Western World improve considerably, it also provided me with theoretical and methodological tools to make sense of the material which I collected during my fieldwork.

Very early in my studies I decided to put the results of my fieldwork into the wider context of gender and widowhood within Nepali culture and society, and to consciously apply contrastive and comparative aspects to my interpretation of the phenomena which I observed. This proved to be a very fruitful approach that prevented me becoming too mired in the specifics of Hindu-caste culture, and helped me to focus on its social implications instead, for which I am grateful.

At this point I want to thank my advisors at Chubu University, Profs. Nakayama Noriko, Takarabe Kae, Ulrich Möhwald and my external advisor Prof. Robert Croker from Nanzan University for their guidance, comments and critique that helped me to finish this study. I want to thank Prof. Möhwald for making available to me the scripts of his Japanese lectures, his English excerpts from French and German books, especially those on the social history of the European family, and his personal comments and observations concerning family and widows in Germany. Next, I want to thank the staff of *Women for Human Rights – Single Women Group* in Kathmandu and in Chitwan District for their cooperation and help during my fieldwork in Nepal, and of course, I want to express my gratitude to all the widows in Chitwan District who participated in the group discussions and the interviews during my fieldwork.

During my doctoral research I received scholarships from Rotary Club Japan, the Tôkai Foundation for Gender Studies and the Daikô Foundation, and research

grants from Chubu University for my fieldwork in Nepal. Without this financial help I could not have finished my studies successfully, so I am very grateful towards the institutions that provided it.

My gratitude also goes to my husband Rupesh Khadgi for his patient support and sympathy during the long period of my research, and to my parents in Nepal for their emotional support. I also want to thank my fellow students in Chubu University's Graduate School of Global Humanics for their friendship and help, and the clerical staff of Chubu University's College of International Studies and Graduate School of Global Humanics for their advice and support.

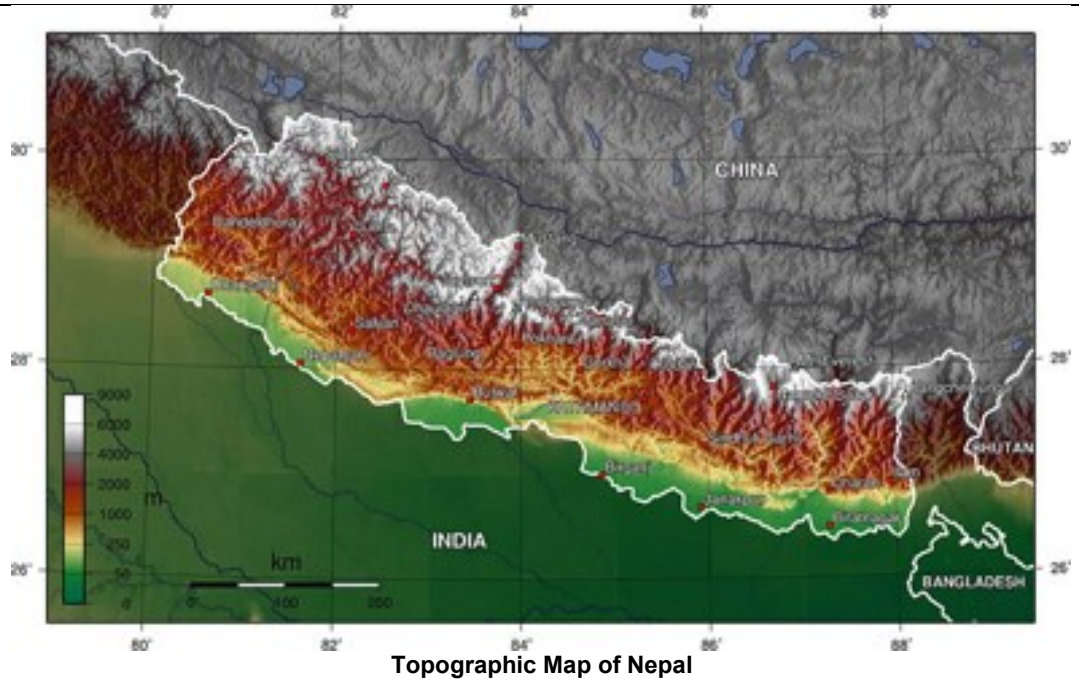
Chapter 1: Introduction

Some explanations are necessary at the beginning of this thesis. In the analysis of the interviews and other materials that I collected in my fieldwork in Nepal this study will make heavy use of the concept of “support systems”, which was introduced by Lopata to the sociology of widowhood in the 1970s (see Lopata 1979, 1987a, 1987b). Therefore, chapter two of this study will focus on the introduction of this concept and its adaptation to the different culture of Nepal. But as Lopata herself abundantly made clear in her seminal sociological introduction to the state of widowhood in the contemporary United States of the 1990s, widowhood in any society or culture is not limited to the question of support systems (see Lopata 1996). It is also related to and intertwined with a great variety of other social, cultural, economic, and political aspects, which condition the actual state of widowhood in any specific socio-cultural environment. For Nepal, this means especially the conditions set by its Hindu-caste society and culture to the life of women in general and the life of widows in particular. Therefore, after a short introduction to the country of Nepal, section two of this introduction will focus on the situation of women in Nepali Hindu-caste society, and chapter three will give an overview of widows’ life in Nepal, before I proceed to the analysis of the results of my fieldwork in chapter four.

1.1 Nepal

Nepal is a landlocked country in South Asia, positioned between China (Tibet) in the north and India in the south. Its position lies on the border where the Indian subcontinent collided with the Asian plate after it had detached itself from the African plate. Hence this is an area of increased tectonic activity, which resulted in the Himalaya chain of the highest mountains on Earth, but also made the country prone to devastating earthquakes, of which the most recent ones occurred in January 1934 and in April and May 2015. Descending from the Himalayas to the south, the geology of the country first changes into a hilly area with subtropical climate before changing into the fertile plains that border India in

the south, which form the backbone of agriculture in Nepal and house the majority of its population.



Topographic Map of Nepal
Source: Wikipedia, English Edition, Accessed March 5, 2021

Throughout its history Nepal has been an area through which various peoples migrated, settling in the country, fighting with each other, and establishing their own kingdoms. This history is reflected in the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual composition of the population of the current Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, home to 125 distinct ethnic groups speaking 123 different mother tongues. Nepali is the mother tongue of 44.6% of the population, and Maithili is spoken by 11.7% of the population; no other lingual group makes up more than ten percent of the population. It is also a multi-religious country comprised of a multitude of indigenous folk religions besides a vast majority of followers of Hinduism (eighty-one percent of the population), Buddhists (nine percent), and Muslims (four-and-a-half percent).

The current nation of Nepal dates back to the unification of the country by the Gorkha Kingdom in the mid-eighteenth century. Despite its remote location, the country came increasingly under the Westernizing and modernizing influence of the British rulers of India in the mid-nineteenth century. This influence increased after World War II and led to the birth of a pro-democratic movement, which was

suppressed in 1960 by the autocratic King Mahendra, who nevertheless promoted a number of modernizing reforms. The tensions between various factions advocating their own ideological brand of modernization ended in ten years of civil war between 1996 and 2006 that was accompanied by summary executions, massacres, purges, kidnappings, and other war crimes, and resulted in the death of more than 17,000 people, including civilians. Since the end of the civil war and the demise of the monarchy in 2008, Nepali politicians and governments have striven to build a new democratic country, and have received significant support from the United Nations and other international organizations in this endeavor.

Since the early 1990s Nepal increasingly caught the attention of various international organizations promoting democracy and the modernization of the country and these activities only increased after the end of the civil war, resulting in better medical services and education and a rapid increase and pluralization of educational and labor migration to other countries. It also led to an accelerated modernization of the daily life of the people without completely substituting traditional practices and customs.

Despite an incredibly high economic growth rate of 6.3% in 2018 and a growing industrial sector, Nepal is still one of the poorest countries of the world; it also remains a predominantly agricultural country, with agriculture employing about 65 percent of its population and accounting for 31.7% of its GDP. The other major income of the country comes from the remittances of its labor migrants to other countries, which provide 28% of its GDP. Tourism has been a rapidly growing industry in recent years, but this development has been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.[1]

1.2 Women in Hindu-caste Society

The Western perception of women in South Asian countries and in Hindu religion is one of an extreme discrimination and subjugation based on religious beliefs

[1] Concerning Nepal see the web site of 日本ネパール協会 and ”Nepal” in the English language Wikipedia.

and customs that have created a hierarchical relationship between women and men. Actually, Hindu religious texts dating back to Indian antiquity seem to support this perception that Hinduism demands this kind of hierarchical male-female relations, and many of these texts impose severe restrictions on women, especially on widows. Foreign observers of Indian Hindu-caste society – both European and Muslim traders – have noted the low status of Indian Hindu women since the sixteenth century, and they always have been especially fascinated by the custom of *sati*, the self-immolation of widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands.[2]

A thorough discussion of the status of women and male-female relations in Hindu religious texts would go far beyond the topic of my research. I only want to stress here that these texts have been continuously amended and changed since Indian antiquity, reflecting changing historical situations and social conditions, and the same is true for the customs based on these texts. Most of the important canonical Hindu texts exist in quite a number of manuscript variants compiled over more than two thousand years in various regions of South and South-East Asia, and the parts dealing with the position and correct treatment of women often differ considerably and contradict each other. Therefore, the authenticity of existing variants of the canonical texts has been a major point of contention

[2] Before *sati* became the popular image of women in Hindu societies in Europe after the publication of Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* in 1872, its knowledge in the Western World was mainly disseminated during the nineteenth century by the British colonial administration and Christian missionaries in India. But *sati* was by no means a general Hindu customs. It was limited essentially to the higher castes of warriors and nobility like the *Kshatriya* and evolved out of the customs of the women of a vanquished lord to commit suicide after his death in order to escape capture, rape, and slavery by the enemy. This kind of customary suicide of the wives is not limited to Indian Hindu caste societies, but could be found in many warrior cultures around the world, among them Japan during the Sengoku Period and pre-modern Korea (see Hogarth 1996). Incidences of *sati* increased during the period of Muslim invasions of India in the middle ages and in other periods of warfare (concerning the history of widows and *sati* in Hindu civilization see Altekar 1987: 115-165). *Sati* was prohibited by the British colonial administration after 1798, but it is unclear how widespread the custom really was. Absolute numbers of several hundred cases over a period of five years in a population of more than a hundred million people rather suggest that *sati* was practiced only in very special circumstances. Numbers given by the British colonial administration and Christian missionary organizations suggest an increase in the number of incidents throughout the nineteenth century, with almost an explosion of numbers reported by missionary organizations in the second half of the century, but these numbers cannot be trusted and were probably inflated because of these organizations' own agenda of gaining donations in their home country. Galvin (2005: 16) notes that recent research has ascertained that cases of *sati* were much less widespread than the reports from the nineteenth century suggest; she also noted that only very few cases of *sati* are reported from Nepal, and that all of the reported cases involved royalty. Cases of *sati* still occur occasionally in contemporary India (see Kishwar and Vanita 1987).

among Hindu scholars, at least since medieval times, and has caused continuous doctrinal strife and religious schisms over time. It has also led to a great degree of regional variation in the customs based on religious texts (concerning women in Hinduism see Altekar 1987, concerning Hinduism as a religion see *Hinduism* in the English language Wikipedia).

The authenticity of canonical texts demanding a severe discriminatory treatment of women and customary practices based on them has especially been the target of critical examination by Hindu reformers since the late nineteenth century. Good examples of this are Shib Chander Bose's account of Hindu customs and manners (Bose 1881) and Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati who in 1888 introduced the darkest aspects of high-caste Hindu women's treatment to the European and American public (see Ramabai 1888, 2017). Especially contentious among Sanskrit scholars is the authenticity of the various versions of the *Manusmriti* (Code of Manu) (see *Manusmriti* in the English language Wikipedia) because of the harsh rules concerning women, especially widows, in the Calcutta version and commentaries of this text that differ considerably from other versions. This version was first translated into English in the late eighteenth century and was adopted as the authoritative version of Hindu law by the British colonial administration after 1772 and popularized throughout South Asia during the nineteenth century.[3]

However, the most important point concerning traditional Hindu law is that the *Manusmriti* and the other *dharmasastra* in Hinduism are not law in the Western

[3] During the nineteenth century the *Manusmriti* became the model for the codification of law in various predominantly Hindu countries, but it is unclear to what degree its Calcutta version influenced the National Code of Nepal (*Muluki Ain*) from 1854, which is said to have been based on the Nepalese *Manab Nyaya Shastra* from the fourteenth century, which itself was based on an earlier version of the *Manusmriti*. The use of the Calcutta version of the *Manusmriti* by the British colonial powers and British Sanskrit scholars during the nineteenth century is typical for the distortion of the cultural heritage of colonized peoples by the colonial powers during the nineteenth century in order to prove the barbarian nature of these cultures, see Said (1979), Leclerc (1972). This happened while at the same time women experienced the rapid diffusion of legal changes reducing women's rights and economic independence throughout Western and Central Europe after the promulgation of the French Code Napoléon in 1804 and were completely subjugated to the authority of their fathers and husbands and lost the right to manage their own property. British laws became especially unfavorable for women. These legal changes were accompanied by the evolvement of a new discourse concerning gender relations and the colonialized peoples which defined women's intellectual development as inferior to men and feminized Indian men as lacking in masculine prowess (see Rose 2010: Chapter 3).

or East-Asian sense, but rules for the proper behavior and conduct in intra- and inter-caste relations for the higher castes based on specific – often contradicting – interpretations of the ancient *Dharmasūtra* texts, and that this aspect of ethical rules of behavior was still strong in the codification of law in various South-Asian societies during the nineteenth century, e.g. the National Code of Nepal (*Muluki Ain*) of 1854.[4] These rules of conduct are then reflected in the everyday customs and practices within local Hindu-caste societies, which also leads to a great amount of diversity and variation in these customs and practices.

1.2.1 Caste and Gender in the Customary Practices in Nepalese Hindu-caste Societies

According to the 2011 Population Census of Nepal, the country had a total population of 26,494,504, which was composed 48.5% of men and 51.5% of women (Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal 2012: Table 12).[5] Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious society. There existed 123 languages in 2011, and Nepali was spoken as a mother-tongue by 44.6% and Maitili by 11.7% of the population; no other lingual groups amounted to more than 6% of the population. The majority of the population (81.3%) were Hindu, Buddhists amounted to 9% and Muslims to 4.4%, and 4.3% believed in other religions (Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal 2012: 4).

The caste system in Nepal is quite complicated. Caste-related beliefs, nomenclature, customs, and ways of ranking differ considerably among the different ethnic groups with Hindu religious affiliation (see *Caste System in Nepal*). Because of the low number of members in several castes, in today's daily

[4] Until 2018 Nepal had only two sets of law, the Constitution of Nepal from September 2015 and the National Code of Nepal (*Muluki Ain*), which was a single comprehensive law including criminal law, civil law, and administrative law. In August 2018 the National Code was replaced by three separate sets of Criminal Code, Civil Code, and Administrative Law. The *Muluki Ain* was originally composed in 1854 after the regent Jung Bahadur Rana's visit in Europe and attempted to provide a comprehensive legal code valid for the Hindu and non-Hindu populations and all ethnic groups of Nepal. It was continuously amended and changed, with a major reform under King Mahendra in 1963.

[5] The population census of Nepal is executed every ten years, and the next census is planned for 2021. According to the United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division, the current population is estimated at 29, 136, 808 (www.worldometer.info, September 25, 2020). According to the National Planning Commission of Nepal, life expectancy at birth in 2020 is estimated as 73.2 years for women and 70.1 years for men (www.worldometer.info, September 25, 2020).

practices, castes are largely differentiated into high castes, which include mainly *Brahmin* and *Chhetri*, low castes, which mainly applies to *Dalit*, and *Adivasi/Janajati*, which applies to indigenous ethnic groups that may have or may not have Hindu religious affiliations. The Census of 2011 counted 126 different castes and nationalities in Nepal, which can be reclassified into eleven major groups (see Appendix 2, Chart 9).[6] One look at the chart and the difficulties in classification makes it clear that the caste system in Nepal cannot be interpreted as a system of social stratification.

Nepal is a Hindu-dominated patriarchal country, where men hold the superior position in both family and society (Bennett 1983; Kondos 2004). Subjugation of girls and women is perceived as a natural phenomenon, the results of which can be seen in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2018), according to which Nepal holds the 105th position among 149 countries in four different fields, i.e. economy, education, politics and health, where women are placed at extremely low positions compared to other countries.[7]

If we want to discuss the situation of women in Nepal, we must first point to the difference between those who belong to the local Hindu-caste societies and those who do not. Since most reports concerning women in Nepal are based on stereotypes concerning Hindu patriarchal society, which often do not correctly understand the Nepalese practices of caste and of the position of women in caste society, it is necessary to go into more detail concerning this question. As Brunson 2016 (loc. 556-889) has discussed, the practices of caste, socio-economic class and gender are closely intertwined with each other on the micro level in ways that defy universal categories of caste, class, and gender based on quantitative analysis at the macro level, in which culturally defined variations

[6] *Dalit* do not appear in this reclassification, because the classification of the more than twenty *Dalit* caste groups over the various ethnicities is extremely difficult. An estimate based on the 2001 Census claims that *Dalit* groups occupy 13.1% of the population of Nepal (see Shrestha 2002).
[7] The position of Nepal has slightly improved in the Global Gender Gap Report 2020.

disappear. My discussion here is limited to that part of Nepalese society which can be defined as belonging to a Hindu-caste society.

Perhaps the most comprehensive approach to caste in South Asia has been presented by the French cultural anthropologist and Sanskrit scholar Louis Dumont's structuralist analysis (Dumont 1980). Dumont's effort culminates in postulating that all South-Asian societies are organized on a hierarchical principle based on the binary relation between purity and impurity that allows a ranking of the castes (*varna*) from absolutely pure to absolutely impure, and that this ranking is codified in the ancient *Dharmasūtra.* In his endeavor to localize the structural principle of ranking in these hierarchies, he ignores both historical development and regional variation as important for the working of this principle (Dumont 1980: 46-61). Nevertheless, an important point in Dumont's analysis is his identification of caste as *status* (Dumont 1980: 55-57). I regard this as important because of the obvious similarities between castes and premodern social estates (in Max Weber's sense)[8] as sources of social status and their differences from categories of social stratification like social strata and classes. Social classes and social strata are located in the material world, i.e. they are based on the socio-economic positions of individuals within the economy of a society. They can become a source of social status like many other social positions. Castes and estates, on the other hand, are primarily based in the mental world, i.e. on distinctions between the degrees of (ritual) purity and impurity (castes) and social honor (estates), and these are categories which are defined by the degree of deference or disrespect accorded to an individual by the members of his/her social environment, based on how these members evaluate the position of this individual within the social relationships of which he or she is part, and this allows for regional and historical variation of customary practices associated with the maintenance of the hierarchical relationships between people of different status.[9]

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[8] See Max Weber's discussion of estate (Stand) in Weber 1955: Bd. 1, 177-180 and Bd.2, 631-641. Also see Möhwald 2020, especially 64-68.

[9] And here my understanding of status and hierarchical relations differs from Dumont's structuralist approach. I do not disregard the importance of socio-structural conditions and social stratification in delimiting the degree to which resources and options are available to individuals in any society, but I do not regard invariant

The enormous variety and differences of caste and gender practices that can be observed in South Asian societies has caused a rich debate about the meaning of caste and gender in each of the South-Asian Hindu-caste societies (see Brunson 2016: loc. 556-610). From this discussion it becomes clear that in the everyday practices and customs of Nepalese Hindu-caste communities, caste cannot simply be treated as a category of social stratification similar to class. Socio-economic classes characterized by differences in the economic resources of the households co-exist and intersect with castes and are one element of social status in these communities, but they are by no means congruent with castes. High caste can be combined with high socio-economic class status, but it also can be combined with low socio-economic status in which both husband and wife are forced into gainful work in order to obtain the necessities of the household (see Brunson 2016: loc. 697-749). The same is true for low caste status, which can be combined with high or low socio-economic status. It is clear that this kind of difference between two sources of social status can easily become a source for conflict and violence when the demands for the priority of one of them collides with the other, a fact that is considered by Brunson in the discussion of abstinence from social participation and conspicuous consumption of a low-caste household with a high socio-economic status (see Brunson 2016: loc. 816-844).

In her discussion of the relation between gender and caste, Cameron distinguishes between two different aspects of caste: *varna*, which refers to the ranking system as it is codified in the *dharma* and laws derived from them, and *jât*, which refers to the cultural and interactional system that is actualized in the customary practices in everyday life. Both, *varna* and *jât* have distinctive connections with gender (Cameron 1998: 9-11). But she also notes that there exist regional and ethnic variations in the attributions of caste positions within the hierarchy (see Cameron 1998: 13). Central to the discussions about caste and

abstract principles as the agents for the production and reproduction of hierarchical relations and social status, and insist that both are produced and reproduced by the individuals' practices of distinction and evaluation that determine their behavior towards other individuals on the micro level. Therefore hierarchical relations and social status are not invariant but dependent upon cultural and social change that results in historical and regional variation.

gender in Nepal are Hindu beliefs about ritual purity/impurity and pollution of states of people, objects, and actions (see Cameron 1998: 7-9).[10] Protecting a person's purity and avoiding impurity is a central concept of Hindu religious beliefs that dictates everyday practices and customs. High castes, Brahmin and Chhetri in the case of Nepal are associated with purity, low castes (*Dalit*) and non-Caucasoid ethnic groups as well as non-Hindu people are associated with impurity. All women, on the other hand, are believed to be periodically impure and always in a danger of pollution.[11] Seen in this way, the position of women in Nepalese society is not simply a matter of a patriarchal social gender hierarchy based on the assumption of the superiority of men and the inferiority of women, but in Hindu-caste society it is closely intersected with religious beliefs concerning purity, impurity, and the avoidance of pollution, which have a strong impact on social customs and practices.

1.2.2 Women and the Family

Next I would like to discuss the family in Nepalese Hindu-caste society and the position of women within it. The ideal family in this society is a patriarchal and patrilocal multigenerational joint family with shared inheritance among the sons, and in which the sons remain part of the joint household after marriage and the birth of their children. The vast majority of contemporary Nepalese have experienced life in this kind of joint family, and it is still the preferred form of family life among members of Hindu-caste society, irrespectively of their gender. Nevertheless, members frequently break away from their joint family to live in nuclear family households of a couple and their children, for reasons such as the lack of economic resources to support the number of members of the joint family or because of frictions between its members, especially between mothers-in-law

[10] Cameron's use of the binary relation between purity and impurity as principle for ranking, and for distinguishing and establishing hierarchical relations between castes in Nepalese Hindu society is based on Dumont's (1980: 46-61) discussion of the ranking of the *varna*, but her discrimination between *varna* and *jât* allows to move away from the macro level to an analysis of the customary practices in the interaction between people from different castes on the micro level of local society and the family.

[11] The major reason is the belief that the contact with blood causes impurity, which is a religious belief that is not limited to Hindu religion, but can also be found in Buddhism, Shinto, and the Abrahamic religions. The association with blood and women is based on the involvement of blood in menstruation and child-birth.

and daughters-in-law and between the daughters born in the households and the wives of their brothers (see Brunson 2016: loc. 902-908). Nevertheless, in these nuclear families reverting to the form of a joint family after marriage of the sons is still a strong aspiration among its members (see Brunson 2016: loc. 1298-1360). From the discussion in Brunson (2016: loc. 2287-2310) it becomes clear that the size and continuing existence of joint families is heavily dependent upon the economic resources of the household. Therefore, it is no wonder that the continuing existence of joint families over more than four generations is concentrated in the better-off socio-economic strata, while they tend to break up more rapidly among people at the bottom of the socio-economic order.[12]

Until revisions of the regulations concerning inheritance in the National Code of Nepal (*Muluki Ain*) in 1997 and 2002, only male relatives were entitled to inherit property, [13] but even after the inheritance rights of women were legally ascertained, customary practices allowing only men to inherit continued, and cases where the joint household tries to prevent widows from exercising their rights of inheriting their husbands' property are frequent.[14] While the inherited shares of the sons are equal, their positions of authority in the household are not. The latter differ according to their order of birth.

The patriarchal joint family is organized by a hierarchy of authority. The ultimate position of authority within a joint-family household resides with the oldest generation of its male members and from there moves down the line of male

[12] On the other hand, as historical examples show from migrants to the big cities in European societies of the second half of the nineteenth century, immigrants to the United States in the nineteenth century, European countries during the big depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s and after World War II show, the temporary formation of joint families in order to share scarce resources is a common strategy in many societies in times of crisis and disaster. The necessity of a balance between the economic resources of a household and the number of members it can support is also well known from social and economic historical research on peasant families in Europe and Japan.

[13] Women's right to inheritance were first recognized in the *Muluki Ain* in 1997, but these rights were severely limited. The 11th amendment of the code in 2002 abolished major limitations and strengthened the rights of women, which were further reinforced in 2006.

[14] This is possible because of the lack of a system of comprehensive family registration like in Japan; under these circumstances the proof of identity and marriage is easily controlled by the male members of the joint family, and many widows lack identity cards at the time of the death of their husbands.

members according to the order of their birth.[15] Women are basically subjected to male authority, but among them authority is decided first by their position of being a mother-in-law, a daughter of the household, or a daughter-in-law. Daughters-in-law are treated like servants, especially by the daughters of the household. Their position in the household is decided by the birth order of their husband. Their position is ameliorated after they have given birth to a child, especially the birth of a son.[16] The bottom of the hierarchy is occupied by the youngest (counted from the birth order of her husband and the date of her marriage) daughter-in-law. In a certain sense, women are never really considered to be full members of a joint family. In their natal family, their existence is considered as that of a temporary guest until they leave for the family of their husband, in which they are always considered as outsiders, and their position in the family deteriorates if they become widows (see Brunson 2016: chapter 2). Hence we can identify three criteria for deciding the position of a person in the hierarchy of authority of the family: Gender, length of membership in the joint family (generation, age, order of birth, and order of marrying into the family), and consanguinity.

As I have discussed above, the position of women in the family of Hindu-caste society is first defined by their being perceived as dangerous and as potential sources of pollution. Possible pollution, of course, comes through the blood shed by menstruation and birth, but it also comes through sexual intercourse.[17] Therefore the control of women's sexuality is a major agenda concerning the restrictions placed on women in the joint family (see Bennet 1983: 214). Women are not supposed to leave the house except to work in the fields or visit the market, and they are not supposed to speak in public beyond the necessities of business,

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[15] It is important to note here that ranking in Nepalese society is not exclusively based on the principle of purity/impurity, but also includes other factors like socio-economic class, political power, gender, age, and birth order that intersect with caste.

[16] Unlike in European and East-Asian patriarchal societies, the birth of a son is not important so as to assure the continuity of the lineage but rather because sons play an essential role in the Hindu funeral rites for their parents. Sons also have the responsibility to care for their old-age parents, including their widowed mothers, a responsibility many have shed with the increasing independence of nuclear families due to better education and job opportunities in the wake of modernization and migration to foreign countries.

[17] See the low position of prostitutes (*badi*) among the 'untouchable' persons in Nepalese caste hierarchy, Brunson 2016: Appendix A, loc. 3551.

because this could be seen as attempts for soliciting sexual relations by other members of the community; the preservation of the patriline's purity of descent is the duty of all members of the household (Bennet 1983: 125). Chastity and deference are the main aspects of the behavior of daughters-in-law in the joint family when communicating with the consanguineous members of the family and with their mothers-in-law (see Bennett 1983: 172-173; Brunson 2016: loc. 1064-1129).

1.2.3 Mothers-in-law, Daughters-in-law, and Daughters in the Joint Family

Under the patrifocal[18] ideology in Hindu-caste society, deference to another person is based on the notions of superiority of men over women and of old age over youth (Bennett 1983: 142). Thus, the entry of a daughter-in-law who is new to the family not merely helps her mother-in-law to ameliorate her previous low position in the patrifocal family, but she also gains power which she can exercise over the new bride. "Being the wife of the senior male in the family is the greatest source of prestige available for a woman in Brahmin-Chetri society – just as for men the highest prestige is to be the senior male" (Bennett 1983:186).

With her entry into the family, the daughter-in-law is expected to carry out all household chores that were previously performed by her mother-in-law. In the observed families, "daughters-in-law are, even now, expected to greet their *sasu*[19] by touching their foreheads to her feet. They must also drink the water from washing their *sasu*'s feet before each meal, ask if they may wash her clothes, and rub oil on her feet at night" (Bennett 1983: 180).

Bennett's research shows that possessing a pleasant and subservient demeanor and producing a male heir for the husband's family helps the bride to secure her position in the new family (Bennett 1983: 202). Bennett describes the tensions and conflicts that occurred between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law in

[18] The term *patrifocal* was coined by Bennett 1983 to describe an ideology which is focused on male precedence in all matters of life.
[19] In Bennett's book, and also in Brunson's book the Nepalese term *sasu* is used by the daughters-in-law for a mother-in-law when addressing and referring to her as both authors observed during their fieldwork and noted it as a form of deference. But in Nepalese language the term can also be used in a more neutral way.

daily life, which motivated the daughter-in-law to urge her husband to separate from the joint family (Bennett 1983: 182-185). However, one of Bennett's informants talked about her harmonious and supportive relationship with her mother-in-law who criticized her son for marrying a second wife. [20]

Brunson's (2016) research shows that in rural joint families the daughters-in-law were basically valued for two reasons, firstly for producing sons that can perform the funeral rites in Hindu religion, and secondly to provide labor for agricultural and household work. The workloads of the daughters-in-law described by her informants, even of those who married into the family under the age of sixteen, were very heavy, and without much regard for their health or eventual pregnancy. They had to be on the beck and call to serve every whim of those positioned above them, including the young daughters of the family. This contrasts vividly with the treatment of the consanguineous daughters of the joint family.

The patrifocal ideology is complemented by a filiafocal[21] ideology, where young, unmarried, virginal, consanguine girls are worshipped as an incarnation of the goddess, and their participation in Hindu rituals is considered to be a source of auspiciousness because of their purity (Cameron 1998: 8-9). During childhood, the female child receives higher deference than her male siblings (Bennet 1983). In *brahmin-chetri* kinship groups, the sacredness of a consanguine female can be felt during a number of Hindu ceremonies and rituals for daughters and sisters (Bennett: 1983: 142). Brunson (2016: loc. 937-1129) describes the difference in the treatment of daughters in their natal household and of daughters-in-law in their husbands' household. Daughters are treated indulgently; they have their tasks within the work of the household but everybody makes sure that they are not overburdened. Their position among the women of the household is in principal higher than that of the daughters-in-law, who have to obey their

[20] Polygamy has been customary practiced in Nepalese Hindu-caste society.
[21] Another term coined by Bennett 1983 from the Latin word *filia*=daughter + *focal* in order to analyze the differences in the treatment of daughters and daughters-in-law.

wishes.[22] Daughter-in-laws are put to work in the household immediately after entering the family without much concern for age or physical strength, and they are also treated as servants by the daughters. Brunson describes the shock experienced by thirteen- or fourteen-year-old brides upon being forced to leave the protected and comfortable situation within their natal household and move into a life among strangers, being forced to do hard and unaccustomed work, and to eat strange food.

Brunson (2016: Loc. 771-814) and other authors report that in Nepal the restrictions due to caste-related practices and customs are more severe for higher-caste women who have to pay more attention to protecting their purity and avoiding pollution, and that poor lower-caste women display a greater degree of independence and choices of work. However, I have to agree with Brunson that this phenomenon is not a matter of individual choice but born out of the necessities of a life of scarcity.

1.2.4 The Limits of Marriage

Galvin (2005: 39-44) introduces several important concepts for understanding family and kinship in Nepali Hindu culture that also have a relevance for widowhood in Nepal. First she categorizes the conjugal relations between husband and wife, the relations between the daughter-in-law and her new joint family, and the relations between parents and their offspring and siblings as three types of different kinship relations of Nepali women that are established through the exchange and sharing of potentially polluting substances. *Conjugal Sharing/Marital Body* is based on the sharing of bodily fluids in sexual intercourse between husband and wife. The production of offspring is an important part of the woman to be incorporated more securely in her husband's joint family. Once marriage is established, the man and woman are believed to be bound to each other eternally, and the wife is not supposed to remarry when her husband dies,

[22] "In principal higher position" is, of course, a question of generation. Unmarried aunts and sisters of their husband's generation have a higher position than the young daughters, but the daughters do not have a higher position than their mothers, even if these are still merely daughters-in-law.

and her life is believed to have ended with the death of her husband. *Affinal Sharing/Family Body* concerns the relation with her affinal family, which supersedes the woman's ties to her original natal family membership. An important element of its establishment is the sharing of various substances, especially food and shelter. This sharing of food and shelter demonstrates the bride's legitimate place in the home. In reverse, isolating the woman into a special room and ending the sharing of food when she becomes a widow demonstrates that she no longer is regarded as a legitimate member of the joint family. *Biological Sharing/Progeny Body* is based on the blood bond between parents and their offspring and between siblings. It is established by the biological sharing of semen and ovum in sexual intercourse between the parents. This bond continues to exist after a woman marries into another family, and it can become a source of support for a woman in the case of need. Galvin then introduces the "three main concerns to the patrilineages into which Nepali women marry: 1) to maintain agnatic or paternal patriline unity, 2) to maintain caste purity, 3) to produce progeny. In-marrying daughters-in-law can be a threat to the first two concerns, yet are necessary to fulfil the third" (Galvin 2005: 42), which have been identified by cultural anthropologists' research on Nepali women. The primacy of the agnatic principle is secured by the socialization and training of a daughter-in-law into the rules of her new joint-family household and by the household's women's mutual regulation of compliance with these rules. Here appear the reasons for the limits of support a married woman or a widow can draw from her natal joint family. Due to the principle of agnatic unity of the patriline, a widow's own biological relationships with her natal joint family are limited to her parents and siblings, and because of the competition between the conjugal units of the joint family concerning each's share in the resources of the household, parents and brothers have to be careful not to provide an amount of support to their daughter or sister that does cause antagonism and strife with the other conjugal units and disturbs harmony within the joint-family. Widows are aware of this problem and limit their own reliance on support by parents or brothers to help with bureaucracies, because civic, documentary, and legal affairs are a male responsibility.

If we discuss the situation of married women in Nepal, I have to address one more point: child marriages, especially child brides. In the Population Census of Nepal 2011 (table 19), there were 1,501,123 persons who were married under the age of fifteen, which constituted 11.3% of people ever married. The vast majority (81.1%) of people married as children were women. In Hindu-caste society, a marriage of a girl that has not yet had her first menstruation is considered auspicious, because her higher state of purity is protecting her new family from pollution (and her age facilitates the control of her sexuality) (see Bennett 1983). Most of the women interviewed by Brunson (2016) were married between thirteen and fifteen years, but the census data (Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal 2012: 131, Table 19) show that 58.2 % of the Nepalese women ever married were married at the age of fifteen to nineteen years, 16.3% were married under fifteen years of age, and 115,150 of them were married under the age of ten[23]. An important point is that once a girl is married and enters her husband's household, her school attendance stops. This is one reason for the considerably lower literacy rate of Nepalese women.[24]

1.3 Outline of this Study

Here the discussion connects with the topic of my study, i.e. the life situation of widows in Nepal. Child marriages and women's generally low age at marriage (74.6% were married under the age of twenty) combined with a high mortality rate of men and an extremely low rate of remarriage of young widows also point to an important difference between Nepal and advanced societies like the United States, Western and Central Europe, and Japan concerning the age structure of the widows in these countries. If we look at the age structure of the widows in

[23] Marriage of girls under the age of ten is especially practiced among several tribes of Nepalese, which are concentrated in Northern India, but also exist in Nepal. The problem is not only the child bride, but also of those who become widows while still younger than ten years. These child widows, called *vaikalya,* are not allowed to remarry and are forced to stay widows for the rest of their life, recent research by WHR estimates their number in Nepal to be about 900-1000 women, but WHR also notes that there might exist a considerable dark number of cases.

[24] The World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2018* reports male literacy rate in Nepal as 71.7% and female literacy rate as 48.8%. In 2018 there was almost no difference between boys and girls concerning school attendance, but most of the elder women who became informants in anthropological fieldwork only attended primary school, many of them not completing their school years, and once school is finished, literacy is lost if you have no opportunity to read and write.

Lopata's (1973, 1979) research on widows in Chicago, the overwhelming majority of the widows who participated in her survey was older than sixty years for two reasons. One reason was that the selection of the sample was based on the addresses provided by Social Security Administration, which have a bias towards older age groups, and that many of the younger widows declined to participate in the survey (see Lopata 1979: 56-60). But the other reason is that in general in highly advanced countries a prolonged period of widowhood tends to be limited to higher age groups. On one hand, in contrast with Southern Europe, in the Western and Central European cultural sphere we have a long historical tradition of young widows remarrying quickly after the period of mourning, because in the male and female division of labor in family farming and the crafts the respective areas of work were complementary to each other and the position of husband and wife could not be left unfilled over a longer period (and the generally low marriage rate in this area provided ample candidates for remarriage) (see Sieder 1987: 60-62, Rosenbaum 1982: 69-70). This tradition not only influenced the customary practices of consent with the remarriage of widows in the European advanced societies, it also influenced these practices in North America and Australia. On the other hand we have to take into account demographic factors like the higher mortality and lower life expectancy of men in the advanced countries that lead to a strong imbalance between the sexes the higher the age of the widow is, which strongly impedes the chances of remarriage for older widows. Compared to the situation in advanced countries (including Japan) where the majority of widows are older than sixty years, in Nepal with its high mortality and lower life expectancy for both sexes, the high proportion of child marriages, and the existence of strong impediments to the remarriage of young widows, the majority of the widows belong to younger age groups, which is also clear in the age structure of my sample of informants.

The life of Nepalese widows is strongly conditioned by the customary practices in Hindu-caste society. But this statement does not suffice to understand how these customary practices influence widows in their everyday life, especially since traditional beliefs, customs, and practices have silently been overlaid with

influences from global and internal modernization. Comparing the lives of widows in various cultures we find a lot of variation and diversity, but we can also notice a number of common problems that widows (and to a certain degree widowers) face. Searching for a common denominator that allows us to analyze these differences as well as their commonalities, I concluded that the best fit would be the concept of *support systems*, which was proposed by Lopata in 1979. In chapter 2 I will discuss how this concept was developed by Lopata based on a large survey in Chicago in the 1970s, and how this concept was further developed and adapted to a diversity of life situations in the course of studies in eleven countries in North America, the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific using quite a variety of different research approaches and methods of inquiry. I also will assess which factors we have to be aware of, if we try to adapt these concepts to contemporary Nepal.

Chapter 3 deals with widows in Nepal. It starts with a review of previous literature on widows in India and Nepal. Section 2 discusses the demographic background of Nepali widows based on the results of the National Population and Household Census 2011 and a survey of more than forty thousand widowed members of Women for Human Rights – Single Women Group in 2010, which gives additional demographic information that is not covered by the census results. Section 3 describes the general situation of widows in Nepal based on previously published literature and reports. It also makes clear that this situation is fluid and has been changing considerably and continuously since the 1980s. Many of the restrictions described by Galvin (2003, 2005) for the late 1990s and early 2000s have been relaxed, and the mental dispositions and attitudes towards widows in their social environment have become more lenient and tolerant, but most widows still harbor fear about the reactions to their widowed state by the people around them. The final section of this chapter gives an overview about health care, social security, and other services available to the people in contemporary Nepal, especially to old-age people and widows.

Chapter 4 deals with my own case study on the support systems of widows in contemporary Nepal. Its first section presents a description of the area and the

details of my fieldwork in rural Chitwan district. Section 2 analyses the process of widowhood in the case of the widows in my sample based on selected life histories of my informants. Section 3 analyzes the present state of the widows' support systems. It first gives an overview on the infrastructural aspects of these support systems in the area of my fieldwork. Then follows an analysis of the widows' resources and networks in aggregate. The final section of this chapter deals with the widows' support networks in detail. It looks at the initial crisis at the start of widowhood, family relations of widows, their relationships with organizations and social groups and miscellaneous other aspects that are important for the state of their support systems. After the conclusion, I have added three appendices: Appendix 1 presents photos of the widows and their environment, Appendix 2 consists of tables and charts on the demographic background of Nepali widows based on Nepal's National Population and Household Census 2011 and a survey that the NGO Women for Human Rights – Single Women Group conducted among more than forty thousand of its widowed members. And Appendix 3 gives an overview of the widows in the aggregate in tables and also contains twenty-seven condensed life histories of the widows in my sample.

Chapter 2: Support Systems: A Tool for the Analysis of Widows' Life Situations

From an interest in a topic to its academic analysis is based on two distinct steps: First, one has to find a methodological and theoretical framework that allows one to go beyond mere description and reporting of facts; and second, one has to collect the necessary data for the analysis. Both steps begin with a review of the literature in order to find examples of academic research on the topic one has chosen, and here the problems started.

Besides keyword search of bibliographic data bases and library catalogues, my advisor and I also searched through the English, Japanese, German, and French Amazon shops – which nowadays also list antiquarian books – for relevant titles using the key words "widows" and "widowhood". This produced an incredible number of several hundred pages with books including the words "widow" or "widowhood" in their title, but on closer inspection the vast majority of these titles belonged to the realm of popular literature novels of the genres of mystery or pornography. The second large, but still much smaller portion of titles included books that tried to give advice and help to those who have recently lost a spouse, in coping with their grief or to assist in dealing with various institutions and their bureaucratic demands on the widowed person – for Germany especially advice about how to deal with the intricacies of the country's new and revised laws on widow pensions. These types of books might be very helpful to those who have to face numerous demands and tasks while still being barely able to function normally, but they are of little value for planning social research on the life situation of widows in another culture. And if one continues diligently to examine the hundreds of titles on the screen one finds a very small number of nonfiction accounts on the life of widows. Not all of these can be labeled as social research but rather are reports on the life situation of widows around the world (see Owen 1996). The conclusion from my bibliographic review was that widows and widowhood are a rather neglected topic in sociological and anthropological gender and family research, with less than a handful of sociological (basically

only the work of Lopata and her collaborators from the 1970s and 1980s) and ethnographic (see Aoki 2010, Birech 2012, Galvin 2005) studies.[25]

One of the reasons for this lack of interest in the topic of widows in family and gender research might be the fact that there does not exist an established social role for widowhood in contemporary, highly developed societies. Therefore, if widows are mentioned at all, they are either treated in the context of remarriage (predominantly young widows) where they are discussed together with divorced women, or they are treated in the context of care for and support of old-age family members, where they constitute a special problem in the older age groups because of the increasing numbers of one-person households of women without any surviving relatives.

Reading Owen's (1996) *A World of Widows* and the studies included in the two volumes of *Widows* edited by Lopata (1987), it became clear that the life situation of widows varies a lot between different cultures and societies, and also between different regions and rural and urban areas, and different subcultures within the same country. It also became clear that the situation of widows is heavily influenced by social change, and that it also differs between younger and older generations of the women who become widows. But it also became clear that there exist commonalities in the situations of widows across all the different socio-cultural settings in which widowhood is experienced.

My conclusion from this literature review is that the concept of "support systems" used by Lopata and her collaborators for analyzing the life of widows not only in North America but also in a number of very different societies around the world is an appropriate methodological and theoretical tool that allows a common frame of reference for comparison without neglecting the cultural and social differences between various countries. But before discussing Lopata's conceptualization of "support systems", let me first give a short summary of the situation of married

[25] There are several recent studies in French and German cultural and social history on widows in early modern Europe, but the only field in the social sciences that deals more regularly with widows and widowhood seems to be studies on grief and trauma caused by the death of close persons in psychology and psychiatry. In family and gender studies, widows are in general only treated in passing in chapters dealing with the support of family members in old age (see Towsend 1957).

women in some highly developed Western societies (and Japan) and on what happened to them if their husbands suddenly died during the time of Lopata's research on widows in Chicago in the 1970s.

With the shift to mass affluence in the highly developed countries of North America, Western Europe, and Japan after recovery from World War II, in the period from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s the dominant family form in these countries was characterized by a composition of husband, wife, and their unmarried children, which also could temporarily include elderly grandparents, a high esteem of the privacy of family life, and a gender role division in which the husband was responsible for earning the income of the household and the wife was responsible for the family and household matters.[26] The ideal type of this kind of family was propagated throughout the world during the 1950s and 1960s by American television sitcoms like *Father Knows Best* and *The Donna Reed Show*.[27] But this family form not only meant a complete economic dependency of married women upon their husbands, it also meant that all dealings with the outside world, including driving the family car,[28] it also meant that the wife became an adjunct to her husband's social network, while her own pre-marriage social network dissolved within a few years after marriage (see Salomon 1975).

Under these circumstances the death of the husband not only caused grief and psychological stress; the widow also faced the loss of mobility, economic insecurity, dealing with unfamiliar bureaucratic demands from the public administration, banks, insurance companies and other institutions, and the loss

[26] With the exception of the families of farmers, craftsmen, and shop owners, in which the wife was an indispensable part of the labor force of the family business. Actually this family form developed out of the 'modern' family which evolved during the 17th and 18th Centuries in the Western and Central European wealthy middle classes and became the dominant family form of European bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century. Since the mid-nineteenth century this family form was promoted among other social classes by social scientists and political and religious ideologues and reformers as the *normal* and *natural* family form, while at the same time new civil laws enacted since the French Code Napoléon from 1804 reduced women to legal and economic impotency and subjugated them to the authority of their male relatives, and in the sciences a social discourse evolved that postulated the mental and physical inferiority of women (on the post-War-II development see Möhwald 2002, on the development of European family forms since the late eighteenth century see Rosenbaum 1982, on the development of the European discourse on gender see Rose 2012: Chapter 3; see also Möhwald 2012).

[27] These two sitcoms appeared during the 1950s and 1960s at least on the British, French, German, Italian, and Japanese television, but they also appeared in many other countries that I could not yet confirm.

[28] Until the 1970s only very few women in North America and Western Europe acquired a driver's license.

of a good part of their social network that had been centered on her husband. The only support she could rely on came from her relatives and children, and depending on the social environment of her domicile, integration in communities and churches, which was typical for rural villages or urban neighborhoods with strong ethnic and class subcultures, became an important asset.

In her study on widows in Chicago, Lopata noted these factors in the life of the widows, and she especially noted the initial breakdown of their social support networks and the need to rebuild it in the process of adapting to the new life stage of widowhood. And she also recognized the usefulness of the concept of support systems as a tool for the analysis of widows' life situations that transcends the particularities and differences between various subcultural and social groups, while at the same time allowing the comparative analysis of these different groups of widows.

The concept of support systems was developed as a major theoretical tool for the analysis of widows' life after Lopata's groundbreaking research on widows in Chicago (Lopata 1973). During the analysis of the situation of widows in different ethnic communities in Chicago, the term "support" became very important to describe the life situations of widows. Lopata noticed important differences in the supports to which different groups of these widows had access. Lopata then started to look more thoroughly into widows' support systems through a large-scale questionnaire survey among widows, again in Chicago, which resulted in a monumental publication on widows' support systems (Lopata 1979).[29] Following Lopata's work, other social scientists took up the concept of support systems as a major approach to describe and analyze widows' life situations. Research from sociologists and cultural anthropologists executed in the Middle East (Israel,

[29] This was essentially a quantitative survey, but due to problems with gaining sufficient information for sampling, she relied on addresses provided by the Social Security Administration, which caused a bias towards recipients of aid from this agency. Further problems were changes of address and refusal of participation in the survey. In the end it was impossible to draw a representative random sample, and Lopata had to rely on weighted nonprobability methods of sampling (Lopata 1979: 56-60). The problems, which Lopata encountered in a society with abundant demographical information and a highly developed research infrastructure suggest that it would be impossible to draw a representative random sample of widows in Nepal, where the infrastructure for research and demographic information is in its infancy.

Turkey, Iran), Asia (India, the Philippines, Korea, China), the Pacific (Australia, Vanuatu), and North America (United States, Canada) resulted in two volumes of studies based on Lopata's concept of support systems (Lopata 1987a and 1987b).

Lopata defines supports and support systems in the following way:

> "A support is an action or an object which the society generally defines as necessary or helpful in maintaining a style of life of a category of its members. A support system is a set of similar supportive actions or objects involved in social interaction. A support network encompasses the people with whom a person is involved in supportive interaction" (Lopata 1979: 4), or more detailed: "A support is any object or action which the giver and/ or the receiver define as necessary or helpful in maintaining a style of life. A support system is a set of similar supports and a support network consists of those persons and groups who provide these supports. Resources from which supports are drawn depend on the society the community, and the personal characteristics of the widow. Societies differ considerably in both formal and informal resources that they create and make available to different categories of members. Formal resources range from laws and the provision of different forms of economic security to communal work and life-styles as well as to complex organizations. Informal resources exist primarily on the community level in the form of neighbors, places where people congregate, norms concerning behavior, and status criteria. Personal resources include health, material possessions, self-confidence, the ability to understand and take advantage of societal and community resources, and the network of children, relatives, friends, co-workers, comembers of voluntary associations, neighbors, and any other persons, groups, or objects that facilitate initial social engagement and reengagement following life-disorganizing events" (Lopata 1987d: 3-4).

Within the informal support systems of the widows, Lobata distinguishes four basic types of support systems: economic, social, service,[30] and emotional support systems. Based on the studies presented in Lopata (1987a), Lopata noticed in her introduction that cultural differences between the research areas and the impact of social change strongly affected the support systems (Lopata 1987e).

Support systems are closely related to the resources that widows can access. In this regard Lopata first distinguishes between resources that exist in the infrastructure of the social environment of the widows (and belong to formal

[30] "Service" can basically be defined as all kinds of help, like for instance household repairs, shopping, care in the case of sickness, child care etc., basically activities of help in the personal life of the widows that are rendered for free and do not include participation in economic activities.

support systems) and widows' personal resources (which belong to informal support systems). She distinguishes three types of resources from which relations and support systems can be drawn:

> "The first set of resources available to a person contains all the attributes, abilities and skills of that particular individual… The ability to utilize community resources is based on habitual skills in behavior towards these different external resources developed during socialization and education at home and in school. A second set of resources is the current assets that facilitate social engagement thus as income and housing. A third set of resources includes all the people and groups with whom the person has an established relationship…" (Lopata 1979: 60-61).[31]

In my opinion, some further clarification of the concept of 'support systems' is necessary. I first want to distinguish between formal and informal support systems. Formal support systems are based on the infrastructure provided in a country or region of it, and on systems of social welfare in a country. These first include public transport and public services like electricity, water etc., but also access to shops and markets, access to health services, and of course institutions of social welfare and social security, especially life insurances, health insurance systems and pension insurance systems. Informal support systems, on the other side, are based on the social networks in which women participate and on their personal resources, but in Lopata's research it also included local churches and community centers and their various activities, which were important for the widows as social resources. This allows us to distinguish three types of social networks that might overlap, but do not necessarily do so: a) the

[31] Set one includes resources that are normally defined as *cultural resources* like education and skills, but beside cultural elements it should also include psychological elements like resilience, independence, self-esteem and self-confidence, set two clearly belongs to *economic resources* and set three to *social resources*, which also include social networks. Lopata names these resources as *resources of the self*, and I will use the same term. For the second set I use the term *economic resources*, and for the third set the term *social resources*.

network based on family and relatives[32], b) the network of old and new friends and acquaintances, and c) local society[33].

In the surveys on widows undertaken by Lopata and her co-researchers in eleven countries in North America, Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific (Lopata 1973, 1979, 1987a, 1987b), family members, especially children were the most important providers of support of widows. The same is true for Central Europe[34]. These findings also correspond to the results of family sociological research on elderly family members in North America and Europe (see Lopata 1987d: 14-23; Townsend 1957). In most societies, the family provides the most important network for support of the elderly and widows. A woman's relationship with her family is either established through her birth or through marriage. Marriage is a public celebration in the modern world which is controlled by family, clan, and society in order to ensure social prestige, economic gain, and political power (Goody 2000; Mitterauer and Sieder 1982). In most patriarchal societies marriage practices are either neolocal, which means that the newly-wed couple establishes its own household, or patrilocal, which means that the bride has to leave the family where she was born and become a member of her husband's household. In many patriarchal societies with patrilocal marriage customs, especially in South Asia and East Asia, a woman is never accepted as a full member of her husband's family, despite the high veneration of consanguineous relationships (Bennett 1983).Only marriage provides her social status and identity, but in a way which is completely dependent upon her husband and her mother-in-law (Kondos 2004). But besides being subjected to the authority and control of her father before

[32] Concerning family and relatives, they should further be distinguished into family and relatives of the deceased husband (affinal kinship) on the one side, and family and relatives from the widow's birth family (consanguine kinship) on the other side, but within the latter we have also to distinguish the widow's own offspring, like children and grandchildren from her birth family, because in most patriarchal societies children and grandchildren (especially sons and grandsons) are charged with the responsibility to care for their old-age parents.

[33] *Old* and *new* friends and acquaintances distinguish those that existed before the death of the husband and those that the widow acquired after his death. Local society is actually the social environment in which widows' are submerged. It not only defines the customary restrictions on widows' life, but depending on the culture it can also provide important supports to widows. Local societies are also affected by social changes concerning its norms and customs, Lopata calls this *community*.

[34] Personal communication by Ulrich Möhwald, February 11, 2021. Concerning family and kinship in Europe also see Gullestad and Segalen 1997.

marriage, and to that of her father-in-law, mother-in-law, and her husband after marriage, there exists no uniform set of family practices in patriarchal societies.[35]

The status of the wife or the bride varies a lot in the in the examples of traditional and modern families from different patriarchal cultures. But from Lopata's overview of support systems for widows in different cultures (Lopata 1987c: 11-23), it becomes clear that in traditional patriarchal societies with extended family systems and patrilocal marriage practices, widows' support systems differ considerably according to the position of the widow within the household before her husband dies. Having become a mother-in-law shielded the widow from losing her support system upon the death of her husband, while the young wife who lost her husband was still placed under the authority of her mother-in-law, and became very vulnerable. But as Lopata also made clear in her discussion, there exist considerable cultural differences among patriarchal societies, and social change has been a major factor of the erosion of traditional support systems for widows.

Judging from Lopata's description of the support systems and resources in her survey on the widows in Chicago from the mid-1970s, another factor that affect widows' support systems and resources is the age of the widow at the time of her husband's death. This is especially true for the size of the network of family and relatives providing support for the widow. Age decides whether there exist surviving parents, siblings and in-laws, adult children, grand-children, cousins, nephews and nieces.[36] But age, or perhaps generation, also influenced other resources, like the education level and the skills of the widows or the amount of property accumulated during marriage and accrued social security benefits (Lopata 1979: 60-72).

Already based on her research on widows' support systems in Chicago (Lopata 1979), Lopata came to the conclusion that on the micro level of the widows' daily

[35] For married women and their family relationships in rural Japan see Smith and Wiswell 1982 and Bernstein 1983, for Korea see Lee 2010, and for South Asia Kaur and Palrivala 2013.
[36] The distance between the homes of the widow and that of her relatives was also important, because it decides the possible frequency of contacts with each other.

life, widows' support systems show an incredible diversity, and this conclusion was further strengthened when she took the results of the studies in Lopata 1987a and 1987b into account (Lopata 1987c and 1987e: 228-229). Concerning North America, Lopata states the following points:

> "One of the main findings of the two metropolitan Chicago studies of widows is their tremendous heterogeneity. Part of this diversity is in the social life space, or the roles and dimensions along which they extend themselves into the society. Some are relatively socially isolated, living vicariously through television soap operas and occasionally seeing other people, usually an offspring. At the other extreme are the cosmopolitan women, who relate to a variety of people in a multidimensional life space that is, in roles in several institutions. They are active in the family religious, recreational, and even political groups and are not geographically restricted. In between are women in traditional neighborhoods, committed totally to their church, working in jobs with which they identify active in friendship networks, or in any combination of these. The advantage they have as urban Americans is the range of choice of resources available to them. The problem they face is the need to volunteeristically engage in these resources and to continuously build and rebuild social networks as their situation and that of their associates change. Socialized in the traditional style of women focused on the private sphere of home and related spaces as the elderly of these widows were, our sample contains fewer of the cosmopolitan types and more of the minimally or single-dimensionally engaged women. Chicago, a large modern urban center in an allegedly very developed society, contains many '' traditional" women and many who have no traditional supports but who are unable to develop "modern" ones" (Lopata 1987d: 20-21). And she continues: "The chapters in this volume point to the fact that even such highly developed countries as Canada and America contain a variety of support systems and life-styles in widowhood within the same location or in contrast to widowhood in another community. Although each chapter develops its own theme, commonalities emerge. Social class remains a very important factor, even above income, as measured by the widow's own education, as well as by the life-style she and her husband built when he was alive. Ethnicity is also important in many places. Stability of the community and mobility of the woman influence the resources from which she pulls together a support network. Several chapters point to the importance of social engagement and of religion as a system of beliefs and a source of social involvement" (Lopata 1987d: 21-22).

Widows' support systems are not structured uniformly, even within the same geographical location and subculture they can vary a lot according to the personal circumstances of the widows. And they are not static, as they are impacted by social change and change on the individual level during the life course of the widows. Because of their cross-sectional design, Lopata's surveys on Chicago widows from the 1970s produced insufficient data concerning the impact of social

change and changes of the support systems of the widows during their life course, but there were a number of questions which especially addressed the latter. The most important point in Lopata's conclusions based on the results of the big survey on support systems (Lopata 1979), in my opinion, is the notion of the disorganization of the widow's prior support network and support system caused by the death of her husband, and the necessity for the widow to reorganize and rebuild her support network and support system in the process of dealing with grief and adapting to her new life of widowhood. In several more traditional patriarchal cultures, the transition of a widow into the next stage of her life is marked by clear norms and customs within her community and family that facilitate and support a widow's transition either into remarriage (including levirate, i.e. remarriage with a brother of her deceased husband) or into an established role of widowhood. This transition is especially painful in the contemporary highly developed countries of North America and Europe, because they lack an established social role of widowhood. Nevertheless, widows' experiences of mental stress caused by grief and uncertainty about their future life, and the disorganization or even collapse of women's support networks caused their husbands' death can be observed in many patriarchal cultures, and it is an important starting point if we want to look at widows' support systems in Nepal.

The results from Chicago showed that in general middle-class widows experienced a greater degree of disorganization in their lives than working- or lower-class widows. Lopata interpreted the greater degree of disorganization in the middle-class as being caused by the strong inclination of the wives to build their identity around actively supporting their husbands' career through participation in his professional social networks and socializing activities. This kind of identity and associated social networks collapse with the death of the husband and leave the widow in a limbo. Lopata's interpretation is supported by the findings of contemporary American sociological and social-psychological family research. Working- and lower-class wives' lives, on the other hand, are less interdependent with their husband's professional life, and the family life-style tends to be more sex-segregated, and the involvement between husband and

wife with each other less intense. While I largely agree with the first interpretation, I am less satisfied with the second one. According to Ulrich Möhwald's observations concerning German and French working-class families (including craftsmen and farmers),[37] the couples in these classes see themselves primarily as partnerships in working together for sustaining the household and raising the children, which might include a temporary withdrawal of the wife from gainful work, but always includes the option to return to it if the necessities of the household demand it; this is a partnership conditioned by necessity, not by choice, because the options for acquiring the economic sustenance of the household have been limited, even after the transition to mass affluence in the 1960s.Hence, the death of the husband does not include a complete dissolution of the widow's identity and social networks (grief is another matter; it may be very strong, albeit the focus on the practical necessities might give the impression that the emotional bonds between the couple were weak).

The question of the effect of social change became more pronounced with the release of the results of studies on widows' support systems in various cultures in the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific (Lopata 1987a), some of which experienced major social changes at the time of the studies, but also with the results concerning various North American subcultures in the U.S. and Canada (Lopata 1987b), which showed considerable variation in the degree of their societal development. Consequently, Lopata added a chapter on the effect of social change on widows' support systems to the volume dealing with the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific (Lopata 1987e) and she came back to the topic in her introduction to the volume on North America (Lopata 1987d).

At the time Lopata wrote these articles, the discussion of social change and modernization in the American social sciences was still dominated by the macro-sociological approaches of modernization theory and development theory that were solely concerned with the complete change of traditional societies into industrialized societies, and only scantly noted the effects of social change on the

[37] Personal communication by Ulrich Möhwald, March 5, 2021.

micro level of everyday life of the people. Lopata is rather critical of this approach and insists that for understanding the support systems and their change due to modernization, one not only has to understand the social structure of the society under examination, but also the daily life of the people and how it is affected by modernizing changes. Lopata makes the following statements before discussing the impact of social changes on the professions, and of the intrusion of a money economy and new services on the way how the people gain the necessities of life:

> "What happens if the supporters of the past no longer feel responsible to continue their support… especially in patriarchal societies in which women are not economically independent?" And she answers: "Human societies have provided many resources out of which their members can draw together support networks that provide support systems and weave varied life-styles. These resources have changed over time, rapidly in recent decades. Each society contains a culture and subcultures that define categories of members and make available, or unavailable, social roles and the means by which one can prepare for and enter these roles. It regulates life and social interactions more or less rigidly through norms of behavior. The life frameworks (support systems, social relations, and social roles) of its members spread across religious, economic, political, family, educational, and recreational institutions" (Lopata 1987e: 2018).

Lopata does not see social change or modernization as a complete substitution of old for new structures and practices on all layers of society. Acknowledging the vast variety and divergence of widows' support systems in different regions and subcultures of North America, she argues that modernization seeps into the life of people and affects the various regions and subcultures to a different degree, resulting in a complex mix of traditional and modern elements even in the U.S and Canada. In her brief conclusions to the volume on North America she states:

> "Here we have two societies, Canada and America, that are allegedly the most "socially developed" and with an extreme complexity of scale. According to some observers, this should make their members alike in their individuality and complexity of involvement. Yet we see tremendous variation in life frameworks, social roles and relations, support systems, life-styles, and self-concepts. In simplest terms, we might say that the widows under study in these societies can be located in various positions along a continuum between traditional and modern, except that none but the very highly educated can be fully located at the modem extreme" (Lopata 1987f: 273).

Concerning the effect of modernization on widows' lives and support systems, Lopata notes that the effects of modernization or social development upon the lives of widows are often indirect, affecting first the younger members of their families and the community structure, and that older women are less directly involved in social change than men, especially the male, and better educated members of the middle-class who benefit the most from the changes brought by modernization. While also benefiting from the changes, the poorer, less educated, and peripheral members of society often lose more at first than they gain, because traditional means of supporting themselves and relating to others are gradually withdrawn, and they are not resocialized to function in the new system (Lopata 1987e: 227). But what is most important for me among Lopata's comments on modernization is a passage concerning the effect of modernization on women's and widows' life in the more traditional patriarchal societies, because it relates more closely to the effects of modernization in Nepalese society:

> Important in the more traditional patriarchal societies "is the responsibility of the male line for support systems for widows, usually that of the late husband rather than that of the father and brothers. This obligation is often written into law, supported by religion, and backed by strongly enforced folkways. In such cases, it is usually the mother-son relationship that is most important to the woman. Dependence upon a son in future widowhood and the norm requiring the daughter to become part of her husband's kinship group thus moving away from the mother's territory and unable to assist her in old age meant that the mother-daughter tie was traditionally weak. When the widow lived in the home of her son and daughter-in-law, or they in her house, interaction was apt to be continuous and competitive, often to the point of conflict. The transformation of societies and families in relatively recent years has begun to weaken feelings of responsibility on the part of the son for parents, widowed mothers, and younger siblings. The independence of the younger nuclear unit from the male line, which is typical of the more developed societies (…), has decreased the strength of this obligation. Simultaneously, the daughter is no longer cut off from relations with her family of orientation, especially her mother, by the demands of the husband's family. She now has more freedom throughout the life course than in many societies. This, as we shall see, is particularly true of daughters in urban America. Similarity of gender identification and experiences results in the daughters, rather than the sons, becoming the main suppliers of most supports (…). This does not mean a complete absence of the son, only the removal of the full burden of responsibility from him. It is he who usually still makes the final decision, or is at least the main adviser, over major changes in the lives of elderly parents, such as residential moves" (Lopata 1987d: 6-7).

When trying to adapt Lopata's concept of support systems to my own research on Nepalese widows, I have first to concede the differences between my own approach to data collection through qualitative interviews and Lopata's cross-sectional quantitative survey on widows' support systems in Chicago from the 1970s. The other important difference, which I have to address, is the difference between Lopata's research area and my own. Lopata's fieldwork was located in a highly developed urban environment with a well-developed infrastructure and welfare system that provided a very different formal support system compared to my own research area in an underdeveloped region of rural Nepal. So, I cannot simply transpose the various elements of widows' support systems that Lopata identified in Chicago to my own research in Nepal,. However, the studies included in Lopata 1987a and 1987b were able to adapt the concept of support systems to their own area of inquiry while using a wide variety of different research approaches ranging from qualitative interviews to cultural-anthropological community studies and the secondary analysis of previous literature to quantitative surveys. Actually, it turned out that this concept is highly flexible when applied to different kinds of data and societal and cultural conditions.

My own fieldwork is based on qualitative interviews with fifty widows. The reasons why I chose this approach as rather more feasible than to try to implement a quantitative survey are discussed below. But this approach limits the information that I gained to the personal and informal resources and support systems of the widows. In order to assess the formal resources and support systems widows in Nepal could access, I had to rely on a secondary analysis of existing statistical materials and various reports on the situation of Nepalese women and widows.

There are three areas in which the situation of the Nepalese widows in my research essentially differ from the Chicago widows of the 1970s: these are the family, the role of religious institutions, and the impact of modernization.

Women's family relations in Chicago were based on the Christian family values that evolved in Western and Central Europe since early Medieval Times, which have not only guaranteed the essential equality and freedom of the bride in

choosing her marriage partner but have also included a focus on the conjugal couple, with a complementary position of the housefather and the housewife with each one's complete authority over his or her own area of responsibility and work for the sustenance of the household, and bilateral kinship ties with affinal and consanguine relatives (see Mitterauer 2010: Chapter 3). Family relations of the women in my rural research area of Nepal, on the other hand, are based on the values and customs that evolved in the local Hindu-caste society since the mid-19th century after the promulgation of the *Muluki Ain* as a unified code of conduct for Nepal as a whole that subjugated women completely to the authority of their fathers and husbands, gave them no choice concerning marriage, limited kinship relations to in-laws, and regulated married women's lives according to the rules and customs based on Hindu religious beliefs concerning purity and the avoidance of pollution. Nevertheless, it would be a great error to simply understand the differences in the situation of Chicago widows and Nepali widows simply in terms of a difference between Christian and Hindu values, since neither of both can be uniformly defined, and since both have been the subject of processes of secularization and modernization since early Modern Times which has resulted in a great regional and subcultural heterogeneity in the practices and customs based on these values. What it means is that I have to take into account the differences in the life of the widows that result from these differences in the family relations of women in both cultures.

In Western countries, Christian churches provide various community services and organize various events on the local level besides religious services. Christian churches provide not only opportunities for socializing to elder people and widows, they also counseling in many matters of life; hence they provide emotional and psychological support and often also material and economic support in times of crisis. The situation in Nepal is quite different. The religious services and ritual ceremonies of Hindu temples fulfil an important role in the life of the communities of local Hindu-caste societies, and their priests occupy an influential position in these communities, but Hinduism lacks the tradition of charity that is an important part of the Abrahamic religions, and the temples offer

little beyond their religious services. Hindu temples and clergy also put severe restrictions on the participation of adult women in their religious services and ceremonies, and they generally ban widows from participation in some of them. Buddhism and Islam do not apply similar restrictions on women's and widows' participation in their services and ceremonies, and Islam, as an Abrahamic religion, has a long tradition of charity and support for its members in need. A special problem in Nepal are Christian churches. Foreign missionaries were permitted to enter Nepal to perform social services, but proselytization and conversion were still legally forbidden and these prohibitions were only relaxed after 1990. Christian churches are actively involved in public charity, and provide a number of services besides religious ones to old-age people and widows, but they also use these services as a vehicle for proselytization and so are heavily criticized, especially by Hindu traditionalists. We must keep these differences in mind when we examine the role that religious institutions play in the life of widows and their support systems in Nepal.

At the time Lopata did her surveys in Chicago, the city represented one of the most advanced areas in the world, and it also was during a period of low social change intensity of.[38] Social change that appeared in Lopata's Chicago surveys largely took the form of generational differences in the life of younger and older women, but in Lopata (1979) she also noted the beginning of the dissolution of the old close-knit ethnic neighborhoods that characterized the life of first- and second-generation immigrants. Compared to this relative stable social condition, Westernization and modernization and its accompanying social change has had an impact on Nepalese society and politics since the mid-nineteenth century. However, since the 1990s and again since the end of the civil war in 2005, the country has experienced an incredible acceleration in the speed of social change and the introduction of many new elements of modernization, and these have

[38] The United States experienced a period of major social change immediately after World War II, which was followed by a period of relative stability of American society that lasted until the early 1970s; a major wave of social change has then started after the oil shocks of the 1970s that brought structural change to the industries in most advanced countries, for the phases within the modernity in the American and European highly developed societies see Wagner 1994).

also crept into the life of the widows in my research area, whose life can no longer be defined as purely traditional. The most obvious effect of this modernization is the absence of many husbands and sons for reasons of internal and international educational and labor migration. And this has had several less obvious consequences, which nevertheless have a profound impact on the daily life of the people in this area. The income of households that have members working in distant places and foreign countries increased through monetary remittances or in kind through gifts of modern household appliances, including television sets, from these members. Especially important are gifts of cellular phones from family members working overseas, because these brought instant communication with distant people to the villages, and since the 2010s also brought access to the Internet.[39] The new means of communication have drawn the people in the rural areas into the modern world, which has had subtle effects on their lifestyles and aspirations. Modernization also brought wider educational and work opportunities and greater mobility to the younger generations and increased their independence. We cannot assume that people in the rural areas still live in conditions ruled by unbroken traditional rules and customs. In this sense, I full-heartedly agree with Lopata's views concerning the influence of social change and modernization on the life of the women and widows that can also be seen in my research area.

[39] The impact of cellular phones should not be underestimated. The proliferation of telephones in West Germany and France in the 1970s after the public telephone companies dropped the artificially high prices of access to landlines brought instant communication with family members living far away. Möhwald was shocked when he arrived in Japan in 1987 and faced a situation of a rarity of private telephones because of the high price of access to landlines, and of the initial fee for access to international telephone service. The introduction of cellular telephones and their low price because of the cut-throat competition between several hundred regional and national service providers in the late 1990s allowed people with lower income to use telephones. The cost of the infrastructure for cellular telephones is also much lower that for landlines, therefore they were rapidly adopted in underdeveloped countries around the world, private communication by Ulrich Möhwald, December 20, 2020.

Chapter 3: Widows in Nepal: An Overview

3.1 Prior Literature on Widows in Hindu Culture in India and Nepal

Given the interest in the women's situation in Indian Hindu culture in Western countries since the nineteenth century, it is no wonder that quite a number of publications on Indian Hindu women and widows can be found. Although many of them are helpful for understanding the beliefs, values, norms, and customs that impose severe restriction on women's, and especially widows' life, we have to be aware of the great heterogeneity of these beliefs, values, norms, and customs in historical, ethnic, and regional perspective, and of the disruptive influence of Westernization and modernization since the eighteenth century, not only in India itself, but in South Asia as a whole, including Nepal, and avoid generalizations that can only vilify Hinduism. In my search for prior literature on widows in South Asia, I limited the timeframe to publications released since the 1980s. For purposes of comparison, I also added several publications on widows in other areas of the world.

Altekar (1987) provides a very useful historical study on women in Hindu civilization that thoroughly and critically traces the historic evolvement and religious background of the customs and restrictions that are imposed on women and widows. Patil (2000) writes a macro-level sociological overview of the situation of widows in India with a feminist touch; she is also influenced by Lopata's research on widows. Nayar (2006) includes a collection of selected papers of the *First National Seminar on Widowhood in India* by the Center for Gerontological Studies [40] in Trivandrum, and is a multidisciplinary effort to approach widowhood in contemporary India and its regional and ethnic heterogeneity.

Besides these three books I found a number of articles published in academic journals, as contributions to books, and one discussion paper dealing with various problems of Indian widows. Since these articles deal with quite diverse problems,

[40] Gerontological Studies in India is a wide multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary field, and research on widows is a well-established topic in this field.

I have organized my review in order of publication. Chen and Dreze (1995) is a report on a workshop and on a conference on the social and economic conditions of widows in India, which both took place at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore in March 1994 and included a number of widows and social activists besides social scientists. As is the nature of such reports, the paper touches on quite a variety of questions. Chakravarti (1995) analyzes how gender and caste impact high-caste widows' opportunities in the labor market. Banjeri (1995) reports what kinds of food are customary prohibited to Bengali widows, and what they can and cannot eat. Agarwal (1998) examines the inheritance of land property as a source of widows' economic security, which is also a problem in Nepal. Jensen (2005) is a contribution to a volume on ageing, and he reports on the impact of caste-related cultural norms and customs on widows' well-being, largely based on a secondary analysis of quantitative survey data. Johnson and Shyamala (2012) analyze the new trend of increasing remarriages of and better job opportunities for widows based on two case studies from rural India, and they conclude that the stigmatization of widows in India is in the process of disappearing. Kadoya and Yin (2012) completed a quantitative analysis of household data on family care-giving from six major cities in different parts of India. The authors conclude that there exists significant regional diversity in the degree of widow discrimination in urban India. Three gerontological studies deal with special problems of elderly widows in India: Kumari (2014) discusses the problems that elderly widows face within their families and communities in rural Jharkhand, Singh (2014) investigates economic support for medical aid of elderly widows in urban Tamil Nadu, and Chinnappan (2015) explores the problems of elderly widows living alone in rural Tamil Nadu.

Compared to India, there exist many fewer publications on widows in Nepal. The cultural-anthropological study of Galvin (2005), which is a slimmed-down version of her doctoral dissertation (2003), is the only academic book on widows in Nepal that I found. The author does not give information on the time frame of her field work, but judging from its contents and from the date of the submission of her thesis, it must have lasted for at least between several months and a year in the

late 1990s/early 2000s, which is about fifteen years before my own fieldwork in rural Chitwan Province. Galvin initially planned a series of structured interviews with widows introduced by an NGO working on women's issues in Kathmandu, but after she was faced with the enormous heterogeneity of widows' lives in Nepal and the constant reminder that Kathmandu is not Nepal and that there exist considerable regional and ethnic differences in the country during her first several interviews, she abandoned this plan. She started to recruit informants by herself; in addition to her interviews in the urban Central region, she travelled, accompanied by Nepali research assistants, to the urban centers in the South-Central region, the Far West, and the East, completing intensive semi-structured interviews with fifty-six widows including nine Christian converts. Her research approach is a combination of kinship modeling and practice theory, and she has found very important facts about Nepali widows' lives; however, a lot of social change has occurred in Nepal and the situation of its widows since Galvin's fieldwork.

After the end of the civil war, widow issues in Nepal gained the attention of Nepalese and foreign scholars who were interested in specific problems that accompanied the building of a new society. The problem of war widows and their children was addressed by Chhetri (2007) and UNDP (2009). Dahal (2007), Houston et al. (2016), Surkan et al. (2014), and Hendrickson et al. (2017) were interested in health and psychological issues of widows, especially of widows who had been victims of violence. Alexander and Reiger (2011) and Sabri et al. (2016) concentrated on widows who had experienced violence and conflicts. Economic hardship was the topic of Ramnarain (2016) and Poon et al. (2016).

Habazaki (2009, 2013, 2015) did fieldwork in Nepal in 2006-2007, and her research was centered on women's empowerment and the organizations promoting it. She chose the NGO Women for Human Rights (WHR) for her interviews and participant observation, which included many widows among her informants, hence she also published on widows in Nepal. Habazaki's 2009 paper was especially interested in resilience and coping strategies of the widows. Habazaki (2013, 2015) dealt with Nepalese widows in the context of participation

in collective action through the NGO and in this regard also gave a more general account of the life of Nepalese widows, focusing especially on the effect of the NGO's activities on widows' lives.

Compared to the other articles, Yadav (2016) explores a unique topic. Having lived outside of Nepal for a prolonged period she was surprised by the change in widows' attire when she returned to the country in 2007. She carefully investigates the changes in the clothes of widows since 1996; and concludes that the white *sari*, which once had been the universally prescribed clothing for Nepali widows, has lost this position, and that social change is substituting the once rigid restrictions imposed on widows with more lenient customs.

Very few of the English academic publications that I reviewed touch on widows' support systems in contemporary Nepal. On the other hand, Thapa's (2012) publication in Nepali consists of a collection of life histories of Nepali widows and their interpretation. This publication and a number of other booklets edited by WHR provide valuable secondary material for the analysis of widows' life situation in Nepal.

For comparative purposes I mainly rely on Owen's (1996) report on the life situation of widows in a number of cultures around the world, and the contributions to the two volumes on widows' support systems in the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific, and in various subcultures in Canada and the United States edited by Lopata (1987a and 1987b). Aoki's (2010) study on widows was also of great interest to me, because like her, I now reside as a migrant in this country. Aoki goes beyond the normal cultural-anthropological constraints and includes a comparative and historical viewpoint, especially concerning war widows from World War II, before addressing ritual and ceremony and the life of widows in contemporary Japan. Additionally, I was very interested in Birech's (2012) cultural-anthropological study on the life of widows in Nairobi, Kenya and Idialu's (2011) research on the discriminatory and violent treatment of widows in various communities throughout Africa.

But, as my advisor Möhwald has often impressed upon me, sociological research also has to make use of other cultural materials that provide useful information. I have been especially impressed with and drawn inspiration from Mehta's (2005) award-winning Canadian drama film *Water* that tells the story of the life of a group of widows in rural India during the 1930s and 1940s, Churcher's (2009) documentary film on Nepali widows for the British Channel Four television chain, and Neupane's (2012) Nepali-language autobiographical novel about the life of a Nepali widow.

3.2 The Demographic Background of Women and Widows in Nepal

My discussion of the demographic background of women and widows in Nepal is based on two sources, the National Population and Housing Census 2011[41] and a survey conducted by the NGO Women for Human Rights – Single Women Group among its widowed members in 2010.[42] Both sources have some limitations which should be discussed before presenting the data. In 2011 the National Bureau of Statistics included for the first time in the history of the Nepali Census since 1911 questions concerning widows in its questionnaire. But as with statistical surveys for population censuses in other countries, there are certain areas in which the information collected in the survey is not completely reliable, for two reasons. Firstly, either because the necessary information is not available or cannot be remembered – the age of elderly people, especially of women, is such an area in Nepal, as researchers who have done fieldwork in the country have reported, see Galvin 2005 – or secondly because answering questions related to the topic is shameful or inconvenient for the respondents – non-Hindu religious affiliations, the age of women at their first marriage (child brides), and widowhood are such topics in Nepal for various reasons. A certain amount of underreporting is therefore to be expected in such areas.[43] WHR's survey was

[41] The Population Census of Nepal is carried out every ten years, with the last census providing the base line for regular updates of the population statistics by the Central Bureau of Statistics in the interim period until the next census; the next census is planned for 2021, but its execution depends on the further development of the COVID-19 crisis in Nepal.
[42] "Single Women" in the NGO's name is a euphemism for "widows".
[43] It should be noted, that claims of systematic underreporting based on the experiences concerning prior Nepalese censuses are somewhat dubious. The Nepali Census of 2011 was conducted after major changes

intended as a complete survey of its widowed members. Membership in this NGO includes roughly 15-20% of Nepali widows, and the survey collected data on 41,530 of its widowed members, but this number by no means constitutes a representative sample of the total population of widows in Nepal because the NGO attracts widows that are already dissatisfied with their situation and inclined to confront public sentiment and customs concerning widowhood in Nepal. There were also technical and other problems in the execution of the survey (see Women for Human Rights 2010: 35-36); nevertheless, the data from this survey provide a good estimate of the scope of various problems related to widows in Nepal that are not covered by the National Census data.

In 2011 Nepal had a population of approximately 26.5 million people, 48.5% male, and 51.5% female (see Appendix 2, Table 1).[44] Compared to highly developed countries like Japan and Germany, Nepal had a young population with 63% of its population younger than thirty years, and 75% younger than forty years in 2011 (see Appendix 2, Table 4 and Chart 3). Nepal is an underdeveloped country in which access to education has been limited to the economically well-situated social strata. Educational opportunities were also better in urban areas. Due to traditional customary thinking and practices, men have had much better access to education than women, and most young brides were forced to stop attending school after their marriage (see page 21 above). These facts are clearly reflected in the results of the 2011 Census concerning literacy and educational attainment. The differences between men and women and between urban and rural areas in the literacy rate are striking. 75.1% of men compared to 57.4% of women were completely literate in the sense that they could read and write at least at a basic

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in the political organization of the country since the end of the Civil War. The organization and execution of the statistical surveys was conducted with the help of the United Nations and various other international organizations who provided a considerable number of specialists for the execution of the census surveys, training of enumerators and their controllers, and data analysis, and also technical aid of computers and computer software. These are facts that are normally omitted in these claims of underreporting, as are the identification of and other information on their sources that are ominously only named as “informed specialists”.

[44] An estimate by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Dynamics (https://population.un.org) gives a total population of Nepal in 2018 as 28,096,000, 12,774,000 men (45.5%) and 15,322,000 women (54.5%); the increased gender imbalance is most probably due to male labor and educational migration to foreign countries.

level, and 22.6% of men and 39.9% of women were completely illiterate. Compared to a literacy rate of 82.2% in the urban population, only 62.5% of the rural population were completely literate. The differences between urban and rural areas are obvious for both sexes but they are even more pronounced for women: 75.2% of urban women were literate compared to 53.8% of rural women, and among rural women the illiteracy rate rose to 43.3% compared to 22.8% for urban women (see Appendix 2, Table 5).

The numbers reported for the educational attainment of the literate population aged five years and above are more difficult to interpret because since they are based on a cross-sectional survey, they only represent a snap-shot of the educational status attained at the time of the survey, which means that perhaps the majority of the young people had not yet finished their process of schooling (see Appendix 2, Table 6). But several points are obvious. Women tend to stop attending school earlier at lower educational levels than men, and this trend is especially obvious in rural areas. Attendance in higher education is extremely low for both sexes (11.7% of men and 8.5% of women), when compared to highly developed countries like Japan. But it should be noted that women accounted for only 37.6% of the population that had received higher education and were concentrated in the undergraduate level. Among graduates from higher education, only 30.9% were women. We can also see a clear trend in the urban population of both sexes towards higher education levels.

But like in many other countries, we can see in Nepal a clear interdependence between age (and generation), gender, and educational attainment, which is unambiguously shown in Appendix 2, Chart 4. The proportion of women who received no education or only primary level education is clearly higher than that of men in all age groups above fourteen years of age, but in the younger age groups we also can see a clear trend towards secondary and even higher education. Nevertheless, starting in the 35-39-year age group, the proportion of those women who received no education exceeds that of women who received formal schooling, and the proportion of women who received no education then

rises from age group to age group and it is close to unity above the age of fifty-nine.

Nepal has a patriarchal society in which women are clearly subordinated to men. Until the start of legal reforms after the civil war and the subsequent democratization of the country, women faced a number of legal restrictions, especially concerning household headship and ownership and inheritance of property. Nevertheless, 25.7% of Nepalese households were headed by women, with 75% of them older than twenty-nine years (see Appendix 2: Table 7), and 19.7% of the households reported female ownership of land or house or both. Female ownership of fixed assets accounted for 26.77% of urban households and 18.02% of rural households (National Bureau of Census 2011: 2).

According to the National Bureau of Census 2011, there were 498,606 widows in Nepal, accounting for 4.9% of the female population aged ten years and above and 1.6% widowers for the male population of the same age; 24.4% of widowed persons in Nepal are male, 75.6% are female[45] (see Appendix 2, Table 2). The information on widows that can be gained from the official report of the Central Bureau of Statistics (2012) end here, but the NGO Women for Human Rights was provided with additional computations, which it published in 2011. In the ever-married population above ten years of age, the proportion of widows is 6.7% and that of widowers 2.7% (Women for Human Rights 2011: 3). 83.5% of widows lived in rural and 16.5% in urban areas (see Appendix 2, Chart 1). This is very close to the proportions in the total female population; 83.7% of Nepali women lived in rural and 16.25 in urban areas (see Appendix 2, Table 1). The census data do not give any information concerning the age structure of Nepal's population of widows, but some information can be gained from WHR's 2010 survey on its widowed members. The general trend that can be concluded from these data is that in Nepal, about 70%-80% of widows are young and middle-aged, which sets

[45] This rather strong imbalance can only be explained by a combination of several factors: To the men's proportion of 66.5% of remarried divorced and widowed persons one can add men's proportion of 79.6% of the persons in polygamous marriages, and the already lower life expectancy of men in 2011 of 65.6 years compared to 66.9 years for women (Women for Human Rights 2011: 3).

the country clearly apart from highly developed countries in which widowhood is generally perceived as a problem of old age (see Appendix 2, Chart 13). The information given by WHR on the caste and ethnicity affiliations of the widows in the 2011 National Census is quite limited, but the data indicate that high castes have considerably larger populations of widows than the total population (they amounted to more than 15% of the female population of these castes, see Appendix 2, Chart 9 and the comments to the chart); and this fact is even more pronounced in the results of WHR's own survey from 2010 (see Appendix 2, Chart 12). Concerning the religious affiliations of Nepali widows, the results of the 2011 National Census (see Appendix 2, Table 8 and Chart 11) show a slight, and the results of WHR's own survey a very strong tendency to a higher proportion of Hindu affiliation than in the total female population (see the comments on the religious affiliations of the widows in the in the 2010 WHR survey, p. 130 below).

Nepalese widows were rather young at the time of their first marriage, and 5.3% of them compared to 1.55% of all married women were married before they reached age ten. However, because WHR's categorization of the groups of widows' age at first marriage does not differentiate between the two age groups of 10-14 years and 15-19 years, the question of widows' child marriages cannot be addressed in the same way as in my analysis of the total population, for which I found 16.3% percent of child brides were married under age fifteen (see Appendix 2, Age at First Marriage, pp. 121-122 below).

Only 11.01% of the widows in the 2011 National Census could read and write, hence were completely literate, compared to a literacy rate of 57.45% for all women. 87.54% of the widows compared to 39.9% in the total female population could neither read or write, and 1.32% could read only. Of the literate widows, 68% received formal education while 30% (compared to 4.95% in the total female population) received non-formal education (basically through participation in adult education courses provided by various organizations). The educational attainment of the majority of the widows who received formal education remained at the primary (1-5 years of schooling) or lower secondary (6-8 years of schooling) levels, with 45.95% and 21.3% respectively. Because the majority of widows had

definitely finished their school education, the numbers of widows who had attained higher levels of schooling is actually higher than that in the total population of literate women (see Appendix 2, Literacy and Education Status, pp. 121-123 below).

Judging from WHR's own survey from 2010, the majority of widows receive their income from their own economic activity in agriculture (Widows for Human Rights 2010: 33), but this survey gives no further information concerning the degree of affluence that widows enjoy besides a few hints that a substantial number live close to the poverty line. Another point related to the economic situation of Nepali widows is the proportion of household heads and ownership of fixed assets among them. 44% of widows compared to 12.9% of the female population aged ten years and above were household heads, and 56% of them live in family households that have another family member as their head, who would not necessarily be male (see Appendix 2, Table 7 and Chart 6). But WHR also notes on women's household headship that "available literature show that Women headed HH also called Lone Mother HH are the poorest in society, and their children tend to be disadvantaged in comparison to their peers" (Women for Human Rights 2011: 11). Ownership of fixed property is another question that is apparent in Appendix 2 Charts 7 and 8. The data show that 93.1% of the widows who are household heads owned the house in which they lived and 5% rented it (other arrangements accounted for less than two percent). 42.6% of households with widows as their head reported that they had female ownership of land, and 56.8% reported that they did not have such ownership. But I have to remind the reader that these numbers do not reflect the economic situation of a larger proportion of the widows, since 56% of them are not household heads, and that 42.6% with property rights among the 44% of household heads amounts to only 18.7% of the total population of the widows. Furthermore, "female ownership" of land does not mean that the property rights are in the absolute control of the widow. These rights can be registered as co-ownership with her children, and, as cases from my own informants show, this does not mean that the owned land is

economically usable, that is, that it can be used as agricultural land or that it is a marketable asset that can be sold.

The results of WHR's own survey from 2010 indicate that more than 80% of the widows live together with their dependent children, which is most probably a result of the relatively young age of Nepali widows compared to highly developed countries (see Appendix 2, Chart 17).

3.3 The Situation of Nepali Widows in Their Social Environment

Nepal is a predominantly Hindu society with 81.3% of the population following Hinduism in 2011 (see Central Bureau of Statistics 2012: 4). But this also means that widows in Nepali Hindu-caste society are treated in ways that are conditioned by traditions and customs, which are based on Hindu religious beliefs. The treatment widows customarily face in Nepal has been reported by Galvin (2005), Habazaki (2009, 2013, 2015), Houston et al. (2016), Surkan et al. (2014), Hendrickson et al. (2017), in the life histories collected in Thapa (2012), Neupane (2012), and in Churcher's (2009) documentary film. Based on these sources I will summarize these customs and their impact on the widows.

Perhaps the first systematic account in a European language of the customs widows face in Hindu culture and a description of the treatment of Brahmin widows in India in the late 19th Century was given by Ramabai (1888a: 81-85). Ramabai also noted a great degree of regional variation in these customs, and that many of these customs were spreading into the lower castes. The treatment of widows passionately described by her included a) forcing them to wear only clothes in subdued colors of white and grey made of course materials, and especially prohibiting wearing anything in the color red and any jewelry, b) being denied certain kinds of food and prescribed bland food, c) being forced to regularly have their hair shaved to baldness, d) being forced to live either in a secluded room in the dwelling of the joint family, excluded from the life of the household, or with other widows in a special asylum called *ashram*, e) being excluded from participation in religious ceremonies, and f) being constantly

harassed by family members, relatives, and in the local community about their inauspicious and polluted status.

Ramabai questions the authenticity of the claim that the strictures forced on the widows are rooted in Hinduism's ancient sacred religious texts, and regards them rather as inventions made by the priesthood in order to secure their social control and political power. In my discussion of the strictures faced by Nepali widows I will set the religious aspects of these customs largely aside and focus on their social implications.

Galvin (2005, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) describes the transition of the widow into her new state of widowhood and customs that mark her impure status and the end of her relations with her affinal family. This happens through the revocation of sharing food with her and the proscription of certain kinds of food, her restriction to a small room separating her from the other family members, and the destruction of the clothes, jewelry, and other items she possessed as a married women, and ending with her re-clothing into white during the immediate period of mourning, and restricting her to unadorned clothing of subdued colors thereafter, the proscription of wearing red or jewelry, or adorning herself with a *tika* or a *sindoor*, and the demand of her chaste behavior for the rest of her life. Galvin also discusses the restrictions on remarriage. Galvin is mainly interested in how these restrictions affect the widows' kinship relations, especially the relations with her affinal relatives. But she also discusses how the strictures concerning clothes make the widows visible and subject her to social control in her community.

Significant changes in the relations between widows and their families and relatives, and also in the attitudes of families, relatives, and communities towards widows after the death of their husband are reported by several sources. In its survey from 2010, WHR asked whether and what kind of changes of negative attitudes widows had experienced after the death of their husband. 44% of those who answered the question reported to have been tormented by family members, not only from their affinal family, but also from their natal family. 26% reported that other relatives with whom they were not living together in the same

household looked down on them, and 30% reported that they were excluded from community life (see Appendix 2, Chart 20). This kind of psychological torment is also mentioned in many of the comments from widows in Thapa (2012). Because widows constantly complained to WHR about having experienced violence , WHR included a question concerning such incidents in its 2010 survey. 78% percent of the respondents reported that they had experienced some form of violence from members of their own home. 80% of those who reported such incidents named verbal abuse, but 12% had experienced physical abuse and 8% sexual harassment (see Appendix 2, Chart 21).

Galvin (2005: 48) reports widows' complaints concerning accusations, gossip, and rumors spread about them among their relatives and neighbors, and she notes how rumors about alleged sexual misconduct of a widow can ruin her reputation in the community and make her vulnerable to false accusations in inheritance and property disputes with her in-laws that may end in a loss of her property rights, and which can also negatively affect her standing in the community and her professional opportunities. However, Galvin pays little attention to the psychological effect of these rumors on the widows, and more or less dismisses their effect on the widows because her informants were more interested in talking about practical problems of securing their and their children's daily necessities and on the effect of their widowhood on their family relations.

Similar restrictions concerning clothing, food, and living arrangements are also reported by the other sources. Widows' complaints about loneliness and feeling ostracized and marginalized by their families, relatives, and neighbors are frequently reported. Widows also feared negative repercussions from members of their social environment for talking with other people about the conditions of their life. Frequently reported is the widows' fear of gossips about suspected sexual misconduct, which makes it difficult for widows to interact with men in public, professional or business circumstances. The sources also report recurrent accusations of widows being seen as responsible for their husbands' death, either because of their bad *karma* or because of their use of witchcraft. This has a disturbing mental effect on widows that can cause anxiety, the loss of self-

confidence, and depression, and can also negatively affect their relations with their children and especially their sons.

Most sources report important differences between the severity of restrictions imposed on high-caste and low-caste widows, especially that low-caste widows are less restricted in the choices of their clothing and in the possibility of remarriage. These reports are also confirmed by Cameron's (1988) study on gender and caste. The region where Cameron was conducting her fieldwork had a dual population structure of high-caste landholders and low-caste laborers. Cameron was especially interested in the differences in which the relationship between caste and gender manifested themselves in the high and the low castes. She discusses several times the disparities in the lives of widows from both castes, and she especially discusses the divergences concerning remarriage (Cameron 1988: 59, 81, 189, 203). Cameron states that high-caste widows were strictly prohibited from remarrying and stayed celibate for the rest of their life, regardless of their age at the time of their husband's death, but that among low-caste widows remarriages occurred frequently and were not frowned upon. She notes that remarriage among low-caste widows was especially frequent and regarded as normal among widows from laborers in artisanal professions without land, while widows who possessed some land to sustain her and her children were much less inclined to remarry. She concluded that artisanal labor could only be successfully performed by a couple cooperating with each other, but that widows with land could hire a male laborer to do the heavy work of ploughing before planting, and therefore were not in need of a husband out of economic necessity. The results of WHR's survey from 2010 (see Appendix 2, Chart 19) show that 64% of widows oppose remarriage, most possibly because of the fear of mistreatment of her children from her first marriage by the stepfather, which is reported by Galvin (2005: 58) from her discussion with her informants about sexual relations and remarriage.

Most Hindu widows complain about their exclusion from or severe restriction in the degree of participation in religious ceremonies and rituals at temples, which are imposed on them by the Hindu priesthood. Widows with non-Hindu religious

affiliations claim the customary restrictions imposed on widows in Hindu-caste society are not applied in their own religious communities; nevertheless, there are many indications that non-Hindu widows are also affected by these restrictions in their daily life if they live in a predominantly Hindu environment.

The sources report that many widows talked about difficulties in securing economic support for themselves and their children. Widows complained about insufficient economic support from their affinal families and about frequent conflicts and disputes with the joint families of their deceased husbands concerning rights of inheritance and property, especially if the marriage had not been sufficiently registered or documented; cases of falsification of documents and violence from affinal relatives in these cases are also reported.[46]

Galvin (2005: 4-5 and 56) points to the visibility of widows in Nepal's society due to the clothing that is proscribed for them in the traditional strictures of Hindu customs, which distinguishes them from all other women's appearance. She comments that the rationale for these strictures is "to make a widow visible as someone who must be controlled and reminded of her lower status" (Galvin 2005: 56). In this comment she misses an important point. She argues earlier that revoking sharing food with a widow is based on the fact that widows become ritually impure through the death of their spouse (Galvin 2005: 52), but does not make the connection between widows' visibility and their state of impurity. A person in the state of impurity poses a danger of pollution to the purity of every person with whom he or she comes into contact. Therefore, I would change her comment to these strictures "make a widow visible and mark them as impure and as a danger to other people's purity". And in the sense that a stigma marks a person as belonging to a social group that is considered as deviating from and dangerous to other members of society, this statement is close to the classical sociological definition of stigma (see Becker 1966, Goffman 1963, Bauman 2016).

[46] I have to make a reminder that contemporary Nepal is a poor country, in which even those that I categorize as comfortable or well-off are rather poor by Japanese standards; therefore the resources of the majority of the households are limited, and competition between household members about their share of the resources is often fierce.

This kind of stigma makes the widows vulnerable to abuse from members of their social environment or from Hindu traditionalists. Contemporary Nepal is not a traditional society, and the acceleration of changes caused by modernization and globalization also result in anxiety and uncertainty about the future among those whose customary entitlements and opportunities have become vulnerable and insecure; they feel disinherited, and search for scapegoats to blame. This kind of social change breeds religious and political extremism, and fearmongers who incite social unrest and violence against stigmatized social minorities that are perceived as dangerous. In Hindu-caste society, widows are especially vulnerable because harassing and tormenting them are accepted as legitimate behavior, and incidents of harassment and violence against them are frequently reported by widows to organizations and people that provide welfare services to Nepali women. We also have to look at the wider social implications of the treatment of widows in Nepali society beyond their cultural embeddedness.

However, we also have to note that social change and the influences of modernization and globalization are affecting the restrictions and customs concerning Nepali widowhood. In Neupane's (2012: 117-119) autobiographical novel, old widows remember that like the widows in nineteenth century India, Nepali widows too once had to regularly shave their hair; this custom is not reported in any of the sources based on research since about 2000 and has obviously disappeared. Galvin (2005) noted that her informants discussed that the customs surrounding the funeral rites and the restrictions imposed on the widows had become more lenient, especially that widows were no longer forced to wear white *sari* all the time and for the rest of their life. She also noted the differences between the Kathmandu Valley and the rural areas she visited: women's fashion in Kathmandu permitted all women to wear rather neutral clothing that did not clearly mark their marital status. Yadav (2016) especially explored the changes in widows' attire and the almost complete disappearance of white *sari* past the initial period of funeral rituals and mourning. I myself noted during my fieldwork in 2016-2018 that the tendencies observed by Galvin have become more widespread and could also be observed in rural areas, and that

recent changes in women's fashion tend to blur the differences of the clothing and other attire women wear that discriminate between marital states (not married, married, widowed). But I must also stress the fact that there exist big differences between big urban centers like Kathmandu and the small country towns and villages in rural areas. Widows in the metropolitan environment of urban Kathmandu enjoy a degree of anonymity that permits wearing clothes that allow them to hide their state of marriage. That is not possible in country towns and villages where everybody knows everybody else. In such an environment, changes in the attire widows wear are only permitted to the degree that they do not conflict with the sense of propriety that dominates in the community. And if we judge from the positive and negative experiences in other developing countries (and also developed countries), the acceptance of changes in the customs towards greater tolerance and leniency is very much dependent upon the degree and the speed to which the socio-economic effects of modernization and its accompanying social change are benefiting rather than harming the majority of the population.

3.4 The Availability of Social Welfare Services to Nepali Widows

The existence and scope of a social welfare system in a society (country) largely decides whether a widow falls into deep poverty after the death of her husband or not, and to what degree the welfare system adds substantial supplementary resources to her economic support system, preventing her from becoming completely destitute. In this respect widows in highly developed countries enjoy a much better safety net then widows in poor, developing countries like Nepal. However, the public social welfare systems in developed countries are not organized in a uniform way. They range from systems that provide only basic support to supplement private provisions for old age in the form of life insurance and savings like in the United States, to systems that aim to provide at least a decent livelihood like in Germany and its neighbors, to systems which attempt full coverage and the eradication of social inequality like in the Scandinavian countries. But even in highly developed countries, social welfare systems are unable to completely prevent widows from falling into poverty after the death of

their spouse (see Hungerford 2001). This section examines the development and current state of the social welfare system in Nepal and tries to asses to what degree it can supplement Nepali widows' support systems.

A Brief History of the Social Security System in Nepal

Nepal formulated its first social security system in 1934 under the name Sainik Drabya Kosh (Army Provident Fund), which mainly targeted military personnel. It was a non-contributory non-fund pension system, i.e. it was completely financed out of the government's budget. In 1936 a similar pension system was established for government employees, and in 1944 a provident fund for civil servants was created. The latter covered at the beginning only civil servants working in the Kathmandu Valley, but in 1948 the system eventually incorporated the whole civil service of Nepal. All three systems covered only government employees, public servants, and employees of public enterprises. Eligibility for a pension was twenty years of service for civilian employees and members of the Armed Police Force, and sixteen to twenty years of service for army and police personnel. In 1959 the Employees' Provident Fund Department was established that managed both the Army Provident Fund and the Civil Service Provident Fund under one umbrella. Later, the Employees Provident Fund was established as an autonomous provident fund organization. In recent years, a few private companies and international organizations have also begun to establish their own provident fund systems (see Paudel 1919).

Currently Available Social Security Systems for Special Groups

On the other hand, various special social security systems were established to cover certain groups of civilians, which are defined as belonging to various categories of vulnerable groups (senior citizens above age seventy, low-caste senior citizens, widows, disabled persons, and children) (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Special Social Security Systems in Nepal		
	Type of Social Security Scheme	**Amount of Monthly Allowances**
1	Senior Citizen's Allowance (Age 70+)	NPRs 3000 /Month
2	Senior Citizen Allowance (*Dalit*)	NPRs 2000 /Month
3	Widow's Allowance (only for women)	NPRs 2000 / Month
4	Fully Disabled Person's Allowance	NPRs 3000/Month
5	Partially Disabled Person's Allowance	NPRs 1,600 /Month
6	Child Protection Allowance	NPRs 400 /Month
7	Children's Allowance (*Karnali* and *Dalit*)	NPRs 400 /Month
Source: *Department of National Id and Civil Registration (donidcr.gov.np).* Exchange Rate in March 2021: NPR 1,000.00 = ¥ 940		

Persons who are gainfully engaged in the informal sectors and persons who are self-employed are not entitled to receive any of these allowances. These allowances seem large, but a widow's monthly allowance of NPRs 2,000 amounts to only ¥1,840; roughly, with these 2,000 Rupees a widow could buy sufficient rice to feed her and two children for one month.

3.4.1 The Infrastructural Side of Support Systems in Nepal

Health Insurance and Health Care Systems

The non-existence of a system of universal of health insurance or health care for its citizens is a not a problem that is limited to developing countries. The United States of America is a good example of one of the most developed countries in which a minimum level of universal health care created by President Obama was almost dismantled by the following office-holder, President Trump. The impact of the unavailability of any kind of health insurance facilities for the majority of the population could be seen when the COVID-19 pandemic spread through the country like wildfire in 2020.

Nepal does not yet possess a system of universal health insurance like Japan. The Government of Nepal launched Social Health Insurance in three districts in 2016/17, which now has spread to most of the country. Citizens can buy an insurance plan for one year for a premium of NPRs 2,000-3,500,[47] and there also exist several private insurance companies that offer private health insurance for considerably higher premiums but also better services (see Singh 2021).

[47] This does not sound like lot of money, but the premium for one person amounts to between one and two months of the widow allowance, and the insured people are restricted to the use of government health facilities.

Basically, Nepali citizens are responsible themselves for all kinds of health-related costs, and have to shoulder these costs themselves or acquire public Social Health Insurance or private health insurance. In contemporary Nepal, the costs for health care, especially in the better equipped privately owned hospitals and other health institutions and its facilities are rising in leaps and bounds. The costs and limitations of the existing health insurance schemes have forced a large proportion of poor people to end up with poor services and endure premature death.

Only economically privileged people and those living in urban areas have easy access to health services. The sad part is that larger numbers of local civilians are still deprived of cheap health services. Though the government has established several hospitals under its supervision imposing only minimum service charges on patients, these hospitals lack good facilities and are not well equipped with diagnostic technology, assigned doctors, and nurses. Even if they are available, the quality of their services cannot compare to privately owned hospitals and clinics, which are again extremely expensive.

But the situation is different for people who are provided with health insurance through their employer. The various types of public and civil servants and government employees are eligible to benefit from the public insurance schemes. People who are employed by international organizations are provided with health insurance by these organizations. In these cases, the family members of the employees are also covered by the health insurance.

In government hospitals a *quota system* is established for chronic and incurable diseases, like patients with heart disease. Under this system, patients receive free medical treatment. Especially, poor people with low income are eligible for this service. However, most people who are eligible are unaware of these kind of benefits. The application process for these services is also time consuming and requires filling out several application forms and requires mobility to travel to these hospitals, which creates almost unsurmountable barriers for illiterate and poor people.

Health services in the form of doctors and clinics are concentrated in urban centers and country towns; the quality and scope of available services are unevenly distributed throughout the country. As a rule of thumb, we can say that the smaller a town is the less varied are the available services and the quality of these services also decreases. Health services in the villages are very poor, being limited at best to apothecaries that sell basic medicine and other health related items, and to health stations, which do not always have a professional nurse on duty. This is especially a problem for old-age people and widows because the vast majority of them live in rural areas. Moreover, the older widows are the less mobility they have, and the more difficult their access to health services becomes.

Life Insurance

Life insurance differs from health insurance as they are only provided by private insurance companies and basically are private provisions for the future. Recently, a craze for life insurance has surged in Nepal among people from the middle and upper echelons of the socio-economic strata. Private sector companies are the major shareholders of the life insurance market. Currently, one can count about fifteen private life insurance companies in Nepal. These different companies each have their own premium policies and insurance plans. Paying a fixed sum of money as a yearly premium is the most common type of life insurance. Policy holders are eligible to receive a lump-sum of cash after completion of payment under conditions that are specified in the contract, or their beneficiaries named in the contract receive this money after the death of the policy holder. It is clear that life insurance can only be afforded by people with sufficient economic resources. For widows, it means that her husband not only must have acquired a life insurance, he also must have named her as a beneficiary in the contract.

Pensions

A pension is a fixed sum paid on a regular basis to a person after his or her retirement from gainful employment. In Nepal, pension systems are mainly limited to bureaucrats and other public servants. In all cases a minimum period of

employment is necessary before a person is eligible to receive the pension. A minimum of twenty-five years of service is required in most cases, but civil servants who have at least twenty years of service are also eligible to claim a pension. After 1950, pension payment was legalized and paid on a monthly basis. Important for widows is that the dependents of a recipient of this kind of pension continue to receive part of his pension after his death, and that these also cover health insurance.

International organizations and a few private companies have recently begun to introduce pension systems for their employees. In these cases, a certain amount of money is deducted from the monthly salary of the employees, and a lump-sum of pension is paid to the employee at the time when he or she leaves the organization.

On the other hand, the Government of Nepal has also introduced various social security systems which seem to be similar to pension systems. These social security funds mainly target vulnerable groups, for instance, elderly *dalit*, elderly people aged seventy years and above, elderly people in the *karnali* region, widows, and others. These vulnerable groups receive monthly allowances in order to live. But the allowances cannot be accumulated, and the sum of these allowances is only sufficient to provide additional support to income from other economic sources.

Old Age Homes (Bridha Ashram):

Old age homes are common in developed countries, where increasing proportions of the old-age population reside in such institutions, especially if they have become single, frail, or handicapped, are in need of nursing, or have no children or other relatives who live close-by and who can regularly look after them. For many older people living in developed countries, moving into an old-age home is not an easy decision because the move tears them out of their accustomed social environment and in general disrupts their daily routines. Especially, the institutions that provide a better quality of life for their residents can also be quite costly and not affordable for low-income groups.

Both privately owned and government managed old age homes, *bridha ashram*, (a Nepali vernacular term) are a recently developed concept in Nepalese society. Customarily, old people are cared for by the family. Parents always occupy the central position in the family. Veneration, priorities, and the ruling line are always organized on an age basis. Complete and legal transfer of inheritance among the progeny often takes place only after the death of the head of the family.

However, now it has become a matter of discussion whether the holding of land and estate still requires older people to hold power in the present Nepalese society. Modern development processes not only have led to a re-evaluation of the definition of what constitutes a family, they also are steadily destroying the whole traditional family structure. Migration, which has increased at both the internal and international level at an ever greater pace, might be one of the main reasons for this development. Another factor might be the spread of the market economy.

We cannot avoid noticing that senior citizens are living under a threat in contemporary Nepal. The discarding of elderly parents somewhere in *pati* (public rest house)[48] or *bridha ashram* by their own sons has become common. Therefore, the provision of old age homes has become necessary and their establishment is a pressing emergency in contemporary Nepal.

We can find private- and government-funded *bridha ashram* in different parts of Nepal but they are few in number. Government-funded *bridha ashram* provide free shelter, food, and clothes. Private *bridha ashram* charge a certain price for their services that differs according to which services are provided to its residents. There are also various privately owned *bridha ashram* that are established for philanthropic purposes. Such institutions normally levy no charge on elderly residents and are flexible concerning the duration of residents' stays.

[48] *Pati* are public rest houses, which were originally established to provide a place of shelter and rest for travelers, they can be used by anybody for free. These places do not provide any services, food or water and bathrooms, discarding an elderly person at such a place is actually abandoning him or her without any prospect of being supported.

Pashupati Bridha Ashram is one of the oldest *ashram* in Nepal. The majority of its elderly residents are widows, followed by widowers. *Devghat* has also become a second and final home for many senior people. *Devghat* is a holy place where hundreds of Hindu pilgrims pay a visit every day. Around this religious site, shelter homes for senior people and devotees have been established, which is also discussed in Neupane's (2012) novel *Seto Dharti*. Some elderly people live here by their own choice, but most are forced to take shelter because they have been discarded by or lost their families. The majority of them are discarded widows and widowers.

We can say that the idea of old-age homes is not yet very widespread in Nepal compared to developed countries. The continuing importance placed on the traditional family system in people's way of thinking might be the reason. But we can also observe that once a person gets old, family members start to maintain their distance from them and often they become people who are avoided within the family. The news media frequently report that old people, including elderly widows, are discarded by their children, and are placed either in government owned old age home (*ashram*) or some temples without their consent and prior knowledge (see Lamichhane 2017).

Other Social Welfare Facilities (Churches, Religious Bodies)

The traditional and conservative Hindu clergy tends to enforce harsh rules on widows. However, while Hindu temples have also provided the traditional *ashram* as shelters for widows, Hinduism has no tradition of charity that is manifested in social services by the religious institutions, albeit followers do provide for the poor on certain occasions. Christian churches and missionaries have provided various social services in Nepal, building medical facilities and offering medical services to the general population, and also arranging for the cremation of destitute people if they had converted to Christianity before their death. Buddhist and Islamic religious institutions also provide some form of charity to members of their religious communities. There also exist a number of NGOs without a religious affiliation that specialize in providing charity and social services. But in essence,

Nepali society does not possess the vast network of welfare work provided by religious and non-religious institutions in Europe or North America. Existing services can be helpful for widows if they are provided near where they live.

Public Transportation

The problem of the welfare and well-being of widows is not limited to the systems of social security and health care, or their economic situation. Other infrastructural elements are also important. Nepal is a decidedly rural society. 82.9% of its population (83.5% in the case of widows) live in rural areas. As many services are concentrated in urban areas and country towns, mobility is a major factor for people who live in rural areas, and that decides to what degree they have access to these services.

Mobility (for both long and short distance) has become a bit easier in comparison to past decades. Newer and more modern means of transportations have slowly but steadily spread throughout all the country and into rural areas. The constructions of roadways, despite difficulties, has also progressed. Public transportation in Nepal is provided by buses, small three-wheel tempos, micro vans, and taxis. The availability and modes of public transportation differ from region to region. Besides public transport, more people nowadays own private cars, motorbikes, and bicycles. Cars are mostly owned by upper-class people, and they are also signs of higher socio-economic status in society. The proliferation of motorcycles, however, is mainly due to increases in income based on the monetary remittances of family members in labor migration, and therefore distributed rather unevenly, sometimes cutting through the traditional socio-economic status lines.

Many people living in villages find it difficult to get easy access to the regional centers despite the increase in the provision of transportation services. The problem is that this increase is still not sufficient to meet public demand. There are still many villages and remote areas in Nepal where a single bus moves once in a day to and from a regional center, which makes overnight stays there necessary. Especially in the case of health problems that need emergency care,

the scarcity of transportation is a big problem. But in general, elderly people, physically disabled people, widows of all age groups, and children often have problems in accessing health services and other public services.

For short distances, bicycles are the most useful mode of mobility for young and mid-aged widows living in the flat *terai* region, if they know how to ride one. But for elderly widows, their mobility is frequently restrained due to limited transportation services, lack of knowledge concerning bus schedules, limited monetary resources, and other factors. On the other hand, physical frailty also limits their mobility. As a consequence, groups with limited mobility are forced to stay within the vicinity of their home. Loss of contact with natal family members, relatives, and friends, and feelings of loneliness are shared by the majority of elderly people in Nepal. The difficulty to move with growing age makes receiving help from close relatives a significant factor in times of need of a convenient means of mobility.

Shops

Buying household groceries, clothes, and other necessary items under the one roof in supermarkets and shopping malls is normal in contemporary developed countries. The concentration of different shops in one place has made it easy and convenient for people in these countries to satisfy their needs. This situation is the outcome of rapid economic and social development.

The impact of such socio-economic changes can also be seen in Nepal. In the metropolitan urban areas big shopping malls, grocery stores, and marts are popping up like mushrooms, replacing the old small retail shops. But this development does not extend into rural areas. In rural and remote areas of Nepal we find small *pasal* or *tanki* (shops) almost everywhere. These *pasal* are often concentrated in the center of the village.

It is easy to visit *pasal*, if one is living in the flat-land *terai* region. But going to and coming back from *pasal* in hilly and mountainous regions takes time and consumes a lot of energy. This is again difficult for elderly and physically weak people, if they need household items. In hilly regions, houses are located on top

of the hill and *pasal* are located at the bottom. If elderly people, including widows, are living in a joint family, this might not be a dire problem. But, if she/he lives alone, this situation causes frequent troubles. Maintaining good relations with close relatives and neighbors who are inclined to provide help becomes very important at this point.

Chapter 4: The Support Systems of Widows in Rural Nepal: A Case Study

4.1 Research Approach and Details of the Region and Execution of Fieldwork

I decided to base my research on a qualitative approach for several reasons. The first reason is the difficulty of drawing a representative sample of widows in Nepal, because of the limits of demographic information on them. Questions about widows were for the first time included in the Population Census of Nepal in 2011, but a closer look at the tables included in the census report shows that important socio-demographic information concerning widows was not collected or not available (see Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal 2012). For instance, while the age of widows at first marriage can be computed (see Women for Human Rights 2011), the age of the widows themselves is not recorded.[49] Additionally, Nepal does not have a comprehensive system of population registers like the Japanese family register (*koseki*) or register of inhabitants (*jûminhyô*), neither do there exist other institutions that can provide a basis for random sampling. The second point is the difficulty of using highly structured or directed interviews with widows because of the low education level of the majority of them, which goes hand in hand with a high rate of illiteracy and the lack of understanding of abstract directed questions. This problem would make the interviews quite tedious work, and render it impossible to let the respondents fill out the questionnaires by themselves (like drop-off questionnaires or sending questionnaires by mail). The enormous diversity of the life situation of Nepalese widows also makes the construction of questionnaires for structured or directed interviews almost impossible.[50] Another problem is language, because for a

[49] As Galvin (2005: 24) has noted that information concerning the age of older widows might be difficult to obtain, because many of them do not remember their age, and allow only rough estimates based on information like "I did not have had my first menstruation at the time of the big earthquake of 1934". The problem does not only exist for widows, but for elder women in general, as the tables on age and gender of the population in the report on the 2011 Census show (Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal 2012: 62-64), which lump together women for which correct information could not be obtained based on estimates. Another problem of the Census is the high possibility that especially Hindu household heads do not correctly report information on widows. Some impression concerning the age distribution of widows can be gained from Women for Human rights 2010: 30, which gives demographic information on the members of the NGO, but WHR members' number amounts to only 17-20% of Nepalese widows.

[50] Galvin (2005: 23) encountered this problem in her own fieldwork.

quantitative survey the questionnaire would have to be translated into several different languages. These conditions make it impossible to use methods of quantitative directed interviews for obtaining information and data on the life of Nepalese widows. Therefore, I opted for semi-structured interviews with the widows about their life, and I also for a qualitative research approach of intensive interviews in order to have face-to-face interaction with my informants. It was most important to me to assure the comfort of the informants during the interviews in order to acquire a wider range of possible responses and information. With intensive interviews this was possible, since they allow a free-flowing type of conversation in which the informants could express their views freely without any interruptions. In my analysis of my interviews I follow Glaser and Strauss' (1967) concept of grounded theory in searching for the connections and relations between a range of variables by carefully reviewing the contents of the interviews. In this analysis, I use a multi-theoretical approach, choosing elements from various theoretical approaches to interpret the relations revealed in the interviews. For fieldwork research methods I also relied on Pant (2012).

Finding informants among Nepalese widows is not an easy task, especially if one resides permanently in Japan and has only limited periods of time for fieldwork in Nepal. Widows are a discriminated and marginalized group within the Nepalese society. If they conduct their life independently, widows normally avoid letting their social environment know about their widowed status; if they still live with their deceased husband's family, they are hidden from the outside world at home. Of course, as Galvin (2005: 23-34) shows, it is possible to find fifty informants on one's own if one has enough time for fieldwork in Nepal and generous research funding, but under the conditions explained above, the only widows who were easily accessible to me, and who openly display their status and are easily amenable to talk about their lives, are those who became members of NGOs dealing with widows' issues.

For the selection of my informants and research area I therefore relied heavily on the cooperation of the NGO *Women for Human Rights – Single Women Group* (WHR), which has more than one hundred thousand members, corresponding to

roughly about seventeen to twenty percent of Nepalese widows. With help and advice from the executive director of WHR I contacted WHR's Chitwan chapter's grass-root's level organizational staff to request their assistance in finding informants who were willing to cooperate with my research, making appointments, organizing travel schedules, and assisting with the interviews. The grass-roots volunteers also made sure that all informants were fluent in standard Nepalese. I asked WHR to ensure that there was a certain demographic variety in my informants, but beyond that request I had not much influence on the selection of my sample. Participation in the group discussions and interviews was more or less left to the willingness of the widows to do so, and in a certain sense my sample can be called an 'opportunity' or 'convenience' sample (Galvin 2005: 29)[51] with elements of chain referral and respondent-driven sampling.

Since most of the prior research was conducted in the metropolitan area around Kathmandu, I wanted my research to take place in a rural environment. I conducted the first stage of my fieldwork in February 2016, which was a period of social unrest and political conflict in Nepal. Therefore, considerations of security and safety played an important part in the selection of my research area. WHR proposed a location in Chitwan District, which is located in the southern central part of Nepal, and where WHR had been able to recruit widows who were willing to cooperate with my research. For travelling to and within my research area I and the local WRH staff members, who assisted me in my fieldwork, used public buses. The low frequency of buses to and from the local central town and the villages made it necessary to stay overnight in each of the villages during the interviews.

Characteristics of My Research Area

My research area is level land bordering on hill country. Its main industry is agriculture with husbandry and rice, maize, and wheat as major crops with additional vegetable and fruit gardens for household use. Selling milk, chicken,

[51] With reference to the 1995 edition of Bernard's *Research Methods in Anthropology*, see Bernard 2018: 149-150.

and eggs on the local market or at the street side is an additional source of earning for people engaged in agriculture or possessing a vegetable garden.

The Location of my research area within Nepal

The landscape in my research area.

Buses are the major mode of transportation for long distance, but their number and frequency are very limited. Missing one bus might result in a long wait time. This situation frequently creates problems if one wants to go back-and-forth to the city within a day, which became particularly a problem for people like us. Therefore, we decided to stay in the local communities during our interviews and stay in widows' houses. But for short distances, small three-wheel taxis and

micro-vans called *tempo* are popular. In addition, in the last few years the use of motorbikes has grown, especially among youth, as we saw during our travels. Ownership of motorbikes and scooters indicate belonging to a better-off social stratum. Concerning my research area, only a few households own motorbikes. During the period of staying in the villages, I recognized bicycles as the most convenient mode of transportation. The majority of the households possess bicycles. Since my research area is flat land it is easy to travel by bicycle.

Riding the bus in a rural region

Travelling to my research area was really time consuming and tiresome. I still recall the muddy and bumpy gravel roads. On the other hand, people get on and off transportation at any place according to their convenience rather than use allocated stations. People are accustomed to this situation of no punctual time for arrival and departure, and of no apologies from the bus driver or conductor for being late. Loud Indian and Nepali music is played in the bus entertaining the passengers during the whole trip.

However, the hearty welcome and appreciation shown by the locals at our arrival, particularly widows, gave us relief from all sufferings that we endured during our journey on the bus. When we went to greet the widows in their houses, they offered tea and snacks, and treated us like important and favored guests.

Mud houses with thatched roofs can hardly be seen nowadays. Concrete and cinder-block houses and houses with one floor and the roof covered with corrugated iron have begun to replace the mud houses. The cinder-block houses were mostly owned by middle class or lower middle class households. In my research area, households living in concrete houses belong to either the middle or upper middle class. These households have a quite good income. During my research it became clear that international remittances from labor migration played a significant role in improving the social status of these households.

Most of the houses have their own toilets. Only a few houses have an attached bathroom with shower. During my visit, I found that the majority of the houses had a bathing place and toilet outside the house, located in the back yard. These bathing places were surrounded by walls. Also, these houses had a small vegetable garden in their back yard. Women usually bathe early in the morning. After their bath, they performed morning rituals like worshipping. These local people were fully occupied from dawn to dusk. They had to prepare fodder for their cattle, work on farmland, and do many more tasks. Women were usually busy in preparing the morning meals for the whole family and performing other housework.

A widow's house

An outdoor bathing place and vegetable garden

The adoption of modern household utilities has made women's livelihood comparatively easier and better. A high proportion of the households have purchased modern kitchen facilities, especially gas stoves. But at the time of our visit wood and dung briquettes were still widely used for cooking. Table or ceiling fans and television sets were commonly available. People were up to date about

things happening around the world. Interestingly, families whose members were in Arab countries received television sets, mobile phones, hand watches, and even rugs sent by their relatives working abroad.

Restaurants and groceries stores are concentrated in specific shopping areas. These places are called *bazzar* (market) in vernacular language. We saw people arriving here from different parts of the village with public transportation. The market areas felt like micro worlds in which everyone is familiar with everyone else. Medical services in the villages are limited to apothecaries and medical stations that are not always manned by professional nurses; doctors are only available in the clinics located in the small urban centers.

International and regional mobility has brought an apparent transformation among villagers' use of latest mobile phones and the Internet. Mobile phones and access to the Internet have become a basic necessity for villagers. Difficulties in accessing landlines for telephones and the cheaper costs of cellular phones and their services have facilitated the popularity of cellular phones within a short span of time. These modern means of communication have brought family members that are dispersed over great distances closer to each other. But people still find it expensive to buy modern technical gadgets like computers and laptops, and they also find them to be too complicated to use.

Foreign and regional migration (including for both work or study) is increasing in all sections of Nepalese society in recent years. During my period of stay, I saw only a few young men in the villages; most people were elderly, children, and women. Most young and middle-aged men migrate to the city or to foreign countries, either for educational purposes or to earn money. This is a factor that has allowed women to become actively involved in household management and to take household responsibilities besides housework, child rearing, and farming by managing the income their husbands remit from foreign countries. Women also actively participate in seasonal labor work and contribute additional income to their families. I see these as elements of modernization silently creeping into village life.

Since the 2000s, foreign mobility has increased continuously in low and middle class families as well as among lowly educated people choosing either Arab countries or South East Asian countries, particularly Malaysia, and also European and East-Asian countries for work. We observed the positive impact of such mobility in the improved living standard of the families and many more facets. Higher educational qualifications, economic stability, and increased opportunities have made it easier to go to highly developed countries like Japan, South Korea, the United States of America, and Europe, either to pursue education or to work.

Fieldwork

My fieldwork was conducted in three stages, with group discussions in the first stage in February 2016, and intensive interviews in the second and third stages in October 2017 and November 2018. In all three stages the informants were selected through cooperation with WHR. The first stage was conceptualized as preliminary fieldwork; it consisted of group discussions with about sixty widows (there was some fluctuation between the sessions) to gain basic information about their life and the challenges they face, in order to develop more systematic questions for the intensive interviews in the next stage. The groups consisted of widows from the villages Parbatipur, Sibanagar, Gunjanagar, and Mangalpur. With the consent of the informants to record the discussions and the use and citation of the recorded contents in my future publications, the group discussions were video-taped and later transcribed into Nepali, English, and Japanese. This stage also consisted of expert interviews with officials working for the NGO and a collection of printed materials.

In my fieldwork in 2017 and 2018, the first wave of interviews was conducted in October 2017 with thirty-two informants from Parbatipur and Sibanagar. The second wave of interviews was conducted in November 2018 with eighteen informants from Gunjanagar and Dibyanagar (which were selected because difficulties in scheduling made it impossible to interview the widows from Mangalpur). In both waves the interviews took two to three hours for one single informant. I had prepared the part of the questionnaires that concerned socio-

demographic information of the informants in a semi-structured format, while the questions dealing with the informants' life situation had an unstructured format. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed into English and Japanese. The informants gave their consent to record the interviews and have pictures and videos taken; this consent also included consent for future quotation from the interviews. To ensure their convenience and time, transportation cost was paid.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Informants in the Intensive Interviews

Age			**Age at widowhood**			**Caste*)**		
Below 41 years	41-50 years old	51 years and above	Young widows	Middle-age widows	Old widows	Upper-caste	Lower caste	Adivasi/ Janajati
14	18	18	27	19	4	33	6	11
Educational attainment 育)**					**Religion ***)**			
Illiterate	Primary	Lower-secondary	Higher secondary	Adult education	No answer	Hindu	Buddhist	Christian
24	4	25	1	12	8	43	6	1
Age at marriage				**Duration of Widowhood**				
16 years and younger	17-24 years	25 -29 years	No answer	Up to 5 years	6-10 years	More than 10 years	Widowed twice	
16	31	2	1	12	7	30	1	

*) Upper caste represents Brahmin and Chettri and lower caste represents dalit, Advasi/Janajati represent ethnic minorities.
**) Primary education include both complete and incomplete primary school. Lower secondary also include class 10 to 12 schooling.
***} No answer represents those who .most probably adhere to indigenous ethnic religious beliefs.

With fifty informants, the size of my sample is typical for the range of sample sizes in qualitative research among difficult to access social groups (see Bernard 2018: 145). But the table above reveals several specific points of bias in my sample. First of all only twenty-four informants reported that they were completely illiterate, compared to 87.5% of the widows in the 2011 National Census (Women for Human Rights 2011: 10), and 70.9% of the widows in the Central region in the 2010 survey of WHR on its members (see Women for Human Rights 2010: 31), but most of the twelve informants that reported "adult education" were not able to read and write at the time of the death of their husbands. Compared to the age structure of WHR members in the central region of 44% of the members aged under forty-one years, 37.3% aged forty-one to fifty years, and 18.7% aged fifty-one years and above, my sample is clearly biased towards the older age groups and widows under forty-one are clearly under represented; upper-caste widows are clearly over-represented, and Adivasi/Janajati widows are under-represented, while Dalit come close to the average compared to WHR members in the Central region (see Women for Human Rights 2010: 30). The Adivasi/Janajati group in my sample is very heterogeneous concerning ethnicity and religion. The age at

marriage in my sample is clearly concentrated in the 17-24 year-old age group;, there are only sixteen widows who were married before they were seventeen years old, but three of them were married under fourteen and one under ten. The majority of the widows in my sample have experienced a rather long duration of eleven years or more of widowhood, and 31 of them had experienced more than ten years of marriage before the death of their husbands. Most of the husbands died after a severe sickness or of sudden death, one was a victim of the civil war, and four of them died in accidents (three of them in work accidents in foreign countries).

4.2 The Process of Widowhood

The death of her husband throws the life of the wife, her identity and her support networks into crisis. In order to adapt to her new situation of widowhood and to rebuild her life, the widow has to reconstruct her identity, social networks, and support systems (see Lopata 1979: 47-91, 1987c, 1987d). This task confronts the widows in Nepalese Hindu-caste society with a dilemma because of the restrictions they face due to the beliefs, customs, and norms in their social environment. Following Galvin (2003: 24-42), we can interpret this situation as an interaction of the widow with the system (structure) of beliefs, values, norms and customs that dominate her socio-cultural environment and force her to make choices about her strategies for rebuilding her life. This is not an easy task, because this system not only imposes severe restrictions on her behavior, it also produces constant accusations of being impure, polluted, dangerous, and responsible for the death of her husband. The widow herself is not free of these beliefs, values, and norms, which she has internalized throughout her socialization in this environment. The constant accusations she faces cause psychological stress and the loss of self-confidence that can eventually lead to depression and even suicide. But the situation out of which widows have to adapt to their new life are not uniform. This situation differs considerably according to the age of the widow at the time of their husband's death, whether she has access to information and is literate and knowledgeable enough to make use of it or not, whether she has small and dependent children at that time or not, whether she

lives together with the joint family of the deceased husband or had formed a separate nuclear family household with her spouse and children, and her socio-economic status and caste position and many other factors. This situation is not static; it is fluid and changes due to various factors such as she and her children growing older or her attending adult education to learn how to read and write. The choices a widow can make depend on all these factors and many more, but the first, and most important one, is the decision to survive. Her next choices depend upon her options and their changes in the course of life. Widowhood can be perceived as a process, and the same is true for the widows' resources and support systems. To approach this point let us first look at the summarized life histories of the widows in my sample (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows).

For most of the widows in my sample, the start of widowhood was accompanied by a crisis which was triggered not only by the emotional impact of the death of their husband and the rituals and funeral ceremonies that stripped her of her identity as a wife and daughter-in-law and marked her new status with the outward signs of widowhood,[52] but also included the often enormous costs of the death rites and other funeral ceremonies and the cremation[53] of their husbands which the widows had to bear. Among the high castes, these ceremonies continued for thirteen days led by priests to which fees had to be paid, and filled with gatherings of relatives and other mourners, which had to be hosted and fed by the household – ultimately by the widow.[54] If the husband died after a prolonged disease and had received medical treatment for some time before his death, substantial medical expenses would have added to the total of the bill. A number of the widows reported that they had to take out loans to cover the costs, which led to a prolonged financial crisis of several years after the start of their

[52] See Galvin's (2005: 49-53) description of the death rites and her analysis of the psychological changes that are imposed upon the wife of the deceased husband.
[53] The cremation of the body of a deceased Hindu is executed on a funeral pyre; a major cost of this cremation is the purchase of the necessary fuel of wood, which can be substantial for widows and their households in the less affluent social strata.
[54] One widow from the low *dalit* caste (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: BE) reported that the ceremonies for her husband ended after ten days.

widowhood (Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AD, AL, BA, and BB). But widows in general, and widows who are burdened with exorbitant funeral and medical costs for their husband in particular, are not seen as trustworthy debtors. Actually, in several cases the widows had difficulties to secure loans with reasonable conditions, particularly if they did not have a trustworthy go-between who introduced them to a money lender.[55]

Most of the older widows reported that they did not experience overt discrimination or bad treatment in their immediate social environment in the local community, but they also reported fear about rumors and gossip and fearful anticipation of repercussions when attending auspicious occasions at the temple, and they were reluctant to be in front at such occasions (Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AE, AJ, AO, AW, AY, BH, BI, and BL). These widows were aware that their situation in the local society is vulnerable and fragile, and dependent upon the goodwill of relatives and acquaintances in the community. They fear repercussions if they stray beyond a behavior that is deemed as appropriate in their social environment and offend the feelings of the people around them, and they try to anticipate eventual bad feelings towards them and behave in a way that mitigates the danger of such occurrences.

The relations with relatives from both sides, the families of their husband as well as their own natal family, where more ambiguous. The widows reported good relations, sympathy for their situation,[56] and help from some of them. But when trouble came, it mostly originated from relatives, again from both sides, and from the relatives trouble sometimes spread into the community. There are some disturbing stories about the behavior of relatives towards the widows, especially the stories of AD, who was loaded with all the costs for the cancer treatment of her husband for years without any help and support from his family, BI who felt badly treated by her sons and their wives, and BB who reports that one of her

[55] See Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Story of AY for the role that the sister of her husband played as a go-between to acquire loans on reasonable conditions.
[56] See Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Story of AO, who even reports that the brothers of her husband and their wives recommended to her not to wear white attire in public, because it would make her visible and easily recognizable as a widow by everyone, and make her a target for discrimination.

stepsons falsified documents in order to prevent her from receiving part of her husband's pension from the Indian Army (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows). Several of my informants who became widows at a young age reported that they received no help or property from their husband's family, really bad treatment from their husband's joint family, or that they and their children were not cared for by the husband's family and the transfer of inherited property was denied or delayed. In all these cases avoiding the transfer of property seems to be at the bottom of the troubles of the widows, but this motive is masked with accusations of lack of propriety, having a loose character, bringing bad luck, and suspicions that they only want property to be able to elope (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AB, AK, and BI). For some of these widows the experiences were really traumatic, and they have become very confrontational in their rejection of high-caste Hindu customs, even despising all Brahmin and Chhetri.

Widows who lived in a nuclear family before their husband's death also reported other problems with which they had to deal during their transition into widowhood. AJ reports that the social network that existed before her husband's death which was centered on him collapsed, and relatives, friends, and neighbors stopped visiting. In AY's case her husband not only managed their business but also household matters that require dealing with the public sphere outside of the household. This left her completely ignorant about how to deal with these matters, she didn't even know how to pay taxes and electricity bills (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AJ and AY).

The problems the widows encountered in the initial phase of widowhood were manifold and varied a lot. Some more detailed analyses follow below. But in the end, the widows managed to rebuild their social networks and support systems, some of them more stable, some of them more vulnerable and fragile. Their present state and how it came into being will be discussed in the next sections.

4.3 The Present State of the Widows' Support Systems

4.3.1 The Infrastructural Aspect of My Informants' Support Systems

Lopata and her collaborators' research on widows' support systems in North America (Lopata 1979, 1987b) showed that the infrastructure in the area where a widow lives is an important factor that influences her wellbeing and what supports are available to her. In that respect contemporary Nepal does not differ from North America in the 1970s and 1980s, but what differs between the two is to what degree the infrastructure is developed and what kind of infrastructural services are available in the various regions of the country. Nepal is still a developing country with a great diversity of infrastructural development between the various regions. A more sophisticated infrastructure is limited to urban areas, especially the metropolitan areas of the Kathmandu Valley and of Bharatpur in Chitwan District. In the rest of the country the available infrastructure differs from location to location, and there does not exist a common "basic" level of infrastructure that is provided even in remote areas, like in developed countries. Therefore, it is necessary to look at what was available to the people – including the widows – in the area at the time of my fieldwork.

The widows in my sample live in villages in the rural area of Chitwan District in the south of the Central Region. The central city of the district, Bharatpur, is the second largest city of Nepal, and it is known for its high-quality medical facilities. Considerable infrastructural development connects the city to Chitwan National Park, which is an international tourist attraction. But the roads between the country towns and the villages were in a poor condition, essentially unpaved dirt roads that become quickly impassable with heavy rain.[57]

Traveling to the nearest local centers required bus rides of two to three hours one way. Together with the limited bus schedules and the time needed for one's business, daytrips to the towns were basically impossible if one did not have

[57] Due to its south-eastern location close to the Indian border this region is subjected to the South Asian monsoon. During the monsoon season of June-July the district receives torrential rainfall and heavy thunderstorms, which also cause flooding and landslides.

access to a car. This was very unfortunate for the widows, since medical and other social services are concentrated in the rural towns, and most of the widows did not have the economic resources to access using cars and could barely use the buses.

The situation in the villages was rather bleak compared to urban Japan (but according to my advisor, in many aspects not very different from rural villages in Germany or Japan, especially concerning the availability of medical services). Three things to which we are so accustomed in our life in a highly developed urban environment that we barely notice are running water, electricity, and communication by phone. However, there is no running water provided in the villages. The water comes from individual wells, but compared to former times they have become quite convenient to use because nowadays they are connected to houses by indoor pumps; the only problem is that there exists no control for the quality of drinking water. Most houses were connected to electricity lines, but there existed frequent blackouts, especially in the dry season. Cellular telephones have become a basic necessity in the rural areas like water and food, and all of the widows possessed their own cell phone or had easy access to one. There were shops and markets in the village centers, but medical facilities were limited to apothecaries and health stations that did not always have certified nurses on duty.

Perhaps one of the biggest infrastructural problems for the widows was mobility. As I have already explained, mobility within the villages was limited to the few cars owned by the rich, taxi services by mini-buses and three-wheel tempos, motorcycles, and bicycles. But none of the elder widows could ride a motorcycle or bicycle, and for economic reasons using taxi services was limited to emergencies. The mobility of the elder widows was basically limited to walking distance in the vicinity of their homes.

Two of the widows in my sample were entitled to receive part of the pension of a deceased husband who had been employed in the government and public services, but it is unclear whether they also received the medical assistance that

accompanies such pensions in the case of their husbands.[58] None of the other widows had acquired health insurance on their own. At the time of my fieldwork, most of the widows received the meager financial support from either widow allowances or old-age allowances, but since these allowances have been established only very recently, many of the widows had received no such support for a more or less prolonged period of their widowhood. These circumstances mean that the support systems of the widows were essentially limited to the resources and support networks that they themselves had been able to build.

4.3.2 The Widows' Resources and Networks in Aggregate

The individual situations of the widows in my sample are very diverse, and they often defy easy ways to place them into categories that can be viewed in the aggregate. Answers to structured questions that seemed straightforward at first glance, like property rights of fixed assets, proved to be less so after inspection of the recordings of the unstructured interviews. Behind the simple answers were often hidden conditions that limited the resources' usefulness for the widows, and therefore made it necessary to assess the real meaning and implications of the answer case by case. In this section, I only present four aspects of the personal resources of the widows that could be categorized with some difficulty: the situation of the economic resources based on an assessment of income, ownership of economic assets, and the possession of shelter; education; family relations based on the living arrangements of the widows; and social networks based on membership in organizations and self-help groups.

Economic Resources

The economic resources of the widows can be divided into two types. The first is monetary income that includes regular payments from various sources, earnings from irregular work, and occasional receipt of monetary help and gifts. The second is non-monetary economic resources, of which there are many: food

[58] See Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AB and BC. AB's husband was a police officer who died in the insurgency. She receives NPRs 10,000 pension per month and ten to twelve thousand rupees per year for the education of her three daughters. BC only mentions NPRs 10,000 pension a month.

produced by oneself or products bartered through labor exchange and one's own products;[59] possession of shelter; help in agricultural and other tasks bartered with remuneration in kind or based on labor exchange etc.; possession of milk-producing animals like goats, cows, and buffaloes that could generate regular monetary income; and property rights of fixed assets especially houses and agricultural land. However, these property rights were often limited in their usefulness due to conditions placed on them such as partial property rights shared with children or other persons might have severe restrictions on the sale of property, a lack of usefulness of the property for economic purposes, squatting rights on government land that only allow its use for building shelter and agricultural production but does not constitute full legal property rights for sale etc. I assessed the combined effect of these various resources case by case and categorized the economic security of the livelihood of the widows into four states: very good, comfortable, stable, and precarious.

The majority of the widows in my sample are either in a comfortable or stable economic situation. But fourteen of them live under conditions on the brink of poverty that I have defined as "precarious" because the slightest worsening of their support network could plunge them into destitution. "Stable" means that the widows have economic support that provide them with the basic means for living and are not in danger to suddenly collapse but do only provide a relatively low standard of living. "Comfortable" means that the economic situation and standard of living is better than "stable" and allows the widows some leeway in their expenses. The economic situation of eight of the widows can be defined as "very good" as they have stable economic support from successful businesses or other sources of monetary income and own considerable property for the region in which they live. It is interesting to note that the socio-economic situation of the widows seems to be independent of their caste position. Five of the high-caste widows belonged to the group with "very good" economic supports, but the

[59] Despite the ever increasing penetration of the money economy in rural Nepal since the 1980s, the informal economy still plays an important role. This fact was also reflected in WHR's 2010 survey of its widowed members, in which between 22.7% and 36.3% of the widows, depending on region, wished to engage in informal economic activities in the future (see WHR 2010: 33).

majority of them ranged in the middle, and the situation of five of the high-caste widows has to be categorized as “precarious”. On the other side of low-caste widows, the economic situation of half of the six *dalit* widows falls into the “precarious” category, but the situation of the other three is “stable”, “comfortable”, and even “very good”. This conforms to Brunson’s (2016: loc. 613) observations that caste position and socio-economic class are independent from each other (see Appendix 3, Table 1).[60]

Forty-three of the widows had ownership of the place where they lived, one was provided with a small room for free, one rented the place where she lived, and five lived with relatives and had to provide domestic services for their accommodation. All of the widows over fifty own their own place (see Appendix 3, Table 3).

Education

The educational state of the widows is an important resource that is not simply defined by an attained level in formal schooling or the binary distinction between “literate” and “illiterate”. It includes knowledge, skills, and experience that is acquired in the course of life outside of formal education, and which can have an important influence on the degree to which a widow is able to deal with her life on her own. But these kinds of knowledge, skills, and experience cannot be categorized in aggregate and have to be assessed in detail. A caveat has to be placed on the category “literate”. In the quantitative surveys for the National Census or by WHR among its members, “literate” is defined as “basic skills of reading and writing”, but widows consider themselves as “literate” if they can make sense of simple texts and are able to write their own signature. Having received formal schooling or adult education is also no certain measure for assessing the reading and writing skills of a widow. These skills deteriorate quite

[60] Here I like to add that Brunson’s research also shows the high-caste joint households of lower socio-economic status relied heavily on the labor force of their daughters-in-law in their agricultural operation, and that in our discussions about these findings Möhwald recurrently pointed out that from the standpoint of historical and sociological research on peasant families in Western and Central Europe and in Japan, the treatment of the widows in these Nepalese households without regard for their labor force was economically counter-productive.

quickly if they are not practiced for several years, which was the case for the majority of married Nepali women who had left school after marriage. The effect of adult education is also difficult to assess; especially, people who receive education at an advanced age have difficulties in making sense of what they are taught, as one seventy-eight years old widow put it bluntly, “I joined adult class, but I found it hard to recognize letters” (see Appendix 3, Life Selected Histories of Widows: Story of BJ).[61]

My sample included a high number of widows who learned to read and write through adult education and only a very low number of illiterate widows; this tendency can also be seen in the case of the widows in the 2011 National Census, and widowed members of WHR in its survey from 2010 (see Appendix 2, Chart 5 and Chart 15). The majority of the widows who received formal schooling in my sample attained primary and lower secondary level education, but one widow was actually enrolled in university. Only one of the widows over fifty years of age received formal schooling, and four of them were illiterate. The vast majority of them acquired their literacy through adult education. The situation is more mixed for the middle-aged widows between forty-one and fifty, one of them was illiterate and sixteen were divided half and half between formal schooling and adult education. Almost all widows under the age of forty-one received formal schooling, only three received adult education, and none were illiterate (see Appendix 3, Table 4). But judging from the selected life histories of the widows, they themselves assess their own skills much more critically than simply reporting themselves as “literate” or “illiterate”.

Family Relations

To develop a comprehensive understanding of the widows’ resources, the question of their relationships with family members from both sides has been categorized based on the living arrangements of the widows. But actually, the

[61] The *Devanagari* script, which is nowadays generally used to write Nepali language consist of forty-seven primary characters to which are added twelve diacritic signs for vowels, ten numerals, and various punctuation and accent marks, this creates a formidable amount of character variants, which are difficult to learn for any adult who has only acquired concrete thinking.

question is much more complicated. Families, especially joint families, do not present a unified bloc in their relations with the widows, as they are riddled with internal competition and differences in the attitudes of their individual members towards a widow. They may change abruptly because of the death of a household head, the popping up of disputes about expenses and property, or simply because of the influence of a jealous wife on her husband. I will come back to this question in the discussion of the widows' support systems in detail.

The vast majority of the widows lived together either with dependent children or with married children. Only four of them lived alone, two lived with their natal family, and two lived with affinal family. This means that the majority of the widows had more or less stable family relations, and that old-aged widows living alone has not yet become a major social problem in contemporary rural Nepal. However, it tells us nothing about the degree to which these relationships can be mobilized as support networks. Because of the high degree of diversity in the widows' relationships with their families as groups or with single family members, this question can only be addressed in detail. Living with dependent children or with married children is largely a question of age, since children age themselves and will marry, setting up their own household or forming a joint family with their mother. From the life histories it becomes clear that this is one path to living with married children, the other is that the couple was already of old age when the husband died, or the widow aged herself[62] to a degree that she could no longer live on her own and therefore moved in with her married children, or the children moved in with her for several different reasons; in the latter case the scenarios are quite diverse (see Appendix 3, Table 2).

Other Social Networks

While networks based on friends and acquaintances can only be assessed in detail, I was able to categorize social activities based on the widows' participation in various organizations and self-help groups. While incorporated organizations

[62] Most of the widows were widowed for more than ten years, some of the older widows even for more than twenty, and even more than thirty years.

like NGOs and credit unions provide social networks with women in a wider context, the informal and rather traditional self-help groups essentially provide social networks within local society.

All of my informants were involved with WHR, but there also exist several different incorporated cooperative grassroots organizations for women and widows in the villages, of which only one was directly related to WHR. These organizations were not based on Nepali models but followed designs of grassroots level micro-financing and mutual help that have been popular among international NGOs involved in women's empowerment since the mid-1980s. Some of these organizations may have even preceded the establishment of WHR's local chapters in Chitwan District, while some of them might have been inspired by WHR's activities in the district. The self-help groups clearly follow Nepali models and include groups of mutual help like Senior Citizens' Groups, Mother and Daughter Groups, and Community Development Groups that are active in local society. It turned out that quite a number of the widows are socially very active, none of them are not active in any formal organization or other social group, and the majority of them is engaged in two or more groups and some in more than three or four. When counting membership by age groups, I noticed that the widows with multiple engagements clustered in ages between forty-five and sixty-five, multiple engagements were very rare under age forty-five, and it declined after the age of sixty-five. The higher castes were often considerably more involved in multiple engagements than the other caste groups (see Appendix 3, Table 6).

At the time I conducted my fieldwork, I was actually not aware about the variety of the organizations and social groups in which women and widows could participate in the area, and during the interviews I presumed that the groups mentioned by the widows were all somehow related to WHR, and because of time limits for the interviews I ignored further inquiry. The variety of groups and organizations for women that exist in the villages became only clear in the more detailed analysis of the collected interviews after the end of my fieldwork. Therefore, in my structured questions I only inquired how the contact of the

widows with WHR was established. Twenty of the widows were recruited to WHR by other members of the NGO, twenty-five of them were introduced to WHR by family members or neighbors (two of them by both), and one was told about the NGO by a local administrator when she had some problems that she could not solve on her own and he could not simply provide a solution. Concerning the distribution by age, it is interesting that most of the widows under age forty-one were approached by other WRH members directly, while the introduction to the NGO was more diverse in the older age groups. This also means that WHR is actively recruiting members and reaches out to widows who are too shy or too anxious to seek outside help on their own initiative (see Appendix 3, Table 5).

The self-help groups provide socializing and various types of support to the widows, but it is unclear to what degree they can be mobilized as stable support networks for the widows. WHR and the various cooperative organizations, on the other hand, provide very stable support networks and occasions for socializing, communicating, and acquiring skills and information.

4.3.3 The Widows Support Networks in Detail

In this section I will look at the situation of the widows' support networks in a bit more detail, using the voices of the widows themselves. I will organize this section into several topics that are of concern in terms of the widows' support systems. These topics are the initial crisis that the widows experienced at the start of their widowhood, their relations with their families and relatives, their situation within their local society, and their relations with organizations and self-help groups; at the end I will touch on some other aspects that are important for widows' lives and the state of their support systems.

The Initial Crisis

While the widows give only scant information on how their support networks evolved in the course of their widowhood, many of them vividly remember its initial phase and the problems that they faced at that time.

In the case of all of my informants the death of the husband had severe consequences for their social networks. In the case of young widows living with the joint family of their husbands, they became isolated within the joint family and local society. Only in the case where their natal households lived in the same community or close by did they receive support from their natal kinship network. In the case of middle-aged widows living in nuclear family households, the already weak relations with relatives from the husband's joint family came more or less to an end; relations with the kinship network of their natal families remained functional only when they were living close by and when parents and siblings still survived. Social-networks with friends and acquaintances basically came to a halt after the husband's funeral because they had been centered on the husband and not on his wife. In the case of old-aged widows, the relationships with both the husband's family and their own natal family had already grown very thin because of the prior deaths of close relatives; for non-kin social networks the same development applied as in the case of the middle-aged widows.

One severe consequence of the collapse of social networks after the death of the husband is the isolation of the widows, which often leads to psychological and emotional problems. The problem of social isolation that widows experience after the death of the husbands has been reported from many cultures, for instance Lopata (1979) for Chicago, Owen (1996) for widows worldwide, Birech (2012) for Nairobi, Kenia, Galvin (2005) for urban areas of Nepal, Thapa (2012) for Nepal in general, and Aoki (2010) for Japan. It seems to be a general problem for widows worldwide, especially for elderly widows. But if we consider the information from the U.S. and Europe, in advanced societies it seems to be a problem that can easily become more difficult for older widows who start to live alone in highly urbanized environments with poor human relationships in the neighborhood; this problem is much less likely to become severe in rural communities or urban environments with vibrant neighborhood communities. In Nepal, the problem is aggravated because of the customary shunning of widows in Hindu-caste local societies and the customary isolation of the widows from the outside world in joint families. Most of my own informants reported being shunned

by local society and also talked about their feelings of isolation and loneliness after the death of their husband.

- I lost my husband when I was twenty-five years old. Before the death of my husband I was treated as very special and important. After his death the relatives of my husband's joint household started to ignore me and blamed me for the death of their son. They haunted me psychologically. My brothers-in-law repeatedly accused me of planning to steal the property inheritance from the household… I lost my confidence, I always cried, without confidence nothing was left but crying. It was a very dreadful life. (AK, 40, Brahmin, School Leaving Certificate, young widow)
- I was thirty when I lost my husband. We lived together in one room with our two sons, and did tailoring work there together. Immediately after my husband died, the landlord rudely told me to leave the house with my children. The neighbors persistently blamed me to be untouchable (*dalit*), practicing witchcraft, and longing for other men, refused any contact with us and pressured us to leave the neighborhood. (AV, 57, Dalit, illiterate, young widow)

These two cases are examples that are typical of the initial crisis in the relationships of the widows with their husbands' joint families and in local society. But at the same time, they also reveal that other motives than concern for the protection of the household's or the local society's purity are also at play in the treatment of widows. The first case clearly shows that the possibility of the widow's inheritance of her husband's property and its prevention was a major concern of the men of the joint household in their treatment of the widow. The second case is more difficult, but it is clear the treatment of the widow overlapped with social discrimination against the low-caste *Dalit*.

The economic problems that can be very severe because of the costs of the funeral rites and of eventual medical treatment of a sick husband before his death are clearly shown in the following two cases.

- Before my husband's death I was a housewife. My husband had cancer. Actually, he was working for the Nepal Police Force. The Maoist revolution was at its height at that time, so we asked him to resign his job but it was not easy. But one day he came home and never returned back to his job. He was diagnosed with cancer. It was very hard to manage the home and household alone. We were confronted with financial difficulties. In-laws did not help at all. Shortly after my husband's death, one of my close natal relatives asked one of his friends to hire me. Luckily, I got the job and joined an office of the Nepal Electric City Authority. Now I earn nearly 16,000 Nepali rupees a month. I am the household head and I have sons studying at school. (AD, 40, Brahmin, uncompleted secondary education, young widow)
- My relationship with my husband was not very good, he always lied to me. When he had drunk too much alcohol, he associated with another woman. When he was in Saudi Arabia, he had an accident and died. Because he died in an accident, I was entitled to receive money from his labor accident insurance, but my husband's family and people from their neighborhood were against me receiving this insurance, and they hid his citizenship certificate and our marriage certificate and so prevented my access to the insurance money. At that time, I had rented land from a relative and engaged in agriculture. At first, none of my in-laws was bad-mouthing me, but at the time of the harvest, they took away the produce without consulting me. I had invested a lot of money and worked hard, and it was all for nothing. It was terrible, but I could only weep. (AI, Chhetri, uncompleted secondary education, young widow)

A special problem for the widows, who had had no prior experience in dealing with the world outside of the household, was the confrontation with their new situation of being solely responsible for the household, business matters, and dealing with the authorities without help.

- Before his death, my husband took care of all the household financial matters. After his death, I had to go and pay the electric bills at the Electrical Authority City Office for the first time in my life, and I was very confused and did not know where to do it. I had to ask a lot of people until I found the right place. (AJ, 47, Brahmin, uncompleted primary education, middle-aged widow)

The end of social relationships centered around the deceased husband, which was experienced by widows who already lived in a nuclear household before his death, is shown in the following case.

- Concerning differences in treatment by the family and society after entering widowhood, it was and is obvious in my case. Family members have behaved differently after the death of my husband compared to before. When my husband was alive, neighbors and relatives regularly visited our home. But now, such visits have decreased dramatically. Men usually do not visit after a woman becomes a widow. (AJ, Brahmin, uncompleted elementary school, middle-aged widow)

Family Relationships

Family relationships can be divided into four distinct groups: relationships with members of the affinal family, relationships with members of one's own natal family, relationships with one's own adult children, and relationships with one's own dependent children and grandchildren. However, first I want to look at the widows' relationships with their deceased husbands.

Relations with the Deceased Husband

Most of my informants reported satisfactory or good relations with their deceased husbands, and some of the widows' narratives revealed persistent bonds of love with their husbands. But several of the widows reported that they encountered problems in their marriage or that they had had really bad relations with their husbands.

AW said that she was tricked into marrying a man who had mental problems about which she was not informed before her marriage. He was kind to her and she called the marriage relations satisfactory, but she needed to provide extra help to him, which was an additional burden. She believes that her natal

household wanted to marry her off, because they were poor and she was an orphan and a financial burden for her brother (see Appendix 3, Selected Live Histories of Widows: Story of AW).

AI reported that her relationship with her husband was not very good. He lied to her, was a drunkard, and kept another woman on the side but outside of the household (see page 92 above). Another example of a womanizing husband was given by AG, and examples of violent husbands by BA and AN.

- I managed household tasks myself. I struggled alone. It was not easy for me. He was a manual laborer. He was always attracted to women. He had sexual relations everywhere when he went away on a job. My relationship with my husband was not satisfactory, so his death did not bother me at all. (AG, Chhetri, adult education, middle-aged widow)

- Marriage relations with my husband were not good. He was physically violent. Every time we met, he fought and beat me a lot. He died due to a disease. (BA, Brahmin, adult education, young widow)

- I was 21 years old when I married and he was 25 years old. He was in the Nepal Army. He was an alcoholic and died from alcohol. We always had fights, not a good relationship. (AN, Chhetri, adult education, young widow)

The husband's alcohol abuse was mentioned in the narratives of several widows, and in one case it was related with his womanizing, but only the two cases of BA and AN mentioned that the husband became physically violent towards his wife when he was drunk.

Before discussing relations with their affinal and natal families, we must note that these relations are first of all dependent upon a widow's current age and upon her age at the time of her husband's death.[63] In the case of the affinal family the relations of the widow with her affinal joint-family household were basically mediated through her husband's parents and brothers and other members of the joint household had less responsibility to her, although the narratives of the widows reveal that sometimes another sister-in-law in the household provided support.[64] A similar point applies to a widow's relationship with her natal

[63] See Appendix 2, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Story of BJ. She was sixty-three when her husband died and there was no one left from her maternal family, and perhaps neither any one from her husband's family, he was already forty when he married her, and he was well over eighty when he died, she lives now with her younger son and his family.

[64] The term "sister-in-law" is a bit ambiguous, because it can apply as well to a daughter of the household as to a daughter-in-law. Generally in Nepal, the relationships between the daughters of the household and its daughters-in-law are not very close.

household. After her marriage into another household, this relationship was basically mediated by and limited to her parents and brothers (her own sisters were in general not mentioned in the narratives). As a widow grows older, relationships are only possible with those affinal or natal relatives who are still alive, and those who still survive after the widow crosses the age of sixty are very few. Therefore, above a certain age the only relatives that still can be part of a widow's support networks are her own children, and sometimes grandchildren.

Another important point that applies to affinal families, as well as to natal families, is the fact that in either case there are relatives with which the widows have had good relations, while relations with others are very difficult. Sometimes the family relations with both sides can be very convoluted, see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Story of BA.

Relations with Affinal Family

The relations of the widows with their affinal families are complicated. They cannot simply be divided into the two types of "providing support" versus "declining or preventing support". Generally speaking, the affinal families did not form a united front in their relations with the widows, some members of the affinal families caused problems, while other members provided emotional and material support.

- My mother-in-law and father-in-law forced me to leave my home where I had lived with my husband and daughters soon after his death… In the past, my brother-in-law also used to discriminate against me, however, now he has changed…. My sister-in-law has always helped me to find loans. (AA, Chhetri, adult education, middle-aged widow)

- No relatives from my husband's side helped at first. But my sister-in-law helped a lot in every crisis of our life. She did not give us money but helped us to find immediate loans. (AY, Chhetri, adult education, middle-aged widow)

The relations with the affinal family was especially crucial in the early phase of widowhood, especially in the case of young widows who lived with their husbands' joint-family household. Scolding the widow and accusing her and her daughters of being responsible for the death of their husband and father[65] and other forms

[65] Several of the narratives of the widows report that they were called "husband eater" and their daughters "father eater", which is based on a belief that the wife and the daughter used a kind of witchcraft to consume

of psychological pressure drove the widows into a mental state on the brink of depression and hampered the process of coming to term with the death of their husbands and rebuilding their lives.

- My mother-in-law also continuously accused us that I ate her son's life and that my daughters ate their father. In the past, my brother-in-law also used to discriminate against me, however, now he has changed. I was always scared of my mother-in-law. At that time, I could not respond to her bad treatment and painful words. I just cried sitting in some corner, where no one could see me. (AA, Chhetri, adult education, middle-aged widow)

The other problem, which I already discussed above, was the initial economic burden from the death rites and eventual medical treatment of the husband and the reluctance of the joint family to share in these costs, which, combined with the joint family's reluctance to hand over property such as agricultural land to the widow, could cause long-term difficulties for the widow's economic support system (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Story of AD).

But in many of these cases there were affinal family members who provided emotional and sometimes also material support. And then there are exemplary cases as well, in which the affinal family provided stable emotional and material support to the widow and her children.

- I am lucky, because I was born and married in the same place. So, I did not face extreme forms of discrimination and suppression from my husband's family and society. Everyone has known me since my childhood. My brother-in-law has also promised to give me land. My mother-in-law is also kind. My husband's family is really kind to me.… My children are also treated equally with love and care at home. (AE, Brahmin, uncomplete secondary education, young widow)

In the narratives of the widows, relations with the natal family were dominated by mothers-in-law, who often formed the center of the torments of the widows and influenced the other family members' behavior towards them. Other important players in the relations were brothers-in-law, who sometimes were very restrictive and unsupportive towards the widows, and sometimes very kind and helpful. Fathers-in law did not figure very prominently in the widows' narratives, and like their sons they could either be a problem or a support for the widows.

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the strength and life force of their husband and father (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AA, AC, AK, and AU).

Relations with Natal Family

Like with the relations to affinal families, the relations with the natal families are also not simple. These relations were additionally conditioned by the distance between the widow's place of residence and that of her natal family. A large distance between the places made it impossible for the members of the natal family to become continuous and stable sources of emotional and material support. Therefore, their support was only activated in situations of major crisis.

- My maternal home is in Dolkha *(a bit more than 100 km from her present home, K.T.)*. My natal home is quite far from my home, so I cannot rely on them for help every time I need it. (AA, Chhetri, adult education, middle-aged widow)

AA's complete narrative clearly shows her reluctance to ask her mother for help unless she faced a major crisis in her life.

Relations with the natal family were basically limited to the narratives from young widows and middle-aged widows. In the narratives of old-aged widows they are seldom mentioned, and almost never as sources for support[66]

There are a few narratives in which a brother displayed a negative stance towards his sister's state of widowhood, but in these cases the negative attitude seems to have been conditioned by the poverty of the natal household and the reluctance of the brother to provide material assistance.

In general, however, most narratives of widows that touched on relations with members of the natal family reported that they repeatedly received emotional and material support (money, food, labor) from their brothers and parents (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AC, AD, AK, AL, AY, and BL). There were even cases in which young widows were, at least temporarily, readmitted into the natal family (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AC and AV).

[66] The terms "young widow", "middle-aged widow" and "old-aged widow" do not refer to the actual age of the informants at the time of my interviews, but to their age at the time of the death of their husbands. Following WHR's definition, the husbands of young widows died when the women were aged 18-35 years, middle-aged widows were 36-59 years and old-aged widows were 60 years and above.

- My daughter was just 9 months old when she lost her father. His unfortunate death strangled our life. We were living in a joint family. Soon, I started to face discrimination and bad-mouthing from his family. I felt like I would become mentally ill. I was under pressure every moment. I always sought about ways to leave his home. I could not handle those situations. I was very eager to separate from them. My natal home took me back in. When I left my husband's home, I felt so much relief that I cannot express it. (AC, Brahmin, undergraduate student in university, young widow)

Judging from the narratives of the widows, this support from the natal family was not considered by the widows to become permanent, and they only approached their natal family for help when they were in dire situations of emotional or economic crisis.

If we summarize the relations of the widows with their affinal and natal families considering the contribution of these relations to the widows' support networks, we must conclude that in the case of young widows and many of the middle-aged widows they cannot be regarded as stable and permanent contributors to the widows' support networks. There is also always the danger of abrupt changes in the behavior of the joint families, if the position of authority changes.

Relations with Adult Children

There are several kinds of scenarios in which a widow of advanced age eventually ends up living in the household of her adult children. However, the traditional normative way in Nepali society would be that one of the sons, normally the eldest son, takes care of his old-aged parents, including a widowed mother. This is especially the case for old-aged widows who were by definition older than fifty-nine years at the time of the death of their husbands, and also the case for middle-aged widows whose sons were already grown up at the time of their fathers' death and one of them took over the household headship.

- I am now 86 years old. In my time there was no school, so I have never been to school. I married at the age of 18. My husband was 23 years old at that time. He died at 89 due to his age. My relationship with my husband was good and satisfactory. I don't need to do work. I am old. Therefore, I just stay at home and help if needed. My daughter-in-law is kind and behaves properly. She respects me. Our family lives together. We are not separated yet. Thus, our property is also not divided and we are ok. We have more than 10 members in our family. My younger son and his family lives in Hong Kong. They visit Nepal in their vacation. Now I live with my elder son and his family. My children are educated. My elder son worked in an international company for many years, and he travelled to many countries. They are open-minded. (BF, Janajati, illiterate, old-aged widow)

This narrative of a very old widow shows a very good arrangement in which the adult sons provide a stable support network for their old mother, but this

household is composed of Buddhist Janajati and not of high-caste Hindus. As the following example shows, in the case of high-caste Hindus the relations between the old mother and her sons' households are not always as smooth as the example above.

- I have two sons, ut every six months I have to rotate between their households. It is not because they care about and love me; the reason is different. Actually, I am burden to them. One of my sons and his family live in Nepal and the other is working in a foreign country, but his family lives in the same village as me. When I stay with his family and my son calls from the foreign country, he never talks to me and never asks about my health condition. My daughter-in-law treats me like an outsider. My daughter-in-law and grandchildren are really harsh to me. My son does not scold them for mistreating me. Although I help them in their farm work and kitchen work, I am never appreciated. I even wash my plate after I finish my meal. I feel so sad in my heart. (BI, 71, Brahmin, illiterate, middle-aged widow)[67]

BI was forty-one years old when her husband died, so she is categorized as a middle-aged widow, but at the time of the husband's death her two sons were already grown up and her daughter had also left the household. The family was and still is engaged in agriculture and the widow still retains ownership of the land, but household headship has moved effectively to the wife of her son who is a labor migrant in Saudi Arabia or Dubai.[68] Her relations with her sons is not very good, and she especially complains about her treatment by her daughters-in-law and her grandchildren. Her support system provides her with a stable but not comfortable livelihood, which together with the regular alternating of her residence between the households of her two sons points to an unwillingness of her sons to provide more than basic support for her.

However, other narratives also show that among high-caste Hindus adult sons do provide the majority of the support networks for their old mother (see Appendix 2, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AO, BJ), and also regularly send her money if they are labor migrants in foreign countries (see Appendix 2, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AJ, AO).

Looking at the narratives, it becomes clear that contrary to the findings of several prior studies that responsibility for the care of older family members is limited to

[67] From the complete interview I know that this widow owns considerable property, and it seems that her sons only share their duty to care for her in the hope for inheritance. But because of the bad treatment she has received from her sons and their families, she has decided to leave her property to her daughter who lives in very poor conditions, which will be very difficult due to the opposition of the sons.
[68] She mentions both names in her narrative, but Dubai is part of the United Arab Emirates, not of Saudi Arabia. This mix-up might be due to insufficient geographical understanding; she has no school education.

sons because daughters are cut from their natal families, in my sample adult daughters were an important part of the support networks of middle-aged and old-aged widows (see Appendix 2, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AH, AQ, AU, BB, BC, BE, BH).

Relations with Dependent Children

Twenty-two of the young widows and twelve of the middle-aged widows had dependent children living with them at the time of the death of their husband and thereafter (see Appendix 3, Table 7). Relations with these dependent children and the degree to which they could act as a support for their mother differed according to their age. Dependent children were first of all an emotional support for their mothers, and especially when the mothers were driven to the brink of depression, they provided their mothers with a motive to go on living and to explore how to ameliorate their situation. Small children cannot be expected to be much of a material support for their mothers, but children grow up. Depending on the length of time between their mothers' age at the time of her husband's death and the time of my fieldwork, they increasingly provided material help to their mothers. All of the widows with dependent children expressed concern for their children's education and wished them to continue their education as far as possible, so the school fees and other costs of the education of their children occupied a major part of the widows' expenses, and sometimes put a severe drain on their economic resources. Only in a few cases did affinal relatives support the costs of the widows' children's education; in such cases, outside support often came from the natal family, pensions, and scholarships. But there were several cases in which the economic situation of the household was very unstable, and sons or daughters decided to leave school early in order to work and support the household economically (see Appendix 2, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AP, AU, and BB). Also, there were several cases in which initially dependent children became a stable part of the support network of their mothers in their later, advanced years.

Relations with Local Society

Relations with local society appear in the widows' narratives basically as relations with neighbors and incidents during auspicious and religious events.

Most narratives report unproblematic and friendly relations with neighbors. Reading between the lines, I got the impression that the neighbors rather wanted to stay out of eventual conflicts between the affinal family households and the widows. Nevertheless, several narratives report that members of the affinal household influenced neighbors in a way that they adopted a discriminatory attitude towards the widows, or even supported the affinal households in attempts to harm the widows' support system (see Appendix 2, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AI, AL, BL, and BI). I found only two cases in which a widow who lived with an abusive affinal household received emotional support from the neighbors, or even help by caring for the widow's son for a few hours when she had to work (see Appendix 2, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AA and AK).

Auspicious and religious events are somewhat complicated. As the following excerpt from the narrative of AC shows, the Hindu priesthood is not necessarily united in its treatment of widows' participation in religious ceremonies.

- Five years back, an unforgettable event happened to us. There was an auspicious event for worshipping gods that was held in a nearby village. One of the priests told us, "Widows are not allowed to participate in the front line and touch the items prepared for worshipping. It pollutes them". I stood up and started to argue with him, and then the main priest intervened and apologized to us. (AC, Brahmin, undergraduate university student, young widow)

The following excerpt from the narrative of AU makes clear that other members of the congregation can react quite disruptively when they feel offended by the widow's way of participating in an auspicious event or religious ceremony.

- During my brother's marriage, the priest told me that I can put *tika* on his forehead. But other people who were near us advised me not to do so. They started to scold me. My mother cried a lot hearing this. (AU, Brahmin, uncompleted secondary education, young widow)

But AU's experience points to a larger problem. In many of the narratives the widow expresses fear and concern for offending the feelings of other members of the congregation while participating in auspicious events and religious ceremonies, and they stress a reluctance to participate in such events in a

prominent position (see Appendix 2, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AB, AJ, AO, AY, BH, BL). This fear indicates that many widows are not certain about the stability of the current more lenient and tolerant attitude and behavior towards them, as it is especially clearly formulated in the excerpt from AO's narrative below.

- Sometimes I feel like, if my husband was alive, everything would be easy and I could spent my time happily. We did not have restrictions while married, especially we did not have to become conscious while laughing and talking to others. We were fearless at that time. But after becoming a widow we become self-conscious. We always think and be careful of what others might talk and think about us. We cannot easily leave our home and stroll around or take a walk. There is always fear in the bottom of our hearts and a feeling of fear of suppression from others. At the same time, I am always conscious not to go to the front during auspicious functions and events. People might not feel comfortable seeing us while they go on a long trip. Because the stereotypes and beliefs concerning widows still prevail in the society, tasks might not get done if the people who have to do them see them as being for a widow. (AO, Brahmin, adult education, middle-aged widow)

Relations with Self-Help Groups and Incorporated Organizations

Self-help groups and the various cooperatives were mentioned in the widows' narratives more or less only in passing. It is interesting to note that only two of the self-help groups had exclusively female membership (mother groups and daughter-in-law groups, but they sometimes were also divided into various groups for different castes). Membership in these groups allowed the widows to some extent to regain a legitimate social position within local society, and judging from the narratives, this was also the case for membership in the cooperatives and in WHR, especially if the widow became an officer of any of these organizations. One of the widows even mentioned that she had become a member of the local temple committee.

- Now, I am one of the active members of the WHR Single Women Group and president of WHR's Mangular office. Things have changed now. His family feels proud of me *(her formerly abusive parents-in-law, K.T.)*. I am also involved in different organizations, developing my ability and capacity. Also, I continued my studies and now I am an undergraduate student in the nearby university… Now I am also a member of the local temple committee. I am now stronger than in the past. I do not feel afraid. (AC, Brahmin, undergraduate university student, young widow)

AH is also one of the widows who is very active socially. At sixty-five, she is much older than AC, but she is also better educated than widows of her generation in general. Besides WHR, she is also active in several other cooperative groups, and she also works as a health-awareness volunteer in the Health Awareness Program. She also loves to travel. As a Buddhist, she did not receive any negative treatment from her affinal and natal families (see Appendix 3, Selected Life

Histories of Widows: Story of AH). Both cases show that a better education can be an important factor for enabling the social activities of a widow.

Only one of the cooperatives had been organized by WHR; the other cooperatives also had exclusively female membership, but they were not limited to widows. When those cooperatives were mentioned, the informants sometimes also touched on their function for the support networks of the widows. They provided an opportunity for savings and a source for loans on good conditions, and also disseminated business know-how and other skills. Some of the cooperatives also provided scholarships for the education of the children of their members. The only organization that gained more detailed consideration in the widows' narratives was WHR.[69] The narratives of the widows show that besides membership in the cooperatives, especially WHR membership was decisive for many widows to rebuild their support networks. It especially helped widows to rebuild their self-confidence and to acquire new social networks. Some of the widows even became very confrontational within local society if they perceived negative attitudes towards widows, which represent good examples of agency (see Galvin 2003: 24-41).

- We participated for the first time in a workshop on widows in Kathmandu. After we returned home, we organized a widows' group in our region in Chitawan. When I remember now, we all started to weep when we participated for the first time in the workshop on widows. Even now I cannot forget how we started to weep when we heard the founder of WHR, Miss Lily's presentation at the workshop. Recently, I have been elected to the temple committee, and my self-confidence has greatly improved compared to before I became a member of WHR. Now I have no fear in public. (AC, 40, Brahmin, undergraduate university student, young widow)

- I lost my self-confidence the moment my husband died. I always wept. I had no confidence and the only thing left was weeping. It was a very dreadful time. My life changed after I joined WHR. My way of thinking changed, and I started to understand that it was my human right to live a fulfilling and happy life. Now I can give advice to other widows with confidence.（AK, 40, Brahmin, School Leaving Certificate, young widow）

- After I became a member of WHR, I developed self-confidence. WHR became the place to meet new people and to share our feelings. In the past, talking with other people was scary. Compared to before, now I have become able to speak, and even to negotiate. (BB, 47, Janajaati, uncompleted secondary education, middle-aged widow）

[69] This could also be an effect of the way my interviews were structured. I asked explicitly about their relation with WHR, but not about the widows' membership in other social groups, because I was unaware at the time of my fieldwork to what extend many of the widows were socially active in local society.

- When I participated in events, I made many new friends among the widows. Thus, my network enlarged and the number of my relationships with people on whom I can rely when I am in trouble increased. I am happier than before. (AO, 63, Brahmin, illiterate, middle-aged widow)

- Simply by being a member of WHR, I meet other widows when I participate in WHR events. There I understood that I am not the only miserable one, I noticed for the first time that all of us had the same experiences. (BH, 36, Dalit, uncompleted secondary education, young widow)

Participation in events of WHR led to a rebuilding of the self-confidence of the widows which was accompanied by a reduction of anxiety that had become an impediment for dealing with other people. This process was crucial for the widows in establishing new social relations and in becoming able to deal with their social environment. Participation in activities with other widows and sharing their own life experiences with them had a cathartic effect on widows who were lost in grief and anxiety. One can even say that the widows developed new identities of being a widow and a member of WHR that transcend caste differences. At the same time, the interaction with other widows helped them to build new social relationships and to rebuild their social networks and support systems. Other widows did become friends and confidants on whom the widow can rely for advice, help, and other support.

The effect of WHR membership on the widows' support systems was not limited to rebuilding the widows' identity, it also includes much more direct support for the widows.

- I became a widow at the age of 39. I cannot read and write. That's why I have no steady job. I work as a daily wage laborer and earn money on a daily basis. I am the only breadwinner of my family. I have two daughters. Both are bright at study. Unfortunately, I do not have sufficient money to send them to a private school. It is sometimes difficult to manage money for their additional remedial classes. But the best part is my two daughters receive scholarships, one from the widow NGO, and one from a private sponsor. (AA, 47, Chettri, illiterate, middle-aged widow)

This case shows that like several of the cooperatives, WHR also promotes awareness concerning the education of their dependent children among widows, and also tries to help mothers without means to give their children an education. WHR also helps in dealing with local bureaucracies and assists with filling out applications.

- When my husband was alive, I did not realize the importance of the citizenship certificate. But I needed it after his death in order to claim the monthly widow allowances provided by the government. I am illiterate, and I did not have any idea about dealing with the official applications and documents that are required to be submitted. So, sisters working at WHR helped me to prepare all the required papers (AA, 47, Chettri, illiterate, middle-aged widow).

This case shows how support from WHR becomes important for widows who lack the basic skills for dealing with bureaucracies and paperwork. The citizenship certificate and the citizenship card are very important to prove a widow's identity and marriage status, and are necessary for applying for a widow allowance or old-age allowance. Widows without a citizenship certificate have to apply for them with the local administration. This process is sometimes more difficult than simply requiring help with the paperwork of illiterate widows, because additional testimony has to be provided by the deceased husband's joint family. This can be withheld, especially if questions of inheritance or pensions from foreign countries are involved. In these cases, support from WHR becomes decisive. Like the cooperatives, WHR also provides direct economic assistance through its savings and credit program.

- Now, my self-confidence has improved. Because I became a member of the savings and credit program of the NGO, every month I put money into my savings. When I have money troubles, I can borrow from the NGO. Now my life is much happier than before. To help me to stabilize my life, I received goats as economic support from the NGO, and as the number of goats increases, I sell them. (AN, 40, Chhetri, adult education, young widow)

In this case, the economic assistance was provided in kind. Goat meat has become the most luxurious food item in Nepal, and raising goats is much easier than other kinds of husbandry. But what is important here is economic support on the micro level which aims at a sustainable business and supporting the economic independence and self-reliance of the widow. This kind of economic support is normally provided through savings and credit unions, which are themselves an example of self-help on the micro level.

Other Aspects of Importance for the Widows' Support Systems

The other factors that cannot easily be categorized but nevertheless have an important effect of the support systems of the widows are the learning of new skills and the labor migration of husbands and sons. Also important are the economic situation of the widows, and widows' attitudes towards remarriage.

Both the cooperatives and WHR provide various kinds of skills training. These also include workshops for fostering women's and widows' knowledge and awareness about their own social and economic situation, and new skills in

processing information that are not typically possessed by married women in a Hindu-caste society.

Labor migration of the husband before his death can also result in such new skills for the wife, because she has to manage on her own alone while her husband is abroad. Hence, a widow might have become an independent person prior to her husband's death, which gave her a much better chance to avoid the meltdown of her support systems caused by his death (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Story of AQ). In particular, the labor migration to foreign countries by her sons or daughters provided increased the resources of the widows, not only through regular remittance of money but also through gifts of new technologies like TV sets and cellular telephones (see Appendix 3, Selected Life Histories of Widows: Stories of AH, AG, AO, and BB). As is evident from the examples of older widows who developed their own independence because of their husbands' labor migration, women who are currently married to men who are labor migrants also foster their own economic independence. This is a kind of silent social change with effects that will only become apparent in the future.

Most of the widows in my sample sustain their life with a combination of economic support from a variety of sources, not all monetary. We can see in the widows' narratives a mix of the formal and the informal economy. Up to a quite high age over sixty years the widows' own labor was the most important source of economic support. Several of the widows received the bulk of their livelihood from day labor, but the dominant form was engagement in agriculture, which, even in the case of only meager property of agricultural land, for many of them provided at least the bulk of their food. Additional income came from pensions and the special social security allowances, like the widow allowance and old-age allowance. These provide a regular cash inflow that was additionally supplemented by working children's contribution to the household expenses and the more irregular supports from monetary remittances from children working abroad, and monetary help from members of their natal and affinal families. Nepal is still an agricultural country, and most of the widows were accustomed to agricultural work since their youth, and managed quite well with occasional male

help for the more heavy tasks. Besides help from brothers, labor exchange was an important source for acquiring such outside help. Compared to agricultural work, it was more difficult for widows to adjust to doing artisanal work alone without the cooperation of their husband, as the example of AV, who did tailoring work with her husband before his death, shows.

- For one to two months, my father took me back in and I stayed there, but after that period I returned to live on my own, and I started the work of sewing by myself. At first, I did not know much about how to cut the clothes, but I learned slowly. (AV, 60, Dalit, illiterate, young widow).

AV's case is reminiscent of Cameron's (1998: 81) finding about the difficulties of low-caste widows performing the tasks of artisanal work without the cooperation of a husband.

Among the questions guiding the unstructured section of my interviews was an inquiry about the widows' opinion concerning the remarriage of widows; therefore, this topic appears in most of the widows' narratives. They sometimes are a very interesting read, like the following one:

- While talking about remarriage of a young widow, I will allow it if she is my daughter, but I cannot permit it if she is my daughter-in-law. She is my son's wife. How can I permit it? She has to perform rituals for our family. I am fully against her remarrying eventually. (AG, 60, Chhetri, adult education, middle-aged widow).

This statement clearly shows that the topic is a conflicted issue in the mind of many of the widows in my sample, not only of the older ones. The promotion of lenience towards the remarriage of widows is one issue on the agenda of WHR and therefore vocally supported by most of the informants, but then come conditions which the informants regard as important. In general, the informants are comfortable with the remarriage of childless young widows, but they express strong objections to the remarriage of young widows with small children. Remarriage of middle-aged and old widows was not considered at all. It should be noted that BB, the only case of a widow who remarried (and became a widow for a second time), left her dependent daughter with her maternal family when she married her second husband, and brought her into her own household only after her second husband's death. The marriage with her second husband, a widower himself, was arranged by relatives from her natal household. The point here is, in the case of remarriage, dependent children from the first husband

cannot easily be integrated into the family of the second husband, and face discrimination and harassment there. Concern for the well-being of the children from the prior marriage seems to be the main motive for the rejection of the remarriage of widows with dependent children by my informants. While sons sometimes are welcome in their father's patriline, daughters are in principle not, and the natal household is also not always able to accommodate them.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Widowhood is a global phenomenon, and widows around the world share many experiences, some of which are also shared by widowers. Nevertheless, widowhood has not gained much scholarly attention, neither in family studies, nor in gender studies. Widows and widowers share the experience of loss and grief, but the social impact of losing a spouse is quite different. In general, widowers do not experience the same collapse of social networks and support systems as widows do. The reason for this is the gendered nature of social and economic relations in patriarchal societies. But patriarchal societies are not all the same around the globe and through the ages. The treatment of widows and the processes of the collapse and rebuilding of their support networks differ due to various socio-cultural factors, which we have to take into account if we want to apply the concept of support systems to different socio-cultural environments.

Socio-cultural customs concerning gender relations in Nepalese Hindu-caste society have many peculiarities compared to other patriarchal societies, so it is necessary to explore the cultural basis for these customs and to understand their fluidity. If we look at the descriptions of the life of widows in Cameron (1998), Galvin (2005), Thapa (2012), and the results of my own fieldwork from 2016-2018, these studies indicate that the customs concerning the treatment of widows have continuously become more lenient and tolerant in the last three decades. And as Brunson's (2016) rather longitudinal cultural-anthropological study, which consisted of more than ten years of recurrent fieldwork, shows, the gender-related customs in Nepalese Hindu-caste communities are not static. They are influenced by structural changes on the macro level and also by learning experiences on the micro level. Nevertheless, these customs, which are based on concepts of (ritual) purity and pollution, still define the situation of women in Hindu families and in local society. They are the major factor that determines the deprived and vulnerable position of widows in Hindu-caste communities. The narratives of the widows in my sample show that traditional Hindu beliefs about the impurity of widows - that they are dangerous, harbingers of bad luck, and destroyers of the life of their husbands - still exist in rural Nepal, and are by no means limited to members of the older generations. They also still determine the treatment of young widows in their husbands' joint families. As the cases of Buddhist informants indicate, these widows' experiences in their families differ considerably from that of widows in Hindu families, but nevertheless they experienced similar restrictions and discrimination in a predominantly Hindu-caste social environment of local society, and that they tried to conform in public with the customs that dominate in their social environment.

Examining widowhood in Nepal in a wider context not limited to the results of my fieldwork not only allowed a better understanding of how cultural customs and beliefs condition the life of widows in Nepali Hindu-caste society, it also allows us to see that these customs and beliefs have been subjected to continuous change

since the 1990s, and which has accelerated since the end of end of the civil war. Many of the restrictions widows faced in Cameron's (1998), Galvin's (2005), and Thapa's (2012) reports could no longer be observed in my fieldwork from 2016-2018, or they had become considerably relaxed, and attitudes towards widows in local society had become much more lenient and tolerant.

The concept of support systems, which was developed by Lopata and her collaborators in the 1970s and 1980s, is a useful and effective theoretical tool for analyzing the life situation of widows and its changes in the course of time. However, as the studies in Lopata (1987a, 1987b) show, the content and structure of these support systems are heavily influenced by socio-cultural factors and by social change. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of these factors on the micro level of social and cultural customs and gender relations. These factors are less structural and more processual in nature. A lot of the processes of social change operate on the micro level of socio-cultural customs, and the same is true for Nepal. Using the concept of support systems in the analysis of the widows' relations with their social environment also allowed a certain emotional distance from some of the more disturbing practices in Hindu-caste society that were reported in the widows' narratives.

The interviews with my informants reveal that widowhood in Nepal is not a static stage in life but rather a process which includes several stages and which evolves over the life course of the widows.[70] The first stage is characterized by grief, despair, and the collapse of widows' social networks and support systems. In this stage, widows experience isolation and discrimination within their husbands' joint families and local society. Their social position drops to the bottom of the social hierarchy. In this phase, widows also experience a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence and growing anxiety in dealing with other people. The support of relatives from a widow's natal family and from her own children can mitigate the impact of this collapse of social networks and support systems, but this depends on the age of the widow, the distance of her residence from that of her natal family, the age of her children, and her children's place of residence.

Judging from the widows' narratives, their family relations cannot simply be divided between affinal and natal families. Both seldom acted in unity. The relations between the widows and their families were in both cases in essence decided by the relations with individual family members, and in both cases these relations could have a positive or negative effect on the widows' support systems.

Because of the increasing tendency of couples in their thirties and forties to separate themselves from their joint-family households, the effect of the affinal families on the support systems of the widows is difficult to assess. On one hand,

[70] Lopata's research on widows in Chicago was based on a quantitative cross-sectional survey, which does only give very limited information concerning changes in the widows' lives during the life course, but she was aware of such changes.

the separation from the affinal joint family shelters an eventual widow from the detrimental effects of the treatment that she might experience from her mother-in-law; on the other hand, it also deprives her from support that the affinal household might offer. For younger widows the relations with the affinal family might more often be detrimental than beneficial for their support networks. Relations with natal families in general provide support in crisis situations, but they seldom act as a stable and long-term addition to the widows' support networks. What remains are the widow's relations with her own children, which are quite diverse. If the children were already independent prior to their father's death, some are happily providing stable support to their widowed mother, while others do this only grudgingly or even shed the responsibility completely. Originally dependent children who grew up experiencing the effects of her state of widowhood in general tend to provide stable support to their mother.

In the relations between the widows and their adult children we can observe a silent change of growing ambivalence of the sons concerning their responsibilities towards their widowed mothers and an increasing involvement of the daughters in the widows' support networks. Judging from the widows' narratives, daughters have become important actors in their mothers' support systems. This is an interesting fact that was also observed by Lopata in her research on widows in Chicago from the 1970s, but which to a certain degree is less surprising than the observations from contemporary Nepal, because of the focus on the bilateral kinship relations in Western and Central European historical marriage traditions dating back to the early medieval era (see Mitterauer 2010: Chapter 3).[71] Rapid socio-economic changes have directly and indirectly influenced the structure of Nepalese households and the definition of a family in itself.

With the expansion of international labor migration[72] and educational migration, in many cases sons and their families live in foreign countries. Even if they send financial help, they cannot perform their traditional responsibility of the day-to-day care of their old parents. Daughters are emerging as prominent economic contributors and caretakers for their widowed mothers. This is another factor in the change of family practices in Nepalese Hindu-caste society.

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[71] As a general note I like to add that I don't agree with the popular assumption in the social sciences of mothers' in patriarchal societies preference of the relations with their sons to the detriment of mother-daughter relations; it lacks empirical evidence, and in my opinion it is more a result of male-dominated research designs and prejudices, than based on a correct understanding of the social realities.

[72] Between 2008 and 2017 the Nepalese government issued 3.5 Million labor permits to migrants workers in foreign countries, which is more than ten percent of the total population of Nepal, but these numbers are by no means complete, because they only include migrant workers that participate in bilateral programs between the state of Nepal and foreign countries and they do not include migrants for other purposes, like education or family dependents, who later enter gainful employment in their host countries. The economic impact of labor migration is immense. In 2017 the total remittances from labor migrants to relatives in Nepal amounted to USD 6.56 Billion, which was more than 26% of Nepal's GDP (https://asiafoundation.org, 2020.11.09).

International migration has other effects besides providing stable monetary support to many widows in my sample. They also include gifts of new technology, especially of communication technology like cellular telephones which have become ubiquitous in rural Nepal and also among widows, and which have opened up communication opportunities with distant relatives and children that did not exist a decade or two ago. Labor migration of the husbands of women living in households that have separated themselves from the joint families also adds another new factor into the social fabric of patriarchal Hindu communities: These women have to manage their household and its resources alone on their own, which teaches them new skills and knowledge that are not typical for wives in rural Hindu-caste society, and this has introduced independent wives into rural Nepal on a much larger scale than a decade ago.

Local society, which is described as a formidable base for the customary Hindu practices concerning women in much of the prior case studies on gender relations in Nepal, seems to be much less involved in negative treatment of widows and much more tolerant and lenient towards widows nowadays. But judging from the narratives of the widows, while neighbors sometimes side with the affinal families, they are more often reported as kind towards the widows and even helpful in small things; rather, neighbors seem to avoid being drawn into conflicts between the affinal families and widows. Quite another thing is the widows' participation in auspicious events and religious ceremonies, because this participation always includes the risk of offending the religious feelings or traditional attitudes of other participants in the congregation. The Hindu priesthood, where it is mentioned at all, displays rather ambiguous attitudes towards widows and is no longer unified in its stance concerning the state of widowhood as principally impure and a danger of pollution.

The narratives tell us that many widows engage in considerable social activity by participating in various self-help groups, cooperative unions, WHR, and also some other organizations. Especially the cooperative unions and WHR form an important part of the widows' support networks. Participation in these organizations enables the widows to overcome the psychological impact of widowhood by rebuilding their self-confidence and reducing their anxiety in social interaction with other people. It also provides them with new social relationships that allows them to rebuild their social networks and support systems. Crucial in this process is the development of communication with other widows and the sharing of their experiences, which has a cathartic effect on the widows in understanding that they are not alone in their plight. These organizations, on the other hand, help them all of the way in this process by providing a variety of material and non-material support that enable them to deal with and function in their social environment and to build an independent life.

The Nepalese NGO *Women for Human Rights – Single Women's Group*, which supported me during my field work, is the biggest actor working for the

improvement of the life of widows in Nepal and also in rural Chitwan district, and judging from my informants' narratives it is quite successful in its endeavors. It does not have the same access to material resources as the international NGOs from highly developed countries. Therefore, the material support of WHR (and of the other cooperative organizations too) is concentrated on fostering self-help and economic independence on the micro level through the establishment of savings and credit unions and skill training. But this approach also fosters the development of widows' social networks and self-confidence. Several of my informants have grown from discriminated beings on the bottom of the social hierarchy to leaders within their community.

A disturbing finding is the deep-seated fear of widows about the possibility of sudden changes in the behavior of their social environment towards them that was expressed in the narratives of many of the mid-aged and older widows, despite the apparent changes in the customs and treatment of the widows in contemporary rural Nepal, especially the relaxation of the strictures concerning clothing, food, and behavior that once were imposed on widows. These fears speak of deeply ingrained mistrust concerning the effectiveness and stability of the changes that I could observe in my fieldwork. The majority of Nepali Hindus still harbor deeply rooted beliefs about widows' impure state and their being harbingers of bad luck. Such deeply rooted beliefs do not simply evaporate, even with decades of social change and campaigning against discrimination, as the resurgence of racist behavior of white Americans with the rise of Trumpism shows – not only among poor white unskilled labor and agricultural classes, but also in the conservative elites. These beliefs lurk under a seemingly calm surface ever ready to explode into action, when the conditions of life worsen and the search for scapegoats begins. Neither can religious beliefs be easily erased, as the example of post-Soviet Russia shows. The older Nepali widows are instinctively aware of this danger.

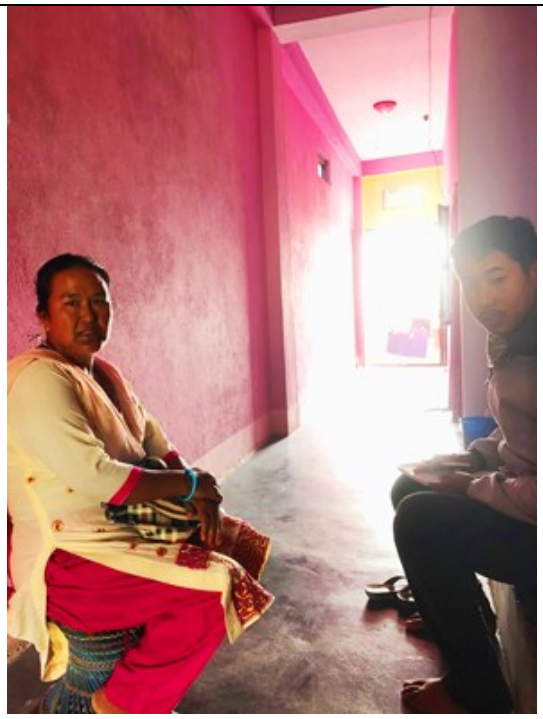
I have said that in Western developed societies no distinct and established social position of widow exists, and that Lopata had identified this fact as one possible reason for the scarcity of sociological research on widows, but this statement does not mean that a woman loses her prior social positions in society and the family with the death of her husband. The social positions of a daughter, aunt, niece, cousin etc. in her natal family continue to exist after her marriage and also in widowhood. Also, her social positions of daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, mother, aunt etc. persist in her affinal family after the death of her husband (they can even survive after remarriage). In some of the more severe patriarchal societies around the world an old widow may even gain the position of a revered matriarch. This is not the case in Nepali Hindu-caste society. There exist differences between joint families and nuclear families, but in principle with her marriage the social position of daughter in her natal household is cut, although the kin relations with her parents – especially with her mother – and her siblings are maintained and may become important sources of support, and her social positions of wife and

daughter-in-law in her affinal family are erased with the death of her husband. In Hindu-caste society a widow does not retain any legitimate social position after the death of her husband. This makes her extremely vulnerable in dealing with her social environment, because her life is always dependent upon the feelings and (mis-)trust that other people harbor towards her state of widowhood. In the small towns and villages of rural Nepal everybody around her knows about her state, independently of whether she wears the outward signs of widowhood or not.

Appendix 1: Photos of Widows and Their Environment

Unfortunately I lost most of my photos from my fieldwork when my camera memory was destroyed in a traffic accident and I only found a small number of photos and videos in my files that were send to me and downloaded on my computer before the accident.

These are pictures from my group discussions in 2016 and my interviews from 2017 and 2918.

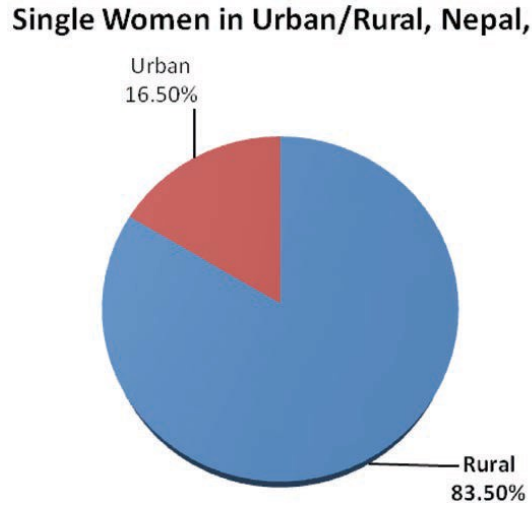


While writing the part on the color of the clothes of the widows, I remembered that while the widows did not wear clothes in the exuberant colors that young married women prefer, nevertheless, many of the widows in my sample wore clothes in a shade of red, and they also wore bangles, but ones that were made from metal. This can also be seen in these photos.

Appendix 2: Demographic Background of Nepali Women and Widows

General

Appendix 2, Table 1: Population of Nepal 2011			
Nepal			
	Total	**Men**	**Women**
Number	26,494,504	12,849,041	13,645,463
Percent	100	48.5	51.5
Rural			
Number	21,970,684	10,542,992	11,427,692
Percent	100	48.0	52.0
Urban			
Number	4,523,820	2,306,049	2,217,771
Percent	100	51.0	49.0
Chitwan			
Number	579,984	279,087	300,897
Percent	100	48.1	51.9
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal (2012): Table 16, own calculation			



Appendix 2, Chart 1: Widows' Distribution between Urban and Rural Areas. Source: Women for Human Rights 2011:5

Point 1: 83.7% of the female population lived in rural areas and 16.25 lived in urban areas. These numbers do not differ much from the proportion reported for widows in Women for Human Rights (2011: 5) of 83.5% and 16.5% respectively, but we have to note that the numbers cannot really be compared, because the populations in the two calculations differ. The table above is based on the population of all ages, while the numbers reported by WHR are based on the female population of the age ten years and above. WRH comments that many of the younger widows migrate from the rural to the urban areas because of better options for gainful employment in the latter, while non-widowed women stay in the rural areas, therefore it is highly possible that the proportion of the total female population aged ten years and above in the rural areas is higher than that in Table 1. Actually the total number of women aged ten years and above in Nepal is 10,822,774, with 8,963,008 (82.8%) living in rural areas and 1,859,766 (17.2) living in urban areas (cf. Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal (2012): Table 16, own calculation), which basically does not support WHR's comment.

Marital Status

Appendix 2, Table 2: Population aged 10 years and over by marital status and sex.								
Sex	Total	People who are						
		Never married	Single married	Multiple married	Re-married	Widower/ Widow	Divorced	Separated
Nepal								
Total	20,721,682	7,383,186	11,905,483	297,601	412,715	659,837	23,189	39,671
Percent	100	36,6	57.3	1.4	2.0	3.2	0.11	0.19
Men	9,898,908	4,014,521	5,214,554	236,806	247,314	161,231	11,674	12,808
Men %	100	40.6	52.7	2.4	2.5	1.6	0.11	0.13
Women	10,822,774	3,368,665	6,690,929	60,795	165,401	498,606	11,515	26,863
Women%	100	31.0	61.8	0.6	1.5	4.6	0.11	0.25
Urban								
Total	3,765,599	1,454,540	2,131,057	39,317	28,416	99,798	4,201	8,270
Percent	100	38.6	56.6	1.0	0.75	2.7	0.11	0.22
Men	1,905,833	835,832	996,054	33,075	19,540	17,461	1,662	2,209
Men %	100	43.9	52.3	1.7	1.05	0.92	0.09	0.12
Women	1,859,766	618,708	1,135,003	6,242	8,876	82,337	2,539	6,061
Women%	100	33.3	61.0	0.34	0.24	4.4	0.14	0.33
Rural								
Total	16,956,083	5,928,646	9,774,426	258,284	384,299	560,039	18,988	31,401
Percent	100	35.0	57.6	1.5	2.3	3.3	0.11	0.19
Men	7,993,075	3,178,689	4,218,500	203,731	227,774	143,770	10,012	10,599
Men %	100	39.8	52.8	2.55	2.85	1.8	0.125	0.13
Women	8,963,008	2,749,957	5,555,926	54,553	156,525	416,269	8,976	20,802
Women%	100	30.7	62.0	0.61	1.75	4.6	0.1	0.23
Chitwan								
Total	480,700	172,919	272,999	10,345	9,990	12,706	581	1,160
Percent	100	36.0	56.8	2.15	2.1	2.64	0.12	0.24
Men	227,474	94,023	115,811	8,434	6,082	2,459	282	383
Men %	100	41.3	50.9	3.7	2.7	1.1	0.12	0.17
Women	253,226	78,896	157,188	1,911	3,908	10,247	299	777
Women%	100	31.2	62.1	0.76	1.54	4.05	0.12	0.31
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal (2012): Table 18, own calculation, because of rounding the percentages do not add up to 100.								

Note: The meanings of the categories 'once married' and 'multiple spouse" are not clearly explained, since remarriage after widowhood or divorce is covered in the category 'remarried' and the numbers add up, these categories can only point to marriage forms of one-husband-and-one-wife" and "one-spouse-with-several-spouses-of–the-other-sex"; polygamy was legally permitted until the 2010s and it is still practiced in Hindu caste society, and fraternal polyandry is practiced among Tibetan tribes in Nepal. It should also be noted that the data made available by Women for Human Rights (2011: 3), which are based on the ever married population, report 6.7% widows and 2.7% widowers for the female and male populations of this age.

Point 1: 24.4% of widowed persons in Nepal are male, 75.6% are female. This rather strong imbalance can only be explained by a combination of several factors. To the men's proportion of 66.5% of remarried divorced and widowed persons one has to add men's proportion of 79.6% of the persons in polygamous marriages, and the already lower life expectancy of men in 2011 of 65.6 years compared to 66.9 years for women (Women for Human Rights 2011: 3).

Age at First Marriage

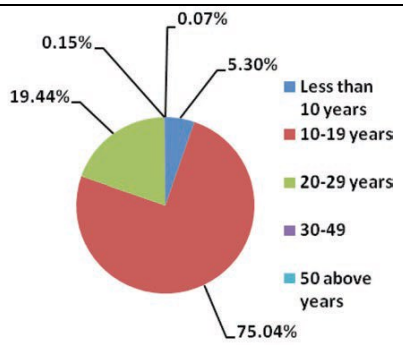
Appendix 2, Table 3: Married population aged 10 years and above by age at first marriage									
Sex	Total	Age at First Marriage							
		under 10	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40+
Nepal									
Total	13,338,496	138,015	1,363,117	6,517,281	3,818,296	1,126,434	273,715	68,649	32,989
Percent	100	1.04	10.2	48.9	28.6	8.4	2.05	0.51	0.25
Men	5,884,387	22,865	261,232	2,176,784	2,266,932	859,929	219,651	53,122	23,872
Men %	100	0.39	4.4	37.0	38.5	14.6	3.7	9.1	0.41
Women	7,454,109	115,150	1,101,885	4,340,497	1,551,364	266,505	54,064	15,527	9,117
Women%	100	1.5	14.8	58.2	20.8	3.6	0,73	0.21	0.12
Urban									
Total	2,311,059	20,790	176,136	877,029	781,005	338,518	91,716	18,995	6,870
Percent	100	0.90	7,6	37.95	33.8	14.6	4.0	0.82	0.30
Men	1,070,001	3,334	28,635	249,860	432,273	257,418	77,608	15,628	5,245
Men %	100	0.31	2,7	23.35	40.4	24.1	7.25	1.5	0.49
Women	1,241,058	17,456	147,501	627,169	348,732	81,100	14,108	3,367	1,625
Women%	100	1.41	11.9	50.5	28.1	6.5	1.14	0,27	0.13
Rural									
Total	11,027,437	117,225	1,186,981	5,640,252	3,037,291	787,916	181,999	49,654	26,119
Percent	100	1.1	11.0	51.2	27.5	7.1	1.7	0.45	0.24
Men	4,814,386	19,531	232,597	1,926,924	1,834,659	602,511	142,043	37,494	18,654
Men %	100	0.41	4.8	40.0	63.1	12.5	2.95	0.79	0.39
Women	6,213,051	97,694	954,384	3,713,328	1,202,632	185,405	39,956	12,160	7,492
Women%	100	1.6	15.4	59.8	19.4	3.0	0.64	0.20	0.12
Chitwan									
Total	307,781	5,179	32,338	133,369	94,137	32,872	7,409	1,736	741
Percent	100	1.7	10.5	43.3	30.6	10.7	2.4	0.56	0.24
Men	133,451	653	4,759	38,529	54,605	26,693	6,270	1,402	540
Men %	100	0.49	3.7	28.9	40.9	20.0	4.7	1.05	0.41
Women	174,330	4,526	27,579	94,840	39,532	6,179	1,139	334	201
Women%	100	2.6	15.8	54.4	22.7	3.5	0.65	0.19	0.12
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal (2012): Table 19, own calculation, because of rounding the percentages do not add up to 100.									

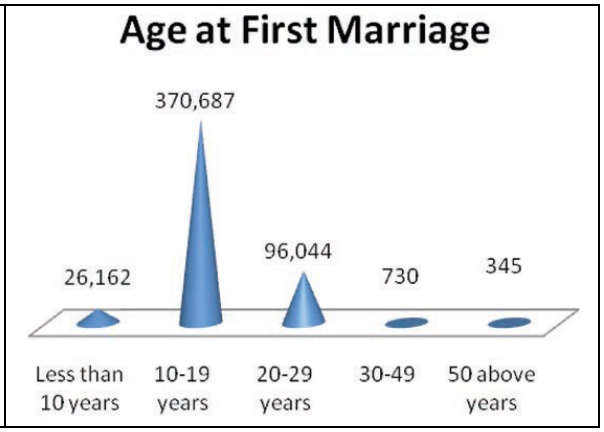
Point 1: In Nepal we can see a general trend towards a young age at first marriage for both sexes, and this trend is just a bit more pronounced in rural areas, and more clearly visible in the female population. Marriages of boys under ten amounting to less than 0.4% of the male married population in the 2011 Census and have virtually disappeared, in the married female population they also amounted to only 1.5%, but with absolute numbers of more than 115,000 women they were still visible, and marriages of child brides under age fifteen combined accounted for 16.3% of the married female population. 74.5% of the married women had married before they reached age twenty; we do not have data concerning first marriages by single years of age, but the marriage ages of their informants, and the trend in the higher castes to prefer in-marrying brides who had not yet had their first menstruation reported by cultural anthropologists (cf. Bennett 1983, Cameron 1998, Galvin 2005, Brunson 2016,) suggest that in the high castes (Brahmin, Chettri) most women were married before they reached seventeen, i.e. before the age of graduating from secondary education.

Point 2: In the married population of Nepal the Census counted only 44.1% men compared to 55.9% women; in Chitwan Province, where my fieldwork took place the ratio

was 43.4% men to 56.6% women. This imbalance is most likely caused by the husbands' absence because of national or international labor or educational migration.

Widows' Age at First Marriage





Appendix 2, Chart 2: Widows by Age at First Marriage, Source: WHR 2011: 3

Compared to only 1.55% of the total population of married women, the proportion of the widows who were younger than ten years at the time of their first marriage was 5.30%. But with 75.04% the proportion of the widows that were married for the first time at the age 10-19 years does not differ considerably from the 73.00% of the total population of the married women. It is unfortunate that the proportion of widows aged 10-14 years at the time of their first marriage, which amounts to 14.8% in the total population, is not computed separately in the charts presented by WHR, so we cannot examine whether the proportion of child brides was significantly higher among widows.

Population by Age

Appendix 2, Table 4: Population of Nepal by Five-Year Age Groups 2011

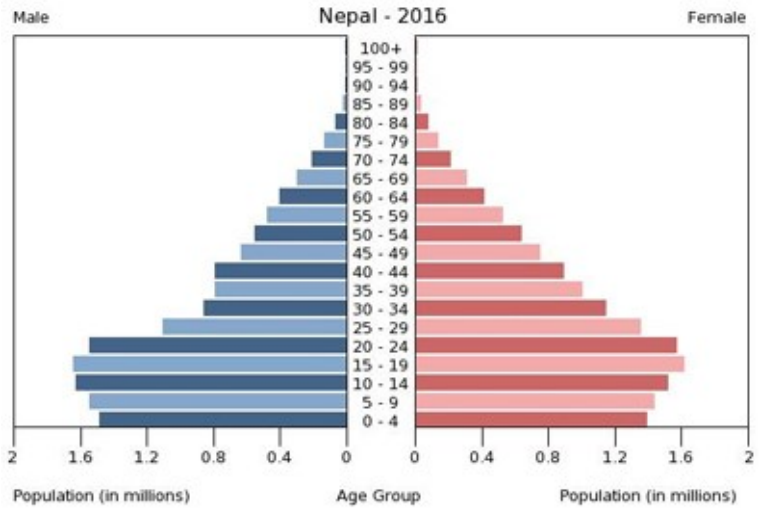
Age Groups	Total		Men		Women	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All Ages	**26,494,504**	**100.00**	**12,849,041**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**
0-4	2,567,963	9.69	1,314,957	10.23	1,253,006	9.18
5-9	3,204,859	12.10	1,635,176	12.73	1,569,683	11.50
10-14.	3,475,424	13.12	1,764,630	13.73	1,710,794	12.54
15-19	2,931,980	11.07	1,443,191	11.23	1,488,789	10.91
20-24	2,358,071	8.90	1,043,981	8.13	1,314,090	9.63
25-29	2,079,354	7.85	917,243	7.14	1,162,111	8.52
30-34	1,735,305	6.55	770,577	6.00	964,728	7.07
35-39	1,604,319	6.06	740,200	5.76	864,119	6.33
40-44	1,386,121	5.23	660,290	5.14	725,831	5.32
45-49	1,172,959	4.43	575,101	4.48	597,858	4.38
50-54	1,005,476	3.80	505,864	3.94	499,612	3.66
55-59	818,263	3.09	412,892	3.21	405,371	2.97
60-64	756,827	2.86	368,451	2.87	388,376	2.85
65-69	554,449	2.09	277,782	2.16	276,667	2.03
70-74	395,153	1.49	199,610	1.55	195,543	1.43
75-79	235,135	0.89	117,358	0.91	117,777	0.86
80-84	128,777	0.49	62,787	0.49	65,990	0.48
85-89	52,526	0.20	25,810	0.20	26,716	0.20
90-94	20,335	0.08	8,940	0.07	11,395	0.08
95+	11,208	0.04	4,201	0.03	7,007	0.05

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal (2012): Table 16, own calculation, because of rounding the percentages do not add up to 100.

Point 1: Nepal has a young population, roughly 63% of its population is younger than thirty years, and more than 75% are younger than forty years. People above sixty-four amount to only 5.3% of the population.

Point 2: The gender balance in the population above sixty-four years is slightly in favor of men. The total amounts to 1,397,583 (100%); Men 696,488 (49.8%); Women 701,095 (50.2%). This is very different to highly developed societies in which in the elderly population women clearly outnumber men and the proportion of women increases with every single year of age (cf. the report of the 2015 Census of Japan which had a ratio of 43.3% men and 56.7% women in the population above 65 years, but above the age of seventy the proportion of women increased with every year, https://www.e-stat.go.jp). In Nepal's population the gender discrepancy between 48.5% men and 51.5% in the total population decreases in the in the population above sixty-four years. Actually, until 2005 women's life expectancy in Nepal was clearly shorter than that of men (58.20 years for women, and 59.01 years for men, Galvin 2005: 5), it started to rise thereafter, and already in 2011 reached 66.9 years for women and 65.6 years for men. Nevertheless, arguments based on the situation in highly developed countries that cite the gender imbalance between men and women in the elderly population as one reason for the low remarriage rate of widows cannot be applied to Nepal.

The census data do not give any information concerning the age structure of Nepal's population of widows, but some information on it can be gained from WHR's 2010 survey on its widowed members, which are shown in Chart 13 below.



Appendix 2, Chart 3

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal; available online on Microsoft Bing: population of nepal 1950-2019 data&chart. http://bing.com. Accessed 2021-03-16. Appendix 2, Chart 2 is based on the regular update of the population of Nepal by the Central Bureau of Statistics with the 2011 Census providing the baseline

Literacy and Education Status

Appendix 2, Table 5: Population aged 5 years and above by literacy status.					
Sex	Population aged 5 years and above	Population who			Not stated
		Can read and write	Can read only	Can't read and write	
	Nepal				
Total	23,926,541	15,777,786	602,777	7,524,427	21,551
Percent	100	65.9	2.5	31.45	0.09
Male	11,534,084	8,666,282	283,708	2,575,935	8,159
Percent	100	75.1	2.5	22.6	0.07
Female	12,392,457	7,111,504	319,069	4,948,492	13,392
Percent	100	57.4	2.6	39.9	0.11
Urban					
Total	4,196,720	3,450,674	71,276	672,398	2,372
Percent	100	82.2	1.7	16.02	0.06
Male	2,133,451	1,899,135	31,888	201,577	851
Percent	100	89.0	1.5	9.45	0.04
Female	2,063,269	1,551,539	39,388	470,821	1,521
Percent	100	75.2	1.9	22.8	0.07
Rural					
Total	19,729,821	12,327,112	531,501	6,852,029	19,179
Percent	100	62.5	2.7	34.7	0.10
Male	9,400,633	6,767,147	251,820	2,374,358	7,308
Percent	100	72.0	2.7	25.3	0.08
Female	10,329,188	5,559,965	279,681	4,477,671	11,871
Percent	100	53.8	2.71	43.3	0.11
Chitwan					
Total	537,183	413,526	10,579	112,785	293
Percent	100	77.0	1.97	21.0	0.05
Male	256,694	215,282	4,946	36,351	115
Percent	100	83.9	1.9	14.2	0.04
Female	280,489	198,244	5,633	76,434	178
Percent	100	70.7	2.0	27.25	0.06
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal (2012): Table 25, own calculation, because of rounding the percentages do not add up to 100.					

Point 1: The differences between men and women and between urban and rural areas in the literacy rate are striking. 75.1% of the men compared to 57.4% of the women are completely literate in that they can read and write at least at a basic level, and 22.6% of the men and 39.9% of the women are completely illiterate. Compared to a literacy rate of 82.2% in the urban population, only 62.5% of the rural population are completely literate. The differences between urban and rural areas are obvious for both sexes. But they are even a bit more pronounced for women: 75.2% of the urban women are literate compared to 53.8% of the rural women, and among rural women the illiteracy rate rises to 43.3% compared to 22.8% of the urban women.

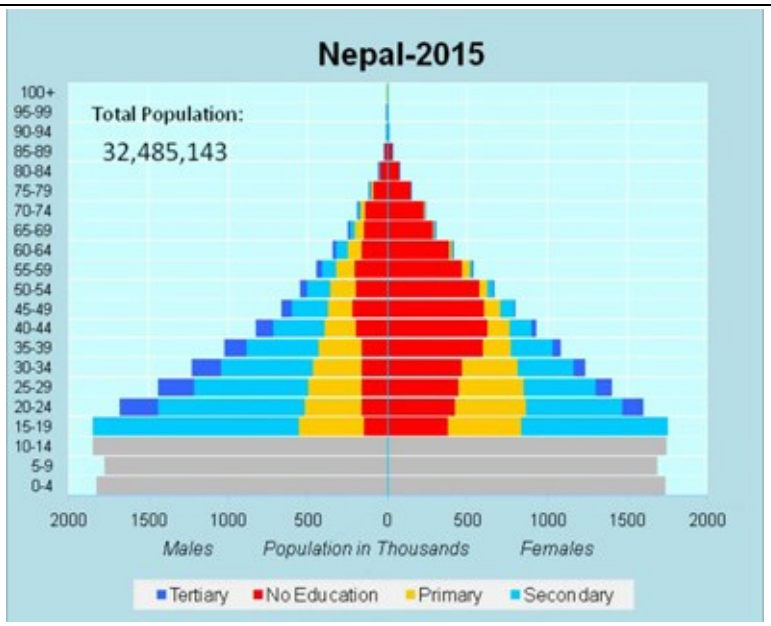
Appendix 2, Table 6: Literate population aged 5 years and above by educational attainment.												
Sex	Total	Beginners	Primary (1-5)	Lower Secondary (6-8)	Secondary (9-10)	S.L.C.	Higher Under-graduate	Higher graduate	Higher Post-graduate	others	Non-formal education	Not stated
Nepal												
Total	16,098,519	639,031	6,285,124	3,266,513	1,857,368	1,636,159	1,036,448	457,744	158,432	17,141	668,117	76,442
Percent	100	4.0	39.0	20.3	11.5	10.2	6.4	2.8	1.0	0.11	4.15	0.47
Male	8,832,352	341,944	3,361,832	1,768,964	1,038,105	932,103	605,011	306,772	118,829	9,421	308,647	40,724
Percent	100	3.9	38.1	20.0	11.75	10.55	6.85	3.5	1.35	0.11	3.5	0.46
Female	7,266,167	297,087	2,923,292	1,497,549	819,263	704,056	431,437	150,972	39,603	7,720	359,470	35,718
Percent	100	4.1	40.2	20.6	11.3	9.7	5.9	2.1	0.54	0.11	4.95	0.49
Urban												
Total	3,471,763	109,689	880,148	601,192	433,292	517,040	444,472	251,999	99,762	3,305	115,694	15,170
Percent	100	3.2	25.3	17.3	12.5	14.9	12.8	7.3	2.9	0.1	3.3	0.44
Male	1,910,442	59,805	467,191	322,875	233,884	284,557	250,010	160,954	72,068	1,868	49,145	8,085
Percent	100	3.1	24.5	16.9	12.2	14.9	13.1	8.4	3.8	0.1	2.6	0.42
Female	1,561,321	49,884	412,957	278,317	199,408	232,483	194,462	91,045	27,694	1,437	66,549	7,085
Percent	100	3.2	26.4	17.8	12.8	14.9	12.5	5.8	1.8	0.09	4.3	0.45
Rural												
Total	12,626,756	529,342	5,404,976	2,665,321	1,424,076	1,119,119	591,976	205,745	58,670	13,836	552,423	61,272
Percent	100	4.2	42.8	21.1	11.2	8.9	4.7	1.6	0.46	0.11	4.4	0.48
Male	6,921,910	282,139	2,894,641	1,446,089	804,221	647,546	355,001	145,818	46,761	7,553	259,502	32,639
Percent	100	4.1	41.8	20.9	11.6	9.35	5.1	2.1	0.68	0.11	3.75	0.47
Female	5,704,846	247,203	2,510,335	1,219,232	619,855	471,573	236,975	59,927	11,909	6,283	292,921	28,633
Percent	100	4.3	44.0	21.4	10.9	8.3	4.15	1.05	0.21	0.11	5.1	0.5
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal (2012): Table 26, own calculation, because of rounding the percentages do not add up to 100.												

Point 1: Comparing the total populations in Appendix 2, Table 5 and Table 6 reveals that 76.6% of the men and 58.6% of the women received any kind of education that led to literacy.

Point 2: The majority of the population of Nepal graduated only from the primary and lower secondary school levels (58.1% of the men and 60.8% of the women), and attendance in higher education is extremely low for both sexes (11.7% of the men and 8.5% of the women), when compared to highly developed countries like Japan. But it should be noted that women amounted to only 37.6% of the population that has received higher education and are concentrated in the undergraduate level. Among graduates from higher education women amount to only 30.9%.

Point 3: If we compare the results for each area cell for cell, we can see in the urban population a clear trend towards higher education levels for both sexes. This trend is especially obvious if we compare the results for urban and rural areas. The results also reveal a clear trend of the female population to be limited to lower level educational attainment.

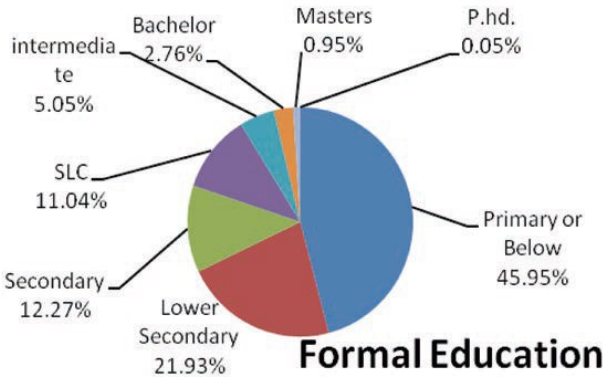
But as in Japan and most European countries until the 1990s, we can see in Nepal a clear interdependence between age (or generation), gender, and educational attainment, as it is shown in Chart 2 below, which is based on updated population data from 2015. The proportion of women who received no education or only primary level education is clearly higher than that of men in all age groups above fourteen years of age, but in the younger age groups we also can see a clear trend to secondary and even higher education. Nevertheless, starting in the age group 35-39 the proportion of those women who received no education exceeds that of women who received formal schooling. And the proportion of women who received no education then rises from age group to age group and is close to unity above the age of fifty-nine.



Appendix 2, Chart 4

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal; available online on Microsoft Bing: population of nepal 1950-2019 data&chart. http://bing.com. Accessed 2021-03-16.

Only 11.01% of the widows in the 2011 National Census could read and write, hence were completely literate, compared to a literacy rate of 57.45% for all women. Compared to 39.9% in the total female population 87.54% of the widows could neither read nor write, and 1.32% could read only. Of the literate widows 68% received formal education, while 30% (compared to 4.95% in the total female population) received non-formal education (basically through participation in adult education courses provided by various organizations) (Widows for Human Rights 2011: 10). The educational attainment of the majority of the widows who received formal education stayed at the primary (1-5 years of schooling) or lower secondary (6-8 years of schooling) levels, with 45.95% and 21.3% respectively. Cf. the chart below (Source: Women for Human Rights 2011: 10). Unfortunately we cannot compare the numbers of widows to the total literate female population given in Appendix 2, Table 6, because based on a cross-sectional survey, these numbers only report the status at the time of the survey and include on every level persons who have not yet finished their process of education, while the widows had definitely completed their formal schooling at the time of the survey. Therefore the numbers of the widows who attained higher levels of schooling is actually higher than that in the total population of literate women.



Appendix 2, Chart 5: Widows' Educational Attainment in Formal Education, Source: WHR 2011: 10

Female Household Heads and Ownership of Fixed Property

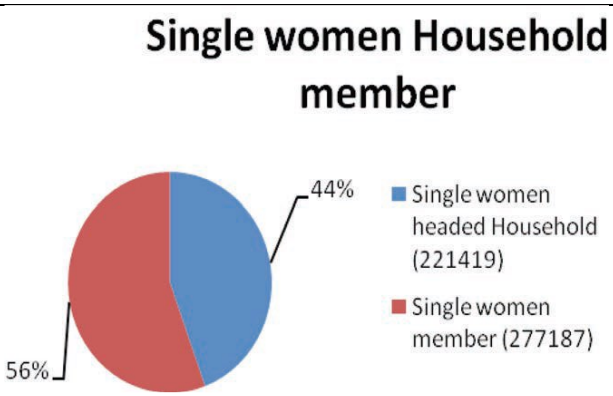
The 2011 National Census found that altogether, 19.71 percent of the households reported the ownership of land or house or both in the name of a female member of the household. In urban areas, 26.77 percent of the households show female-ownership of fixed assets while the percentage stands for 18.02 in rural areas (National Bureau of Statistics 2012: 2).

Appendix 2, Table 7: Female Household Heads in Nepal by Age

Area	Total	Under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70 +
Nepal	1,396,692	28,630	319,696	395,171	256,764	165,187	147,011	84,233
Percent	100	2.05	22.9	28.3	18.4	11.8	10.5	6.0
Urban	294,737	9,899	80,809	81,716	50,102	31,427	24,576	16,208
Percent	100	3.4	27.4	27.7	17.0	10.7	8.3	5.5
Rural	1,101,955	18,731	238,887	313,455	206,662	133,760	122,435	68,025
Percent	100	1.7	21.7	28.4	18.8	12.1	11.1	6.2
Kathmandu	121,287	4191	38,271	32,540	19,081	11,732	8,968	6,504
Percent	100	3.4	31.6	26.1	15.7	9.7	7.4	5.4
Chitawan	44,638	821	10,671	14,665	8,691	4,665	3,315	1,810
Percent	100	1.8	23.9	32.9	19.5	10.5	7.4	4.1

Source: Population Census of Nepal 2011, Table 17, own calculation.

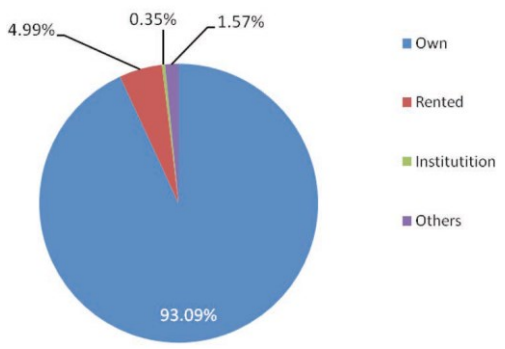
The total number of household heads was 5,427,302, and 4,030,610 (74.3%) of them were male and 1,396,692 (25.7%) were female. Among the female population aged ten years and above of 10,822,774 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2011: Table 16), female household heads amounted to 12.9%. But, "available literature show that Women headed HH also called Lone Mother HH are the poorest in society, and their children tend to be disadvantaged in comparison to their peers" (Women for Human Rights 2011: 11).



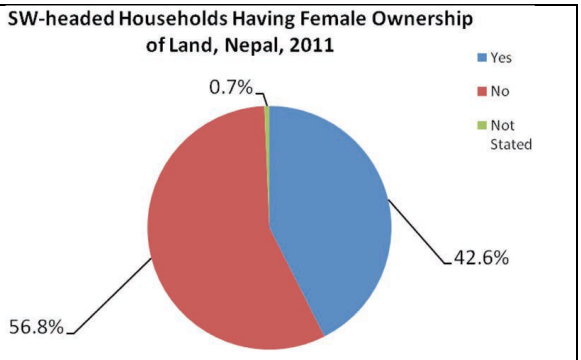
Appendix 2, Chart 6: Widows' as Household Members and as Household Heads, Source: WHR 2011: 11.

44% of the widows compared to 12.9% of the female population aged ten years and above were household heads, and 56% of them live in family households that have another family member as their head, which would not necessarily be male.

Ownership of fixed property is another question that is approached in Charts 7 and 8 below. 93.1% of the widows who are household heads owned the house in which they lived and 5% rented it (other arrangements accounted for less than two percent). 42.6% of the households with widows as their head reported that they had female ownership of land, and 56.8% reported that they did not have such ownership. But I have to remind the reader that these numbers do not reflect the economic situation of the majority of the widows, since 56% of them are not household heads, and 42.6% of 44% amounts to only 18.7% of the total population of the widows. Furthermore, "female ownership" of land does not mean that the property rights are in the absolute control of the widow, these rights can be registered as co-ownership with her children, and, as cases from my own informants show, it does not mean that the owned land is economically usable, what in essence means that it can be used as agricultural land or that it is a marketable asset that can be sold.

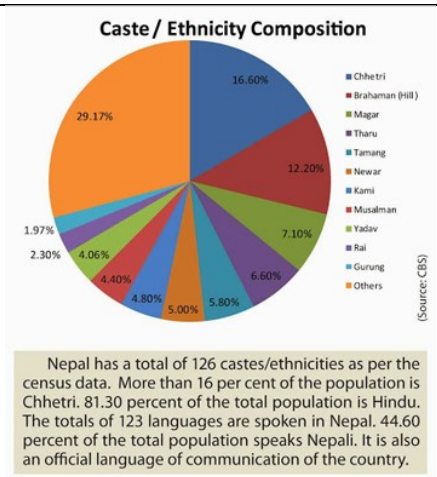


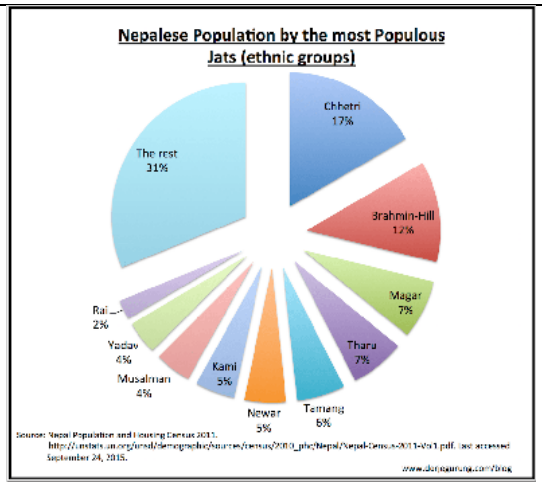
Appendix 2, Chart 7: Widow Household Heads Ownership of their House. Source: WHR 2011: 11.



Appendix 2, Chart 8: Ownership of Land of Households Headed by Widows. Source: WHR 2011: 12.

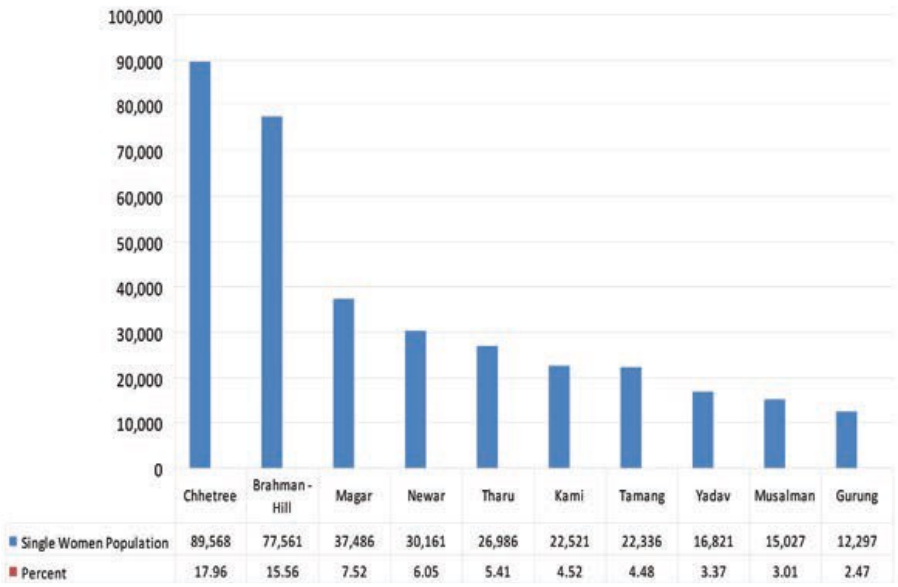
Caste and Ethnicity





Appendix 2, Chart 9: Castes and Ethnicity Composition of Nepal 2011.
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal; available onne on Microsoft Bing: population of nepal 1950-2019 data&chart. http://bing.com. Accessed 2021-03-16

The data in the 2011 National Census of Nepal concerning widows that are reported in Women for Human Rights 2011 show that the proportion of widows in the female population differed considerably among the castes and ethnicities of Nepal. The largest widow populations were reported for Chhetri (17.96%) and Hill-Brahmin (15.56%) (cf. Chart 10 below) and the smallest widow populations exist in various ethnic minorities of Nepal (cf. Women for Human Rights 2011: 4). But the reasons for the small size of widow populations in these groups, most of which have other religious affiliations than Hinduism, are not explained, but remarriage rates in these groups might be higher, and live expectancy lower than in the total population, and some of the groups might also practice fraternal polyandry and levirate. Many of these groups are very small and information on them is not easily available. The large widow populations among Chhetri and Hill-Brahmin are interesting since they point to a tendency that widowhood is enforced as a lifelong status and remarriage socially discouraged in in the higher castes.

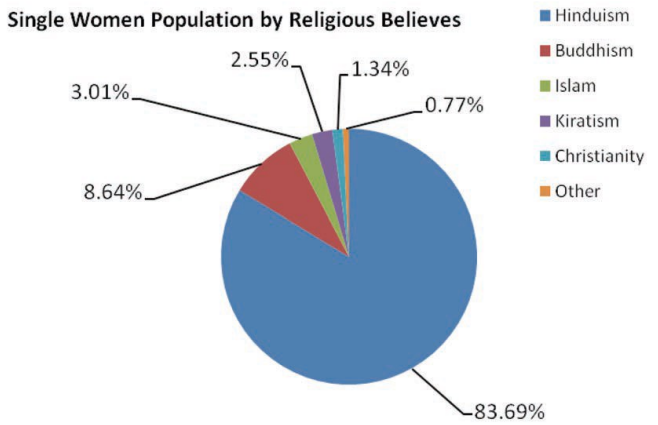


Appendix 2, Chart 10: Widows and Caste/Ethnicity. Source: WHR 2011: 4.

Religion

Appendix 2, Table 8: Religion in Nepal								
Sex	Total	Religion						
		Hinduism	Buddhism	Islam	Kirat	Christianity	Prakriti	Other
Total	26,494,504	21,551,492	2,396,099	1,162,370	807,169	375,699	121,982	80,302
Percent	100	81.3	9.04	4.4	3.05	1.42	0.46	0.30
Male	12,849,041	10,470,964	1,139,779	583,799	380,117	175,470	58,083	42,829
Percent	100	81.5	8.9	4.5	3.0	1.40	0.45	0.33
Female	13,645,463	11,080,528	1,256,320	578,571	427,052	200,229	63,899	32,364
Percent	100	81.2	9.3	4.2	3.13	1.47	0.47	0.24
Source: Population Census of Nepal 2011, Table 22, own calculation.								

Point 1: Women have a slightly lower affiliation with Hinduism than men, and a slightly higher affiliation with Buddhism and Christianity. 52.4% of the Buddhists and 53.3% of the Christians are women, but we can see no clear trend.



Appendix 2, Chart 11: Widows Religious Affiliation. Source: WHR 2011: 5.

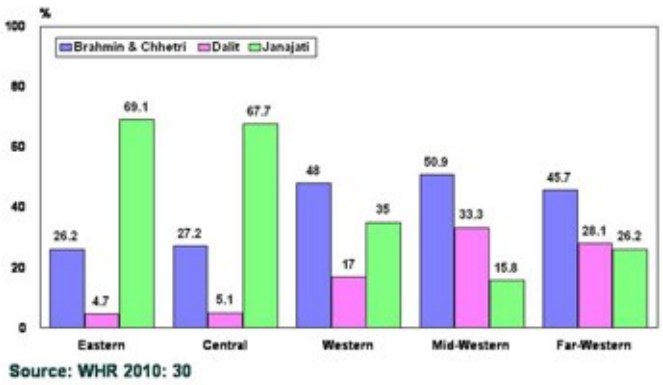
There are no big differences visible between the religious affiliation of the total female population and the widows. It should be noted, however, that the widows' proportion of Hindus is 3.5 percentages higher than in the total female population, and that in all the other religions slightly lower. This indicates that conversion to non-Hindu religions in order to avoid the restrictions in Hindu communities is not a popular strategy among widows.

The Profile of the Widows in the 2010 Survey among WHR Members

WHR collected data from 41,530 widows. The data were collected by the district offices of WHR, but due to technical problems and problems in understanding, not all district offices collected all the data or cooperated with the survey, for instant in the Central Region reporting on the question concerning the current economic activities was forgotten. Another problem was that the lack of education, fear and intimidation, and unawareness resulted in not all widows answering all of the questions. Nevertheless the results allow a good estimate of the quantitative scale of Nepali widows' life in areas that are not covered by the 2011 National Census. I will include here only a limited number of the fifteen available charts, but will I summarize important tendencies that appear in some of the charts that are not included.

The first important point that becomes clear when we examine the complete set of fifteen charts are the large regional differences that appear in every aspect of the widows' life that was inquired in the survey. This confirms the reasons for which Galvin (2003, 2005) decided to abandon her original plan to limit her fieldwork to Kathmandu and decided to visit regional urban centers.

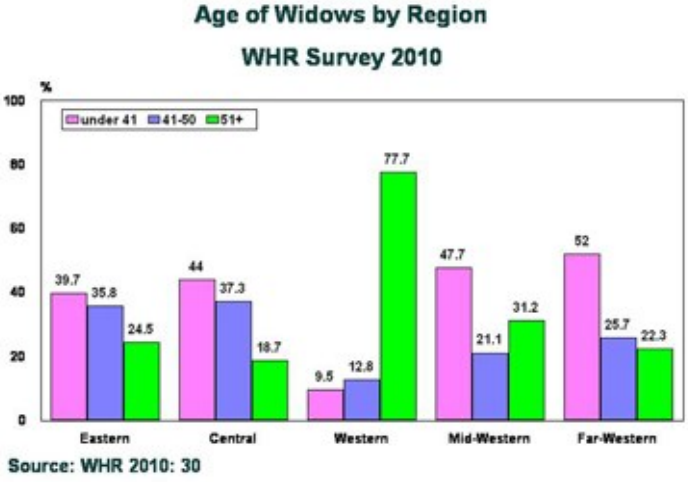
Caste/Ethnicity



Appendix 2, Chart 12

WHR classified the respondents in only three categories: Brahmin & Chhetri (high castes), Dalit (low caste), and Janajati. Especially the proportion of Janajati showed large regional differences, but Janajati is not a category that represents unified characteristics, and it is composed of various different groups and internally highly diversified, and the results are therefore difficult to interpret. What is obvious in the chart is the trend to higher proportions of the high castes and a lower proportion of low castes, which conforms to my comment above on caste and ethnicity of the widows in the National Census.

Age of the Widows

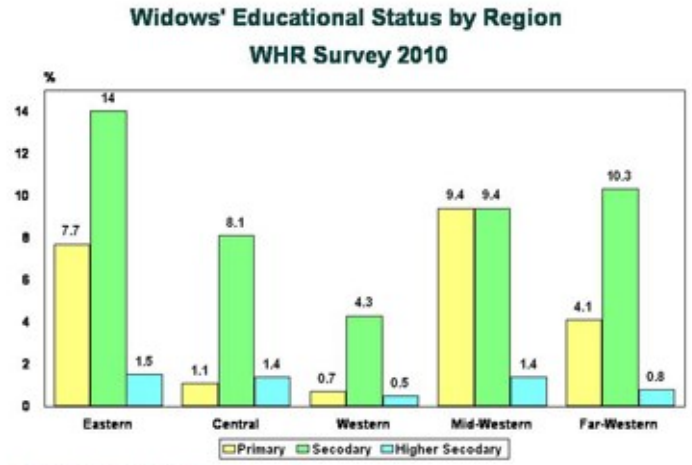


Appendix 2, Chart 13

No information concerning the age of widows was available from the 2011 National Census. Despite the regional differences (the results from the Western Region have to be ignored because the data might be skewed due to technical difficulties in the cooperation of the regional district offices), the general trend is the high proportions of

young and middle-aged widows, which sets Nepal clearly apart from highly developed countries in which widowhood is generally perceived as a problem of old age.

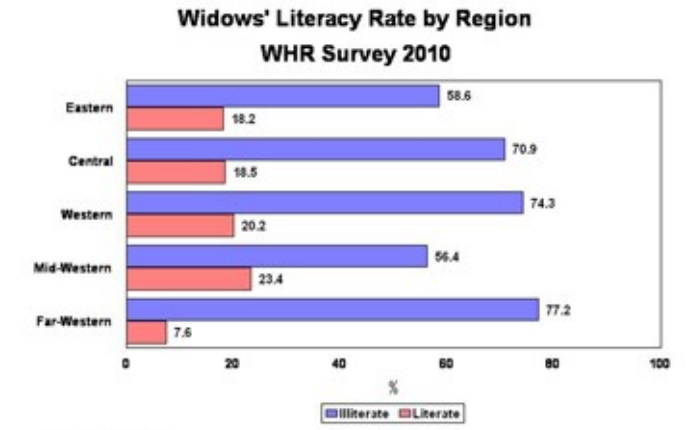
Widows' Educational Status and Literacy



Source: WHR 2010: 31

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100 because of incomplete primary school or no formal schooling, and because of no response.

Appendix 2, Chart 14



Source: WHR 2010: 31

Note: Literate is defined as ability to read and write, illiterate as can neither read or write. The percentages do not add up because of no response and because of persons with rudimentary ability to read.

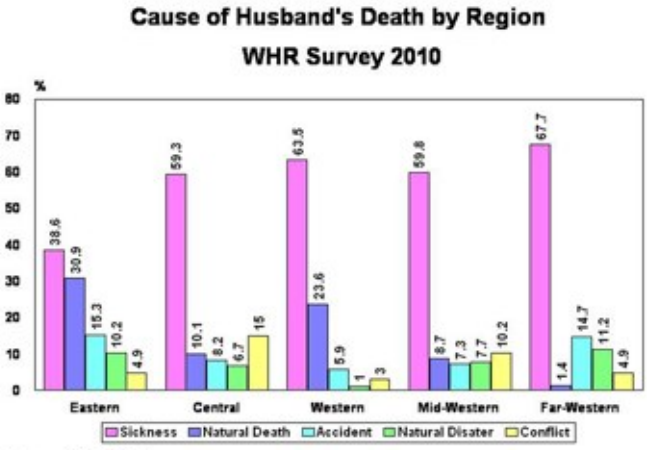
Appendix 2, Chart 15

Chart 14 confirms the results from the 2011 National Census that the attained educational level of widows who received formal schooling concentrate on the primary and lower secondary levels. The high rates of illiteracy among widows are also confirmed by the results from the WHR members, but the illiteracy rates of WHR members are considerably lower than the 87.5% in the total population of widows found in the 2011 National Census. This indicates a high proportion of the members having attained literacy through adult education, and perhaps also a propensity for activism among them.

Religious Affiliation of the Widows (No Chart)

The religious affiliation of the widowed members of WHR shows in general very high proportions of Hindus of 88.6%to 99.2% except for the Far Western Region, in which other religious affiliations amount to 61.1% of the members (no comment concerning this result is given by WHR, and I am at loss for an explanation of the results). What is striking is the degree to which these results exceed the proportions of Hindus in the total female population (81.2%), and among widows in the 2011 National Census (83.7%), which might be related to a) higher remarriage rates among non-Hindu widows, b) dissatisfaction with, and wish of reforming the attitudes of the traditional priesthood towards widows as one of the reasons for becoming members of WHR; it also confirms that the widows have no inclination to convert from Hinduism to other religions (WHR 2010: 31).

Cause of Husband's Death



Source: WHR 2010: 32

Note: The data are tentative because of very high non-response rates of 13.1%, 55.8%. 8.9%. 13,1%, and 38.3%,

Appendix 2, Chart 16

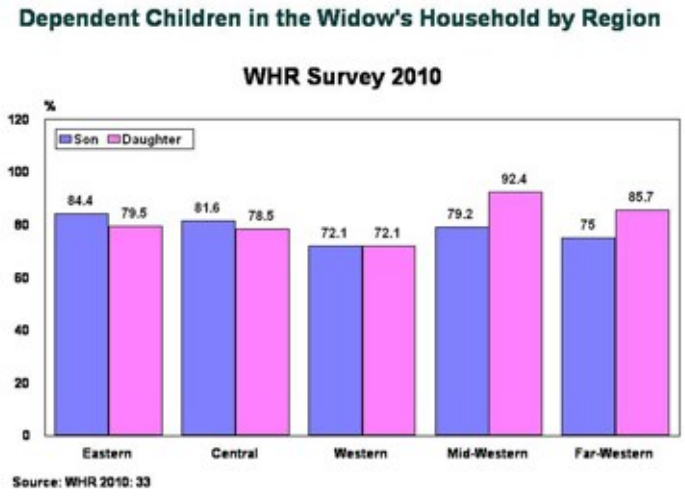
The data show that the majority of the husbands died either from sickness or natural causes. Accidents are also an important cause of death, and interestingly enough "conflict" (which most probably refers to the civil war and the political and civil unrest that accompanied it) is only a more important cause of death in the Central and Mid-Western Regions. The cause of death is important, because especially when the cause was illness widows are often accused to be responsible for the death, either because of bad *karma* or witchcraft; added to the already bad image of widows are conflicts about the responsibility for the – often quite substantial – costs of medical aid. This normally is not the case for deaths caused by accidents, natural disasters, and conflict.

Current Residence (No Chart)

The vast majority (between 68.3% in the Eastern Region and 97.2% in the Far Western Region) of the widowed members of WHR lived in their own place. Living in the parental home was only somewhat important in the Eastern Region (9.6%) and the Central

Region (7.5%), in the latter living in a rental place also amounted to 10.7% (WHR 2010: 32).

Dependent Children



Appendix 2, Chart 17

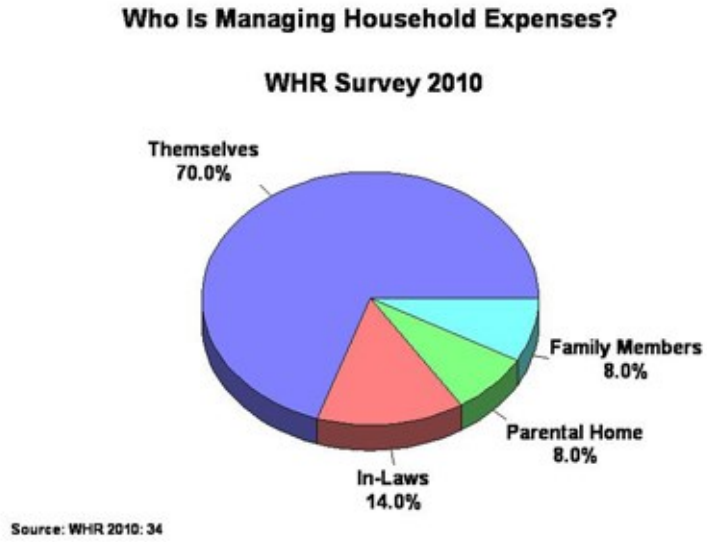
The vast majority of the widowed members of WHR live together with dependent children, this might be a result of the high proportion of young and middle-aged widows in the sample. The children of the older widows have most probably already reached adulthood, but if they were still small when their father died, they might continue to live together with their mother even after they reach adulthood.

Economic Activities (No Charts)

Mistakes in communication between the central and regional offices caused a lack of data from the Central Region concerning the current economic activities of the members. Nevertheless, the data from the remaining regions show that the vast majority (between 74% and 100%) of the widows received their income from agriculture. Other economic activities were only important in the Eastern Region (business 15.2% and services 10.6% and the Mid-Western Region (services 14.1%) (WHR 2010: 34). While agriculture still was most important among the desired sector of economic activities in the Central, Western, and Far-Western Regions, the Eastern and Mid-Western Regions show a considerable pluralization of the economic activities in which the widows wished to engage, if the opportunity was available. What is also very interesting that in all regions a considerable proportion of the widows considered to become engaged in the informal economic sector as desirable (WRH 2010: 33).

Also related to the economic situation of the widowed members of WHR and their economic independence is a question about “who is managing the household expenses?” that is presented in Chart 18 below. 70% of the widows are managing their household expenses themselves, which also indicates a high degree of independence and competence. In the case of 14% of the widows the expenses are managed by in-laws, which indicates a low degree of economic independence, and in 8% of the cases the

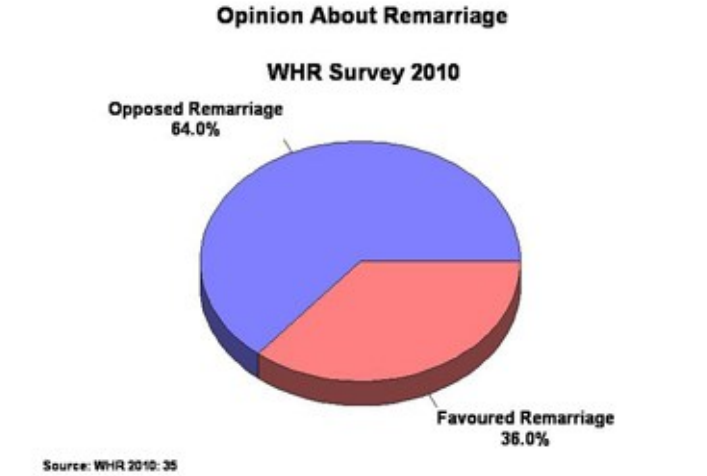
expenses are managed by the parental household of the widow, which also indicates economic dependency, but with a somewhat different flavor than being managed by in-laws. WHR also classified 8% of the cases as managed by “family members”, which most probably means descendants of the widow like sons, daughters, or grandchildren.



Appendix 2, Chart 18

Problems Faced by the Widows

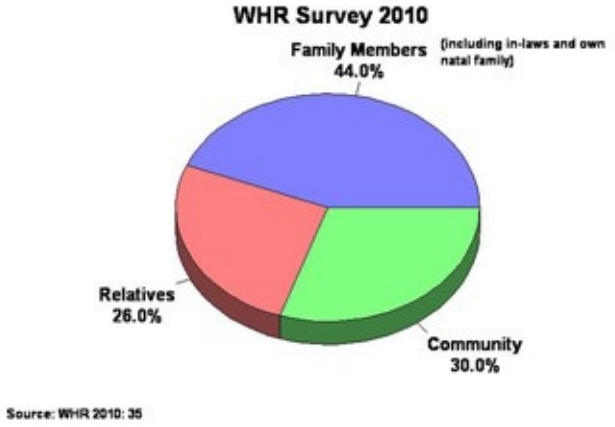
The 2010 survey of WHR among its widowed members also included three questions about problems that are faced by widows besides questions on the demographic background of the widows.



Appendix 2, Chart 19

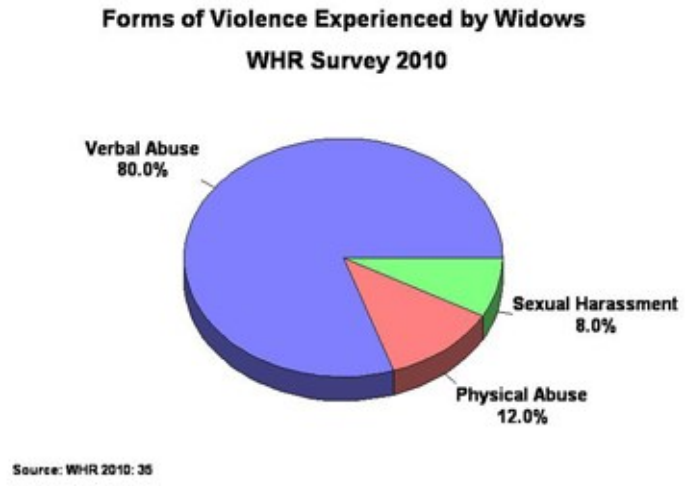
The question of remarriage is an important point of contention with Hindu-caste society's customary treatment of young and middle-aged widows for observers from highly developed countries. Contemporary customs based on religious beliefs strongly disapprove of the remarriage of widows, even if they are very young and without children, and force child widows into lifelong widowhood. These customs are very strongly applied to high-caste widows, while among *Dalit* remarriage of young widows is more often observed, but mostly a choice stemming from economic necessity. Western observers normally criticize this situation as an infringement of the widows' freedom of choice and human rights. But qualitative case studies have pointed out that many of their widowed informants are rather reluctant to consider to remarry, especially if they have dependent children.

WHR asked its widowed members about their opinion to remarriage and found that 64% opposed remarriage, a proportion that must include quite a number of young widows, and only 36% of them favored it. Freedom of choice does not necessarily mean that the choices made will be the same choice as for the advocates of this freedom. One of the most important reasons for young widows not to consider remarriage are small children and concern for their treatment by the prospective new husband and his family. The data on dependent children in Chart 17 above show a tendency that the mothers are increasingly thought to be responsible for male children too instead of the joint family of their father, as it once was the case in high castes because of the priority of the patriline.



Appendix 2, Chart 20

The question in Chart 21 asked whether and what kind of changes to negative attitudes towards them they had experienced after the death of their husband. 44% of those who answered the question reported to have been tormented, by family members, not only from their affinal family, but also from their natal family, 26% reported that other relatives with whom they were not living together in the same household looked down on them, and 30% reported that they were excluded from community life. This kind of psychological torments are also mentioned in many of the comments from widows in Thapa 2012 and from widowed informants in qualitative case studies.



Appendix 2, Chart 21

Because widows recurrently complained to WHR about having experienced violent incidents aimed at them, a question concerning such incidents was included. 78% percent of the respondents reported that they had experienced some form of violent behavior by members of their home. 80% of those who reported such incidents named verbal abuse, but 12% had experienced physical abuse and 8% sexual harassment. The widows are no longer regarded as legitimate members of the family and therefor can easily become the target of various forms of torments and abusive behavior.

Appendix 3: Sample Overview and Selected Life Histories of Widows

Widows in the Aggregate

Appendix 3, Table 1: The Economic Situation of the Widows				
	Very good	**Comfortable**	**Stable**	**Precarious**
Total	8	14	14	14
Brahmin/Chettri	5	10	10	5
Dalit	1	1	1	3
Janajati	3	3	3	5
Under 41	x	4	5	5
41-50	x	9	3	6
Over 50	8	1	6	3

The majority of the widows in my sample are either in a comfortable or stable economic situation. But fourteen of them live under conditions on the brink of poverty that I have defined as "precarious", because the slightest worsening of their support network could plunge them into a destitute situation. "Stable" means that the widows have economic supports that provide them with the basic means for living, and are not in danger to suddenly collapse. "Comfortable" means that their economic situation is a bit better than "stable" and allows them some leeway in their expenses. The economic situation of eight of the widows can be defined as "very good", they have stable economic supports and own considerable property for the region in which they live. It is interesting to note that the socio-economic situation of the widows seems to be independent of their caste position. Five of the high-caste widows belonged to the group with "very good" economic supports, but the majority of them ranged in the middle, and the situation of five of the high-caste widows has to be categorized as "precarious"; on the other side of low-caste widows, the economic situation half of the six *dalit* widows falls into the "precarious" category, but the situation of the other three is "stable", "comfortable", and even "very good". This conforms to Brunson's (2016) observations that caste position and socio-economic class are independent from each other. A bit of a surprise is the fact that all of the widows in a "very good" economic situation are older than fifty years, the reason might be that the widows who belong to this category are quite business smart, which is a condition which Nepali women are normally not equipped and have to learn, when they are on their own alone.

Appendix 3, Table 2: Living Arrangements of the Widows						
Living with	**Alone**	**Dependent children**	**Natal family**	**Affinal family**	**Separate in the dwelling of affinal family**	**Married children**
Total	4	17	2	1	1	25
Brahmin/Chettri	4	13	1	x	1	15
Dalit	x	2	x	x	x	4
Janajati	3	x	x	1	x	6
Under 41	2	9	2	X	x	1
41-50	1	7	X	1	1	8
Over 50	1	1	X	x	X	16

The vast majority of the widows lived either together with dependent children or with married children. Only four of them lived alone, two lived with their natal family, and only two lived with affinal family, of which one had a separate kitchen. From the table it is clear that living with dependent children or with married children is largely a question of age, since children age themselves and will marry, setting up their own household, or form a joint family with their mother. From the life histories it becomes clear that this is

one path to living with married children, the other is that the couple was already of old age when the husband died, or the widow aged herself, to a degree that she could not live on her own and therefore moved in with married children (most of the widows were widowed for more than ten years, some of the older widows even for more than twenty and more than thirty years), or the children moved in with her. The scenarios are quite diverse. The two widows who live in the same house as their affinal family are a bit difficult to classify, because even the one with her own kitchen shares in important parts of the life of the household with its other members, and her relation with her mother-in-law has smoothed considerably, after the latter was widowed herself, cf. the life history of BA below.

Appendix 3, Table 3: Housing Expenses				
	Owned by herself	Provided without rent	Rented	Services to relatives
Tota	43	1	1	5
Brahmin/Chettri	30	1	1	1
Dalit	3	X	X	3
Janajati	10	X	X	1
Under 41	10	1	X	3
41-50	14	X	1	2
Over 50	19	X	X	X

Forty-three of the widows had ownership of the place where they lived, one was provided with a small room for free, one rented the place where she lived, and five lived with relatives and had to provide domestic services for their accommodation. All of the widows over fifty own their own place.

Appendix 3, Table 4: Education				
	Illiterate	Formal schooling	Adult education	No answer
Total	5	20	23	2
Brahmin/Chettri	3	16	14	x
Dalit	x	1	4	1
Janajati	2	3	5	1
Under 41	X	11	3	X
41-50	1	8	8	1
Over 50	4	1	12	1

Interesting are the high number of the widows in my sample who received their education through adult education, and the very low number of illiterate widows, this tendency can also be seen in the case of the widows in the 2001 National Census, and widowed members of WHR in its survey from 2010 (cf. Appendix 2, Chart 5 and Chart 15). The majority of the widows who received formal schooling in my sample attained primary and lower secondary level education, but one widow was actually enrolled in university. Only one of the widows over fifty years of age received formal schooling, and four of them were illiterate. The vast majority of them acquired their literacy through adult education. The situation is more mixed for the middle-aged widows between forty-one and fifty, one of them was illiterate and sixteen were divided half and half between formal schooling and adult education. Almost all widows under the age of forty-one received formal schooling, only three received adult education, and none were illiterate.

Appendix 3, Table 5: Introduction to WHR						
	Recruited by WHR member	Introduced by Family Member	Introduced by local administration	Introduced by acquaintances	Introduced twice, by family and by friends	No answer
Total	20	8	1	15	2	4
Brahmin/Chettri	12	8	X	10	2	1
Dalit	4	X	X	1	X	1
Janajati	4	X	1	4	X	2
Under 41	8	4	X	2	X	X
41-50	7	3	X	5	1	2
Over 50	5	3	1	6	1	2

Twenty of the widows were recruited to WHR by other members of the NGO, twenty-five of them were introduced to WHR by family members of neighbors (two of them by both), and one was told about the NGO by a local administrator when she had some problems that she could not solve on her own. Concerning the distribution by age, it is interesting that most of the widows under age forty-one were approached by other WRH members directly, while the introduction of the NGO was more diverse in the older age groups.

Appendix 3, Table 6: Membership in Organizations and Self-Help Groups					
	WHR	Cooperatives	Self-Help Groups	Multiple Memberships	Not Reported
Total	41	22	16	26	8
Brahmin/Chettri	26	15	10	16	3
Dalit	5	3	1	3	1
Janajati	10	4	5	7	4
Under 41	10	4	1	5	3
41-50	16	10	12	11	2
Over 50	15	8	13	10	3

The numbers in this table differ from the other tables, because they were not counted from the re-categorized answers to the structured questions. At the time of the interviews I was not aware of the different organizations and self-help groups and that they were not necessarily related to WHR, so membership in these groups was not included in the structured questions. I became aware of their importance only in the closer inspection of the unstructured narratives after my fieldwork. For this table only mentioning of membership in any of the groups in the narratives was counted separately, therefore there are only forty-one WHR members, because nine of the widows did not mention their WHR membership in the narratives. Any membership that was mentioned was counted separately for each group. When an informant mentioned two or more memberships, she was additionally counted as multiple memberships. Eight informants did not mention any memberships in the narratives. Due to this method of count, the total numbers for the rows exceed the totals in the sample.

Membership in the community-based self-help groups clearly is tending to widows with a higher age, especially if we look at the age of the widows in single years instead of the age groups. Only one of the widows under age forty-one mentioned membership in any of these groups, but four of them mentioned that they were members of cooperatives. If we look at the memberships in the single years of age instead of the age groups, multiple membership clusters in the ages between forty-five and sixty-five.

Appendix 3, Table 7: Existence of Dependent Children at the Time of the Husband's Death						
	Current Age of the Widow			Age at the Start of Widowhood		
Total	Under 41	41-50	Over 50	Young widow	Middle-aged widow	Old-aged widow
34	12	16	6	22	12	X

Eleven widows had independent children at the start of widowhood, one widow had no children, and five widows gave no response to the question on children. That leaves a total of thirty-four widows with dependent children in the early phase of widowhood. Twenty-two were young widows and twelve were middle-aged widows.

Selected Life Histories of Widows

Note: Most dates are given in the year of the Nepali calendar (B.S.), for converting the dates to the Western calendar (A.D.), please use 1950 A.D. = 2006 B.S. as reference. The year of birth of AA below is then: 2025-2006+1950=1969. I have condensed the English translations of these life histories in a different way than in the prior translations of some of the excerpts from my informants' narratives that I have cited in the main text.

1. AA, Chhetri, Hindu

I was born in 2025 B.S. Now I am 47 years old. I became a widow at 38. My husband died of paralysis.[73] I participated in adult education, but I only know to stamp my fingerprint. I was 28 when I was married and my husband was 40. He died at 51. He was a cook in some restaurant in India. I am a day laborer and household head of my family. I have two goats. I have two daughters. When my husband died, the youngest was perhaps four or five. I am confused. The elder daughter was one year senior to the younger one.

My maternal home is in Dolkha *(a bit more than 100 km from her present home, K.T.)*. My natal home is quite far from my home, so I cannot rely on them for help every time I need it. My mother-in-law and father in law forced me to leave my home where I had lived with my husband and daughters soon after his death. They accused me to want to elope with someone else all the time. My mother-in-law also continuously accused us that I ate her son's life and my daughters ate their father. In the past, my brother-in-law also used to discriminate me, however, now he is changed. I was always scared by my mother-in-law. At that time, I could not respond to her bad treatment and painful words. I just cried sitting in some corner, where no one could see me.

The neighbors were good and they treated me and my children in a good way. My mother-in-law and father-in-law were always offensive. My sister-in-law has always helped me to find loans.

I don't participate in auspicious occasions. I feel fear, I might be blamed as a woman who brings bad fortune. So I want to remain far from such rumors.

Regarding the remarriage of widows, I think we can live without remarrying, health is the most important thing in life. I never received any remarriage proposals.

My daughters always insisted that they want to continue their studies. I think education is the most valuable thing a woman can acquire, therefore I try to fulfill my children's desire to go to school, although it is really expensive to manage their fees. Although my daughters go to a government school, it still costs a lot. They have to join extra tuitions, buy books, pens etc., for which we need extra money besides the fees. My daughters receive scholarships from a private person and from WHR. They are very good at their studies, their school teacher always praises them and their hard work. They sometimes say to me that I am their mother, so it is my duty to fulfill their demands and needs. But I don't have money, I feel bad.

[73] This is a euphemism for AIDS, the husband was infected with HIV while he was working in India. He also infected his wife with HIV, but she did not disclose this information to anyone. I was told about her husband's AIDS and her HIV infection by the local WHR staff, because they thought that I had to be informed about it, and be careful in our contact.

After I joined WHR, with the help of a member of WHR. I noticed many kinds of changes. I can share my pain and sorrow with other widow sisters. I find myself changed, now I can handle and deal matters. Now if my family says something bad to me, I tell them that I will gather all my widow sisters. Most importantly, finally with the help of WHR I was able to get my citizenship card. Before that I did not have any legal documents of marriage and citizenship, which were necessary to claim widow's monthly allowances. I am also involved in *Sana Kishan,* which is a saving and credit cooperative group.

We live in a mud house which is not in a good condition. Mice have made holes here and there. In the rainy season, I feel like if the house will fell on us and we all will die. I earn money only on a daily basis. If I go to work, then on that day I earn money, nearly 300 rupees. When I am sick and I do not go toe work, then I will have no money. I do not earn enough to repair the house. The landownership authorization under which the house is built is under the name of my brother-in-law. I just only stay there. They have not yet transferred it in my name. Maybe because they think I have daughters; one day they leave home after marrying. So we might not need it.

2. AB, Janajati, Buddhist

Now I am age 45. I married at the age of 22 and my husband was 24. He died when he was 29. I became a widow at very young age. I was 27 at that time. I am illiterate, I can only sign. My husband was a police officer and he died in the insurgency period. Our relation was satisfactory. I have three daughters. My youngest daughter was one month old, the second was one and half years and the eldest daughter was three years old when he died. Now, they are in grades 9, 11 and 12. I received a little financial aid from the Nepal government after the sudden demise of my husband. From that money I bought land and built a house. My husband's family did not help us. Since my husband was the eldest son in his family. I receive10-12 thousand Nepali rupees yearly for my children's education from the Police Headquarter Office, which is located in Kathmandu. At the beginning I received financial help from my maternal home. It was hard to manage school expenses.

I have not received property from my husband's family. It is still not divided. I feel that because I have no son my husband's family despises me. When my husband was alive it was the same. I saw women back biting other women. I feel that those who are not happy with me tried to push me down using rude words. A single woman is not supposed to be in the fore and front line while worshipping or on auspicious occasions, and she is despised by other women when she does it, because of my feelings I am angry and argue as soon as possible when I hear such things. It becomes tough to be oneself. Regarding the remarriage of widows, other people still back bite such widows. It is not easy. My neighbors helped me to get involved with WHR. After getting involved, I began to notice various changes within myself.

My main occupation is agriculture and it is also my major source of earning. We earn thirty to thirty-five thousand rupees per year. I don't need to buy rice or grains. Our production is enough for my family. We have one buffalo and three goats. We sell two to three goats yearly. I have five *kattha* land and a house. My daughters and I are joint owners. My major part of expenses goes for the children's school. I don't receive any financial support from my family. I receive monthly ten thousand rupees as a pension.

3. AC, Brahmin, Hindu

I am 40 years old now. I am currently president of WHR's Mangular office. I became a widow when I was twenty-two years old. I married at the age of 19 and he was just 20. We were only one-year different. He died at the age of 23.

My husband had completed his inter-level college and at the same time, I was also a student. My husband had started his electronic shop, and I was also preparing for my school leaving certificate examination, but unfortunately, in this time my husband died from a brain hemorrhage. My daughter was just 9 months old, when she lost her father. His unfortunate death strangled our life. We were living in a joint family. Soon, I started to face discrimination and bad-mouthing from his family. I felt like I would become mentally ill. I was under pressure every moment. I always sought about ways to leave his home. I could not handle those situations. I was very eager to separate from them. My natal home took me back in. When I left my husband's home, I felt so much relief that I cannot express it.

They called me a husband eater. I was young when my husband died, so everyone accused me that I might elope very soon. My father-in-law used to be often quiet whereas my mother in law was harsh and rude. Family members accused me to be responsible for the death of my husband. They blamed even my daughter as a father-eater girl. They said that she ate her father as soon as she was born. She was just only a 9 months old baby, how can she eat her own father. It always gave me pain to hear these blames.

For my husband's medical treatment, I deposited all my gold jewelry as a collateral and withdraw a loan from a bank for the health checkup of my husband. My maternal home helped both financially and emotionally. But, the costs incurred during the funeral and death ritual were covered by my husband's family.

Now, I am one of the active members of WHR Single Women Group. Things have changed now. His family feels proud of me. I am also involved in different organizations, ameliorating my ability and capacity. Also I continued my study and now I am an undergraduate student in the nearby university.

We participated in the widow's workshops organized in Kathmandu's head office. After participating there, we started to gather the widows of our locality and started the Single Women Group. Every participant was crying when we participated in the workshops. We also cried a lot, when we were listening to Lily Thapa's speech.

Now I am also a member of the local temple committee. I am now stronger than in past days. I do not feel afraid. 4-5 years back, an unforgettable event happened to us. There was an auspicious event for worshipping gods that was held in a nearby village. One of the priest told us, "Widows are not allowed to participate in the front line and touch the items prepared for worshipping. It pollutes them". I stood up and started to argue with him, and then the main priest intervened and apologized to us.

4. AD, Brahmin, Hindu

Age: 36. I was studying in secondary school when I received the proposal for marriage. I was 19 years old and my husband was 24. I could not continue my schooling. I failed in the SLC exam. My parents told me if I don't pass the exam then it is good to marry. My husband was a police officer. He left the job during the period of insurgency. We received regular threats from insurgent groups, which forced him to leave the job. After few years he was diagnosed with cancer. He never told me about his illness. We were already separated from my husband's family before he died.

I have 2 sons and both are in secondary level. The elder son goes to a government school and younger goes to a private school. My natal family sometimes helped to pay the school fees. When their father died, my elder son was just only 5 years old and the younger one was 3 years old.

It was extremely difficult while my husband was ill. It was not easy. I had to go out to work the land, and hurry back home to take care of my husband, and my children were so small. I cannot express how I felt. My husband's family, they never helped me and ignored my children. Sisters-in-law, at the same time while their husbands were and are oppressive, they tortured me all the time. They try to control their maternal home's matters. They blame me and point a finger at me when I wear red. Although they are married, they still interfere in the matters of their maternal homes. They control their mother.

I had borrowed a loan for my husband's treatment. At that time, I had a big crisis related to money, but my husband's family did not help me at all. They also did not pass the land ownership in my name, because I may elope after I receive that land. So they gave land in joint ownership with my sons. They did not trust me. The most furious thing is that when our father-in-law was sick and hospitalized, they forced my dependent children to take the responsibility for the medical treatment of their grandfather. It was illogical and added more stress to me. I have land but I cannot sell it when I require it. If I want to clear my loan, I have to manage it from my salary. I feel, it further drives us into debt. Most of the time I manage the financial crisis by myself. And my bother also helps in periods of emergency.

I hate them. I do not like these Brahmin and Chhetri. Their heart is very impure and always jealous of others. All my close friends are Janajati. They are open and kind, so I love to spend my time with them.

Now, I work in Nepal Electricity Office and earn 18,000 Nepali rupees per month. Relatives from my natal home helped me to get that job. Though it is a government job, I am still not permanent staff. So I am requesting them regularly to give me a permanent position.

5. AE Brahmin, Hindu

Age: 39-38 (born in 2035 BS). I married when I was in class 9. I was 19 and he was 22. He died at 27-28. I became a widow at 22-23. We only spent 3 years together, because he worked overseas. He died in a truck accident in Katar. I received 9-10 lakhs as an insurance after the death of my husband.

I live in a house built by my brother-in-law. My elder son got a scholarship since he started school. He is intelligent and diligent in his study. With the insurance money I bought land (1 *kattha*) in a near town. It is in my own name. We do agriculture, raise cattle, and use help during cropping and cutting time. I have two sons. They go to a private school. Every one suggested me to send both sons to the boarding school.

I am lucky, because I was born and married in the same place. So, I did not face extreme forms of discrimination and suppression from my husband's family and society. Everyone has known me since my childhood. My brother-in-law has also promised to give me land. My mother-in-law is also kind. My husband's family is really kind to me. Although there is no direct prejudice and change of treatment after I became a widow, I feel insecure, that problems might occur when I participate in ceremonies. You know, a kind of hesitation is deep rooted in my heart. I attend marriage ceremonies and other auspicious events, but I still fear.

My children are also treated equally with love and care at home. But if they had a father, then they would be happier than now. As I have told you I live in a nuclear family. I am the household head, but I tell my mother-in-law wherever I go, because I feel fear. They do not take it negatively.

Regarding the remarriage of widows, I think if a widow has a child she should not marry. She should take care of her child. If she marries a second time, she might face more discrimination.

I am involved in WHR and other cooperative groups. I have found that I am developing in my confident level. Now, I can talk in front of others. It is easy, we can share our feelings, sorrow. I feel happy and relieved. With that cooperative group, I made a tour to Illam and Ihapa in the eastern part of Nepal. There are only women in the group, and that has helped us to do the tour without any objection from the family.

6. AG, Chhetri, Hindu:

My age is 60. I was born in 2014 B.S. I joined adult class. That's why I can now write my name. I married at the age of 28 and my husband was 41 years old. He died in2060 B.S. I became a widow at age 45-46. My main occupation is agriculture. I live alone. He's death was sudden.

I managed household tasks myself. I struggled alone. It was not easy for me. He was a manual labor. He was always attracted to women. He had sexual relations everywhere when he went away on a job. My relation with my husband was not satisfactory. So his death did not bother me at all. While talking about remarriage of a young widow, I will allow it, if she is my daughter but I cannot permit it, if she is my daughter-in-law. She is my son's wife. How can I permit it? She has to perform rituals for our family. I am fully against her remarrying eventually.

7. AH, Janajati, Buddhist

I am now 65 years old. I married at the age of 17 and my husband was 30. He died at the age of 71 and I became a widow at the age of 59. He was a cancer patient and he was also old. I have studied up to class 7. The school was far from my home. That's why I could not continue my studies. I was better educated than my husband. I might have become a nurse or a teacher if I had continued to go to school. Currently, I am active in the Health Awareness Program and work as a health-awareness volunteer. I went India for a visit. If my health is good, I am interested to visit new places again. I love travelling.

I have one son and one daughter. My son and his family is in Belgium. He comes sometimes, when he gets a chance to visit us. Now my daughter and her family stay with me, in my home. They moved in with me, in order to look after me now. My son is kind. He regularly calls me, asks my health condition. He often remits money to me for my daily expenses. I am happy with him. He also came here when his father died. He told me he will come to see me again after he gets the permanent residence permit of Belgium after living 12 years in the country.

About my economic condition, I have a house, agricultural land and buffaloes, goats, and chicken. We do also farming. My daughter also has her own retail shop. I have my own bank balance account. So I am not in trouble with money. My major expenses go into hosting our relatives when they visit us.

After I became a widow I did not receive any different treatment from the family, because we belong to an educated family. If we were uneducated or illiterate I might have faced such problems or troubles. And also in Buddhism we do not have such discrimination like in Hinduism. The situation is not simply easy for widows. Life is extremely easy if the husband is alive. Being a widow, others always try to suppress her voice. Back biting is extremely frequent. In the case of young widows, people clearly make the assumption that she may remarry. Still, even educated people back bite. It is not very easy for widows. A change is hard to come.

I was introduced to WHR by the ward authority and now I save on a monthly basis with WHR's saving and credit program. And I am also involved in other organizations such as SAAN. I go on tour with the members of the cooperative group.

The most important thing about a widow's active participation is that if a widow comes up to the front and speaks, then other people do not want to accept it easily. They hate it, if we behave in a different way. Society also assumes that if she is a widow, she will elope with someone. It is still not easy to bring change. Even educated people back bite.

8. AJ, Brahmin, Hindu

Now I do not know my exact age. May be 46-47. I was born in 2027 B.S. I have studied until class 2. I married at the age of 14 and became a widow at the age of 44-45. My main occupation is agriculture. We are now four in our family, son, daughter-in-law and grandson. My son is working in Malaysia. I am the household head of the family. I had a very good and satisfactory relation with my husband. We never fought with each other. But he died due to a neuro disease.

Concerning differences in treatment by the family and society after entering widowhood, it was and is obvious in my case. Family members have behaved differently after the death of my husband compared to before. When my husband was alive neighbors and relatives regularly visited our home. But now, such visits have decreased dramatically. Men usually do not visit (a kind of break in relationship) after a woman becomes a widow.

Although I have not yet faced any direct discrimination and isolation, I always fear in the inner core of my heart of getting discriminated. Especially during auspicious occasions such as worshipping ceremonies and marriages.

I have not recognized any difference in treatment between the children with a father and children without a father, but I am always occupied with feelings of insecurity and fear. The children grew-up after their father died.

I do not need to take permission from anyone, but if I go out without informing them, they may worry about me, so I always tell them before I leave home and where I am going.

Regarding the remarriage of a widow, if a widow is young then she can remarry, but if she has child, I suggest not to remarry. I think young widows also have lots of desires and they have rights for their happiness as well.

9. AK, Brahmin, Hindu

I became widow at the age of 25. Now I am 40 and the household head of my family. I have completed SLC. I married at the age of 19 and my husband was 24. He died when he was 30 years old. My husband died from cancer. We had an arranged marriage. We were six daughters and one brother in my family. In those days, marrying a boy without seeing him was a normal phenomenon. Frankly speaking, because in my natal home there were 6 daughters, my father and mother were very concerned with our marriage.

Before the death of my husband I received equal and fair treatment. Unfortunately, the scenario changed soon after his death. My brother-in-law started to oppress me directly in a misogyny way. I was forbidden to stay in the front line while performing *puja,* worshipping god, and at auspicious events. He regularly mentioned that widows are illegible for religious ceremonies; they are bad luck, and water touched by widows

is not pure for religious ceremonies, festive worship, and offerings. Though now, I attend the auspicious events. Once upon a time, when my brother-in-law was going abroad I was indirectly told to be bad luck. I was victimized by my husband's family. Maybe because I was a widow at the young age of 25 was the main reason. However, my natal home fully supported me during those painful times. I was accused for killing my husband. I feel like I am still unmarried. My brother-in-law constantly made allegations that I might elope, taking with me all property. Whenever, I went somewhere for work, I always asked help from my neighbors. I pleaded for taking care of my son for a few hours, so that I could finish the work. The family never took care or helped in that sense.

Not only me but my son also received discriminatory language or despising from his school friends. Friends called him an orphan. My son, therefore, always cried and did not wanted to go school. Finally, we changed his class.

We had already separated from the rest of the other family when my son started school, so I did not receive any help. I was both economically and emotionally supported by my natal home. Managing the school fee for my son was very difficult. My son was and is very good in his study, so he received scholarships from his junior year until his higher secondary level.

I also received marriage a proposal but I was not inclined towards remarriage. Remarriage should be prioritized for widows who are young and still do not have children. To live a single life is not an easy task. A husband is the first support, then a child. Eloping by discarding children should be avoided

I noticed changes after I became involved with WHR. Before that, I always cried. My confidence level was zero. There were not any other options except crying. It was quietly excruciating moments. Now, my conceptions are changed, I believe to live a respectable life is our basic human right. My level of confidence has developed, I can condole and make comfort to the sufferers.

I participated in various training programs and also my natal home supports me whenever I need help. I have seven *kathha* land and a house. It is joint ownership with my son.

10. AL, Brahmin, Hindu

Age: 58. I married at the age of 13 and my husband was 15. He died when he was 30 and I became a widow at 28. We had a very good relation. He died due to cancer. Now our family is mainly engaged in agriculture.

Yes, I experienced an extreme difference in treatment by both family and the nearby community. Before the death of my husband, no one spoke in a bad language to me. Every one treated me in a good way. But after his death people's perception began to change. They started to back bite me. They called me a woman with a loose character. I was not allowed to wear red. My mother-in-law always suspected that I might elope with someone else. It was very difficult to have land passed into my name, every one supposed I may sell it and elope. While I wore red attire everyone looked at me with suspicion, back biting, but I always ignored them and walked my own path. Seeing widows while outside was supposed to be bad luck.[74]

I received all help from my natal family. They even helped me to repay back the loan.

Many time my children came home crying. They often complained about others' hateful words.

Regarding the remarriage of widows, I think it is ok for young widows to remarry. I also received a remarriage proposal, but I did not know at that time.

I came to know about WHR from Bishnu Pandey, the one who first started a Single Women Group in Chitwan.

My son works in a man-power company. We have a monthly income of 15-20 thousand Nepali rupees. My son and daughter-in-law help financially. I have 17 *kathha* land and a house in the village in joint ownership with my son. We have one house in Kathmandu in the name of both, my son and daughter-in-law.

11. AN, Chhetri, Hindu

[74] This part of her story has certain similarities with Sudha's story in Galvin 2005: 60-54.

I was born in 2035 B.S. my husband was 4 years older than me. I can write my name only. I was 21 years old when I married and he was 25 years old. He was in the Nepal Army. He was an alcoholic and died from alcohol. We always had fights, not a good relation. He left his job during the Maoist emergency and went to India and died. My younger daughter died from *dengue.* She was in class 5. She was 12 years old. My elder daughter is already married. I am now a day laborer and earn on a daily basis. Maybe monthly I earn 8,000 rupees. My husband left the army without being retired, so I could not receive a pension for him. I not only suffered when he was alive, I also suffered after his death.

His family is not helpful. They think their son had died, so I don't belong to them. I have a small garden land and an old house. They gave me a land little far from the main road, on the back side. They did not think that I am alone at home and the area of the house is out of view and dark, and might be dangerous for me. They took the land on the front side. They never invite me to eat together. They hardly talk to me.

But my father-in-law gifted me with a red *tika* and my sister-in-law gifted me with red attire. My major expenses go for food. I save 50 rupees monthly in WHR. At first I received goats as a donation from WHR. Now I have one mother-goat and two kids. I breed and sell them. It has become an extra source of income. I also go on tour when I get time from the cooperatives in which I am associated.

12. AO, Brahamin, Hindu:

I don't know my exact age. May be now, I'm 62 or 63. I was born in 2011 B.S. I cannot read and write properly, I can just only sign. I have attended adult education. I was 15 years old and my husband's age was 30 years when we got married. He died at the age of 69. I became a widow at the age of 58. I have 4 sons. One is in Korea; another son has retired from the Indian army. My younger son, who is now in Korea, regularly remits money in my name. Marriage relations with my husband were quite satisfactory. But his sudden death shocked all of us. My husband was retired from the Indian army. Even after his death I receive pension. Normally, every six month 15,000 Rupees. So I do not have to fully depend on my children.

While talking about the social and family discrimination and dismal treatment, I did not experience any kind of subjugation or differences. Maybe because I became a widow at an older age, or maybe I was not young enough. However, now the condition is very different compared to the past. Perceptions of family and society toward widows are changing slowly. Many people have begun to realize the situation of widows and are more aware. Sons and daughters-in-law are really kind and positive. They supported me a lot after I lost my husband. They stated that wearing white and plain attires makes me recognizable easily in front of everyone and become a reason for discrimination. No one can easily identify us if we wear red attire like a married woman whose husband is alive.

Sometimes I feel like, if my husband was alive, everything would be easy and I could spent my time happily. We would not have restrictions while married, especially we would not have to become conscious while laughing and talking to others. We were fearless at that time. But after becoming a widow we become self-conscious. We always think and take care what others might talk and think about us. We cannot easily leave our home and stroll around or take a walk. There is always fear in the bottom of the heart and a feeling of fear of suppression from others. At the same time, I am always conscious not to go in front during the auspicious functions and events. People might not feel comfortable seeing us while they go for a long trip. Because the stereotypes and beliefs concerning widows still prevail in the society, tasks might not get done, if the people who have to do it see it is for a widow. Concerning remarriage, I feel like, it is not easy for a young widow to live alone without a husband. Therefore, young widows can remarry, but they should not remarry if they have children.

Now, I am also engaged in WHR and in an old age group. *Ranzana,* our neighbor, introduced WHR to us. After engaging in that organization, I got to know and came into contact with many new people. These people on the other hand act as a helping hand in the time of crisis. For example, whenever we need loans and other kinds of financial support, we can request and receive financial help from the organization where we are engaged.

13. AP Brahmin, Hindu

I am 46 years old. I have studied till class 5 in India. My husband was 23 when we married. We had a satisfactory relationship. I became a widow at 36. He died due to jaundice. I have a tea shop. I earn Rs 500

to 1000 per day selling tea and pay 500 rent. I have also 1 *kathha* of land that is in my own name. I have savings in a cooperative bank. I am now the household head. I have two sons and one daughter. One is an electrician and one has a meat shop. My sons also provide money to me. They started to work discontinuing their schooling. Even though I assured them to pay for their tuition fees.

I did not notice any kind of differences in treatment, nothing wrong happened to me from the family side and the society after becoming a widow. I was taken care of by everyone. No one, demeaned me. Maybe because I was alone. Everyone was kind to me. My father-in-law and mother-in-law also both supported us financially and emotionally.

I am involving in WHR, and in *AMA shamuha* (Mother's Group). Neighbors helped to get to know about the organization. It has become easy for monetary transactions. However, I still cannot speak in front of others.

(During the interview she was extremely busy in her shop. So, I could not collect much information about her. Her replies were short. I felt she did not open much to us, K.T.)

14. AQ, Chhetri, Hindu

Now I am 61 years old. I was born in 2013 B.S. I have not attended any formal school, but I can write my name. I married at the age of 17. At that time my husband was 30years old. He died in 2062 B.S. I became a widow at 47-48. I am a farmer. We are four in our family. My marriage relation with my husband was satisfactory, good. He died in an accident. Now, I live with my only son and my grandchild. My son is mentally not normal, that's why my daughter-in-law eloped with someone else. I heard that now she lives in the outskirts of our village. I am really not happy with her. My younger daughter is in Australia. I am very proud of her. She frequently remits money. This year we have started to construct our new house also. I have also sufficient land and I do farming. Both land (24-25 *kattha*) and house is in my own name. In the season I sell agricultural products and milk. I am still financially safe.

I did not experience any bad treatment after the death of my husband. Also I did not face any difficulty. Nobody helped me. I did everything by myself. My husband was working in India. Therefore, from the beginning, I had to manage all the household activities. It did not become difficult for me even after entering widowhood. After we lose our husband, people think of us as poor and always convey sympathy. Till today, no one has objected to me. The reason might be because I am in a later age. It also might be because I know the way of carrying out essential and required tasks during auspicious occasions, like marriage and *pujas* (Hindu ceremony to honor a special guest). Actually, my husband was *purohit* (family priest) and astrologer. Everyone in the village knew us for decades.

Now I am member in WHR and in an old age group*, Sana Kisan*. My neighbors introduced me to the WHR. After becoming a member, my confidence level has increased. Though we make mistakes, we always learn new things, share new ideas and knowledge. We can communicate without fear. Also I do monthly savings in different cooperative organizations and the amount of saving varies.

15. AU, Brahmin, Hindu

I was born in 2035 B.S. I married when I was 14-15. He was 9 years older than me. I have studied up to class eight. He died when he was 40 years old. My relation with my husband was satisfactory. He died due to a heart attack. He used to drink a lot of alcohol.

I have two daughters and one son. My son receives a scholarship from one of the organizations. He goes to a private school. My two daughters go to a government school. My children are studying in classes 5 and 10 and one is an undergraduate university student. It costs 20-25 thousand rupees yearly for their education. I was dependent on my husband. I am now working in the re-construction office for one year. It is not permanent. After another 5-6 months my employment will end. I am worried. Now I earn 16,000 rupees per month.

My elder daughter has started to work and also participates in a computer class. We were already separated from his family before he died. His family did not want to give me a loan. So when he died I sold my jewelry and also borrowed money from the neighbors to manage the funeral process. My mother is poor. Their economic condition is not good. She also lives in a rented place. I couldn't rely on her and ask for her help.

My father-in-law later started to pressure us. He showed his pain and suffering all the time. He now visits us and asks money. He also blames me for the death of my husband. He used to call me *buda tokuwa* (huband eater). The Neighbors are good. The children of my brother-in-law went to a private school. We don't have a good relation.

During my brother's marriage, the priest told me that I can put *tika* on his forehead. But, other people who were near us advised me not to do so. They started to scold me. My mother cried a lot hearing it. I think if we have children, it is good not to remarry.

I was introduced to WHR by a member of WHR who had heard about me. Now my confidence level has increased.

16. AV, Dalit, Hindu

I have attended adult school. I was thirty when I lost my husband, now I am 59 years old. My two sons were 12 and 8 years old respectively when their father died. He suffered from tuberculosis. We had a very good relation. We lived together in one room with our two sons, and did tailoring work there together. Immediately after my husband died, the landlord rudely told me to leave the house with my children. The neighbors persistently blamed me to be untouchable (*dalit*), practicing witchcraft, and longing for other men, and they refused any contact with us and pressured us to leave the neighborhood. For one to two months, my father took me back in and I stayed there, but after that period I returned to live on my own, and I started the work of sewing by myself. At first I did not know much about how to cut the clothes but I learned slowly. My father gave me 5 *kathha* land. After the death of my husband I send my younger son to his father's brother's place to stay there. My brother-in-law was very kind. He looked after my son until he completed his class ten. My brother-in-law's wife told me to take my son back to me, when he was studying in class 9. Then my younger son returned back to me.

17. AW, Brahmin, Hindu

I cannot read and write, I can only do *sahi chap* (like *hanko* stamp).

I am 35. I married at 19. My husband died when he was 30. I am a young-age widow. I do agriculture, and raise cattle. I have no stable source of earning. I go for helping in others farms for daily wages. I have two dependent daughters and a son. My husband and I had satisfactory relationships. He was mentally disabled. He died suddenly soon after he fainted. I was cheated and got married. I did not know about my husband's problem with mental illness before marrying. I was an orphan. May be my brother found it financially difficult to take the burden of caring for me. When I was a married woman, I suffered a lot. My husband was mentally weak. I had to take a lot of care for him. Now, I feel relief. I felt isolated and bad when I was called the wife of an abnormal man. It was a different feeling.

My natal home is poor, and that might be the reason for my discrimination in my family. Whenever they scolded me, I always cried, sitting in a corner where no one could see me; before getting involved in several groups. I felt fear and suppressed myself and spoke in a low voice.

Really no one helped me after I became a widow. My mother-in-law tries to control me, she always tries to suppress me. In the past my father-in-law was caring, but now he has also changed.

Though my father- and mother-in-law hate and discriminate me, they love their grandchildren. No, discrimination for the children from society as well. Sometimes I feel like although my husband was mentally weak, my children were no orphans, it gave some kind of safe feeling. I ask permission or inform my father- and mother-in-law before I go out. I feel fear going out without informing them. In some corner of my heart, I am always scared that something goes wrong.

Regarding remarriage of a widow, I am not interested in remarriage. I want to live the rest of my life looking after my children.

I am involved with WHR. My neighbor introduced me to WHR. Now my confidence level has grown up. It was not easy for me to speak in front of others, now my speaking skill is developing slowly.

I have 2 rooms and 4 *kattha* land but *laal purja chaina* (not legal ownership of the land). It is difficult to manage from my earnings. No one from the family members supports me financially. My children go to a

government school. My father- and mother-in-law play the major role in decision making concerning their education.

18. AY, Chhetri, Hindu

Age: 50 years old. Born in 2026 B.S. I joined adult education class for 3 months. I am confused about my and my husband's age when we got married and our marriage ages. He died when he was 49. I became a widow at 39. My marriage relations were satisfactory. He died suddenly. It was a great shock for us. The sudden death of my husband placed us into a more vulnerable situation. My husband was active in managing household expenses, loans and collateral related activities, everything was done by him. The most ridiculous time I recall was when I did not even know about the offices where I had to pay the house tax and electric bills. I was not fully prepared, since I was totally dependent on my husband. Also, in the last years, business has been quiet as well. It helped a lot to sustain us, but now the business has gone down. Now, school students cannot come outside for lunch, because the school has got its own canteen. We also do agriculture and raise cattle. A good thing is that my daughters are studying at a nursing school and one has already started working. I always felt education is most important, so I loaned money and send all my children to school. But at the same time it is hard for a widow to look after her children. It has now become difficult to fulfill their demands. My source of income is not enough to provide them every time with a new stuff and fashionable clothes.

My natal house was kind. They helped us in time of emotional distress and money crisis. There is a huge difference between a married woman and a widow. No relatives helped at first. But my sister-in-law helped a lot in every crisis of our life. She did not give us money, but helped us to find immediate loans. *"Baleko agoo tapne" ta honi.* It means the one who is strong is noticed by everyone.

Yes, there still exist some, but only a few differences concerning the treatment before and after widowhood. Widows are supposed to cause ill fortune. It is believed that seeing us while traveling brings troubles on the trip. I always attend ceremonies with fear. It helps taking care of the feeling of others. I do not participate in the forefront during auspicious occasions. 75% of my heart is filled with fear and uneasiness. Concerning remarriage of a young widow, I think it is ok to remarry, because children are selfish to a certain extent.

There was a provision to get free tuition for one child, if 3 children from same family are enrolled in the same school. After the death of my husband, my brother-in-law withdraw his child from the school and sent it to another school. Eventually, I had to pay full tuition fees for both of my children. I suffered a lot. In that case, teachers of the boarding school supported me for my children's education. They allowed my children to continue school and waited for months until I could pay the school fees.

The major part of expenses are daily household expenses and school fees. My younger daughter and son are enrolled at school. I myself and my daughter play the major role in decision making concerning our children's education. When there is no money, I take a loan. My daughter and son-in-law also help us with money. I also have a buffalo that gives 1-2 liter milk every day. I don't buy milk so here I can save the money. I make monthly deposits in the cooperative bank.

I am also a member of WHR, after becoming involved with it my confidence level has risen up. I learned from those excruciating moments.

(Janaki kumara a widow of age 50 was very open towards the questions. She spoke frank and openly about her life, K.T.)

19. BA, Brahmin, Hindu

Now I am 49 years old. I was born in 2024 B.S. I have formal schooling up to class 5-6. I married at the age of 19 and my husband was of the same age. He died at the age of 32-33 and I became widow at 32-33. I became a widow at a young age. I am engaged in agriculture. I also help neighbors during the rice cropping season. I do *parma*, labor exchange services instead of paying and receiving money. I have two sons and a daughter in law. One is a computer mechanic and the other is an accountant.

Marriage relations with my husband were not good. He was physically violent. Every time we met, he fought and beat me a lot. He died due to a disease. It was not easy to sustain oneself after the death of a husband. It costs a lot. I took loans to meet the expenses that I needed to pay during the funeral rituals that continued

for 13 days. I paid it back and managed the loans by selling agricultural products, and I also sold cattle that I reared by myself.

Now, I Live together with my mother-in-law under one roof but we don't share the kitchen. Living close to her eased many times. My brother in law also helped us. I received help from my maternal family in the time of crisis or whenever I need it. My father-in-law was good and kind. He presented me a red dress and asked me to wear it without any hesitation. By the way, my mother in law is also a widow. And she was very strict regarding food, attire, and travelling after I entered widowhood. But after she became a widow, she is a bit flexible with herself. My mother-in-law is also quietly active in the household decision making process. I always ask my mother-in-law when I go somewhere for not troubling her.

Concerning troubling and dismal treatment, of course, I experienced different treatment within the family. To me society was and is neutral (positive), but I experienced prejudice from my own natal family members. The children of my brother-in-law were enrolled in a private school. They received a good education in English. And my children went to a government school, which is cheap and there are no good educational facilities. I know that children who have a father and enroll in a good school, then their livelihood is much easier and better than that of those children whose father has already died. They cannot get the money for further education. No one trusts widows and their children when money matters pop up.

Regarding the question of remarriage of widows, I think it is ok to remarry, since it is hard to live single.

I am involved in WHR and other cooperative organizations. My neighbors introduced and helped me to get membership of WHR. After becoming a member of WHR my confidence level has increased. Now I am fearless. We can easily carry out the economic activities by borrowing a loan. Now. It has become much easier. We do not need to ask everywhere when we get into economic trouble.

Also my *sasu* (mother-in-law) owns 7 *kathaa* land and I own 4 *kathha*. The majority of the expenses goes for household consumption.

I manage the earnings and expenses by myself. I have two cows and two goats. I sell milk and get some money. My two sons give me some amount of money and support me economically when I become sick and during the big festivals.

20. BB, Janajati, Buddhist

Born on 2027 B.S. I am now 45-46 years old. I left school at the middle of class 6. I remarried at the age of 25. I am a widow for the second time. First I became a widow at the age of 18-19. The second time I again became a widow at the age of 40. My relatives brought the second marriage proposal. My second husband was a widower too. From my first husband's side I had a daughter. I left her at my maternal home when I got married to the second husband.

After my second husband died, I brought my daughter to my new home since I felt lonely. My daughter went to school but did not go to university; because of our financial crisis after the death of my second husband, she was forced to start to work. Now she works in a factory and manages the daily expenses. I also do agricultural work and sell the products when we produce an extra quantity.

Although the land and house are in my name. I cannot use or sell them according to my wishes. It is controlled by my step sons. My husband was in the Indian army. Marriage relations with the husband were satisfactory, but he died in an accident. After his death, I was in the next position to claim his pension. But unfortunately, ultimately one of my step sons created certain problems that made it difficult for me to receive the pension.[75] The problems are not only limited to that. My age in my birth certificate is recorded as 60 years, which in reality I am not. I am counted as elderly widow which is not true. My younger step son lives in Australia. He is kind to me and sends money at the time of big festivals like *Dashain*. The other step sons

[75] Actually that was pure malice. He falsified documents concerning her age and her marriage to his father, which prevented her to be eligible for her second husband's pension, but he or his brothers were not entitled to the pension anyway and did not benefit from the scheme. Concerning the control of the land, cf. note 76 below.

provide money for festivals, bring meat and food. All sons divided the death-ritual expenses of their father among themselves. The step sons paid the loan, which amounted to 50-60 thousand rupee.

I did not recognize any kind of differences in my treatment by the family and society after becoming a widow. But one of my daughters-in-law behaved harshly to me after my husband died. But now she is suffering from cancer and she has become kind. I have not any kind of anger for what she did to me in the past. I feel pity and I help her in her tasks whenever she needs my help.

My neighbor told me about WHR. After I joined WHR my confidence level has increased. I get contact with new people, share the feelings. In the past, I was too scared to talk in front of others. Now, I can talk and negotiate a little bit.

I and my daughter live together. I retain the house and land in my own name. Our major part of expenses is on daily food. My daughter supports me in financial matters. She works in a factory and earns 9000 R.S. per month; I also I sell 1/2 quintals of rice yearly and that has helped a lot to manage the expenses of the household. We have two cows and I also sell its milk to a dairy.

(Most often she did not answer openly. she did not express her bad feeling towards her step sons. she tried to play naïve. Her true inner feelings were revealed to me by a third person, K.T.)

21. BC, Janajati, Buddhist

Age: 59. I joined adult education. I married at 17. I don't know the exact age of my husband when he got married with me. He was very good. He never shouted or spoke in a loud voice to me. Although he was illiterate, due to his kindness and loyal behavior, one of the department chiefs introduced my husband as a lab boy to the campus of a government school and he was hired permanently. I never asked him about his monthly earning. I took what he gave me. Unfortunately, one day while he was strolling in the village he fainted and suddenly died. Now I live together with my younger daughter and her son. Her husband has married another girl, therefore my daughter and grandson stay with me.

I have a liquor shop and we also engage in agriculture. One of my daughters has her own beauty parlor. I also receive ten thousand per month as a pension from my husband, and I get old age allowance. I own property in my own name. My income is sufficient to manage the expenses. We don't sell the agricultural products, we consume them ourselves. I opened a liquor shop in my own house just for passing time rather than for monetary income.

I did not experience any kind of discrimination from my family and close relatives. It is common among *Bahun*, Brahmin and Chhetri. That's why we should stay strong and act boldly so that no one can suppress us.

My daughters and sons-in-law are the main persons who supported me emotionally and economically. I have five daughters and I have never regretted to have them.

It becomes easy for a woman if she has a husband, a woman can easily move with her husband whenever and wherever she likes. I am the household head of my family.

Regarding the remarriage of widows, I am positive. A widow needs to remarry even if she has a child. Life is long. It is not easy to remain alone and single for the whole life. However, old widows should remain single. In their case it is better to beg rather than to remarry.

Now, I spend my free time, going to various pilgrimages and pray for the peace of my deceased husband.

(She expressed here again, a bonding of loyalty and respect towards her husband, K.T.)

22. BE, Dalit, Hindu

I think I am now 64 years' old. I never went to the school. I don't to read and write. I put a hand stamp if needed. I got married at the age of 18. My husband was 5-7 years older than me when we married. He died at the age of 67. I became widow at the age of 62. We had a very good relationship. His death was sudden. He was normal one moment, and then he was dead.

Now the government provided us with the legal ownership of the land. Actually it was a slum area. We built this block house after getting the land. It is about 1 *kattha*. I have only this house with a small garden.

I have a daughter and a son. My son works abroad (Malaysia). My daughter-in-law eloped, leaving two grandchildren. They are now under my responsibility. My son is irresponsible towards his children and me. He has not yet returned the loan that we borrowed for his travel. Also he does not phone us. We do not know anything about his current status. It is almost 5- 6 months that we are out of contact. Among my two granddaughters, the younger one receives a scholarship for her education. I am old so my daughter lives with me with her family. She supports us economically and manages household expenses. My son-in-law is now in custody. I heard he was detained in a drug-taking case. He had conducted the same behavior previously, but this time we will not take him out of the custody.

Although I became a widow, I never experienced any kind of social and family differences in treatment. But the sudden death of my husband caused an economic difficulty. We did not have money at all. At that time, my son-in-law helped a lot. It was really a grave time for us. Although my daughter manages the household expenses, I am the household head.

Regarding remarriage of widows, I do not support them. Once we had experienced painful moments, if we remarry it will be the same the next time as well.

Our funeral ceremonies continue for 10 days. At the end of the last day we eat duck's meat.

I am involved in WHR. My Neighbor told me about the organization. After I became involved there, it has become easy. We can request a loan whenever we need it. Besides my daughter's support, I receive old age pension. But it is not sufficient.

23. BF, Janajati, Buddhist

I am now 86 years old. In my time there was no school, so I have never been to school.

I married at the age of 18. My husband was 23 years old at that time. He died at 89 due to his age. My relationship with my husband was good and satisfactory. I don't need to do work. I am old. Therefore, I just stay at home and help if needed. My daughter-in-law is kind and behaves properly. She respects me. Our family lives together. We are not separated yet. Thus, our property is also not divided and we are ok. We have more than 10 members in our family. My younger son and his family lives in Hong Kong. They visit Nepal in their vacation. Now I live with my elder son and his family. My children are educated. My elder son worked in an international company for many years and he travelled to many countries. They are open-minded.

I did not notice any kind of differences in treatment by the family and society after entering widowhood. Our caste is very flexible and easy going. It is strict only among *Bahun* (*Brahmin*). Although we follow Buddhism, we live in *Brahmin* society, and to a certain extent we are influenced by the Hindu customs. So for 13 days we performed the death rituals like the Brahmin, everything pure and we did not consume meet at all. Just only plain food and fruits.

24. BH, Brahmin, Hindu

Age: 52. I can only sign. I am at present president of Shivanagar Single Women Group *(Shivanagara Chapter of WHR, K.T.)*, and I also am the household head of my family and everyone respects me and my opinion. I was 12 years and my husband was 22 when we got married. He died at 46. I became a widow when I was 33 years old. Agriculture is our main occupation and we also raise cattle. I have two daughters and one son, and also one granddaughter from my close relatives lives with us. She stays with me to help me. My relations with my husband were good and satisfactory. Unfortunately, he died due to disease.

I do not find any different behavior from society nor from my family now, but I was sad within myself and lost self-confidence.

Yes, I go and attend auspicious occasions, but I have always some kind of hesitation in my heart. Regarding remarriage of a widow, I think, if a widow has children it is good not to remarry.

I am involved with WHR and other cooperative organizations. My sisters and my family introduced me to WHR. After I got involved in such organizations, I got a chance to engage in trainings. I started to understand more new things and learned how to speak and communicate with other people.

I have a *kattha ghar* house and land in joint ownership with my son. We can sell it on joint agreement.

Our major part of expenses is for daily food and medicine. We have three buffaloes and one cow. I sell milk to a dairy. Both my daughter and son support me with money. Also, I have monthly savings.

(I noticed something different in her case, she wore lots of gold jewelry. There was no other single widow who put on lots of gold. Though she told me her house was mud, it was like cemented. Her son went to Korea for work and she has also a house in Kathmandu. She didn't mention many details about her past life, although she shared her feelings that she had once suffered. Her two daughters are also in good economic conditions, K.T.)

25. BI, Brahmin, Hindu

I was born in 2003 B.S. and now I am 71 years old. I cannot read and write. I married at the age of 11 and my husband was 20 years above me. My husband died in 2044 B.S. I became widow at the age of 41. We were involved in farming. My relation with my husband was satisfactory. He died in an accident.

My sons insisted that I not wear red. I followed the differences in dress for widows and married women.

I did not receive any torments from society and family members. Also my children were grown up, so I did not recognize any different treatment from society and family. My daughter-in-law is the household head of the family. I ask permission from my daughter-in-law, if I go to attend auspicious celebrations such as wedding ceremonies, rice feeding ceremony or festivals. Everyone is good to me, so I have not found any differences or bad reaction from the people because of my presence at such auspicious occasions.

I am involved in WHR. My daughter-in-law and neighbor introduced and helped me to get involved in WHR. After participating I noticed many changes, now I can communicate without any fear and with easiness, I can know new things too.

One of my sons is in Saudi Arabia and one has a shop in the village nearby to my home. And my daughters-in-law are engaged in agriculture. I have 5 *kathha* 6 *dhur* land in my own name (*laal purza cha*), but I cannot cultivate it by myself. I want to transfer it to my daughter's name but I cannot do it or sell it. It depends totally on the interest of my two sons about the land.[76]

As I have told you I have two sons. I live in a rotation manner, changing my domicile between their households every year.

My son who is working at Dubai never talks to me on the phone. I left home for two times without informing my sons and their families. They became enraged with anger. They called me a crazy or mentally ill person living in their house. Despite of my old age I have to perform most of the household tasks, such as laundry and cleaning household utensils. Although my two sons earn good sums of money. Every one of the family still expects that I pay them a certain portion from my old age pension, i.e. from the 2000 R.S. which I receive per month. I am really helpless, my daughter-in-law manages everything, she dislikes my presence is demeaning me. I cannot even speak at home. My daughter in-law-gets angry and loud if I go somewhere and I'm getting late to return.

26. BJ, Tiwari, Hindu

I am 78 years old. I can only put a stamp with my finger *lepche hannu* (finger print). I joined adult class, but I found it hard to recognize letters. I married at the age of 16 and my husband was 40 at that time. I was his second wife. My husband wanted a son so he married me. But I feel very lonely. It would be good, if I also had my own daughter. I became a widow at sixty-three. My relation with my husband was very good. He died of asthma. Now I live with my younger son and his family. I did not face any kind of problems, because I became a widow at the age of 63.

[76] She has full property rights, but the patriline, i.e. her sons may have prerogatives of inheritance, so she cannot fully dispose of the land without their consent; not only are the legal matters complicated, because her husband died thirty years ago, proceeding without regard for her sons might also cause disputes and troubles in the family.

Now Agriculture is our main occupation. At the same time my sons work in a foreign country. I did not receive any help from my maternal family, because I don't have any of them left. Both, society and family members treated me properly. I did not receive bad treatment from society and family towards my children, because my sons were already grown up when their father died. Now, my daughter-in-law is the household's head wife and manages the income of the household. I ask permission with family members when I attend auspicious celebrations such as wedding ceremonies, rice feeding ceremony or festivals. I don't want to worry them. Also, no one has interrupted or treated me badly because of my presence as a widows at such auspicious occasions. Every time I work in the frontline.

I am involved with WHR and other cooperative organizations. I came to know about the organizations through my neighbor, late Dil Maya. After getting involved with such organizations, mostly, monetary problems are solved, and one is getting the chance to learn new ideas, my communication skill has developed.

We live in a cement house. I own 1 *bighaa* land in my own name, have a bank account, and also receives widow pension every month. We also have a buffalo. Selling and managing of the agricultural products is done by my daughter in law.

27. BL, Chhetri, Hindu

Age: 46. I can only write my name. I married when I was 13 and he was 23. But he died at 37. I became a widow at the young age of 27. He was good and we had a very satisfactory relationship. He died, because he was sick. My three children were 7, 3, and 1 years old when their father died. It was a tough time. My natal family took care of me and my children and they still help us. Our main occupation is agriculture. Yearly, we earn 20-30 thousand rupees.

After I became a widow, my husband's family did not care for me and my children. In the surrounding community they also thought it was bad scold others and to speak up for me. It was really hard at that time. My brother-in-law's treatment was really terrible. He did not pass the land to my name. He suspects that I will remarry and elope. My natal family helped both financially and emotionally. They paid all the school expenses of my children. But I did not receive any ill prejudice from the community where I live.

I participate in auspicious occasions, but my heart is always filled with fear. Regarding the remarriage of a widow, I think a young widows must be allowed to remarry, but if she has children then she must avoid it. She has to take care of her children. I also received remarriage proposals, but I did not pay attention.

Now I am a member of WHR and other cooperative organizations. The president of single women group Mrs. Chandra Maya Bastola introduced me to WHR. After I joined WHR, my level of my confidence has increased. I came to know that that there are other widow sisters whose fate is similar to mine. It also became easy to receive loans from the organization

I own 7 *khatta oilane jaga (land which is not legally owned by the person who is in its possession, but is government land that can be used, K.T.)* and we built a house on it. It is not very easy to manage household expenses. We borrow, and then we repay the loan. We have one buffalo and four goats. We sell 8 liters' milk per day and earns 400 Rupees per day. Besides our small monetary income, my son provides money when needed.

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