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A Case Study of Death and Bereavement arising from Political Violence in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about death and bereavement arising from political violence in Nepal. Throughout the thesis, an attempt is made to analyse death and bereavement in the context of a post-conflict situation with an emphasis on the people's engagement with death and their coping mechanisms for grief and loss. Chapter one, as the 'Introduction', outlines the background framework as well as the rationale for this thesis. A layout of the broader socio-economic and political picture of Nepal is presented so as to place the study of death and bereavement within a contemporary Nepali perspective. The second chapter, titled 'Death: Meanings and Perceptions', presents historical and theoretical perspectives in which death and bereavement in the post-conflict Nepal must be discussed. The third chapter 'Researching Politically Implicated Violent Death: Some Methodological Issues' provides the rationale for employing a qualitative methodology, particularly 'multi-sited' ethnography, which was used to collect data. The challenges and complications of being in the field are discussed in detail. Drawing upon analysis, the fourth chapter, 'Understanding of Death in Post- Conflict Nepali Society' discusses the meaning of death in detail. The analysis highlights the ways in which the meanings of death constructed in various cases are interconnected with one another in some visible or invisible form, concluding that death was not only a sense of acceptance or rejection but also seen as a transcendental approach and a means to self-actualisation. Furthermore, the meaning of death, appear to overlap within categories and to extend beyond the limits of categories to give a pragmatic outlook to life. Chapter five, discusses the way in which the deceased were commemorated under the heading 'Commemorating Violent

Death: Ritual Perspectives and Practices', suggesting that death, when viewed through the lens of rituals, it presented a complicated case. Rituals appeared as important but challenging to incorporate, which had its implications and was recognised as a social issue as well as a political problem. Chapter six analyses grief and bereavement patterns under the title 'Understanding Grief and Bereavement following Violent Death'. It notes that handling grief and the ways of bereavement were significant when death was put to the test with the concept of living. The meaning for living was important, and was particularly envisaged within a 'dukkha' model of grief. It was the concept of everyday living that encouraged family members to recreate their own worldviews. Finally, chapter seven, titled 'Conclusion – towards a Framework for Understanding Political Death in Nepal' concludes the thesis, suggesting that it is necessary to understand death in its complexities, if life is to be lived in its totality, of which the understanding of death and grieving in a micro and macro perspective are an important part.

A Case Study of Death and Bereavement arising from Political Violence in Nepal

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Introduction

This thesis is a study of death in Nepal particularly what I call "political death", that is, death as a result of political conflict. It examines the ways in which the disruption of traditional mechanisms of coping with death and bereavement due to political violence occur and how people deal with this disruption. Many people in Nepal view the death of their family members as an outcome of the Maoist conflict that started in early 1996 and continued until April 2006, costing more than 13500 lives (HRYB 2008).

An analysis of Nepali society suggests that political death in its modern conception is a new phenomenon in Nepal which has disrupted existing social and familial value systems. Violence and loss have created vulnerability in the family, particularly when the deceased was a bread earner and the head of the family. All the same, these characteristics are to some extent similar of those found in places of civil or political conflict around the world (Robben 1995). In this sense, political death is not new but it was certainly new in its

characteristics in the case of Nepal. Death has particularly fractured the preexisting collective community bonding leading towards a further fragmentation
of the society. A bereaved individual is seen as isolated within the community,
which was not the case before when death and bereavement were shared
collectively in the community. Different types of conflict including those with
ideological, personal and social bases have led to the many deaths, of which a
large number involved direct state intervention while others were disguised in
form. These deaths took place in larger numbers than ever before. Formally or
informally, whatever way we may frame it, these deaths were extended beyond
the walls of power structures and moved to the societal and family level in its
extreme forms, that finally disrupted the traditional mechanisms of coping with
death and bereavement. This as a result led to the extreme politicization of the
society that seems to be a new phenomenon and death a by-product of the
emerging polarised phenomenon of politics.

The interesting question that one may ask here, which is of considerable importance, is how death became political in the context of Nepal, when conventional understanding views death as a natural fact and the political as a construct. What I call political death is the semantics and the characteristics of politics that appear to be imposed on death due to political and social differences. Hence, this thesis talks about death that has occurred due to a political reason which directly or indirectly disrupted the existing social fabric of the society, subsequently dismantling the traditional mechanisms of coping with death and bereavement.

Several questions can be raised to understand political violence and death in post conflict Nepal; for instance, what are the typologies of death such as political death or death of general public/political cadre or both? How does this relate to who die - men/women, poor/rich, high/low class, high-/low caste? Whose deaths are of social importance and how does context of these deaths in terms of place/ space/ and time shape this importance? How were these deaths negotiated in a larger societal context, in terms of social status and place in society? Was it only a death or something more in terms of the causes and consequences of the death? How did families respond to conflict induced death and negotiate their social status in a post conflict situation? And how did death in a family contribute to the social identity of the bereaved and how did they correspond to such situations? This thesis therefore seeks to answer some of these questions. It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to understanding the meaning of death in conflict situations and serve as an important endeavour in the field of death studies.

The case of Nepal suggests that the violence was present in the form of continuous terror (akin to such events as the war in Iraq or Afghanistan, or the violent practices of the brutal regime of apartheid, and unlike sudden violent episodes such as the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and was both mobilized and targeted towards certain groups of people, adversely affecting the lives of the people, breaking up the cultural and social interconnectedness of the society and family (Tiwari 2010; Baral 2006; Kattel 2003; Nepal 2003; Lal 2003; Bhattachan 2000). Yet, in spite of the severe disruption of lives and bereavement, everyday life seems to have regained normalcy, at least

superficially. Nevertheless, the process in which the bereaved transform themselves while navigating through grief has been a matter of concern and remains uncertain. Over the last fifty years, the questions about how people suffer and return to normalcy after such overwhelming experiences have been debated and discussed; yet the processes remain continuously contested (Robben 2004; Walter 2012).

This thesis attempts to analyse the case of Nepal, with an emphasis on the disruption of the traditional ritual patterns and people's engagement with death and their coping mechanisms for grief and loss, adding a new dimension to the contested discussions of death and dying. Discussion is grounded in an anthropologically informed context in which the centrality of ritual in societal accommodations of death is emphasised as a key feature. The meaning of political death and dying is constructed socially, while coping with grief is done in religious and cultural perspectives, while engaging the reflections of the bereaved members. This thesis also seeks to elaborate the discussion beyond individual grief and bereavement processes to understand death as a variable in social change. In addition, the relationship between political death and the social identity of the bereaved is looked at in a social setting.

Throughout the world, the death of a family member is seen as inducing the vulnerability of the bereaved and bereavement patterns are seen as a natural response to grief. Literature from a number of studies on families living in contexts of conflict, whether be it civil or ethnic in developing countries, or gang 'warfare' or violence within large cities, suggests that the effects of such

conflicts have often been extreme (Cheney 2005). Conflict also compels countless others to live with material and emotional deprivation, including loss of the structures that give meaning to social and cultural life, and disruption of social networks and primary relationships that support family's physical, emotional, moral, cognitive and social development (Maguire and Shirlow 2004). This gives currency to the developing understanding that people eventually do cope with death and grief even though it is politically motivated, unexpected and sudden in nature. This thesis thus also attempts to discuss the patterns of coping and association of the bereaved persons, who have lost their loved one due to political violence. And it further explores how competing political ideologies are influential in breaking off the patterns of coping and association. Moreover, it also explores and emphasises the socio-cultural and spiritual ways of handling the suffering in the process of bereavement. Besides that, I, myself, coming from Nepal, and being aware of the miseries and the experiences that the families and the communities have gone though, and the nature of conflict and its effects on people's lives, have been closely associated with the subject, particularly in terms of imagining the absoluteness of death and its relation to life. This thesis is an attempt to engage with the subject further, seek clarity on the absoluteness of death and respond to questions that arose for me about the ways in which the bereaved make sense of death and bereavement.

At this juncture, before engaging in a detailed discussion, it is important to introduce Nepal as a nation state where revolt against established structures has taken a heavy toll on people's lives. This will set the background necessary for

understanding the phenomenon of political death and its emergence in Nepali politics, in which conflict played a role that triggered social change. Hence, before going into the issues of death and bereavement, let us first look into the historical development and the conception of violent politics that had its roots in the making of Nepal as a nation state.

The Nepali State: a Historical Overview

The present day Nepal in the Himalayan basin represents 'an area of interface to two different cultural worlds: 'Indic' and 'Bodic' (Gurung 1997, p. 498). The geographical boundary runs North West to South West dividing the boundary based on mountains and hills including 'Tarai' where the Caucasoids (Khas) predominate in the Karnali basin, the Mongolides (Kiranti) eastwards and aboriginal Madhesis in the middle. Before 1742 this rugged and remote geography fostered numerous tribal units, chiefdoms and petty states that were only conceptualized and extended as one Nepali state through conquest over petty states by Prithvi Narayan Shah during 1742 – 1775. The present day polity and geography of Nepal are thus shaped by Prithvi Narayan Shah (1723–75), the ruler of the tiny Gorkha principality in the 18th century (Whelpton 2005; Stiller 1993; Pradhan 1991; Regmi 1972). This is what we know as Nepal today.

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¹ . The word 'Indic' means the people having origin in the Indus Valley Civilization in ancient India.

². The word 'Bodic' denotes the people of Tibeto Berman origin.

³. 'Tarai' is a geographical region in Nepal mostly consisting of flat agricultural land adjoining India in the South. Geographically, this area is the bread basket of Nepal, where the major economic activities take place.

Nepal before 1950

The idea of a 'nation-state' was not visible until 1814, when the territorial ambition of the Nepalese government came into conflict with the East India Company, which strictly limited the 'Gorkha Empire's' preoccupation with territorial expansion across the Himalayas. By the treaty of Sugauli, the boundaries and structure of the polity were finally sketched which eventually became the landmark to seek for popular legitimacy of Nepal's governmental authority (Regmi 1972) that in turn sought the position of the ruler in terms of systems of ruling.

Later, a more systematic effort was carried out by the Rana rulers to model Nepal as a nation-state. The 'Muluki Ain' (the Legal code of Nepal) was brought about in 1854. This taxonomy was imposed on top of the pre-existing, local definitions of relative political status and the segmented political hierarchies across the country (Sharma 1977). The first democratic revolution of 1950 put an end to the Rana oligarchy and installed a Monarchical democratic system. However, a democratically elected government lasted for a very brief period of time and only helped in restoring the Shah dynasty, which had been kept away from the centre of power since 1846.

Nepal during 1950 to 1990

King Mahendra took over the reins of power in 1960, dissolving an elected Congress Party⁴ government, and installing the Panchayati⁵ system. This

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⁴. The Nepali Congress is a centrist political party of Nepal that was founded as the Nepali National Congress in 1947. It continued to dominate Nepali politics until 2006 and is now the second largest political party in Nepal.

regime espoused a 'guided democracy' through the Panchayat system, that in reality, allowed the king to reserve all powers to himself (Brown 1996). The project was to spread nationalism with national sentiment. Simultaneously, a certain conception of national identity was born. The identity the King claimed was based on the religious faith of 'Hinduism'. Hence 'Hinduism' was presented as 'the religion' of the Kingdom (Burghart 1996). One may argue here that the consolidation of the Nepali state therefore must have been brought about as a feature of elite ideology imposed upon the locals, first as an administrative fact and finally as a social and cultural reality, by assigning each group to a very precise position in the hierarchy of castes. Historically, caste was recognised as a unique socio-cultural phenomenon of Nepali society and stratification⁶ took place via hierarchically arranged caste rankings. People were granted rights and duties based on kinship and their relations with the central government. Rights over land and trade were not the same for everyone (Burghart 1996; Hofer 1979; Sharma 1977). Thus, belonging to one group or another had both political and economic consequences. Several studies over the course of the last 40 years have shown how various processes of mutual

⁵. Panchyat denotes a village development unit. The term basically originates from the word 'pancha' meaning the local leaders who were reputedly above party politics, first used by the King Mahendra to implement his philosophy of the Panchyati system to govern the masses.

⁶ The 'Muluki Ain' of 1854 (Legal code of Nepal) tried to comprehend the pluralistic cultures of Nepal into a single scheme of the Hindu caste universe. These caste hierarchies were classified into five categories in the following order of precedence: 1) Wearers of holy cord (Tagadhari), 2) Non-enslavable alcohol-drinkers (Namahsine Matwali), 3) Enslavable alcohol-drinkers (Mahsine Matwali), 4) Impure but touchable castes (Chhoi chhito halnya naparne), 5) Impure and untouchable castes (Chhoi chhito halnya parne or Ma ju pim). The scheme was biased in favour of the dominant Bahun, Thakuri and Chhetri hill castes. However in the recent past these categorizations have been contested within Nepali society. Sharma (2004) in 'The State and Society in Nepal and Gurung (2003) in 'Trident and Thunderbolt: cultural dynamics in Nepalese politics' discuss the caste dynamics in detail.

accommodation between regional ethnic systems and the policies of a centralizing state have led to economic inequality and identity politics in Nepal (Regmi 1978; Seddon 1993; De Sales 1998; Kumar 2000, Bhattachan 2000; Lawoti 2010; Hangen 2010).

In order to build national identity, which was the principal aim and philosophy of the 'Panchayati System', the Nepali language was imposed from the beginning of primary school, at the expense of other languages⁷, which was seen as oppressive (De Sales 2003). Lawoti (2007) argues that the bias of state institutions in favour of the Khas-Nepali language has put non-Khas-Nepalinative speakers in a disadvantaged position and there was little done to assure the protection of minority rights against the tyranny of the majority. Internal migration of the hill caste groups from hills to the tarai also contributed in establishing Nepali as the lingua franca of the country, and so, seen as a powerful means of national integration. The superimposition of caste, differential privileges, inability to accommodate minority cultures (language) and the top down approach to establishing democratic systems failed to unify people into a common 'Nepali' identity and instead gave rise to group and ethnic identities. As a result, the consolidation of Nepali people in the Nepal state remained contested.

In addition, monarchical institutions gave marginalised groups very limited opportunities of participating in the decision making process at the national

⁷ . The number of languages/dialects reported increased from 31 in 1991 to 106 in 2001. The 2001 census records an additional 22 Rai, 17 ethnic and 12 other languages/dialects. These languages are classified into hill caste groups, hill ethnics, and tarai caste groups (Gurung 2003, p. 5-8).

level, except for those few trusted individuals and families who were able to do 'chakari' (to gain favour through bribes, as false praise). The prevailing family network priorities within the high caste and the culture of 'afno manche' (one's own people) further contributed in retaining broader alliances of the privileged caste and their domination within the power structure of the country. This has repeatedly led to the discomfort of other marginalized groups, compelling them to frame their own separate identities (Bista 1991; Macfarlane 1993) based on historical and cultural roots. Resistance to the monarchy prevailed and the 1990 'People's Movement' (Jan Andolan I) was spread for the restoration of democracy, bringing together liberals and communists, both of which were banned under the Panchayati regime. This was thus the beginning of mass politics for which forty years of profound social change had prepared the country (Hachhethu 2000, 2003; Baral 2000; De Sales 2000; Burghart 1993).

Since the time of unification of Nepal, the rulers of Nepal had tried to develop Nepal as a homogeneous, monolithic and unitary state, in the state - designed schema of national integration. This only assisted a few from the hill high caste Brahmin - Chhetri and Newar groups to remain in a privileged position in society. Other groups, for instance Madhesi⁸, Janajati⁹, and Dalits¹⁰ were generally left marginalized. In this sense, until today the state of Nepal has not

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⁸ . People who live in Tarai land are called Madhesi; they consist of various castes and ethnicities.

⁹. Janajati denotes different minority groups having lived originally in Nepal from ancient times.

Dalits are the lowest caste group in the hierarchy of caste system. This group of people have always been marginal in terms of social and economic status.

emerged as a nation; it is still divided by socio-cultural cleavages and lack of political will to objectively promote national integration. Thus, culturally varied groups and their daily life practices appeared in conflict with the dominant elites. This was seen as an accretion of the underlying structural deformities that were introduced and continuously maintained by the hill high caste Brahmin - Chhetri and Newar. However, this was reflected logically as the agents of movement diffusion (Gurung 2003; Anderson 1983). One would thus argue that the concept of the formation of the nation-state had a hidden agenda of not incorporating the Nepali masses into mainstream development and polity but of constructing a discourse that would dissolve future possibilities of any mass movements that might challenge the prevailing power structures.

Maoist in the Making

It has long been argued that modern states are expected to provide human security, along with 'positive political goods' such as an independent judicial system to adjudicate disputes, to enforce the rule of law and to protect the fundamental civil and political rights; a functioning educational and healthcare system; an efficient transportation infrastructure, food security and other conditions necessary for the development of their people. The absence of all or any of these could leave a nation in a volatile condition conducive to rebellion and conflict (Rotberg 2003). Therefore, in order to understand death and dying due to political violence, here, it is necessary to place these deaths in the context of larger socio-political processes.

Although the 1950s movement for democratic polity gave some hope for positive change in Nepal, nevertheless it was not translated into reality. Although, after capturing power in 1960, King Mahendra tried to modernise the Nepali state in a guided form, it mainly retained many of the features and functioning mechanisms of the old state. The trend continued even after the 1990s People's Movement and unfortunately the situation did not change drastically for the people who lived in the remote hinterlands of Nepal who constituted a majority of the population. It is in this context that the Maoist people's movement seems to have been conceived in the remote hinterlands of Nepal (Nickson 2003; Kumar 2000; Mikesell1999; Burghart 1993; Hoftun 1993; Seddon 1993).

While the communist ideology has prevailed in the region since 1947 when a Nepal Communist Movement was first formed in Calcutta under the leadership of Puspa Lal Shrestha and later transformed into the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), the rise of Maoism as an alternative political ideology came late in Nepal, dating from 1971. Initially it began with the influence of the teachings of Mao Tse -Tung and the experience of Charu Mazumdar, the early architect of the Naxalite Movement in India. Influenced by Naxalites of the neighbouring border town, young activists in Jhapa, in the Estern Tarai, formed the Koshi Regional Committee of the CPN, later known as the 'All Nepal Revolutionary Coordination Committee' (ML). These young activists, for the first time, launched an underground guerrilla movement to wage a people's war, popularly known as the 'Jhapa uprising'. The Jhapa uprising was one of the first of its kind, when Nepali communists adopted armed struggle as

a revolutionary strategy against the existing establishment and ruling elites. However, the movement was brought to a quick end by a violent counterinsurgency campaign by the police, which led to the deaths of many of the cadres of the All Nepal Revolutionary Coordination Committee (ANRCC). The members of the same group later reworked their strategy to launch a people's movement that could at the opportune moment be altered into an armed revolt. Today's top leaders of the Maoists come from the same school (ANRCC) that was initially organised by Mohan Bikram Singh and Nirmal Lama (Cailmail 2009; Karki and Seddon 2003, Nickson 2003; Thapa 2002; Maharjan 2000).

However a major political change did not occur until 1990, when the National People's Movement (Jana Andolan I) reached a point of popularity where it could no longer be ignored and finally a constitutional Multi Party Democracy with Ceremonial Monarchy was established in April 1990. It would be appropriate here to point out that the mass movement that brought the desired political change was equally supported by the underground communists who basically came from Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), Fourth Convention, and later split into various groups such as the Communist Party of Nepal (Mashal), Ma- Le, Communist Party of Nepal (Unity Centre- Ekta Kendra) and Janabadi Morcha (People's Front). In some ways, the indirect support of these groups of communists allowed them to see themselves as a contender in party politics who wished to become as a major political group in Nepali politics. These underground communists saw themselves as instrumental to creating the political crisis which led to the events of April 1990 uprising. However, they

were cornered by the dominant political groups including the Nepali Congress and Communist Party of Nepal Marxist/ Leninist (CPN-M/L) and further marginalised in the new political order. Even the left front, a major left alliance, found itself in a distinct minority in the interim government. Thus, its demand for the constituent assembly that to draft a national constitution, was originally talked about as early in 1951, was again rejected. In reaction, the United National People's Movement, a group of underground communists including the Communist Party of Nepal (Unity Centre- Ekta Kendra) rejected the new constitution, considering it an inadequate basis for a genuine democracy. They continued to demand a constituent assembly, with a view to drawing a new democratic constitution and eventually, the formation of a People's Republic (Karki and Seddon 2003).

The CPN (Maoist) headed by Prachanda (Puspa Kamal Dahal) boycotted the 1994 election and CPN (Unity Centre) was divided further into the CPN (Unity Centre) led by Niranjan Govinda Vidya and the CPN (Unity Centre) led by Babu Ram Battarai. The Electoral commission refused to recognise the later. This seems to have been the turning point for the Maoists. At this point, the CPN (Unity Centre) led by Babu Ram Bhattarai repudiated all political engagements within a constitutional framework and started preparing for a People's War. The CPN (Maoist), already underground, and CPN (Unity Centre) resisted joining multiparty politics, taking advantage of the situation to shape up their ideology while criticising the parliamentary democratic system. This finally led to the Maoist's People's war to bring about radical change through armed struggle (Karki and Seddon 2003; Nickson 2003). A field

research carried out by Karki in March 2001, in Rolpa and Rukum suggests that initially after the rejection of parliamentary politics, Maoists workers were harassed substantially, which further pushed the Maoists to organize themselves for an armed struggle. In arrogance, instead of negotiating with the groups and bringing back the rebels to parliamentary politics, the state power pushed Maoists further to the jungles. According to Karki and Seddon (2003), the ruthless Operation Romeo became a discourse to challenge state power and served as a crucial factor behind the Maoists' eventual commitment to launching a People's War. De Sales (2003) notes similar dissent raised by the Magars of Kham Country, where the Maoists were initially able to establish themselves.

Finally, in January 1996, the United People's Front of Nepal (CPN Unity Centre and CPN Maoist) presented a 40-point demand to resolve the hostility and insisted that if no progress is made towards fulfilment of their demands by 17th February 1996; they would have no choice but to resort to armed struggle against the existing state. The government, instead of responding positively, further cracked down and hence a full-fledged Maoist People's War started in the hinterlands of Nepal. Certainly, democratic inclusion and exclusion have always been central to political discourse in Nepal. As discussed, historically, policies and practices only favoured a few elites, leaving a majority of people, including Madhesi, Janajati and Dalits disadvantaged and their agendas for development ignored. The Maoist People's War was thus, one may conclude, an outcome of the imbalances on the political and socio economic fronts which

led to an armed class struggle in a neo-Marxist fashion, leaving many dead, many more bereaved and a minority to rule the majority.

Death during Maoist Conflict

Coming back to the disastrous impact of armed conflict and death, one may suggest that violent death is not a new phenomenon within the history of Nepal's power structure. As I have discussed earlier, the foundation of Nepal itself is historically grounded in the skills of war making. For instance, one may recall continuous assaults made by Prithvi Narayan Shah to conquer small kingdoms to unify Nepal, or King Mahendra's crackdown on political cadres in the 1960s to sustain his power. This strategy has long existed and been observed by the rival groups in the backyards of power structure. Thus, earlier instances occurred within the boundaries of power regimes, whereas later instances prepared a conducive ground for death to capture the public imagination in Nepali society.

In the beginning, this had little impact in terms of transforming death in the public imagination and remained limited to the negotiations of power among the ruling elites. Thus, the history of armed struggle in Nepali politics primarily dates back to the years of 1960s when democratic intelligentsia launched armed protests to establish democratic governance in Nepal against the autocratic monarchical regime. For the first time, formal executions took place to suppress the democratic movement initiated by the then Nepali Congress, a leading centrist political party in Nepal in 1962. The army was mobilized against the people in Bharatpur in inner 'Tarai' in response to those

who were involved in armed struggle in which four people were recorded as dead, killed by army personnel.

Oral history suggests that the armed struggle that started in the beginning of 1962 probably killed around 200 people in different districts and border towns of Nepal, in contrast to the report of the Human Rights Year Book (1994), which reports killing of only 27 people. Struggle continued in the 1970s and 1980s to establish democracy in Nepal, costing the lives of a few hundred people, but did not get much attention. It seems that, since then, the killing of politically active people continued. At times, it was crafted in the name of maintaining law and order, while at other times key political activists were killed who shared a particular political ambition. Hence, death appearing out of political conflict which that had its seeds five decades earlier, continued and expanded to capture public imagination during the days of Maoist conflict.

The Maoist conflict, is known as the Maoist People's War, which formally began in 1996, was brought to an end by a peace accord signed between the Communist Party of Nepal, Maoists {CPN(M)} and the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) in 2006. This technically brought an end to the violent conflict. A full-fledged armed conflict had started on February 13, 1996 when members of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) attacked a police post in Rolpa district of Western Nepal. It is also argued that the genesis of an armed insurgency in the districts of Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot was attributed to several factors, including poverty and general underdevelopment of the area, grievances against the 1991 democratic government, the heavy crackdown on

CPN-M activists during 1992, 1993 and 1994, and a long-standing presence of Communist activists in the area (HRYB 1996; Sharma 2003; De sales 2003; Karki and Seddon 2003; Cailmail 2009).

From the beginning of 1998, the Maoists started intensifying and extending their activities by attacking police posts in the remote areas of Rolpa. The government launched a major crack down operation, called Kilo Sierra 2, which led to a massive increase in confrontation, clash between the police and the Maoists and a sudden rise in the injuries and deaths resulting from the conflict. In a period of one year from April 1998 to May 1999 the number of deaths due to conflict increased to 596, of which 457 were a result of police actions (Karki and Seddon 2003). Over the next decade, the Maoist insurgents targeted government officials, police personnel, army depots and banks, and succeeded in controlling large areas of the countryside. Data from various sources suggest that around 13,347 people have died since the Maoist uprising in 1996, which continued until 2006. Among them, 8338 people were killed by the state security forces and 4970 by the Maoists. A record 4,603 people were killed in 2002 of which 3266 deaths were perpetrated by the state security agency actors and 1337 by the Maoists. This includes 452 children and 1016 women. In addition, around 500 have lost their lives after the Madhes armed struggle which continued just after the April 2006 mass uprising (Human Right Year Book, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 22 May, 2008; Reuters AlertNet, 20 Nov 2006).

In addition, one can also find numerous news stories and newspaper opinion columns, commenting on various aspects of the conflict, including death and torture cases, in the archives of the various newspapers. However these reports present a considerable variation in their estimates of the intensity of conflict across Nepal. Data suggests that nearly 5000 people were killed in the Western Region, the epicentre of the Maoist conflict, while casualties were much lower, around 1600, in the Far Western Region and the rest dispersed in the Mid Western, Central and Eastern regions (Do and Iyer 2009, HRYB 2006). A statistical analysis of the death related data prepared by Do and Iyer (2009) suggests that conflict-related deaths were significantly higher in poorer districts, and in geographical locations that favoured insurgents, such as mountains and forests.

The reality in the field was that a large number of people were killed, from villagers to left supporters¹¹, Maoists, government officials, police and army personnel and other political party supporters and innocent people who did not comply with the extortionate demands of the Maoists. Reports also suggest deaths occurring during patrols or encounters, whether real or fake, and a majority of killings took place during offensives by Maoists on police and army positions. Nevertheless, in all cases, killings were either labelled as Maoist if perpetrated by the security forces or a feudal, reactionary if perpetrated by the Maoists. However, reports from different sources suggest that many killed for being Maoists were local villagers and peasants with no ideological background as class revolutionaries. They were, most of the time,

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¹¹. These are the people who supported communist ideology strictly and ritualistically.

pulled-in as supporters through coercion and blackmail. In these times of uncertainty, some eventually turned Maoist, because they did not have much choice in the remote villages in the absence of a state administration and did not have a sense of security.

Deliberate and unlawful killings

Unlawful killings, including extra-judicial executions by the police were also widespread during the launch of the intensified security mobilization operation after May 1998. However, after February 2000, there seems to have been a decline in the number of unlawful killings due to international pressures and ongoing attempts to initiate dialogue between both sides. However, the incidence of unlawful killing shot up dramatically with the state of emergency imposed in November 2001 and reached its peak in 2002.

The members of the Maoists also perpetrated a number of deaths including members of other political parties particularly Nepali Congress, and other civilians. The Maoists have argued that these civilians were killed because of their involvements in specific acts such as corruption or collaborating with the police or at times were seen as feudal and reactionary. However, Maoists have refuted any killing based on the membership of a particular political party. Death of some also occurred when individuals defied warnings given, while a few were killed without any apparent reason. Apart from these killings taking place unlawfully, killings in custody, killing due to severe torture, and death by deliberately implanted landmines also occurred. At times these landmines hit

the targets as set by the Maoists while on other occasions they cost the lives of civilians.

Meaning of Death in Maoist Revolution in Nepal

Conflict induced death spread across the geography of Nepal and was distributed in most ethnic, cultural and religious settings. Here, it is important to interrogate how death is discussed by the revolutionary forces, as well as by the masses, which grabbed public attention. In this respect, some of the literature on death and its implications especially as discussed by De Sales (2003), Ogura (2004), Shah (2008), Lecomte-Tilouine (2006, 2009), Onesto (2006) Ghimire (2009), Dhital (2009), Weyermann (ed. 2010) provides necessary insight to locate death in a post conflict Nepali context.

Death - a sacrifice

In the past, war was equated with sacrifice in Nepal, and the language of death was couched in a language of self-sacrifice. This equivalence was made explicit in various ritual practices and propaganda literature of the Maoists. For example, the conventional understanding that 'death on the battlefield does not pollute the relatives as death normally does' was emphasised. Death in Nepal's context of conflict was most of the time understood in terms of sacrifice when the deceased was a revolutionary. In popular Maoist discourse, this is described as an act of bravery and it is the brave whose blood is being shed on

the ground. The warrior's sacrifice is not a substitution but rather an alternative to the Brahmanic theory¹².

Lecomte-Tilouine (2006) analyses the literary material produced by Maoists, which can be found in ceremonies, memorial parks, songs, and poems and argues that Nepalese revolutionary warriors expose themselves in many ways as renouncers. They detach themselves (*tyag garna*) from all the selfish components of life and even from their material bodies, which they offer to the war as a sacrifice 'on the altar (*vedi*) of the revolution'. Their renouncement stems from altruism. They repeatedly claim that they act for the liberation of the people, for a better world in the future, which they might not be able to enjoy. Propaganda emphasises benefits obtained by those who accept voluntary death. Self-sacrifice confers grandeur, shining glory, and an abstract sense of immortality on the fallen. It transforms them into stars that light up the dark world.

Martyrdom

To offer sacrifice (to kill) or to be offered in sacrifice (to die) means that the person makes a sacrificial gift of his own person or 'balidan', and aims at creating a better world on earth through its generative power of multiplication, which will help realize the 'dreams of the martyrs'. This, we understand, generates more śakti (power) to fight the enemy. Maoist propaganda discusses this as death soaked with the blood of martyrs, so that the soil germinates, and

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^{12 .} Here Brahmanic theory implies a caste based structured society as discussed in Hindu Sanskrit texts. This is traditionally drawn from the point of view of the cultural meanings associated with their institutionalized manifestations within the Hindu caste and ritual system.

power grows. In simple terms, it is at the cost of death of an individual that revolutionary power flourishes. Death and destruction are therefore seen as creative in compounded ways.

Lecomte-Tilouine (2006) argues that the rhetoric is very stylized, and the sorrow is described at length to show how it is transmuted into energy, anger, and the determination to take revenge. It is in this way, in particular, that martyrdom is said to bring 'urja' (energy) to the revolution. Loss does not have personal meaning. The loss is only discussed within a wider context, without being insulated in any sentimentalism. It is in the death of martyrs that the definition of life can be grasped, because it is a worthy promise of life for future generations. At the same time, however, the close kin of a Martyr present a narrative of sorrow as their experience. Thus, in one sense, the family members of a martyr stands on top of everything, while in another they remain in turmoil in their innermost emotions.

Despite such symbolic readjustments, once a party member died, his or her familial links were reiterated in a complicated manner. The martyr's family was accorded a central place at the moment of homage, but the death rituals were usually, it is said, not performed and the mourning periods were not followed by relatives. This seeming innovation may be grounded in two facets of past practice: first, death on the battlefield was traditionally accorded purity, and, second, martyrs are likened to ascetics, figures understood to have burned their normal life away and secured immortality. The argument here might remind us of a standard Hindu sacrifice according to which the ritual is

supposed to generate more life by taking life. In this sense, offering of sacrifice to God is for the security and protection of the family and society. There is, however, an important difference. De Sales (2003: 20) argues, "In a standard sacrifice, the beneficiary of the sacrifice, the sacrificer in Hubert and Mauss' terminology, sacrifices a substitute of himself in order to obtain more vitality or prosperity for him and his people – his family if the sacrificer is a householder, his subjects if he is a king. He himself does not die but instead has the sacrificial victim killed in his place."

However, with the Maoists sacrificing their own life, we are dealing with another pattern of sacrifice, more common in religions of salvation, such as Christianity or Islam. Revolutionary ideology can be brought into the same frame of thought; since the dead is a martyr, dying here and now for a better world beyond his or her death. S/he displays exemplary behaviour. S/he is not a sacrificial victim whose life is taken away for the benefit of the person who performs the sacrifice. The martyr is the beneficiary of his or her own death, through which he or she will live on, if only in the memory of the people of which they are a part.

Analysing the various poetic literature and symbolic art and posters presented by the Maoists, De Sales (2003), suggest that by giving their lives (Maoists), the martyrs create unity among the people who remember them and worship them. In becoming one kin, the powerless gain power against the enemy. Here, the meaning of the flag of unity, which is red with the blood of the martyrs, is reflected as binary forces. In the Maoist ideology, death loses its character of

reciprocity: one's own warriors are noble and heroic, while the valour of the opponents is denied or scorned. The rebel reaches a 'noble death' and becomes an 'eternal martyr', the Royal Nepalese Army soldier or the oppressor is 'eliminated' or 'cleansed', or meets an 'infamous' death (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006; Sales 2003). This appears in opposition to death during Panchyat times. In both scenarios, death was of the poor village people, yet during Panchyat, the deceased were seen as victims whose life and blood benefited the rulers of the Panchyat regime, and therefore rather than death creating power, created slavery. However, in contrast, the meanings of death acquired more power when it came as the self-sacrifice as of martyrs, rather than simple murder committed by the rulers. For this reason, death, according to the Maoist ideology must be discussed within two competing models of sacrifice: 1) self – sacrifice and 2) sacrifice of the other; self-sacrifice for a cause suggests Sales (2003) and Lecomte-Tilouine (2006).

The second pattern, however, is dominant in Hindu ritual practices and may orient the cosmological, ascetic, mystical and visionary understanding of the sacrificial scenarios that exist in the Nepali cultural and religious framework. Ghimire (2009) discusses Temma's religious landscape and shows how there could be conflict when one plays against the religious sensibility of the people and discusses how traditional 'Chamling Rai' found themselves disrupted by the attacks on their religious sensibilities by the Maoists. In along this line,

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^{13 .} Temma is a holy place situated in Eastern Nepal. Every year tens of thousands of Rai gather together during the Dasain festival, a major festival in Nepal for impressive drinking binges, although people did not feel like celebrating the ceremony during 2002 to 2005 due to the Maoist conflict and ideological differences of the people with the Maoists on religious practices. Ghimire (2009) in his article discusses the case of Religious Upheaval in Temma in detail.

similar to Ghimire's Temmas, Shah (2008) discusses the cultural resistance and reaction in Dallu, of Dailekh.

Death bestows meaning on life

In totality, in the Nepalese Maoist philosophy, the meaning of human life was principally focused on death: achievements during lifetime and the value of human life are treated as negligible. Repetitively, the Maoists' audience was taught that to be born means to die and that self-sacrifice brings a meaning to this inescapable event. It is death that distinguishes the immortals from those whose fate is to be simply 'cleaned' (*saphaya garna*). If one lives as if dead, one enters the true life by death, contributing to its occurrence in the 'material world'. Consequently, all values are inverted: happiness is misfortune, and misfortune brings happiness; life (under the present regime) is death, and death (in the People's War) is eternal life.

On an ideological note one may agree here that life could be death but only through propaganda literature one may not be able to understand what death cost the people and the family who experienced it directly. Metaphorically, the Maoists might have adopted the most potent source of power in the Hindu world, i.e. death, and created an asymmetry in the war realm, a relational pattern that had not previously been known in Nepalese history. This suggests that such asymmetry when discussed might seem as transforming heroism into martyrdom. However, it is more pronounced and is based on revolutionary tactics rather than on the general imagination of the people. It is in this respect that asymmetry occurs as discussed by Lecomte-Tilouine (2006) whereby

death as martyrdom seems contradictory and requires further empirical interrogation. Thus to understand death more broadly and meaningfully, one must not only interrogate death in respect to revolutionary ideology but also to consider various actors to explore its totality.

This contradicts the universal arguments where death itself is seen as traumatic and violent death is beyond anticipation. There has been exhaustive writing on the traumatic effects of war, political violence, and systematic practices of state terror as well as adverse impact of development disasters on marginalized people (Kleinman and Das 1997; Das 1990; Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Lock 1997). Professionals from around the world, like social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists are simultaneously engaged in the writing up of the experiences of the people, describing it with intense narratives, diagnosing and helping people to deal with post traumatic stress disorder and other distressing consequences of murder as well as other forms of brutality. However, in most cases, an individual alone suffers the violence that might have affected their life in some form. Thus political death in Nepal has to be understood in terms of its socio-political impact on communities, in which bereavement as a psycho-social-spiritual phenomenon for individuals and families is embedded.

Aims and Objectives

It is against this background that this study discusses death that was perpetrated for political reasons. To take this discussion further, perspectives are drawn from philosophy, sociology and anthropology of death in the context of bereavement approaches in the family. Moreover, in the context of Nepal, perspectives from the anthropology of death are emphasised since in the Nepali social world death rituals constitute a central feature and provide a cultural framework to handle loss and grief.

It is my contention that if death is politically motivated then it is necessary to contextualise death as a means to social change in a social setting. Therefore, the post-conflict political context sets the ground in which death and bereavement in Nepal is presented. Thus this study aims to understand the meaning of death and bereavement in Nepali society in general and political death due to political differences in particular, by taking bereaved members in the family as cases of study in the post-conflict context. Subsequently, I argue that treating political death as an important social variable would lead to understanding death in its totality which accommodates the social identity of the bereaved in it. Hence, this thesis proposes to discuss the ways in which political death is presented for social change and thus constructs family and societal relations and norms to identify the individual self in a larger society. A detailed analysis of political death in a family and community is discussed throughout this thesis, thus offering an opportunity to understand political death and dying and its contribution to reframing the structure of social identities and social and personal realities in the Nepali State.

Research Questions

This thesis is an attempt to answer the following questions while researching death in the family in post-conflict Nepal.

- How do we understand different types of political death in postconflict Nepal and its impacts on the bereaved family members?
- What does death mean for bereaved family members and how do they construct meaning in daily life situations while coping with death induced trauma?
- What is the response of communities to individuals and families bereaved through the conflict?
- How are these deaths accommodated in the ongoing life of the community?

To answer the above raised questions, this thesis is developed in seven chapters. This Introduction as Chapter One outlines the central framework for this thesis. An outline of the broader socio-economic and political scenario of Nepal is presented so as to place the study of death, dying and bereavement within a contemporary Nepali perspective. This is further expanded while elaborating the meaning of 'political death' and outlining the central assumptions of social identity and social change.

Subsequently, in Chapter Two, an attempt is made to conceptualise the meaning of death as discussed in academia. Discussions are particularly focused first towards the conceptualization of death and philosophical understandings in the Eastern worldview, particularly in Nepal. Secondly, an

emphasis is also given to exploring the notion of death as it is presented within a broader framework of rituals in Nepal. Finally, an attempt is made to understand death with the lens of anthropological imagination as it elaborates on the existing socio-cultural processes that assist in discussing the centrality of death ritual in accommodating the bereaved person in society.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological underpinnings and the process of engagement in the field in which death and bereavement is investigated in the context of post conflict Nepal. The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first the concepts defining methodology, the use of 'multi- sited' ethnography and its importance to researching death and bereavement in Nepal are discussed. Finally, the second section more specifically presents the researcher's engagement in the field and the way in which the fieldwork was carried out.

The subsequent work incorporates chapters four, five and six, which focus on examining the field data and discuss the way in which people formulate the meaning of death and bereavement in Nepal. Chapter Four thus initially draws the meaning of death as expressed by the bereaved in various themes. A typology of various stances is presented, by which to discuss a crude division between those who accept death and adapt to the situation, those who completely reject death and those who see death either as a spiritual process while arguing it as transcendental or a means to achieve self-actualisation. This leads to the conclusion that if death is to be understood in Nepali society, a multifaceted approach is needed to view it in its totality.

Within the Nepali social world, rituals are viewed as a life cycle process. Chapter Five therefore elaborates upon the way in which the dead were commemorated in difficult circumstances. It further focuses on the importance of ritual obligations pertaining to death and the implications posed when ritual is disrupted. Moreover, discussions also incorporate the applicability of rituals which embody an idea of transcendence, of which ritual constitutes a part.

Subsequently, Chapter Six analyses grief and bereavement patterns in post-conflict Nepal. The focus of analysis is articulated in relation to psychosocial, socio-political and spiritual-cultural interpretations. Further, it outlines a framework in which bereavement is discussed. The bereaved person's held positions are included and then discussed within a wider frame of reference.

Finally, Chapter Seven concludes the thesis suggesting four key conclusions that can be drawn concerning death and bereavement in Nepali society. Thus, to discuss death, a holistic approach is required, of which death rituals form an important part. Violent death and disrupted rituals are factors in dismantling social engagements resulting in complicated grief. At the same time, tensions between traditional practices as a social framework and a spiritual resource and the challenges of adhering to such traditional sources of support persisted while engaged in dealing with the types of bereavement experiences of the informants.

CHAPTER 2

Death: Meanings and Perceptions

Introduction

Death is an unavoidable fact, an established reality; after birth, death is certain, yet unpredictable in its timing. Death appears at the edge of a life cycle; yet it occupies a central stage for living beings. Hence, in the human psyche, death in its meaning carries a sense of ambivalence. Therefore, death is a mystery that is never understood, even if it has to a large extent occupied human beings in their thoughts, behaviours and practices. The mystery of death has been debated and discussed throughout history, yet so far, there is not one unified meaning that has been agreed upon within academia and among ordinary human beings. When it comes to understand death, it remains 'the mystery'. However, a simplified understanding equates both life and death as a journey. Consequently, what we call death is merely an episode in a recurring story which has begun before and continues afterwards (Bloch 1988), although this can be contested. The obvious fact is that the meaning of death has long been discussed extensively in various academic streams including religion and philosophy, yet, it remains the only crisis of human existence, and therefore remains important to understand, explore and research. Of course, the question arises whether we can at all understand death in its real sense or we can try to understand the various forms of death and its meanings in relation to people who lose a kinsman, or woman close to them.

Conceptualizing death is very daunting at first. The meanings of death for individuals differ based on one's orientations. And individual orientations are dependent on an individual's experiences and perception of philosophy and religion, science and technology, arts, culture, politics and society. Throughout human history, people have tried to explore 'its causes, its purposes, its timing, its place, its consequences and its endless intractable mysteries' (Cobb 2009, p. 34). Thus far, rather than clearing up the cloud surrounding the meaning of death, an individual finds himself caught in an endless process of contemplation. Moreover, in late modernity, the reflexive outlook of a person has led to reframing the re-enchanted knowledge to seek for transcendence (Lee 2008). This has led to more perspectives and dimensions of thought than ever before.

To put it ingenuously, an individual's death limits his or her living. It is this gratitude for being born at the one end, and the fear of death at the other that shapes an individual's personality to lead a meaningful life. At the outset, the meaning of death in this dual sense remains an area for conflict that needs to be managed again and again to live a meaningful life. In this sense, it is almost impossible to explain death in its totality. The best one can approach to understand death is probably to speculate or philosophise what it would mean to be dead. This is to some extent possible while taking references from the cases of others' death and the ways in which people engage themselves to deal with it. Moreover, an awareness of the limitations of physical existence of human beings has encouraged people to redefine the meaning of life. This has raised the concern of human beings to live their life meaningfully in a

purposive manner as long as they are alive. In this regard, genuinely understanding the reality of death can give directions to a person to live a meaningful life. And therefore, people seek appropriate skills and practices useful for them to live their life.

In this chapter, therefore, an attempt is made to conceptualise the meaning of death as it is discussed in various academic contexts. The core discussions are based around the meanings drawn from various streams including anthropology, sociology, philosophy and spirituality. The purpose is to understand the long held views regarding the meaning of death as discussed across the globe. This in turn would help to formulate the meaning of death arising out of an ethnographic analysis of death in the context of post conflict Nepal. Discussions are specifically directed first towards the conceptualization of death and anthropological and philosophical understanding using available literature on the Eastern world-views, particularly in Nepal. Secondly, discussions also seek to explore existing relationships in which death is grasped in a broader sense. This primarily relates to rituals and practices that in turn strengthen as well as help in sustaining the meaning of death. Furthermore, anthropological debate on death and bereavement is reflected within a socio-cultural framework which contains ritual performance that includes performing rituals just before death, at the time of death and after death for a certain period of time. Hence ritual serves as an important tool which consolidates the social and emotional ties of the bereaved in the Finally, the linkages in which the processes of grief and community. bereavement are perceived and experienced are discussed, which eventually

add to the meaning of death and death rituals universally, as well as in the post conflict Nepali society.

Death - 'Immortality' in Hindu Religion and the East

It is a well held belief that a certain conception regarding death has been present throughout human history. Civilizations and cultures around the world have evolved various traditional approaches to meaningfully understand death and dying. Likewise, various themes on death and dying find ample expressions in Hindu Vedic philosophy and Buddhist practices. Equally, self actualizing death while living has been at the forefront of ancient Hindu scriptures and therefore learning to die is seen as pivotal to truly understand death. This is evident in a story expressed in the Kathopanisad. The story goes like this. A young boy, Nachiketa, was interested to learn about the ultimate secret of death and when he asked his father, who was a priest and his teacher, to teach him about the reality of death, this young boy was advised to consult the god of death, 'god Yama'. After the boy's continued insistence and rejecting Yama's generous offer of wealth and prosperity, Yama agreed to initiate the young boy. Yama, the god of death, explains death to Nachiketa by saying that 'One' becomes free from the jaws of death by knowing the 'One' which is soundless, touchless, colourless, one-dimensional, tasteless, eternal, odourless, without beginning and without end and ever constant. It is the vital energy which is immortal that remains awake while man sleeps, which builds up man's desires and actions. This is immortal 'Brahman' and the self is a part of it. It is this immortal energy that is the real owner of the body and the departure of this vital energy from the body is death (Parmananda 1919).

In another instance, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna preaches to his disciple Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra that is to be fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, who are relatives of the same family. Arjuna, being anxious and in despair, refuses to take up arms against his own brethren. Seeing Arjuna's distress and despondency, Krishna preaches a sermon, which constitutes the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Bhagavad Gita* adopts a dualistic approach to body and soul¹⁴. The body corrupts and dies. The soul is immortal and survives the body. After an indeterminate time period it reincarnates into another body. The process of birth, death and rebirth continues until one is released from the cycle of birth and rebirth (Radhakrishnan 1999; O'Flaherty 1976). The metaphorical significance of the context of battlefield is pointed out by Sri Aurobindo: 'life is a battle and a field of death, this is Kurukshetra' (Sri Aurobindo 1970, p. 37).

In some ways, similar to Hindus, in Chinese Buddhist belief, the last thought of a person during the dying moment whether it is good or evil, is supposed to

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¹⁴ . In this study, the words soul and spirit are used interchangeably. However the fact remains that there is a very distinct difference in term of the uses of these terms. Soul as discussed in this study is defined as being free from the dialectic process of interpretation and is seen of having an existence independent of the body. In the Hindu religious context, a living thing is called as 'jiva' - which consists of a body and soul where the soul retains an immortal life compared to the mortal body. In the cycle of life and death, the soul is always connected with the body, and only leaves the body upon death of an individual. It is believed that the karma is the link between soul and body. Perception and knowledge are functions of the soul. The soul is one with freedom, and the soul is one with existence, and soul is one with knowledge. And all the manifestations that we see are its impressions, manifesting itself. However it differs in its interpretations especially in the Christian faith where human beings are seen as spirit beings. The distinction that they suggest is that we live in a body and we possess a soul but the real person inside of us is our spirit. Our soul consists of our mind, will, and emotions that have the possibility to carry old impressions, but the spirit is instantly reborn with fresh and new energy that does not carry any old impressions. Thus the soul is not born again; it is spirit that is born. Hence, soul denotes a more worldly and less transcendent aspect of a person whereas spirit seeks to rise above the entanglements of life and death. However these interpretations can be contested and are dependent on the religious worldview of a person.

influence the individual's next rebirth (Hsu et. al. 2009). Therefore, in the Chinese Buddhist perspective, caring for the dying person focuses on the state of mind at the moment of death. When death is on its way, reciting 'sutra' around the dying person will instruct him to go freely in peace. The practices are based upon Buddha's talks about the philosophy of life that preach the eightfold path to escape the circle of life and death, what his disciples call attaining 'Nirvana'.

Furthermore, in the Chinese Tao tradition, death symbolises immortality. Taoists suggest that all things ultimately revert to their primordial, original tranquil state of equilibrium. Hence, immortality is the unbound freedom that a human being is seeking for and death is only a transitory phase. Tao simultaneously embodies both "being" and "non-being" in constant, cyclical, and evolutionary flux of production and destruction (Hsu et. al. 2009). In all the epics and ancient literature, the soul is described as of vital importance. It has been placed beyond life and death. Moreover, death is viewed as a preparation for rebirth. Similar to the above discussed views on death, for the people of Buntao, of Indonesia, death is described in a cosmological frame of reference. A creation is merely the presence of blood and bone supported by a cluster of other immaterial components which they call 'life spirit'. This life energy is vital and at the same time also dependent on an appropriate balance of hardness and softness that emanates from a proper combination of blood and bone. It is the fragmentation of this equilibrium that is death (Tsintjilonis 2000).

Death – a spiritual experience

Particularly, in the context of Nepal, several studies point out that 'death' and 'death ritual' have occupied a central feature of Nepali cultures, society and spirituality. Desjarlais (2000, 2003) makes an assertion referring to the Yolmos of Nepal that Yolmo Buddhist aesthetic values are embodied in the notion of death. Therefore, dying for Yolmo Buddhists does not mean dying but moving from one state to another. Hence, for Yolmo, the most important thing is to prepare well for dying. Similarly, in the case of the Gurung of Nepal, McHugh (1989, 2004) notes that life and death is articulated in two key concepts: a moving man – the live body is available because of the presence of a number of souls which they call 'plah' and the consciousness seated in that living body – the sae. The Plah – soul is seen as an immaterial essence that can easily fly out of the body, of which one is neither aware nor has any control over. And if all of the souls are lost, the body's elements are unable to retain the life force together and the person will die. This gives currency to the belief that the existence of a human being is one of utter fragility.

To mention a few others from many of such studies, for instance, Holmberg (1989, 2000) inferring from what he calls exorcising death rituals assumes powerful notions of identity for the Tamang of Nepal. He notes that among the studies on Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples in the Himalayas, death occupies a predominant place in their social, cultural and religious life that is reflected through ritual repertoires and rites of social affirmation. Since death rituals are tools of social affirmation, they are instrumental in explaining Buddhist religious practices and therefore they become the frame through which

Buddhist ideology is elaborated. Holmberg (1989, p. 190-212) describes that, for a Tamang, the human body is composed of several organs that consist of bones, flesh, blood, breath, and internal warmth. The human body is functionally dependent on the equilibrium of the combination of 'heart-minds' that is the seat of consciousness and emotion. The relation of body to the combination of 'heart-minds' or body to consciousness is analogous to that of 'shadow-soul' through which the Tamang formulate ideas of life and death. The life force is intrinsically connected to the body that travels as well as grows through the body, somewhat like the progression of a tree, and when the life force expires so does the body. Upon the death of a person and discontinuation of the life force, what is left is a shadow-soul. This, unlike the life force, endures beyond the death of the body. Although the Tamang attribute nine shadow-souls to everybody, Lamas conjoin these nine into one at the time of death, and it is on this unitary shadow-soul, that ritual attention is focused. The Tamang associate these shadow-souls with consciousness and emotion. While ritual ensures the placement of the shadow-souls permanently among the categories of the Buddhas to form immortality, emotion is redirected towards living. In fact it is the emotions of the departed that die and this is what they call a social death. For Tamang, Lamas are the prominent figures who are inherently associated with death and therefore lamas are the 'deliverers of the dead'. Hence, for the Tamang, mortuary rituals are the essential Buddhist rites that need to be followed; and death rituals are the primary vehicle by which Buddhist ideology exerts its influence.

In the case of the Sherpas of the upper Himalayas of Nepal, Paul (1976, 1979) suggests that the Sherpa view birth, life, and death as a cyclical repetition and transitory in nature; therefore, the enemy of the eternal. It is the eternal that is essential and is to be sought by one who seeks an absolute truth and an unchanging Buddha realm within oneself. Hence, to understand the world of the Sherpa in which death forms its deepest meaning, it is necessary to reflect ones' interiority and subjectivity that informs the essence of one's own thought. In the real sense, to cross the threshold of life and death means not only giving attention to consciousness by observing everyday practices and the absorption of outer and inner world, but also an inwardly redirection of the focus of awareness and a continuous commitment to the process that connects the consciousness to the divine. In Sherpa belief, this process of connecting oneself with the divine requires a destruction of the previous attitude ignorance. It is this ignorance that in reality is the barrier to experiencing the infinite within one's sense perception. Hence, 'in Sherpa cosmology this entails a destruction of the everyday world itself, since the everyday world is nothing more than an erroneous construct caused by the veil of ignorance' (Paul:1976, p.134). And therefore the threefold division of the universe is pervasive in the Sherpa homology in terms of the three jewels - Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, the three bodies or levels of existence in which one finally realises the whole of existence.

Hardman (2004) examines the ancestral spiritual world-view prevalent among the Lohorung Rai of Nepal. According to the Lohorung perspective, every human being is closely bound to the natural world and to a world of spiritual beings. They perceive the natural world as comprised of their outer environment and a world of spiritual beings, which is the world of ancestors and the ancestral spirits that are infused within a person as the vital energy. Thus the Lohorung come to define death in relation to the notion of self and personhood, the mind, consciousness, and the essential life-giving force of a person. For the Lohorung, it is important that 'each ancestor is committed to a particular area of traditional life, sometimes characterized by the way he or she died' (p.331). A dynamic and pervasive world of ancestors and spirits of the dead coexists with the world of the living that connects the living with the divine. Hence, for the Lohorung, it is death and death rituals that serve as a generative power. Particularly death and death rituals are significant to elucidate the interconnectedness of the relationship of the living and the unknown. Beliefs and practices regarding the world of ancestors embody an inherent relationship between the individual and the individual's subjective nature. Therefore, suffering arising out of loss is described and handled in a particular fashion through rituals.

From the above discussed examples, it is clear that in Nepal death is interpreted and perceived subjectively; and to a large extent, it is conceived in a cosmological realm. It appears as if ritualistic conformity forms the backbone on which the meaning of death is drawn, which to some extent has appeared 'exotic' to secular Westerners and has been called "ritualistic exoticism" (Holmberg 1989). Although these studies are able to locate the meaning of death within a socio-cultural perspective whereby death constantly establishes the link between the social and the spiritual, they fail to justify the meaning of

death as a positive social variable which is not only interconnected with the physical and cosmic world but plays a significant role in daily living. Hence death becomes productive for leading a meaningful life. Therefore one can argue that death in the Eastern formulation is articulated in a productive field. The realization that death only brings the destruction of a physical body, not the soul which is 'immortal', is significant to visualising death in a productive sense. In almost all the traditions and practices, whether those of the Vedic Hindus and early Buddhists or the doctrine of Tao or present day practices, death is elucidated in a spiritual and cosmological milieu. In the Vedic scriptures immortality is pronounced in terms of the essence of 'Brahman' while in the Bhagavad Gita all life is viewed as a manifestation of the universal power in the individual, originated in the 'self' that is perceived as 'the divine'. Here, death is essentially discussed in the context of human existence and the spirit. Human existence is therefore understood not merely as a machinery of nature or a wheel of law in which the spirit is entangled, but as a constant manifestation of the 'spirit'. This is what in Buddhist doctrine is called 'Nirvana' or 'immaterial essence' or 'life force'. This is evident from the above discussed practices within different groups in Nepal. Hence, when it comes to the examination of death in the Eastern perspective, it is essential to recognise the connection to the divine that is understood as immortal. An individual seeks for spiritual guidelines to attain immortality. Death thus becomes a part of life, a transition in progression, not an end in itself. And therefore it appears meaningful to the extent that one finally seeks to know death in its true sense rather than limiting it merely to reasoning. Death in this sense appears firmly separated from ethical norms and is moved to religious occupation. Death, therefore, is articulated as a generative power not a destructive force.

Death Rituals in the Hindu and the Buddhist Traditions

In both Hindu and Buddhist practices, life and death are not defined separately. In many of the myths on exploration and characteristics of death, time is seen as the corrupting factor that has been emphasized over and over again. O'Flaherty has produced a classic book, named 'The Origin of Evil in Hindu Mythology' (1976), in which, while drawing from ancient Hindu mythologies she extends the discussion on death in an elaborative sense. Death is discussed as 'evil will' that often requires solutions (O'Flaherty 1976, p. 212- 247). For instance, in the Rig Veda, the word 'kala' which means 'time', was seen as important in terms of death. Later in the Brahmanas, 'kala' came to mean 'destructive time'; and in the Mahabharata 'kala' was death. Since in Hindu and Buddhist religious scriptures, 'kala' - 'time' was fixed as a continuum in which life and death were presented, life and death have thus been equated as two sides of a coin that are inseparable. In the real sense, Hindu beliefs are culturally manifested. Since death comes as a blow to the conception of culture as transcendent and immortal (Orenstein 1970) therefore, the attempt to achieve immortality in one form or another has been a prime goal of human life in Hindu consciousness. For instance, in the Rig Veda, the 'Soma' plant and 'soma rasa' were used to achieve immortality. Later, in the tantric traditions including Hindus and Buddhists, mystical methods were used to attain immortality. For Brahmanas and Yogis, it was 'yoga' through which they claimed immortality (White 1996). Early scriptures suggest that since

immortality was achievable through conquering death, understanding the phenomenon of death was possible. In this sense, 'the gods become immortal and their immortality is renewed by the sacrificer who performs the ritual correctly, thereby also ensuring his own immortality' (O'Flaherty 1976, p. 214).

Like the Vedic scriptures, Brahmanas and Yogis, and Buddha himself too prescribed 'yoga' to attain 'Nirvana'. Hence, to accomplish ultimate freedom, that is, cessation of death, both Hindu and Buddhist adhere to a somewhat similar spiritual doctrine. Moreover, both Hindu and Buddhist practices have the same roots and they stem originally from the same ancient Indian subculture and have developed through the same linguistics. However, they differ in many of their practices and interpretations. This is not to say that Hindu and Buddhist religions are conceived as one. But it is worth pointing out that when death is being discussed, both Hindus and Buddhists adhere to the same doctrine and methodologies, although these interpretations might differ to some extent. However, for the purpose of this study, I concede 'Buddhism' as a web of interconnected entities predicated upon the teachings of the Buddha, whether it is conceived as historical and /or cosmological. What is identical to Vedic Hinduism is the pathways that Buddhism has adopted for attaining 'Nirvana'. Therefore, I have used this definition, which is deliberately broad, in order to encompass the fluid and polythetic characteristics found in self ascribed Buddhist traditions, specific beliefs, and texts. Many of the monastic codes of conduct pertain to the internal issue of purity that is also seen as the only vehicle to attain 'nirvana', that is, to overcome the cycle of death and birth. 'Buddhists' axiom is that everything is suffering, but that there is a way to end this suffering: this path leads to *nirvana*, which principally consists in the end of rebirth' (Demieville 2010, p. 19). A process of yoga is endorsed whereby one becomes aware of the four truths leading towards self realisation. The first truth is that there is suffering. The second addresses the nature of suffering (dukkha). The third is that there is a cessation from suffering. And finally the fourth is the path to this cessation (Jerryson 2010; Demieville 2010). This is somewhat similar to ancient Vedic philosophy (Abhedanda 1996). Hence, Buddhist spirituality and religion and the ancient Vedic Hindu practices appear to me to overlap with one another. Particularly in Nepal, the Buddhist and Hindu cultural systems are diffused in one another when it comes to practice. They coexist side by side and intermingle, along with shamanic beliefs. These serve as undercurrents which combine with or at least provoke a consideration of the interplay of traditions of Hindus and Buddhists (McHugh 1992). This is also evident at the grass-roots level where people have constantly intermingled with both the Hindu and the Buddhist practices even if there are variations in terms of doctrine (Mumford 1989; Holmberg 1989). Hence, for the purpose of studying death, dying and bereavement in Nepal, what is necessary therefore is to contest the conventional ways in which meanings and interpretations are drawn specifically based on philosophical underpinnings, methodologies and practices, where the criterion has been one of separation rather than assimilation, whereas a discussion on death requires assimilation and continuity. It seems, it is for this reason alone that Hindus and Buddhists give very specific meaning to cultural significance – spiritual purity, a concept that is nowhere as fully assimilated to the culturally significant as

among the Hindus, Jainas and Buddhists (Radhakrishnan 1999; Orenstein 1970; Ortner 1997).

Hindu death 'sanskara'

Stuart H. Blackburn points out the relevance of death in Hindu religion. In a mythological story from the *Puranas*, he explores the importance of death in Hinduism. According to Blackburn:

Death is probably unsurpassed; no matter which historical period or cultural level one chooses to examine, concepts lead to or from the problems it presents. Beneath their cosmic purposes, Vedic sacrifices were designed to ward off death temporarily and attain a full life span for men. A more total conquest of death was the goal in the philosophies of the Upanishads, Buddhism, and Jainism; it is this secret that Nachiketa in the Katho Upanishad asks Yama to divulge to him. And even the process of samāsara, the foundation of Indian thought, was first understood not as a rebirth but as continual "redeath" (punarmrtyu). Later, in the Puranas, death becomes a force (Time and Fate) that controls men as much as karma and that Siva absorbs into his array of qualities. A final and very different attitude develops in the devotional cults that enlist the intervention of a god to sidestep the problem altogether; there is Markandeya, who, by clinging to a lingam, was able to remain sixteen forever when Siva kicked Yama in the chest and prevented him from taking his devotee (Blackburn 1985, p. 256-257).

In this sense, the process of life and death has been seen in cyclic form. Life is completed only after the attainment of death; and death is predicted as a beginning of a new life. It is implicit that when one dies, s/he only leaves the body. The physical body dies. His/her soul remains and might have departed to the other world - the world of the cosmos (antariksh-akash). This gives an understanding that the human soul never dies; therefore, an individual's individuality never dies. She/he only changes his/her body from one to another. Hence, a life does not begin at birth and/or end at death. One can only liberate oneself from the cycle of the wheel of birth and death if one attains 'mauksha/nirvana'. Until then life and death are seen as a continuous process. All ancient Hindu Scriptures such as the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad* Gita, the Puranas, the Ramayana, and Hindu philosophy agree on the essence of life and death as 'one'. These scriptures suggest death as ignorance -'ignorance of life' and therefore there is suffering while living. Birth and death are present at every moment but one requires continuous attention and a greater intelligence to realise it. Death in Hindu religion is so pervasive that all of Hindu philosophy of life in its different forms is dedicated to practise a certain roadmap to attain immortality in one form or another (Laungani 2005; Radhakrishnan, 1999; Ghimire and Ghimire 1998; Filippi 1996; Prasad 1995; Borman 1990; Madan 1987; Bhattacharyya 1975; Turner 1974; Pandey 1969).

Moreover, the meaning of life is ultimately understood in terms of life processes. This consists of 'sanskaras' - the rituals from birth to death - the rite of passage. Particularly, 'sanskaras' place a greater emphasis on ritual processes. Ritual actions with symbols and *Vedic* mantras are put in place with

the intent to reveal the transitions between life stages, and the way in which these transitions can be accomplished. It is through 'sanskaras' that a person is actually brought to the world to accomplish the duties and responsibilities ritually, socially and economically, which conclude only after death by the return of that person to the other world from where he had originally come. In Hindu death rituals, as a rite of passage, the steps of separation, transition and incorporation (Van Gannep 1960; Campbell 1976; Bennet 2002) are clearly found. Rituals are performed as 'sanskaras' with the assumption that while performing 'sanskaras' one may liberate oneself from ignorance (Campbell 1976). This is in design a roadmap that is prescribed as a tool to experience the impermanence of human existence and to work towards moving beyond the circle of life and death. Since, in the *Vedas* death is seen as evil, it is treated as a demon that needs to be conquered; in the *Upanisadas*, the view is that life – the cycle of rebirth – is evil and the goal is to release one's soul from the cycle of rebirth and attain 'moksha'. On the other hand, in the Brahmans and Puranas, a prescription is given in which immortality is rendered possible through sacrifice while its correct performance by the dying person as well as after death by the bereaved who acts as a sacrificer to ensure immortality. This coalesces the fact that from the time of the ancient Vedic scriptures to the times of the Brahmans and Puranas, a distinction had already emerged regarding the concept of mortality and immortality and the concept of gods and human beings. And therefore, they propose various measures in which a realisation of these concepts could be attained. In the Vedas, death appears as the only triggering factor upon which the truth of life can be revealed. However, this understanding appears muddled over period of time. This has ultimately led to

ambivalence in the notions of death. Furthermore, opposing explanations and practices have left it ambiguous.

If one looks at the available historical facts, Hindu death rites themselves are seemingly remarkably ancient. The earliest record is found in the 'Laws of Manu' in the second or third century B.C. They appear in elaborate and often gruesome exegesis in the later books such as the *Puranas*, especially the Markandeya Puran (Garuda Puran) in A.D 400-800 (Das 1976; Parry 1982; Bayley 1981; Gonda 1975). Bayley (1981, p. 157) notes that the pattern for the last two thousand years at least has been for Brahmanic rituals to come to serve as a reference point for the lower caste and indigenous people. Ritual practices also suggest that at least over the period of the last three centuries or so, there have been no abrupt and widespread changes in attitudes or institutions of death. In fact, rituals are practised as systematically as prescribed by the various 'drama grantha' (holy book) such as the 'Gaduda Purana' and the 'Laws of Manu'. Nevertheless, there were significant changes in terms of the emphasis given to it.

Notions of purity and pollution in death 'sansakar'

In academic debates, studies of funeral rituals have so far centred on kinship relationships in which the pure and the impure provide fundamental and encompassing positions in Hindu belief and rituals (Dumont 1970; Shrinivas 1952). Orenstein (1970) adds the suggestion that death rituals, if analysed in structural and functional perspective, reveal the logic not only of the different periods of impurity but also the ways in which Hindus make sense of death,

orenstein and is of the view that 'rank' – 'caste hierarchy', purity and kinship relations are all constructed from transactions of substance (*rajasik, tamasik and sattvik*) among bodies. He suggests periods of incapacity at death are times for reconstructing bodies and reviving bodily relations. This shows the differences in which the notions of purity and pollution are discussed by scholars. While Dumont (1970), Orenstein (1970), and Fuller (1988) see it as a social structure constructed to strengthen social systems, others like Bhattacharyya (1975), Das (1976), Kaushik (1976) and Mines (1989, 2002), view it as a functional mechanism in which social hierarchy is maintained and social functioning is assured. To some extent, what seems problematic here is oversimplification of practices which appears reductive rather than productive. And therefore, it appears ambiguous. Yet there is an inchoation at least on the probity of purity and pollution to the extent that it becomes meaningful for life.

Departing from the proposed limiting boundaries in which the notions of purity and pollution are discussed, Das (1976, 1977) extends a possibility that the notion of impurity can be discussed as a productive force. She explores the cultural meanings associated with their institutionalized manifestations. Das claims the body as a natural, unconstrained system which express liminality. She suggests impurity must be understood in terms of a metaphor for expressing liminality. The concept of liminality is used to understand the symbolism of impurity in Hindu death rituals and she argues that liminality symbolizes a creative transcendence of the given categories of a system. Das notes:

"In Hindu belief and ritual, the lateral and spatial categories provide important symbols for dividing the sacred - cosmic world into two parts: the sacred associated with life and the sacred associated with death. The state of unity is considered appropriate for dealing with the cosmic when it is experienced as integrated with the social. On the other hand, the symbolism of impurity marks off those liminal situations where the paradigm is provided by birth and death, when an individual experiences his social world as separated from the cosmic and has to be brought back to an earlier reality, enabling him to see society and cosmos as an integrated whole". (Das 1976, p. 248).

This suggests a necessity of ordering the sacred in Hindu belief and ritual which is important to understand. Purity and pollution are envisioned in relation to the sacred that is 'the unifying force' in reference to life and death. It is this liminal space in which the force of the sacred comes in contact with the notion of purity which is a precondition to experience transcendence. Hence, if a body is to be seen as a vehicle to experience the ultimate reality that is to have a glimpse of immortality, then keeping the body in its purest form seems to be a preset criterion. And therefore, the purity of the body is conceived as a spiritual necessity. Hence, what is obvious is that the notion of purity and impurity cannot be separated and must be discussed in perspective, particularly in the Hindu religious and spiritual context where death and death rituals carry the potential of such transcendence.

Death 'sanskar' - a cosmogony

It is in this context that death rituals are perceived as a cosmogony in themselves. The idea of cosmogony was introduced by Das (1977) and later discussed in detail by Parry (1981, 1982). Das argues that cremation rituals be seen as a sacrifice through which the act of creation is repeated. Death carrying the notion of sacrifice has a cosmogenic aspect and cremation is a fire sacrifice. Hence, death and death rituals are believed to be sacred. The meaning of 'sacred' in Hindu belief and ritual must be conceptualised only in reference to the opposition to life and death rather than the opposition of good and bad as previously discussed by Durkheim (1964) in the case of Europe. In terms of cremation, propitiation of ancestors and worship of deities associated with death and destruction, are events in which contact has to be established between men and women and the factors of the sacred associated with death. The important theme in death ritual is that a dead person is seen as an offering to the gods and ancestors through the means of sacrifice. In this sense, ritual connects the living and the dead with cosmogony. However, it is significant to note that in the case of violent death or unnatural death, the deceased is not deemed fit to be a sacrificial object, as one's intention to sacrifice oneself through death is not established. In such a situation, it is most likely that the departed soul may not be able to establish connections easily with the sacred and his soul might wander as a 'pretatma' (the evil spirit) in 'bhutalok' (world of evil spirit) for a while before finally resorting to 'pitris'.

Kausik (1976) on the other hand advocates death rituals as structural arrangements in terms of the participation of various specialists. Rituals

according to Kausik serve as a symbolic system through which man's empirical world can be linked up with the cosmic world. In fact, ritual as a symbolic system provides an intermediary state between the sacred (cosmic world) and the profane reality (social world). Taking reference from the untouchable *Dom* in Kashi, she argues that the lack of *Sanskritic* elements in the untouchable Dom rituals do not make their basic structure different from that underlying the *Brahminic* rituals. In fact, the former can be seen as a transformation of the latter.

Developing Das and Kausik's supposition, Parry (1981, 1982) argues death rituals as cosmogony. According to Parry, in Hindu religious thought, death rituals are presented to be a synthesis of homology between the body and the cosmos. 'Body and cosmos both are governed by the same laws; and are constituted out of the same five elements; and everything that exists in the one must also exist in the other' (1982, p. 76). This suggests equivalence between cremation which destroys the microcosm of the physical body and the general conflagration which consumes the macrocosm at *Pralaya*. Cosmic dissolution, however, is not only an end of the universe; it is also a beginning, a necessary prelude to a new world cycle and hence a renewal of time. Similarly, cremation is not destruction but simultaneously an act of creation (1981, p. 339-340). Parry argues, since the body is the cosmos, the last rites become the symbolic equivalent of the destruction and rejuvenation of the universe. In this sense, cremation is cosmology and an individual's death is assimilated to the process of cosmic regeneration.

Thus discussions on death rituals vary ranging from body to kinship, purity to impurity; liminality to symbolism; and sacrifice to cosmogony, which appear complex and lengthy in their interpretation. These suggest that death rituals are focused primarily on the restoration of the social order, although the specific argument may go beyond normative social construction. The persistent dualism where death is both a spiritual endeavour as well as a polluting episode is instrumental in cultural and cosmological construction. This suggests that Hindu death rituals cannot be understood as one distinctive characteristic; rather, it suggests a cosmos in itself. Also, what is evident from the analysis is that discussions on death rituals are often translated into sociological notions. Hence, it is heavily reliant on something that is socially constructed. Nevertheless, this dominant sociological analysis which flourishes upon the shared intellectual tradition of social anthropology has its own limitations. This requires a revisiting and a conceptual shift. More than discussing death rituals as sociological endeavour, what seems more appropriate to focus upon is on ritual's transformative nature, in which, ritual becomes a tool that triggers cyclical transformations of consciousness.

Death rituals among Himalayan Buddhists

Drawing upon the Sherpa Buddhist religion and shamanism in Nepal, Ortner (1997, p. 147; 1995) points out that the gods clearly model a certain form of power in Sherpa life where rituals in the form of offerings are the schema through which learning takes place – 'how to deal with powerful beings so that they become allies against bad others'. The prevalent belief is that people need to protect themselves from powerful demons. Hence, a powerful protector is

needed to deal with other powerful beings (demons), which is found repeatedly in the relationship between humans and god themselves. It is because of this reason that the Sherpa value lamas, a religious and an empowered beings who have acquired sufficient awareness of gods. In fact, what they need from the lamas is to recreate the world – not just to destroy it but to transcend it and finally subsume the whole process (Paul 1976, p. 138). And that is the purpose of lamas' spiritual exertions in Sherpa death rituals. This package of ritual practices and beliefs formally constitutes the formal structure of the Sherpa religion. Ortner (1997, p. 154) is of the view that 'before death, religion provides ways of transforming power into protection; once death has occurred, religion has other important things to offer, including ways of handling strong feelings so that one can get on with life'.

In the case of the Gurung, Mumford (1989) as well as McHugh (1989) argues that death ritual is determined by relations of reciprocity among the relatives of the dead. Mumford (1989) further brings out the opposition of traditions that are in practice suggesting that ritual reciprocity is promoted in a shamanic system in contrast to the merited destiny that is taught by the Tibetan Lamas in which the karmic past and psychic preparation during life largely determine the deceased's future. At the same time, in respect of a Bhotia funeral ceremony in a Tibetan village, Ramble (1982) notes a blend of both the elements of great lama and shamanic tradition in practice.

Similarly, Vinding (1982) explores the paradoxical nature of the Thakali death ceremony in which the Thakalis of Nepal construe their social and religious

world. Although, the Thakali being Buddhist (followers of Buddha), value the existence of a paramount soul, they do not subscribe to the orthodox Buddhist's belief of reincarnation. They present the totality of life in three blocks which they call a paramount soul, a mind, and a life principle that are dependent on each other and intertwined. It is the soul which continues to live after death. The mind guides one's actions. It is assumed that human beings who engage in right action will have a right mind and those who act badly will have a bad mind. A man or a woman dies only when his/her life energy leaves the body, as this does not exist independently of the physical body. In another sense, the essential energy keeps a human being alive. After death, the soul is finally placed into the sky in the upward direction, where the Thakali believe the soul will be able to meet their ancestors after death. It is in this light that the Thakali death ceremony is worked out, and it is because of this belief and hope that they engage in the ceremony in which they spend large amounts of money and time. They believe that if they sponsor a ceremony generously, that will be a good deed and they will get a return for it here and now, while they are in this world.

In the case of the northern Magar, Oppitz (1982) describes the passage of death from physical disappearance to the state of pacified ancestor as a long one that involves several stages, and by going through these stages a dead person is finally rendered socially dead. The event that makes this transformation possible is generally known as 'jutho khyene', or throwing away impurities, which Oppitz categorizes into three subdivided major functional phases. Like others such as Tamang or Sherpa or Hindu rituals, the first stage consists of

rituals that are supposed to guide the soul of the dead person into the beyond, followed by the feeding of the dead on this journey together with the feeding of the living for the unity of society, and finally concluding of the mourning period. It is believed that 'a defined set of functions helps to ease a dead person's passage from the realm of the living through the realm of errant spirits to the final realm of venerated ancestors' (p. 390). In this sense, the dead receiving offerings from the bereaved ensure protection from calamity and chaos and also gives an assurance of a cheerful existence of the bereaved. Finally, an inscribed stone is erected in the memory of the dead at a place outside the village which will become a resting place for those who travel. These traditional customary practices further establish the relation that exists between the dead, the divine and its society.

In the Tamang death rituals, Holmberg (1989) points out that all three models of rituals of the Lambu sacrifices, Bombo shamans, and Buddhists lamas, embody the various relationships of human and divine. In Lambu sacrifice, a sacrificer attempts to regularize relations with divine and demonic forces to maintain stability within the living domain in an ordered manner, in which a distance is maintained between sacrificer and the divine and the distance is bridged by sacrifice. The Bombo shamans defy any order and work directly towards engaging with the divine and malevolent forces. In this way, while the sacrificer and lamas keep a distance from one another creating a space for suffering and alienation in an ordered world that would otherwise exclude them, on the other hand, shamans remove suffering altogether. In the memorial death feast, which is the main Tamang ritual, lamas by chanting from the

scriptures recreate a social and cosmic order in which all beings, human and non-human, benevolent and malign, assume their proper places. However, according to Holmberg (1989), even though lamas are working to create a harmonious order, there remains a possibility of disruption in the feast because of the inclusion of destructive and demonic forces. Hence, while incorporating rituals, in practice the Tamang integrate certain aspects of culturally present symbolism in which the social world is maintained. Furthermore, Tamang ritual works on celebrating social relatedness rather than the renunciation as is the case among the Sherpa, where Buddhist values govern sociality and exchange. Similar inferences were drawn earlier by Brauen (1982) while discussing death customs in Ladakh and later by Aggarwal (2001) while researching funeral ceremonies in the village of Achinathang in Ladakh, India. Aggarwal suggests that funeral 'rituals indeed affirm power structure but they have subversive facets, too, which undermine social hierarchies. Feasts are also about the resolution of social inequality, challenging Karmic law of reward and punishment' (p. 559).

In a broader perspective, one can thus conclude that the practice of Brahmanical Hinduism and Oracular Buddhist tradition demonstrates a logic of interlocking or complementary differences (Campbell 1976; Holmberg 1989; Vinding 1982) in which religious ideology is assigned to daily life processes. However, Levine (1989) refutes this simplification in the case of Tibetan Buddhists, for whom Dhamis replace an indigenous oracular tradition. Nevertheless, they remain culturally incongruous but meaningful in some ways. This suggests that in the context of Nepal, ritual patterns articulate a

complex world-view. A range of differing traditional, local and orthodox interpretations guides practical reality, connecting the individual to the social, and the social to the divine. This multilayered nature of belief in Nepali society functions in an interchangeably complex way, but denotes a flexible religious system in interaction. Through the continuing process of dialogue across various cultural boundaries, ritual patterns are affirmed. Finally, in the light of various cultural models, ritual practices and existing kinship theories, the independence of the human soul is articulated in which a broader religiosity is constructed.

Given the multilayered nature of understanding and practices as well as complexities surrounding culturally varied ritual patterns, death rituals within Buddhism seem coined in an aesthetically complex form. With its subjectivity, it appears ontologically profound to come to a conclusion as it always puts pressure on the human being to negotiate one's own existence within and beyond the social world. This is what Turner (1977) calls ritual: a framework which 'entails a separation of operations of different levels of logical powers' as Holmberg (2000, p. 941) emphasises, stating that attribution of attention to ritual in its relation to the production of society – not just as an aspect of resistance practices in Nepal and elsewhere. Further, while drawing on the literature from Nepal and elsewhere, it is clearly evident that rituals play a significant role in accommodating the bereaved family members in society. The social status of a bereaved individual in society is mediated by a culturally structured framework of which ritual constitutes a central feature. Thus, it is

apparent why the disruption of ritual in Nepal by the political players is so destructive. Hence anthropological literature from Nepal and elsewhere informs this study which shows the centrality of ritual as a key component informing the discussion of death and bereavement.

It is thus clearly evident that in the Eastern traditional society death and death rituals are reflected in terms of social responsibility, and are designed in such a way that they reflect aesthetics and religiosity in which the individual comes to term with death and loss. Thus, quite substantially, collective representation of death and grief has been reflected through rituals and mourning practices. Social network and support systems seem to serve as a tool to deal with loss and grief, which seems in opposition to modern Western societies, where individuals are left to deal with the loss on a personal basis in a framework of personal project management (Kellehear 1984; Walter 1991; Seale 1998; Exley 2004).

This shows a significant difference in terms of the ways in which death is discussed in Nepal. Cultural context and social status play a significant role in the bereavement outcome. In essence, the interrelationship between socio-cultural and political structure and the context of a death incident define the social status of a bereaved person in the community. Thus a bereaved person's social status and community support seem dependent upon his or her response to the socio-cultural and political structure. This is also influenced by the political differences among people, which adversely impact on community cohesion as a support mechanism. Hence in the sociology of death, dying and

bereavement, the social situating of bereaved persons, political positioning and the social context in terms of supportive mechanisms and communities, emerge as important determinants of grief.

Death studies and the Anthropological Imagination

A departure from philosophising on death, an individual is instantaneously pushed to realise the inevitability of the biological fact that death is preprogrammed. An individual has to die at some stage of their life and that might be the outcome of several deteriorating factors. However, in the absence of a real experience of death, the 'biological self' - 'human being' - 'the matter' is merely reduced to an object. In addition, while living, one experiences the self in its totality that cannot be reduced to matter but remains a 'whole' altogether. Yet, there lies the paradoxical mystery surrounding human life and death, what Simon et al. (1993) call continued interrogations obscuring the line between biological inevitability and failure of human understanding. All the same, biological interpretation has persistently challenged anthropologists (Robben 2004) and sociologists to find out the social and cultural meaning of death (Walter 2000). This has led to meanings being conferred out of diverse cultural and social responses to death. This is particularly reflected in the early works of ethnographers, sociologists and historians who strove to discuss the universal features of death in the diverse cultural responses (for example ref. Becker 1973; Lifton and Olson 1974; Bauman 1992; Aries 1987).

Despite continuous awareness of death since time immemorial, systematic research on death and bereavement in Western academia only gained its momentum in the aftermath of World War II. Until this time, within the anthropological imagination, death and bereavement were discussed mainly in terms of rituals and customs, taking references from traditional societies. The early accounts on death and bereavement in terms of ritual practices can be drawn from the studies done by Tylor (1871) in 'Primitive Culture'; Fraser (1890), 'The Golden Bough'; Hertz (1907), 'Death and the Right Hand'; Van Gennep (1909), 'The Right of Passage'; Durkheim (1912), 'The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life'; Freud (1917) 'Mourning and Melancholia'. These studies mainly focused on public rituals and the role of the dead in local cultures.

These early works of anthropologists on death draw inferences from the rituals within comparative ethnography, instrumental in developing a structural framework in which death could be analysed. For instance, Malinowski in his 1925 essay, 'Magic, Science and Religion', which was published in 1954, contested the idea of psychologists like Wilhelm Wundt who suggested that people are influenced by the fear of death. Therefore, in public, the bereaved instantly detach themselves from the deceased, yet continue to associate with the emotions of the deceased privately. However, Malinowski indicates that this universal fear of death is instead negotiated and simultaneously complemented by the denial of death through a belief in immortality. The attitudes that are basically arising out of both the fear of death and the denial of death are in turn translated into an ambivalent relationship of the living with

the dead. While displaying grief in public and engaging themselves in ritual processes at the time of dying, the disposal of the corpse, and social mourning, the bereaved first associate with and finally disassociate from the dead. The fear, danger of corpse and the polluting effects of death are transcended in a sublime sense of spirituality, hope, the sacred, and the otherworldly imagination. For Malinowski, religious imagination seems fundamental in response to death, since people cling to the idea of immortality, rather than the idea of the final ending. In this light, religious practices become the vehicle through which people foresee the prospect of salvation after death. Here, engaging in religious practices can be seen as translating into becoming religious, what I equate to being spiritual, which is not only a traditional ritual practice but also transforms the self. Thus, religion gives people a comforting sense of immortality while mortuary practices restore the social and individual functioning that has been disturbed temporarily by the death of one of society's members. Similarly, Hertz in his 1907 essay, 'A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death', referring to the case of double disposal of the dead in Indonesia, suggests that 'death has a specific meaning for the social consciousness; it is an object of a collective representation' (p.28). He foresees a constant awakening of social consciousness in death. For him, 'death is only a particular instance of a general phenomenon' that holds 'a transitory state for a certain duration' (p.81). Arnold van Gennep, in 1909 (1960), in his landmark study, 'The Rites of Passage', argues that mortuary practices suggest a structural approach in which death could be analysed. It seems that van Gennep through his structural demarcation has tried to objectify the corresponding meaning of spirituality, transforming it as a social reality

that is attached to death. For van Gennep, death is seen as a transitional period for the bereaved whereby the bereaved, experience grief while entering through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society.

It is evident from the examples discussed above that these studies focus mainly on ceremonial aspects of death in a pre-existing and predesigned structured framework. The debate is further foregrounded in a comparative analytical effort. In this construction, more than conceptualizing death, early anthropological texts appear as describing the various cultural processes in different contexts in a comparative view. Although the anthropological texts on death largely focused on rituals and mortuary practices, early anthropologists (for example ref. Malinowski 1954; Hertz 1960; Evans-Pritchard 1976; van Gennep 1960; Goody 1962) have extensively emphasized parochialization, folklorization and exoticization as Fabian (1973) puts it. In contrast, later generations (for example ref. Geertz 1993; Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Bloch 1988; Parry 1982; Holmberg 1989, 2000; McHugh 1989; Tsintjilonis 2000; Desjarlais 2000, 2003; Aggrawal 2001; Robben 2004; Dernbach 2005; Stewart and Strathern 2005; Norbert 2011) seem to be continuously absorbed in existing practices, reflecting them through rich ethnography that has led to sophisticated interpretations. However, since the 1970s, anthropological studies have extended their intervention from ritualistic descriptions to interpretative ones. For instance, Huntington and Metcalf (1991) while discussing mortuary rituals provide an interpretative analytical overview suggesting that 'people's customary responses to death provide an

important opportunity for sensitive probing into the nature of human life' (p. 25). Through their landmark work, 'Celebration of Death', Huntington and Metcalf provide appropriate insight by which the death rituals can be reassessed. This has provided a broader reconsideration of all aspects of the experiences of dying and the significance of death in modern society. Bloch and Parry (1982) conceptualise the notion of regeneration in relation to death. From the logic of Hindu sacrifice, Bloch and Parry draw explicit attention to a world-view of life being seen as a limited good. Small and Hockey (2001) interrogate whether models of grief in an interpretative framework could provide conceptual cleavage though which a death becomes meaningful.

In another instance, among the Samburu of Kenya, Straight (2006, p. 102) drawing insight from the case of a stillborn baby argues that "Samburu stillborn babies are not the only dead in need – or in danger – of being annihilated, even if these babies and other kinds of annihilated persons are not typically considered in the same conceptual field. At the fragile, permeable borders between life and death, the ontological status of persons - the living as well as the recently deceased – is typically, even necessarily, in flux." Straight questions the fluidity of agency in which death becomes instrumental for reimagining social relations. Death in this sense occupies both its temporal and existential 'space' and brings a break into the everyday 'mundane' ceremonies of living. This leads the living and the dead to remain entangled. However, at the same time, it does not prove the universal unanimity upon death, which is culturally dependent.

In the tradition of the Wari of Amazonia, Conklin (2001) describes mortuary rituals as a cultural practice in place, whereby the agency of the dead is transformed to a breed, in a new form of personhood in a casing of a deindividuated ancestor. This either transforms the deceased into a unique personhood or annihilates both agency and personhood. Conklin notes, "Dismembering and roasting or burning the corpse set into motion a process of disassembling physical objectification of the individuals social identity and social relations, a process ultimately intended to help the living feel differently about their loss" (Conklin 2001, p. 174). Conklin argues that in Wari memory, the deceased is a harmful being that affects the bereaved. In opposition, by engaging in endo-cannibalism, i.e. by eating the deceased, the Wari saves loved ones from the cold ground. Finally, destroying the body and the belongingness of the deceased helps in toning down the grief of the bereaved. The attachment with the deceased is seen as a major problem that in the long run generates grief and keeps the dead alive. Therefore, in terms of Wari mourning, the mourners emphasise 'memory work' that must progress towards a 'process of detachment' (Conklin 2001; also see discussion in Dernbach 2005 and Straight 2006).

While for the Wari of Amazonia, it is 'disengagement with memory' that works in terms of dealing with grief, in the case of the Chuukese of Micronesia, it is 'maintaining the memory' that works when it comes to the agency of the deceased. Dernbach (2005) describes the concept of death, funerary possession and afterlife in the Chuukese of Micronesia. For the Chuukese, spirit possessions that occur shortly after death facilitate the process

of 'becoming dead'. In this process of 'becoming dead', the deceased seems to appear on both sides of the cosmological divide between the world of the living and the afterlife. A person's soul is equated with the non-material being of the living person and therefore it becomes divine. By engaging in the mortuary process, 'once the soul departs, it is transformed into a spirit generally (anu) and, in particular, a human spirit of the dead (sootupw)' (Dernbach 2005, p. 110-118). It is due to this reason that after the death, bereaved members hope that the spirit will possess one of them to ease their suffering and create a new social relationship. Moreover, Chuukese follow the practice of burying their deceased relatives adjacent to their houses, sometimes building on additions to allow the living and the deceased to share a dwelling. In this way, the association between the decedent's body and personal agency is maintained by following this practice. The Chuukese feel that by burying family members near their houses, they would keep their spirits close by, hence they would be connected with the dead (Dernbach 2005). Here, the process of 'becoming dead' works as a 'liminal period' on both sides of the cosmological divide as articulated by Das (1976) in the case of death among Hindus in India and Turner (1977) while discussing rituals. Mortuary practices help in maintaining social and emotional ties by engaging in mourning practices for the deceased and serve as a tool for reconciling memories of the past with the new circumstances of death and the afterlife.

Anthropological imaginations acknowledge that death remains a productive field for anthropologists to articulate the underlying meaning of death, moving beyond the conventional ritualistic descriptions to stimulating interpretations in which the meaning of life could be drawn. Thus, a shift in perception is apparent. While early enunciation conceded a belief in immortality, later generations see life as a 'limited good'. Hence, the thin line between life and death that exists is broadened, instead of being contained. It appears as if this continuous uncertainty has fractured the human mind when it comes to life and death. It is on this premise that the meaning of death is conceived and seems dangerous and problematic, which academics until recently have failed to acknowledge. Nevertheless, as discussed above, it is clearly evident that within anthropological debate, the centrality of ritual is a key feature in societal accommodations of death. This simultaneously relates to the importance of ritual in Nepali society in general and ritual around death in particular. Thus anthropological discussion informs this study in relation to the grieving of families bereaved through this particular type of death, which helps us to understand better why the disruption of ritual in Nepal by the political situation is so destructive of personal adjustment to the death.

CHAPTER 3

Researching Politically Implicated Violent Death:

Methodological Issues

Introduction

Violent death brings unbearable trauma and grief, particularly to the individuals in the family and to the community as a whole. In addition, when the death of a person is politically motivated and killing is inflicted by violent means, the grief of the bereaved is prolonged. The ways in which political violence may lead to catastrophic death remain case specific and vary according to the context and the culture in which it occurs. Bereaved individuals tend to struggle to craft meaning out of loss and at times contradict themselves in their efforts to accept 'loss' as a fact of the 'present'; a 'past' incident; and to see 'hope in the future'. Individual suffering binds the issues of violent death in a complicated whole. Hence, queries regarding how an individual constructs meaning out of violent death and consecutive suffering in different cultural contexts remain important and valid.

In this chapter, I discuss how I investigated the issues related to violent death and bereavement in the context of post-conflict Nepal. I have divided this chapter into two sections. First, I discuss the concepts defining methodology, the use of ethnography in this study and why it was imperative to draw on 'multi- sited' ethnography to research death and bereavement in Nepal. In the

second section, I discuss more broadly, the researcher's engagement in the field and the way in which fieldwork was carried out in Nepal. To advance the discussion, I reflect upon the methodological underpinnings of fieldwork based on my personal experiences from May 2009 the beginning of the fieldwork until May 2010 when I concluded my fieldwork in Nepal.

Qualitative Design: Mindfulness and Beyond

I took 'multi-sited' ethnography as the mode of inquiry to investigate the broader questions such as what does violent political death mean to the family members? How is the loss of a person due to the violence understood and experienced by the bereaved family members and the community? How do families with experiences of political death shape and reshape their daily living practices? And can death lead to particular social and political identity in Nepali State? Given the complex nature and multilayered issues and problems of political death, I carried out field research, using a qualitative research design, particularly using 'multi-sited' ethnography as methodology. This methodological approach was particularly informed by anthropological insight that explores the meaning of death and bereavement within a culturally structured framework.

I used tools of qualitative design intending to engage in discussions about death and identity in Nepali society (Bryman and Burgess 1999; Creswell 1998; Seale 1999; Crotty 2003). According to Greenwood and Levine, while 'incorporating qualitative design, researches are pervaded by discussions about what the data and descriptions mean and could mean. The one is about

specifics. The other brings mindfulness to the specifics, and uses the specifics to develop claims that enhance our understanding of the general' (Greenwood and Levine 1998, p. 69). In this respect, thinking of systematic and scientific study of death and bereavement is about 'investigative activity' that is capable of discovering the world of the families who had lost their close kin due to the political violence. Qualitative research, as Cresswell (1998, p.15) puts it, is "an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of enquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting". Similarly Denzin (2000, p. 2) conceptualizes qualitative research as multi method in focus involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that in qualitative research a researcher studies a social phenomenon as it 'exists' in its natural setting. A researcher therefore attempts to make sense of phenomena, and interpret them in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Hence, while using qualitative research design, a researcher employs various techniques, tools and methods such as case study, personal experiences, introspective notes, life stories, interviews, observations, historical, interactional and visual texts that describe routine, problematic movements and meanings in individual lives.

This reflects the subjectivity of the subjects under research and methodological awareness of researcher while creating meaning from subjective and personal experiences of people. Moreover, qualitative research in its multilayer exploration is metaphorically complex. Field data by nature are composed of

layers of meanings, with multiple understandings and interpretations. Hence, qualitative design rejects the idea of preset methodologies and interpretations. This further suggests that qualitative research demands a holistic framework. While employing such an approach, a researcher draws from various traditions like constructivist, feminist, interpretivist, postmodernist, positivist 'with a heart', naturalistic research etc. In qualitative research, researchers draw attention to the interpretive procedures and practices that give structure and meaning to everyday life which they might bring from an interpretivist perspective. These reflective practices are both the topic of and the resources for qualitative inquiry (Gubrium and Holstein 2000). Moreover, qualitative research is grounded in the philosophical position which seeks for interpretation in the sense of how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced. The research looks for social meaning in its discourses and practices in a complex multilayered social world (Crotty 2003; Seale 1999; Lincoln and Guba 2000; Schwandt 2000). The data produced should therefore be based on flexibility and sensitivity to the social context and real life situations. The meaning that is constructed depends on various methods of analysis and explanation building which involves understanding of intricacy, details and contexts. Therefore, research conducted via a qualitative design meditates on the deeper meaning of the social world in a given social phenomenon that a researcher researches. It more broadly looks for explanations and explorations of meaning of various themes discussed in research (Mason 1996; Silverman 1997).

Various methods together might be used depending on what the researcher is trying to achieve and so it is important to understand the implications of combining approaches which may have different underpinnings and logics. This might suggest different forms of analysis and several ways of constructing social explanations. Nonetheless, while doing so, the researcher must be flexible in use of tools and practices depending on the context and must be sensitive to the changing contexts and situations in which research is done (Mason 1996; Hammersley 1999). Moreover, the claim that a researcher might make would not be free from the standpoint that a researcher takes to explain a particular situation and the social world (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Critical self scrutiny on the part of the researcher becomes vital. This means that researchers should constantly take stock of their actions and their roles in the research process, the sense and the claim the research is making (Knight 2002).

Ethnography and the study of Death and Bereavement

Critical anthropological insight is crucial in interaction between researcher and the researched. One may argue that it is this interaction between 'self' as researcher and researched as 'subject' that becomes the source of knowledge (Hockey 1990). Through interactions, themes are allowed to emerge. In informal settings, agendas are discussed and formulated. Informants are encouraged to own the narratives of their story. In this environment of togetherness, a researcher is allowed to enter into the 'local world' where shared experiences of subject become knowledge. This is also discussed as the grounded theory approach to research (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Bryant and

Charmaz 2007; Glaser 2007; Glaser and Strauss 1968). Ethnography, to all intents and purposes, incorporates approaches and practices on which grounded theory is based. In grounded theory, the originality in fieldwork and the centrality of social interaction become vital. Ethnographic research engagement explores social interaction in its original frame of reference. Hence 'grounded theory offers not only a methodological but also a theoretical fit between ethnography and interaction' (Timmermans and Tavory 2007, p. 479). In this sense, ethnography as a methodology of research is in effect complementary to grounded theory. In this study, the multifaceted nature of inquiry in terms of death and bereavement was informed by the presumption that to interrogate and explore the deeper meaning of the post-conflict world of Nepali society, one must engage in the situation in which family members and community people make sense of their individual and social world. Hence to understand a bereaved person's individual social world, appropriate concepts were drawn from anthropological texts which emphasised the cultural processes that were at play in the community because of the political differences among the people. This indicated the need for employing a methodology that incorporates a holistic capture of data. Thus, to carry out the research, a qualitative design was imperative and essential in terms of its methodological base to answer the research questions. In particular, to collect the data, I used techniques of 'in-depth unstructured interviews' and 'participant observation', by absorbing myself into the daily life course of the family where family members lived. The process included going back and forth to the history of the family before and after the death incident.

The ethnographic methodology enabled me to get involved, spend long hours in the field and participate in the lives of the people, observing people's daily life and interacting with them, and incorporate these into the study methodology. It also helped to focus on the meanings of individuals' actions and explanations that could only be derived by being in the field. In this context, while researching death and bereavement, qualitative design (Hammersley and Atiknon 1995; Katz 2004) in general and 'multi-sited' ethnography (Marcus 1998) in particular became imperative to meet the purpose of this research. The meanings that informants shared through their life stories and narratives of their experiences remained at the forefront of observation.

Through ethnography a researcher generates knowledge of various phenomena of a situation in a given world. The underlying assumption is that the research process must help people to relate to their own life situations and frame their own reality. Discussing 'thick description,' of data, Geertz (1993) argues that 'culture' is a 'web', suggesting along with Max Weber that 'man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun'. What he meant was that the analysis of ethnographic description should not be one of experimental science in search of laws but an interpretative one in search of meaning. The interpretative description that Geertz was looking for very much depends on various issues such as the methods and approaches, field and the subjects' native language and ethnographer's communication abilities, the researcher's own subject position and representation of data, theoretically informed argumentation, ethical dilemmas and reflexive presentation of collected

information. However, one must be aware that in ethnography, gathering data can be intentionally unpredictable and can have unexpected twists and turns.

Wills (2000) clarifies the concept further and suggests that, while participating in data collection activities over a longer period of time and through many situations, an ethnographer witnesses and records in detail the researched subjects as they go about their daily activities. By engaging in 'participant observations', 'in-depth interviews', and 'informal interactions', an ethnographer inquires into the meanings and values attached to particular activities that are the focus of the study. A researcher further inquires about how informants see meanings and values in relation to the wider social context as well as in their central life concerns. Furthermore, in ethnography a researcher collects some data and tries to make sense out of that data; analyses the data; writes it; and again collects more data and contrasts it to see whether the interpretation makes sense of new experiences, following it with further analysis and so on. Hence, the process of producing qualitative data by using ethnography as a methodology in itself becomes dialectic in nature.

An ethnographic account depends on the richness of fieldwork that is more a kind of 'art' and 'craft' than a statistical manipulation. In this sense, it is philosophical in imagination and practical in confronting 'human subjects' in a social boundary. Nevertheless, it raises the question of ethnographic authority as a scientific method in terms of the reliability of the account that is presented. However, the working definition that I am offering for this particular fieldwork is a form of inquiry in which one is immersed personally in the ongoing social

activities of some individuals in the family as well as the community for the purpose of this research that will help to interrogate the socio-cultural and political processes that influence the bereavement outcome of a bereaved person in Nepal.

Okely (1992) argues that fieldwork is not only an action performed by a researcher with informants but also a vast chain of interdependence. The actual experience rarely lives up to the ideal but is a means of producing knowledge from an intense, inter-subjective engagement. The 'field' and 'fieldwork' requires conscious commitment (Crang and Cook, 2007; Ager 1996). No doubt an ethnographic account seeks for rigorous fieldwork and requires accuracy in description of transcripts. However one may look for purposive selection in terms of representation. The major issue for representation requires answering the question as to whether a researcher as an ethnographer has considered the researched 'subject' in their 'objective' as well as 'subjective' frame of reference and is conscious of the context that might bias the interpretation. A researcher's own 'subject position' of 'self' as an ethnographer thus must be scrutinized.

In this context, as an ethnographer one needs to be reflexive on one's own position as well as the positions of those who are being researched. The aspect of 'who am I' deserves careful thought. An ethnographer having grown up in a particular culture might have created personal idiosyncrasies. Professional training and views regarding the world opposing the views of subjects might create biases. Moreover, by virtue of human nature, we seek to inquire about

the things that we think are important, that which could also lead to biases at times. However, that could be seen as a natural phenomenon. As an ethnographer, it is more important to reflect on what kinds of biases exist. How do they relate to ethnography that I am undertaking? How do they enter into ethnographic work? And how can such biases be documented and discussed? Ager suggests that by bringing as many of them to consciousness as possible, an ethnographer can try to deal with them as part of methodology and can acknowledge them when drawing conclusions during analysis. In this sense, ethnography truly is a personal discipline as well as a professional one (Agar 1996).

Conversely, when it comes to investigating death and bereavement, ethnography does not appear as a popular methodological choice except by a few ethnographic works on death rituals in different cultural settings. Rather biological and psychological interpretations have remained at the forefront and clinical and therapeutic tools have guided death research to a large extent. More specifically, the literature suggests that people working on death and bereavement research have largely used both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. In its practice, cross-sectional designs do not allow for an examination of the researchers themselves. However, they have been useful in identifying the phenomenological features and tracking the grieving process at different points in the mourning process. On the other hand, in longitudinal designs researchers have little experimental control over what they research, but they do allow for prospective assessment and generally offer increased ecological validity (Bonanno 1999). Nevertheless none of these methodologies in reality

tend to investigate the broader social meanings of death and consecutive loss and grief in its totality. Moreover, loss and grief are discussed largely from a medicalised perspective.

These dominant perceptions have challenged anthropologists and sociologists to find out the social and cultural meaning in death (Walter 2000) in diverse cultures and to study social responses to death. Literature suggests that early ethnographers, sociologists and historians have grappled with the existing practices and come up with sophisticated interpretations. A few early anthropologists' interpretations of death were limited to rituals and mortuary practices and the mode of investigation remained conventional ethnography. This is apparent in the writings of Hertz and Malinowski of early ethnography; Blauner, Huntington and Fabian in the 1970s; and Robben, Tsintjilon, Hockey and Valentine lately, to name a few (Hertz 1960; Orenstein 1970; Fabian 1973; Blauner 1966; Huntington 1979; Desjarlais 2000; Robben 2004; Malinowski in Robben (ed.) 2004; Tsintjilon 2004; Valentine 2007; Hockey 2007). On the other hand, a large number of academics including sociologists have looked at death and bereavement either by employing demographic approaches or by using qualitative approaches using interviews and other techniques (Sandler et al. 2008; Tedeschi and Calhoun 2008; Kauffman 2008; Shapiro 2008; Rosenblatt 2008. In the process, academics who have worked on death and bereavement have come to conclusions depending on the nature and demand of their research and their professional background. Thus, the insights that they have derived in researching death and bereavement issues have varied from clinical to therapeutic to psychological as well as sociological (Glaser 1966; Glaser and Strauss 1968; Kübler-Ross 1970; Durkheim discussed in Bendiksen 1976; Becker, 1973; Bendiksen 1976; Stroebe & Stroebe 1989; Kellehear 1984; Elias 1985; Bauman 1992; Baudrillard 1991; Clark 1993; Mellor and Shilling 1993; Turner 1995; Aries 2000; Seale 2000; Walter 2000; Kauffman 2002; Bonanno 2004; Goss &Klass 2005; Dillenburger and Keenan 2005; Holloway 2005; Calhoun &Tedeschi 2006; Lee 2008; Balk 2008; Walker 2008).

A critical review of methodological engagements in death and bereavement study further suggests that there is a lack of broader outlook to understand death and bereavement in terms of its totality and interaction. Contemporary scholarship has focused on exploring only a certain part of the issue, in fragments. And in most cases it has been limited to the end care programme. This has further pushed death and bereavement study towards a much narrower frame of reference. This is not to say that extensive investigation of a limited phenomenon is not required. Rather, it would serve as a strength when put together with a broader exploration of what death and bereavement study means and engages when it comes to helping people in a situation of loss and grief (Tedeschiand Calhoun 2004).

In addition, perhaps, while broadening the avenues of understanding, the field of death and bereavement would help to construe a new outlook to explore and work with people with loss and grief experiences. Perhaps to widen the focus of its lens in terms of interrogating the process of grief, more comprehensive perspectives are required. It is important to begin to investigate loss and grief

using a methodology that not only acknowledges but examines extensively a variety of mutually influential socio-cultural issues within the study, understanding proximate socio-cultural nets of influences within which an individual exists remains vital for the study of death and bereavement. The interrogation of the subject of death and bereavement in its totality requires going beyond the conventional methodologies that have been influential until now (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). It appeared desirable for this research to incorporate a qualitative design and particularly to use 'multi-sited' ethnography as a methodology that combines reflexivity and the actual experiences of the grieving person to constitute knowledge regarding death and bereavement in an expanded socio-cultural and political frame of reference.

Multi-sited Ethnography in Death and Bereavement studies

It has been observed that there are social and cultural mechanisms that are present to cope with death and bereavement in Nepali society. Death due to political violence suggests different meaning in terms of its effects and experiences depending upon the situations and the contexts in which the incident occurred. People shared varied experiences of political ideologies depending upon their support for a particular political party; and the support that they had received from different political groups. Besides that people had died in different circumstances at different times. For instance, the death of a 'Magar¹⁵' man in Rukum or a 'Tharu¹⁶' man in Bara had different effects on

15 . Magar is an ethnic group basically located in upper hills of Nepal.

¹⁶. Tharu is also an ethnic group geographically found in the Terai of Nepal.

the family members due to the nature of the violence and the socio cultural contexts in which they lived. Similarly, the death of a 'Chetri¹⁷' woman in Rukum or a woman in 'Tarai' did not have the same effects as that of a man when it came to coping with loss. Furthermore, individuals have coped, and managed the loss and grief in diverse ways drawing from their social and cultural norms as well as the daily circumstances in which they lived. Hence, exploration was required from different dimensions and at various levels ranging from community to community and place to place.

Collecting insights from ethnography in general and 'multi-sited' ethnography in particular, I focused my investigation on death and bereavement patterns in the families in two geographically and strategically different locations in Nepal. When I talk of 'multi-sited' ethnography as a methodology I mean a set of techniques that I incorporated to generate qualitative primary data produced by direct contact with social agents in the field. The narratives and analytical accounts of subjects' daily life course and the impact of death on the subject were considered for observation at different sites. A 'multi-sited' ethnographic method also became necessary to understand the routine situation of people's lives within different social and cultural groups. As an ethnographer, I participated with and observed the subjects of study overtly at times in an informal setting at different levels and covertly within a guided frame of reference. This could enable me to answer the questions of how and why of a particular situation in a holistic framework. More specifically, the insight drawn from anthropology that the ritual is a key feature in societal

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¹⁷ . Chetri come second in social hierarchy in terms of caste after Brahmin; it is a high caste group, who have largely dominated the power politics in Nepal.

accommodations of death provided an overarching theoretical frame for the process and procedures of data collection in the field.

"Multi-sited' ethnography defines their objects of study through several different modes of techniques. These techniques might be understood as practices of construction through (pre-planned or opportunistic) movement and of tracing within different things of a complex cultural phenomenon given an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it" (Marcus 1995, p.106). Marcus in these lines suggests that 'multi-site' ethnography firstly creates a space in which a researcher can make use of various techniques depending on the existing dynamics of the field. Movement from one place to another in tracing the subjects study provides opportunities for the exploring the interconnectedness of culture which provides the spaces of critical judgment in fieldwork in terms of the meanings construed. Candia (2007), borrowing the concept of 'multi-sited' ethnography from Marcus and others, suggests that the strength of 'multi-sited' ethnography depends on the skills of a researcher to expand his/her boundaries in a unique way that varies from site to site and culture to culture. However, she argues that a weakness arises out of the spread of attention to processes, research bounding and site selection, as well as the informants' selection on behalf of the researcher. The selection processes that any ethnographer has to endure in limiting field experiences also reduce the determinacy that might be required for meaningful accounts. Socio-cultural variations in this sense provide different world views and widen the discussion.

Multi-sited ethnography provided purposeful insight to discuss death and bereavement. I decided to engage myself with a 'multi-sited' ethnography approach, whereby I would be able to follow cases, for a certain period of time, at different intervals, where death had taken place. Hence I gathered information by consciously engaging myself in the field. In the process, I reflected upon the meanings of death and coping mechanisms, which was informed by the anthropological literature that helped in picking up the macro and micro linkages within the socio-cultural processes of the community. Further, I allowed informants to express their experiences of loss and bereavement in a narrative approach that assisted in exploring the importance of ritual in Nepali society. In terms of grief and bereavement due to loss, to a large extent, context played an important role in which individuals narrated their grief in daily life situations.

Particularly, in 'multi-site' ethnography, relational spaces of research are important, as the research is intentionally unpredictable and can have unexpected twists and turns at any time during fieldwork. In the context of researching complex emotions, relational spaces become the tool of productive reflexive engagement. While tracing subjects of study, movement from one site to another also creates relational spaces which give the researcher an opportunity to engage himself in productive reflexive engagement (Gustavson and Cytrynbaum 2003). Relational spaces mean the movements when a researcher goes beyond the set and specified purpose of the study, whereby the relational dynamics of the research plays a vital role in constructing meaning. In this research, relational spaces appeared vital to ponder upon when it came

to informants' expression and meaning. It was not only the informants' present situation that could give meaning to their lives but also the experiences that they had gone through during the conflict and just after the demise of a family member that mattered quite a lot for surviving family members. The context in which the incident had occurred had political dynamics to it. Hence, while discussing the death in the family and community, relational spaces became important to consider. In the case of the study of grief in Nepal, understanding appeared at different levels. First, the context itself provided different meanings that varied from case to case. Additionally, relational spaces provided different world views to understand traumatic events and the ways in which individuals coped with them.

Also, to understand the totality of the situation, it appeared imperative to study various types of death of varied nature among various groups in different locations. Discussing death and understanding death in its varied forms also provided the platform to construct local meanings by discussing subjective implications, first within the family and finally in a broader public sphere. Hence, studying death and bereavement was not only limited to the meaning and understanding at family or community level but also, with a 'multi-site' approach, discussion expanded to the broader social sphere of Nepal (Knight 2002; Mason 1996).

Another consideration was that, it was practically not possible to find a variety of different cases at one location or in a particular geographical location. Therefore, it was necessary to adopt 'muti-sitedness' in site selection where

death had occurred, irrespective of a particular area or a particular group of people. Also, secondary literature on death cases from Nepal suggested that given the nature of death and various types and reasons for death during conflict, death cases were dispersed throughout Nepal. Hence, this research was not only ethnography of space or time or the mainstream conventional and traditional type ethnography in which 'a research paradigm would appear to be a more rigorous notion of what an ethnographic description and analysis of another culture should be' (Marcus and Fischer 1999, p. viii). Rather, this research was conducted as the ethnography of families at different locations in different socio cultural settings in Nepal. In this context, family structure and the dynamics of daily functioning of the family member became major areas of observation along with exploring the meaning of death in a particular community and its cultural setting. In this respect, social and cultural aspects emerged as complementary as well as decisive to make meaning. 'Place' was one of the significant variables in terms of community norms and values and also influenced considerably the way in which individual persons were constructing and defining the meaning of death and bereavement. Sociocultural variations at different locations led to different meanings at different places when it came to death and bereavement, which gave multiple dimensions to discussion of death and bereavement in a broader perspective. In my research, the 'multi-sited' character with two sites - 'juxtaposed' - has much to contribute, as Marcus (1998, p.4) has rightly noted.

Indeed, to set the context, locations were decided based on their importance, whereby meanings of death and loss could be reflected broadly. In this sense,

particular geographical locations and various ethnic and caste groups provided distinct notions of meaning when it came to death and bereavement. To have an authoritative exploration and discussion of death and bereavement for this study it was decided to incorporate one location from the areas of the Maoist 'Adhara Chetra' (high conflict zone) where the impact of conflict was severe. The Western hills of Nepal, especially, Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot, were assumed to be the epicentre of Maoist conflict. The Maoists had control over much of the rural areas of these districts, whereas the government mechanisms were basically limited to the district headquarters. These were also the areas where the Maoist movement originally started. In these districts, the number of death cases was high compared to the other districts of Nepal. Purposefully, Rukum was chosen as one of the sites for field research, along with Rolpa, and Jajarkot. Preliminary review of literature from Nepal showed that Rukum was the district where the highest number of killings took place and was least discussed in public spheres. This is also one of the more remote places in Nepal, with diverse ethnic groups living in this area. Hence, Rukum appeared as a potential site for study as it required much attention and discussion.

The other site selected was the Bara district of the central Tarai region. This was the area where the Maoists were active during the decisive phase of the Maoist movement. This was also an area of strategic interest as it has an open border with India in the South. Most goods and materials pass through this area. Hence it was of economic importance for the nation. Lately, this area had also emerged as one of the major centres where Tarai armed groups had waged an armed conflict. Conflict in this area continued and violent death cases took

place even after the peace process and Maoists coming into government and while I was in the field. In terms of socio-cultural and geographical contexts, these two sites differed qualitatively.

Marcus (1997) in his paper suggests that ethnographers are challenged on traditional mise-en-scène of fieldwork when it comes to cultural formations of subjects. Multiple and heterogeneous sites of production are important in cultural formations of subjects. This does not mean that ethnographers should abandon the intensity with which they collect information locally that they require for analysis. However, Marcus (1995) suggests that the multi-site mode of investigation ethnographically constructs the life worlds of variously situated subjects. It also ethnographically constructs aspect of the system itself through the associations and connections it suggests among sites. In a similar sense, Ester Gallos (2009) suggests that movement between multiple and heterogeneous sites leads to 'cross-fertilization of sites'. She argues that having variously situated subjects under study opens avenues for new questions, possibilities and connections to widen the boundaries, while at the same time bounding the field. 'Multisitedness', in particular, provides space to interrogate 'site' in a relational space which gives meaning to the discussion.

Moreover, 'multi-sited' ethnography makes the researched object complete in the sense that it provides research design with a full mapping of a cultural formation. Therefore, a subject cannot be fully understood only in terms of the conventional single-site 'mise-en-scène' (Marcus 1997) of ethnographic research, assuming indeed it is a cultural formation produced in several

different locales, rather than the conditions of a particular set of subjects that is the object of study. Taking two or more culturally and geographically different sites for study thus provided a broader perspective. I draw upon Marcus's notion of 'world system' where political death in Nepal could give meaning to death in Nepali society as a whole. Of course, it may not relate to the 'world system' in itself, but provides a perspective if one assumes Nepal is a macro system with diverse cultural groups within the system (Marcus 1995; Metcalf 2001; Gustavson and Cytrynbum 2003; Flzon 2009). The focus of the data collection thus moved beyond a specific site and connected the sites with the broader perspective to construct knowledge. Thus, for the research, 'multisitedness' as one strategy became imperative to venture through.

The 'Sites' in Ethnography

Appadurai (1990) and Metcalf (2001) have rightly noted that a 'site' is a place from which to view cultural landscapes. With an elaboration, Vered Amit (2000a) presents a clear picture of what it means to explain the field-site. In Amit's words: '[I]n a world of infinite interconnections and overlapping contexts, the ethnographic field cannot simply exist. It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred' (2000a, p.6). In this context sites are understood as the products of often conflicting political and epistemological processes 'on the ground', and processes in themselves become an object of study. The 'field-sites' for this research were the sites in Nepal where death had occurred in the past due to the Maoist conflict. It was the phenomenon of death in a particular social and

cultural setting that had constructed the field-sites for me. In this sense, sites were the places from where I could get a sense of death and bereavement patterns. Drawing from 'multi-sited' fieldwork the site thus appeared as interconnection of cases, by following the death cases from one site to another.

Fieldwork sites

Field-sites for this study were considered based on contrasting social and cultural understanding within a multisited approach. Field thus forms a layer in sites, varying from the national capital of Kathmandu to district headquarters at district towns and villages in the VDCs at two geographically and culturally different locations. Therefore, I engaged myself in Kathmandu to get a flavour of the 'field' as a 'site' at the national level in the beginning of my fieldwork. I reviewed literature available on death cases that appeared in newspapers such as *Kantipur Daily*¹⁸, *The Kathmandu Post*¹⁹, *and The Nepali Times*²⁰ *and Himal Khabar Patrika* etc. and accessed other online media sources and online blogs such as *Mysansar* and *Nepalnews.com*. In addition, I reviewed policy reports²¹ published by various agencies to understand and define the field and field sites in Nepal.

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¹⁸. 23 July 2009, 'Babu Pharkine Ash Ma Pariwar', Kantipur daily, Kathmandu, p.9

¹⁹. 17 March 2009, A victim's overview, Kathmandu post, p.4

²⁰. 2003, Seven years, 7,000 dead and counting, Nepali Times, issue 128 (17 Jan 2003 - 23 Jan 2003), Kathmandu. 2006, Naresh Newar, 'Can't get away with torture', Issue, 306 (14 July 2006 - 20 July 2006), Nepali Times, Kathmandu.

²¹. For a detailed description the following policy documents were reviewed. 13 Aug 2009, **Nepal's Future: In Whose Hands?**, Asia Report N°173

¹⁹ Feb 2009, Nepal's Faltering Peace Process, Asia Report N°163

³ Jul 2008, Nepal's New Political Landscape, Asia Report N°156

³ Jul 2008, Nepal's Election: A Peaceful Revolution?, Asia Report N°155

² Apr 2008, Nepal's Election and Beyond, Asia Report N°149

¹⁸ Dec 2007, Nepal: Peace Postponed, Asia Briefing N°72

During this time, I identified key people working in the area of social justice. I then interviewed different groups of people such as a member of 'Maobadi Pidit Sangha', and visited several other non-governmental organisations and spoke with the people who worked with conflict victims such as personnel from 'Advocacy Forum, International Red Cross, CWIN Nepal, INSEC, and CIVICT'. Initially, I developed networks; learned about people; talked with them formally and informally. Meanwhile, I established networks with the people in Bara and Rukum and explored the possibility of conducting fieldwork there. Spending the initial months in Kathmandu helped me in preparing the ground for the second phase of my field work, which was to visit the sites and families in the community. By organising interviews with people in Kathmandu and reviewing secondary literature, I developed a preliminary view in which death victims and their family issues cropped up, constructed, and appeared in national debate when it came to Human Rights issues at national level.

Engaging in field-Sites

Marcus (1995) proposes a number of possible strategies in 'multi-sited' ethnography that are basically premised on 'following' (following the people, the thing, the metaphor, and the conflict etc., Marcus 1995, p. 105ff.). Marcus

18 May 2007, Nepal's Maoists: Purists or Pragmatists?, Asia Report N°132

26 Feb 2007, Nepal's Constitutional Process. Asia Report N°128

15 Dec 2006 Nepal's Peace Agreement: Making it Work, Asia Report N°126

10 May 2006Nepal: From People Power to Peace?, Asia Report N°115

2007, Human Rights in Nepal, One Year after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights OHCHR-Nepal.

INSEC, (1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008), Human Rights Year Book, Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), Kathmandu, Nepal.

talks about the mode of construction as a means of 'following' whereby field-sites can be formulated. In terms of my research it was a mixture of different modes of 'following'. I continued with field-sites by not only following 'the people' or 'the thing' but also the 'cases of death' and the family members, as well as possible others that could contribute to the story of past death and bereavement. The consideration of sites appeared very much dependent on the nature of the study. Thus a mixture of strategies was used together.

Moreover the approach was also to allow different voices to appear which Marcus and Fischer (1986) call 'decentred ethnography', that is, to limit the power of single voices and replace it with a plurality of voices in ethnographic text. Thus, they insist upon the narrative presence of others in ethnographic text. My intention to conduct ethnography with a multiple site approach was also to move beyond the narratives of 'others', which also incorporates cultural and social implications of people's voices in different sites. It also helped to contribute to the meaning of death and bereavement not only based on narratives but also by drawing references from the culture and social fabrics in which those stories were construed. This approach of defining the field sites was particularly driven by the insight gathered from anthropological reading, and hence assisted in investigating the social and emotional ties of a bereaved person which appeared influential for the bereavement process. Additionally, people in Nepal do not operate only individually, but also in a larger kin group. Therefore, I decided a household would be the unit of analysis – if households are defined narrowly as those having immediate blood relations; sharing the same house and food together with common pots and stove - in the community. Cases were then identified by following the family members in the communities based in identified sites, depending on the nature and types of death that the family had experienced.

I carried out detailed observations at the household level in the community, to explore the meaning of death in the family and how particularly family members understood death and dealt with death in the family in post conflict Nepal. The gatekeeper of the family, a family head, who was both bread earner and guardian in the family, was taken as the primary informant and the household as the primary unit of study. However, all bereaved members in the family were treated as key informants. In terms of interviews, importance was given to the head of household, children and widows. The families were selected based on the types of death, including death of a family member caught in crossfire; death as a result of supporting a particular ideology; belonging to a rebel group or national army; killed on charges of spying; or as victims of intimidation and violence. The accessibility of a household was the criterion on which the cases were defined and considered. Observations also included children in the family who had lost their parents.

However, among the various types of deaths, I could not find a family where army men had died at my field site. First of all, there were only a few cases of army men who had lost their lives compared to the Maoists and others. Furthermore, these cases were dispersed throughout Nepal. There was no appropriate information available on those families as most of the time army men were killed while on duty and records were only kept in the districts

where they were killed, where they did not necessarily belong. In my field sites, there were only three cases of army men having been killed. All three families had migrated to different places after death of their beloved one, making it very difficult to follow such families.

To collect the data, I employed the technique of participant observation by visiting the families several times after at intervals of a few days. The daily food intake, the house in which informants lived, the odour and the environment of house explained much about their survival and life patterns. I also followed a few informants a couple of times at their work place and the children in their schools and places where they played games. In the case of children in the family, I decided to follow them in the places where they spent time after school with their friends. In a few instances, I accompanied children when they took animals to the field for grazing. Children, whom I followed, varied in their age, ranging from 6 years to 16 years. Observations took place in terms of their daily life activities in which they reflected a sense of loss.

Field Notes - Journal

Discussions with family members included the history of the family before the incident of death and the present situation in which they lived. Notes were taken as and when required while talking to informants. Apart from that, I also maintained field notes on a daily basis along with my reflexive personal diary. Field notes were focused on the observations made throughout the day on different issues ranging from the context in which people shared their story to the culture and practices that they were engaged in. Atkinson (1992) and

Emerson et al. (2001) suggest that which observations may be considered as significant and interesting to write into field notes will be affected by the researcher's professional and personal world-view. Thus, the boundaries of the field, as Atkinson (1992) notes, are: 'the outcome of what the ethnographer may encompass in his or her gaze...and what the ethnographer omits and overlooks as much as what the ethnographer writes' (p.9). The field notes were particularly derived from observations made in the family and the informal discussions that I held with other individuals. In this case, I focused on the particular terminology in local language in local terms and the context in which individuals shared their world-views. For instance when family members pointed out security personal, they always pronounced the word 'dusman' or 'sathu' (enemy). Very rarely they said 'sena', which means army. Similarly people always pronounced 'party komanche' when they meant a Maoist cadre.

I also used a digital recording system to tape the conversations as and when needed. Conversations were recorded when it was convenient to do so. On every occasion, prior consent of an informant was obtained before recording voices from the conversation. Photos were also taken of informants and field-sites (refer to appendices 1). At the same time, I had in-depth interviews with one of the family members who were directly affected by the loss of their close one on several occasions. Conversations were arranged in an informal setting. I interviewed close family members. For example, if a man had died, I interviewed the widow; in the case of death of a female member, I interviewed parents and siblings. In the case of a male member who was not married at the

time of his death, I interviewed parents and immediate siblings. In addition, I also had informal talks with other people in the community and the neighbours of the victim's family.

In order to collect in-depth information, I followed 'death cases' at two geographically different locations, 'Inarawasira' and 'Ratanpuri' of Bara²² and 'Syalapakha' of Rukum²³ districts in Nepal. In Inarwasira Village Development Committee (VDC)²⁴ death cases were scattered in Basudilwa, Kanchanpur (Paharitola and Musalmantola), Mathurapur and Pipariya in Phhatepuradjoining to Matihariya and in Ratanpuri (VDC) I concentrated in Bhaktalal village. Ching and Lampakot villages of Syalpakha VDC in Rukum districts were the field-sites respectively. Altogether I collected data on 37 death cases, 19 from Bara and 18 from Rukum. In the beginning, that task looked tough, but with the help of assistants from the VDC, collecting data became easier. To maintain the anonymity of the deceased and the bereaved, original names of the informants and victims are changed to pseudonyms for the purpose of this study.

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²². Find map of Bara including Inarwasira and Ratanpuri (Bhaktalal) as Appendix 2 at the end of this thesis.

²³. Find Map of Rukum including Syalapakha (Ching and Lampakot) as Appendix 3 at the end of this thesis.

²⁴. Village Development Committee denotes clusters of communities. One VDC consists of 9 wards, clusters of community vary in population from 1000 to 1500 each maximum. This would vary from terai to hill. The number of wards in one VDC is decided on population and the geographical area. In the community these different clusters are called villages and named differently. In Nepali it is also called tole. I have taken VDC as a geographical unit of field site.

In the case of Inarwasira, my assistant in the village helped me in explaining my questions to the family members as I was not very comfortable with the Bhojpuri language, spoken by the people in the region. Bhojpuri is not my language, but close to my mother tongue. I tried at times to talk in 'Bhojpuri', complementing it with Nepali. The unstructured guidelines that I had prepared for data collection also helped to a large extent to put across the questions to the informants. The guidelines were formulated based on the research questions. They included unstructured open ended questions grouped according to different themes. Guidelines included questions related to death and its meaning, people's livelihood issues, social and cultural norms and values which shaped the lives of individuals in the villages, identity and political involvement of the people and gender issues. I revised the guidelines after my initial few weeks' engagement in the community.

People were receptive and showed a willingness to talk about the issues, but to get access to in-depth meanings and experiences of the family members appeared very tricky and complex in the beginning. For instance, on a few occasions, I felt embarrassed to ask anything, given the terrible family situation in which informants lived, that which included the living space and the home infrastructure as well as their struggle for daily meals. In the beginning, this proved a barrier to conducting the fieldwork. At times, it was very disturbing for me to probe in detail, given the emotional outburst of informants. Most of the time, the response of an informant appeared chaotic. In the beginning, during my conversation, informants either remained silent or responded saying things like 'What's to talk about? It is like that! There's

nothing to say etc. These responses indicated either an informant's refusal to share with researcher or the hold of their grief, that prevented them from engaging in any conversation. On other occasions, informants burst into tears when questioned about their loved one. These situations appeared to me emotionally taxing and raised existential questions for myself which continued throughout fieldwork. However, slowly, by spending time in the village and visiting families frequently, I gained confidence to engage actively in fieldwork.

Bara: a Field Site

In Bara, I conducted my field research in three intervals, each consisting of four weeks, with a one or two week break from direct engagement in the field. I used this time to reflect on the collected data and further review the data and prepared progress reports to get my supervisor's feedback. During my first visit to Bara, I spent a month staying in Kalaiya and followed the families of the dead person every morning and spent time interacting with the individuals in the families. I also had several conversations with other villagers at the local market and tea shops, which were the places where people spent their spare time in the village.

After a two week interval, I returned to the field for the second time. This time I started first from Ratanpuri and came straight to Matiharya village and stayed there for two weeks and then moved back to Ratanpuri for a week. Hence, my visit to the field was not confined to one place and I moved from one site to another at two weeks intervals. In Ratanpuri, I stayed in Bhaktalal village. My

host helped me to get familiarised in the field initially. After a two week interval, I visited Bara for the third time. This time, I spent two and a half months in the field at three different locations in Bara. I started from Kaliaya, the district headquarters and later moved to Matihariya village of Inarwasira VDC.

In Kalaiya, I interviewed some members of human rights organisations and journalists. Principal informants in the organisations were programme officers and field staff who worked in the district. However, I used open ended unstructured questions to learn about other stakeholders' views on conflict, death and bereavement, particularly in the case of Bara. I also incorporated interviews with people from non-governmental organisations who worked on conflict and children's issues.

In Inarwasira VDC, I stayed in Matihariya Village; Matihariaya was one of the villages that were relatively secure compared to the other villages, as members of underground armed groups were still present in the villages in Bara. Besides that, I found Matihariya convenient to live in terms of availability of a place where I could stay and get meals. Of course, this village was also in the middle of the VDC and at a comparable distance to the various villages where I carried out field research. Similarly, I conducted field research in Rukum, as is discussed in a later section.

Security a Major Concern

Problems related to political and security issues, in particular due to my own position as a native Nepali researcher, remained critical. There had been significant militarization resulting in increased violence, brutal killings, kidnappings, tortures and disappearances that still continued in central Tarai due to the 'Ethnic' and 'Madhesi' movement, initially led by the people but indirectly also supported by armed underground groups. Perhaps the most important issue in conducting fieldwork in a conflict situation lies in the danger, safety and security of the informant and researchers. Lee (1993) in his paper identifies two types of dangers that social researchers working in violent contexts may face, ambient and situational. The former is conceptualised as a danger that arises when a researcher is exposed to otherwise avoidable dangers simply from having to be in a dangerous setting for research to be carried out. On the other hand, situational danger arises when the researcher's presence or actions evoke aggression, hostility, or violence from those within the setting. The issues appeared in two broader frameworks: firstly, local politics and related insecurity that could impede fieldwork and secondly, the practicalities of conducting fieldwork in Bara. Although the situation was calm compared to the time of violence and counter-violence and repressive responsive situations that appeared in the past, yet, I became concerned about safety and security issues during my fieldwork. I had to collect data from a region where violence was continuing and deaths had occurred even after the comprehensive peace agreement when an elected government was running the country.

When it came to security issues, not only political or practical issues arose but psychological as well. Local politics and fieldwork practicalities simultaneously created fear in me. However I was confident that the danger that I and my informants might face could be avoided by being aware of the contexts and situations. Hence it was important for me to believe that research in a dangerous setting was possible and the risks associated in researching dangerous social situations could be negotiated (Sluka 1995; Robben and Nordstrom 1995; Olujic 1995). Thus, it was important for the research to be approached with foresight and planning.

I was constantly aware that dangers were never totally manageable but I had to make a concerted effort always to maximize skilful handling of the situation, while recognizing that skill alone cannot guarantee success. It was important to evaluate explicitly the possibility of danger, its potential sources, and how it might be managed or exacerbated by my actions. During the fieldwork, it was not only ambience or the situations but also the suspicions of underground armed groups towards the researcher that would have led to intimidation and abuse. The assumption was that if an underground armed group were convinced that I could be of benefit to them in terms of money or issues of interest to them, violent action against me or my informants would have been possible (Robben 1995; Green 1995). Especially, central Tarai was observed to be one of the vulnerable areas in terms of security issues in the recent past in Nepal. In this geographical location, more than the issue of politics, the issue was one of personal risks in terms of kidnapping, intimidation and torture. The

'Madhesi' movement by the underground groups who were operating their activities in the area. For this reason alone, in the beginning, I hesitated to get into the field directly.

The security risks were high since as I was studying in a rich country, like the United Kingdom, I could be seen as an imperialist in the eyes of the revolutionaries. I could be viewed as a threat for them one who would oppose people's welfare. Then they could find a motive to harass me in the field, that which could lead to extortion or kidnapping. Also, my own identity as an insider, belonging to a relatively privileged group of society and having a secure family background, would have created suspicion among the armed group members. In this sense, my own identity as a researcher appeared contradictory in the village. In cultural studies one may view this fractured identity as 'hybrid identity', what Bhabha (1994) argues constructing identity through 'acts of self empowerment'. Hall (1994) points out that hybrid identity are constructed in a cultural domain by taking references from history and undergo through transformation by the continuous play of history, culture and power, rather than, being internally fixed in some form of essentialized past. Such identity is not an essence but a positioning. Hence, identity in terms of positioning is place-bound, both conceptually and geographically. Identity and experiences are thus constituted within specific localized contexts of domination and resistance. In this context, my identity as a researcher was different from that of other villagers, which could be viewed as hybrid identity. In this sense there was a possibility that I might appear dominant, and therefore

conflicting to others. Hence one might get caught between dominance and resistance.

However, while in the field I did not have any such problems in carrying out fieldwork. To a large extent, my Madhesi identity helped me to overcome the fear as I was from the same group for whom these armed groups were advocating. Instead, I was welcomed in the village as people acknowledged the need to express their concerns where I could be a help for them. Nevertheless, during my fieldwork I remained aware of the possibility of disturbances. The point is that there are a series of problems that might occur when doing research at home as opposed to doing it abroad. Of course, it appears much easier to enter in the field but handling issues becomes complex when it comes to understanding local politics and deal with responsibilities (Jackson 1987).

On the other hand, in another field-site, Rukum, stakeholders suggested that it would be too remote a place to conduct field research. I was also advised about the fear that Rukum, being one of the strongholds of the Maoists movement, would have little to offer in terms of new perspectives. Basically, people working in the human rights institutions had concerns that the research could be hijacked by the Maoists. Furthermore, concerns over the feasibility, authenticity and reliability of the data in Rukum were also raised. The risks of data being reflected and framed with Maoists' stories were high. The other issues raised were in terms of the security problems.

After the constituent assembly election of 2006, the Maoists appeared as the only major political power in the Rukum district. They had won all five seats in the constituent assembly. Conducting field research in a stronghold of the Maoists was a risk as there was a possibility of research being influenced by the Maoist's ideology or if the Maoists were contested on their political ideology, there might be issues. In this context, being political in the field would at times be counterproductive when researching violent deaths. I learned from the members of various groups in Kathmandu that the intimidation and abusive tactics that the Maoists had used during their people's movement still continued after the peace process. Therefore, the situation of Rukum remained volatile when it came to political issues. Even though I was going to study the families of the death victims of the Maoists conflict, death was a product of political violence that took place during the conflict. Researching death and bereavement was a political issue, in addition to social issue. Before initiating fieldwork, I was told by local human rights activists that asking too much about the family members could be problematic. There was likelihood that the Maoists might oppose the research process contesting it as psychologically harmful for the bereaved. Thus there was considerable risk in continuing fieldwork in a Maoist dominated area.

In the beginning, it appeared as if it would be impossible to carry out my research where I had planned initially. It was at this point, as a native researcher, that my confidence turned low and I became fearful about my fieldwork. The more I thought about doing 'original- real' fieldwork, the more I became anxious about the field sites. I struggled for a month in Kathmandu to

decide upon actual field-sites away from Kathmandu where I could conduct my fieldwork. I decided to have a quick review of news reports and events in both the districts so that I could decide upon the security issues, risks and threats that had become the primary concern. Analysis of news reports and events suggested that in the Bara, in the past the cases of intimidation, kidnapping and killing were present at regular intervals. However, there was a declining trend in the last couple of months at the time when I was about to continue my fieldwork.

Later, while being in the field in Bara, I came to know from my informants that the district- in-charge of 'Jantantric Tarai Mukti Morcha- Jwala Singh'²⁵ was very active in the district. He was also involved in a number of incidents of extortion related cases, torture and intimidation and killings in the area. However, the situation had become calm after his death in a fake encounter with security forces, a few months, before I started my fieldwork.

People's views of security issues in Bara varied, with two extrems. The first was the fear of violence and intimidation among the people from 'Pahadi' (hill) origin in the district. This suggested that after the 'Madhesh Andolan' the incidence of violence had increased in the central Tarai and particularly in Bara. People of hill origin were the primary targets of such violence.

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²⁵. *Jantantric Terai Mukti Morcha- Jwala Singh* is an underground armed group operating its activities in central Terai region of Nepal focusing on the equal rights of the people of Terai in Nepal.

²⁶. A strong violent mass mobilisation took place in the Madhesh in early 2007 to attain equal rights for the Madhesi. This agitation in the Terai (Madhesh) continued for 21 days from January 19th to February 7th 2007 and triggered a wider crisis in the region. This resulted into death of 38 people and more than 800 people were injured and known as *Madhesh Andolan*.

Therefore, they responded with due concern when it came to security issues in the district. The other groups of people, those who belonged to 'Madhesi' origin, suggested that although the security situation was not perfect, cases of violence and intimidation had decreased in the recent past and there were no threats to life. Whilst it was not denied that one might encounter people who could be intimidating, while talking to the people with whom I had previous contacts in the district, it emerged that the situation might not be as extreme as people in Kathmandu had thought.

Geros (2008), from his experience of Syria, establishes that there is an interdependent relationship between the 'culture of fear' and its enabling effects on behalf of a regime to saturate the minds and bodies of the population. In this case, for me, an enabling effect to create fear in me was the violence perpetrated by the revolutionary armed groups. In such circumstances, social groups and individuals cope with the situation in different ways based on their past experiences and political engagement. Hence, as an ethnographer one may not be able to shy away from political engagement while being in the field. Yet one must calculate the risks appropriately before starting the fieldwork. Based on these references, I had to decide whether I should start fieldwork in Bara and Rukum or limit myself in and around Kathmandu valley. I suddenly found myself in a situation where I had to make a decision by myself, whether I wanted to carry out my fieldwork in Bara and Rukum or just either Bara or Rukum or instead of Bara and Rukum, just do fieldwork in Kathmandu. Based on my assessment of talking to the people in Kathmandu and Bara and reviewing the situation through other sources, I came to the conclusion that at least I should start with one location and see how the fieldwork progressed. I realised, it was also an issue of being decisive and confident rather than being fearful as a native researcher. At this point, I decided to start my fieldwork first with Bara. I began fieldwork in Bara by getting to Kaliya, the district centre of Bara. In some sense, looking at security threats for selecting field-sites in detail provided me with the opportunity to understand the cultural and political formation of a field in a conflict zone. This also signifies that during the conflict period death and bereavement issues were mediated by a very different type of cultural and social aspect which was particularly influenced by political ideology and individual security and survival. Therefore it appeared necessary to situate death and bereavement within a larger political scheme. Drawing on insights from anthropology, theoretical understandings of death and bereavement were posited alongside the situation of political death, raising questions as to why the type of death was important in Nepal's post-conflict context. Further it helped in doing ethnography not only in a traditional conventional sense but also in multi layers of cultural formations.

I could sense security risks while being in the field; however, they did not appear problematic during my fieldwork. For instance, in the case of Ahmad, people always warned me when I thought of going to that 'tola' (community), as they said there were people in this 'tola' still active in underground armed operations. Villagers often suggested that there was a past record of criminal activities in terms at robbery on gun point, and theft by thugs etc. against people of this village and so I should be careful. In fact, while moving around

the village, on several occasions, I could sense people were becoming very suspicious about me and my fieldwork in their community. At times, they did not allow me to record their voices. However they appeared willing to interact with me and talk about their issues pertaining to death. However, most of the time when I went to the village, I was accompanied by my field assistant.

It was at that point, that I again started analysing the risks involved in the field, of which people had informed me at the beginning of my fieldwork. Being in the field, I learned, at times, that even armed group members wanted to draw attention to themselves and had killed or tortured people if these actions had the potential to make the news in the media. I was repeatedly told that I should not take my camera, mobile and recorder, as these instruments were valuable instruments that might pose a risk to life. Villagers at times informed me that someone had been killed just for Rs. 10000 (£ 100) in the recent past. Nordstrom (1997:43) uses the word 'factx' instead of facts to emphasize the observation that, at least in the context, of violent conflict something is always wrong with the 'facts' one is given. Therefore, the facts that emerge out of conflict are essentially contested. Hence, all these information and risks were assessed carefully while I was in the field. Nevertheless, for as a precaution during the initial days whenever I alone moved in the field, I just carried a notebook and a pen and avoided carrying my recorder and camera. However, once I had been there in the field for a few days, I could sense that the risks related to money or other valuables could be a security threat, but not to the extent that one could lose his life.

Ethical Dilemmas

Studying violent death in Nepal was primarily a complex ethical issue for a research project. In particular, ethical issues pertaining to managing data and maintaining confidentiality was vital for the health of the research which had placed me in an increasingly complex situation. Apart from security concerns, the conversations with individuals in the family that might adversely affect the bereaved individuals raised ethical questions before I could continue my fieldwork. Ethical judgment on maintaining confidentiality of my informants and protecting my informants from any further violence due to the nature of investigation were important.

The other issues were whether it was at all ethical to ask about horrifying experiences which could be psychologically disturbing for informants. Protecting informants from possible psychological harm appeared crucial in the fieldwork. Before starting the actual fieldwork, I was pushed to grapple with various questions that appeared as an initial threat to conducting fieldwork. Angrosino (2007) suggests that protecting human research subjects means not only protecting them from harm but also respecting them and valuing their dignity. Hence safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of research subjects was vital.

To secure informed consent in a written form was out of the question because of the social and cultural pattern in which informants lived. Signing a paper with consent would undermine their freedom and lead to suspicion in a way that would deter my informants from cooperating with me. In a culturally sensitive environment imbued with traditional values, where people receive each other with enthusiasm and respect and share their experiences, requesting signed consent to talk to them was not a logical option, and could have only raised confusion. Moreover, the research would then be seen as a government work and so hence in return for participation informants would expect benefits. In either case it would have been counterproductive for the fieldwork. Hence, I introduced myself as a researcher and explained to them my purpose for being with them in their community and asked them whether they would cooperate, to which they gave verbal consent. However, while doing so, I asked whether it would be acceptable to come again and talk to them.

Managing information at the field level and maintaining confidentiality, interpretation and the validity of the information collected were the other issues in the field. These issues were negotiated through continued interaction with others throughout the process of research (Pettigrew et al. 2004; Lee 1995; Hermann 2001). Given the complex set of issues, there was considerable pressure on me to respond to such issues at a very early stage of the fieldwork process and to think how I should go about responding to such problems that would help deal with such issues. In part, I remained open to different aspects of life in the society. In a context of post socio-political conflict, I regularly assessed new emerging conflicts even more carefully by unpacking everything that could be anticipated, outlining the choices, justifying decisions through with critical scrutiny of the available choices and being flexible.

On the other hand, when it came to expressing emotions and the possible harm that emotions could cause to research subjects, I was guided by their pace of expression. For instance, when informants became silent I respected their silence; when they shed tears, I valued them and listened what they had to say. In this context, I took one of the various positions an ethnographer could take into account to deal with ethical issues in the field. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) categorise different positions that a researcher can take to deal with ethical issues including illegitimate strategies. Using illegitimate strategy indicates collecting information in a way that is unethical. However, the matter of illegitimacy depends on the context and judgment. They suggest ethical relativism as an option for those who agree to all considerations (p. 276-277). In such situations, my judgment in context and conscious assessment of the intensity of the situation allowed me to act in an ethical manner.

Being in the Field and Being Doubtful

Once the decision was taken over field sites, the next issue that appeared was the feeling of inhibition to face people to conduct fieldwork. There was great confusion in my mind before I started fieldwork. I was thinking continuously how I would conduct the fieldwork. How would I be able to meet people? How would people react? Would I get the information that would be appropriate for my research? These were questions which needed answers through reflection before I could literally start having conversations with the people in the field. The issue of how I should go about it, turned out to be one of uncertainty. At this point, for me, all my preparations at the university to conducting fieldwork appeared contradictory in respect to the actual reality. The feelings of caution

and vulnerability were appalling. I felt myself as a traveller in my own place that I had thought I knew better. The issue of greater complicity was a necessity to continue the fieldwork.

Initially, the place where I was going to stay in the field also needed to be arranged. I felt annoyed when people gave false promises to fix a place for me to stay. However, once, in the field, I realised that the kind of assurances I was getting from others were mere formalities. I became aware of the fact that such assurances would be a regular feature during the fieldwork process. I could imagine that people in the first place would agree to help, but when help was needed, they may not turn up. Hence, initial relationships were needed with selected people whom I could trust and rely upon. Even though people's attitude differed qualitatively and clashed regularly with my expectations, I prepared myself for any eventuality if I was to continue fieldwork.

In Kalaiya, there were about four local guest houses in the market, one relatively big which had around 20 rooms, with relatively better facilities and others relatively small with 5-10 rooms and minimum facilities. Apart from that there was one 'Dharmasala' (run as a charity home on highly subsidised rate). The 'Darmasala' was much cheaper to stay at, costing Rs 40 (45 pence) than a guest house which would cost from 250 Rs (£2) to 500 Rs (£5 approximately) daily, depending on the room and facilities available. Nevertheless, I got a place eventually after inquiring at different places. However, while I was looking for a place, on one occasion, I was viewed as someone who may have disguised his identity and might belong to the armed

group and denied a place, I assume, due to this reason. I felt confused and infuriated at the same time, due to the treatment that I received on the first day. Slowly, after getting a place, my fear converted into a working mood. I remained aware and vigilant of the situation due to security concerns. For the first few days, my field work was limited to finding out much about the general situation and building up networks which later helped me in collecting data.

Rukum: another Field-Site

Contrary to expectations, I managed to conduct fieldwork in Rukum more easily and confidently, even though it remained a Maoist stronghold. In the beginning, I was not very confident to initiate the fieldwork in Rukum. It was this reason that I first started fieldwork in Bara at two different locations, to gain confidence and understanding of the situation so that I could take Rukum on board. In fact, in Rukum, I did not have many contacts compared to Bara. To designing my fieldwork, I was much more confident about Bara than Rukum, as I could identify myself with the culture and community in the Tarai. I belonged to the same culture and tradition, albeit geographically differently located and speaking a different dialect. Rukum, in contrast, was a place to which I had never been and where I did not know any person beforehand to communicate with.

To my surprise, it proved to be much simpler to conduct fieldwork in Rukum compared to Bara. Primarily it was the fear and anxiety of working in an unknown place which was relatively remote and difficult in terms of access to

road links and the limited access to communications that lowered my self confidence. Ardener (1987) talks about the remoteness in fieldwork and argues that remoteness makes the field exciting as well as challenging. He calls a remote field setting an imaginary world where social space consists of human persons and close interaction among them. Access to Rukum, it was challenging as well as exciting. The only reliable transportation that one could take to get to Rukum was to fly from Kathmandu or Nepalgunj to Musikot, the district head-quarters of Rukum. Lately a road had been constructed that was connected Musikot to the national high way, but it was not yet fully operational. Moreover, it could take around 28 to 30 hours lengthy and risky drive through a narrow mountainous track.

I did not want to form a political affiliation before I could really start fieldwork. Therefore, I avoided taking help from and communicating with the Maoist political leaders who literally controlled the situation in the district. However, I had met a few Maoist workers from Rukum and Rolpa in Kathmandu during my initial days of fieldwork. To some extent earlier interaction with the Maoists gave me an understanding of what it would be like to engage in fieldwork in Rukum. My opposition to the Maoists' values of capturing power through intimidating tactics and violent means to emancipate people in the area made me skeptical about the situation. Given the past experiences and the images Maoists had presented to the people, I was afraid that I would be unable to carry out research without any hindrance. Hence, before I started the fieldwork, there were a number of questions that needed clarification. Grappling with these questions, I however decided to take my

fieldwork journey to Rukum more like a stranger and a traveller than a researcher analysing and prejudging the situation. Hence, I started fieldwork journey towards Rukum with an open mind.

For Rukum I was an outsider. My physical appearance differed in comparison to the locals. The local dialect of the Nepali language also varied qualitatively compared to the language spoken in urban towns in Nepal. Nevertheless, people in the field were receptive and accommodated me with openness. Maoists too offered help enthusiastically during the fieldwork, but at times it was confusing and raised questions whether as a researcher I should take their help, as they would glorify the work that they had done. Occasionally, Maoists' talk suggested that they had done extensive work for the welfare of the people, which might leave little space for me to research conflict victims.

On the day of departure to the field after a long wait at the airport amid the unexpected drama of getting on the plane; vacating it; and again boarding with fear and confusion, I finally reached to Musikot, the district headquarters of Rukum. The reality of death which I was about to research in the field was visualised in my imagination. Thoughts overpowered my mind, as I wondered what could have happened if the pilot had found the technical problem in the air, after takeoff. Indeed it was not a good experience to start the fieldwork at a time when already there were asked that needed answers. I questioned myself why I wanted to do fieldwork in Rukum. What if I faced further problems there on the ground as the district was still more or less governed by the Maoists? What if the Maoists would not allow me to conduct my research

where I wished to do? In fact, my confusion increased much more with the incident at the airport. At that point, I was not very sure what would happen next and feared that my fieldwork plan would be overturned. To be honest, I was prepared for the worst possible situation; hence although I was confident, I was yet again caught in confusion about to conducting the fieldwork. There was also self-realisation as I sensed how an individual must have thought and reacted while being killed either by security forces or by Maoists either on the battlefield or caught in between without any reason.

On landing, my first impression was that I had landed in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by deserted high mountains and houses scattered on the ridges of the hills. I spent the first few days in Musikot, developed initial networks and learned from different agencies about the situations and concerns about conflict and death related issues. From the information that I collected in Musikot, I decided to work in Ching village of Syalapakha VDC, which was one of the adjoining VDC of Musikot and would take around three hours walk from Musikot or two hours jeep drive from Musikot. Syalpakha VDC was one of the highly affected areas in terms of conflict related death cases, with the second highest number of death cases in the district.

Syalapakha was also different in terms of the types of death experienced by the people. People were dispersed in various social groups and were killed in different circumstances. The site was thus decided based on the diversity in terms of data. The other reason was the location of the VDC. It was also an adjoining VDC of the district head-quarters to which it was connected by road.

In terms of accessibility, I was at ease as I had both the options either to walk or to take a jeep to get to the district head-quarters as and when I needed. It was also an issue of feasibility, as I could conduct my research a bit more easily there than the other places. My field assistant, who belonged to the same VDC, initially helped me in the field and introduced me to the family members. I also did not need to worry about the language issue, as all of the villagers spoke Nepali, even though some had different ethnic backgrounds. I could easily find a place to stay with one of the families in the village. All these factors together allowed me to decide on Syalapakha VDC as a field site and 'Ching' as my village, where I could physically live.

Doing fieldwork in mountainous terrain can be taxing if not accessed properly. In such circumstances physical fitness remains critical for continuing fieldwork. For me, the major issue was to cope with walking three to four hours daily while being in the field. Most of the time, I had to walk for hours to get to a place to talk to a family member. Villages were scattered around a big geographical landscape. I had selected two particular villages of Syalapakha, where I had at least 20 families of conflict victims for my study. However these two villages were located almost two and a half hours walking distance from each other, which became a major difficulty later on.

Interacting with Family Members

Asking questions in relation to death and bereavement was one of the primary difficulties for me. In the beginning, on several occasions, I allowed informants to tell their own story. Most of the time informants limited their

expression to raising grievance and compensation related issues rather than death and grief. Death of a family member did not appear for them as positive and informants complained of losing their support system and strength. At other times, informants discussed extensively their own agency and how they had been managing life after the loss. In such situations, allowing space to informants to pause in between the expressions helped substantially. The more they were at ease, the more they discussed.

In the case of the Maoists, before the death of the person, being an active member in the party gave strength and power, not only to the members who had joined the party but also to the rest of the family members. Suddenly, after the demise of the person, family members felt that their strength had diminished as well. It came as a shock to the rest of the family members. It was hard for the rest of the family members to comprehend a situation where the person who had power was no longer there with them. This also resulted in sudden collapse of the power and strength of the rest of the family members. This feeling of loss of power had also added to their long lasting grief. On several occasions when family members needed strength and power to support them, the loss of the person became vivid and reflection appeared spontaneous. Reflections looked obvious in the sense that informants could visualise the death incident in front of them. As a researcher, in such circumstances being there with the informants, I was seen as source of strength for them. This later appeared an ethical issue for me to cope with. I could imagine the hope of getting support from the researcher also might have encouraged informants to share their stories. Again and again, I had to clarify that I was only a researcher

who could not do much for them, although occasionally I informed informants about the ways in which they could get support from the government or other available agencies. At times, assuring a bereaved family member could lead to unexpected hope and one must be aware of such situations, especially when one is dealing with difficult circumstances.

In the beginning, it was difficult to convince people that I was not from the party [Maoist] and I did not have any official connection to the Maoists' party men. This also raised obvious questions for me as a researcher. Informants could question why I was interested to ask about the victim's family's welfare. This also led to confusion and suspicion towards me. However, after preliminary visits, the feeling of fear and confusion changed to hope. Informants without hesitation shared their tragic stories of conflict and death imagining that they might receive some help eventually. The misapprehension that I would help the bereaved to get the compensation took quite a while for me to clear up. It was only possible to clear the misunderstanding as I interacted with other people in the village and continued visiting bereaved families. Only after continuous visits and repeatedly informing them about my purpose in being there in the village did people start accepting me as a researcher. Finally they were convinced that I was interested in their past experiences and wanted to learn from them. Only after I had spent some time in the vicinity were informants ready to share their stories. This led to the situation where in the beginning, I had very little to write except the observations. Hence initially I spent quite a lot of time to learn about community and daily life situations of the people while interacting. However when I started doing interviews, I was overwhelmed by the emotions and the suffering that people talked about. Due to the intensity of emotions during interaction, even at times after interviews, it was not possible to write any notes and transcribe any data. The emotions and heart breaking stories were engaging as well as hard-pressing, and demanding that I should constantly contemplate the idea of suffering, life and death. In fact, questions arose about what as a researcher 'I' was doing and why I was doing it, if death is so ultimate. It was these questions and efforts to answer the questions for myself that made the research process reflexive. Such reflections were helpful to analyse the meanings in perspective, as Knight (2002) notes that only through reflections would a researcher would be able to produce meaningful social explanations of ontological puzzles.

At times the subject of investigation appeared frustrating and useless to continue, given the powerful emotional nature of the story shared. However, the more individual members started expressing themselves, the more I could relate to and understand the situation. Hence I had to be patient and emotionally controlled while engaging with informants. While researching death and bereavement, the required skill was one of wit and humour that could bring the bereaved people back to normality from their emotional trip, which was not an easy task.

Managing Emotions in the Field

Managing emotions was a key issue during the fieldwork. The way in which informants expressed their concerns and experiences of life called into

question the fundamentals of human existence. In the context of conflict and consecutive death, life for the bereaved members appeared a struggle beyond their control. Overwhelming emotions in which participants narrated their life experiences left deep unease and a contradiction in life for me. Hence in the process of research it appeared necessary to reflect upon some of the questions raised and find alternative ways to deal with personal emotions and anxiety about life.

Questions such as what is life? Why do people kill each other? Why does one die? And what remains after death were some of the questions that required an answer. Of course, these were not questions that could be answered by somebody else, but required personal involvement. In the field it was personal reflection that was helpful to come to terms with the reality. Hence, to find out about 'self' and to answer some of the questions and manage my emotions, I decided to take a few days out for meditation. It appeared impressive in terms of the clarity that I attended through observing myself in a quiet and silent environment with a mystic in a hut in the outskirts of Kathmandu. While engaging in meditation practices I was able to manage emotion and accept the situation. I was again able to go back to the field to continue fieldwork.

Interviewing Children

Initially, it did not make much sense to discuss death, loss and bereavement with children. The major issues that cropped up were whether to get an opinion from a child informant. How these children perceived death and managed trauma was difficult to observe while interacting with them. Also, researching

bereaved children involved a potential threat to the child informants as well as for me. It was understood that the reactions to certain questions regarding death and bereavement would reflect the emotions of a child which might have adverse effect on their personal and emotional well-being. This would in turn leave a child vulnerable. Hence, as a researcher I was cautious about intervening with children. Lee (1993) suggests that it is this vulnerability of a child that makes researching children difficult. However, experiences from the field suggest that not only were children vulnerable, but it was also emotionally disturbing for them to articulate on the death of their loved one. Moreover it was also worrying for me as a researcher to observe their emotional disturbance, even though I maintained caution in my engagement with children.

The review of literature on childhood studies proposes that children and young people are worthy of research in their own right as a competent social actors. In this sense childhood is both constructed for children and by children (James et al, 1998). Children are seen as active agents, continuously negotiating their positions within adult-construed structures (Jenks 1996). In addition, children are seen as actors with different needs. Early feminist literature views a household as a consensual unit to expose a child as an actor with different needs and having bargaining powers. Households in this sense are neither sites entirely of conflict nor consensus, but rather arenas of both struggles and cooperation, where obligations are negotiated and fulfilled. Mayall (1994, p. 29) points out that the 'continuously re-negotiated contract is a feature of children's relations with their parents', and that 'children seek to acquire

greater autonomy through resisting the boundaries, challenging parental edicts, seizing control of their own life'. A majority of the children with whom I interacted did not have any memory of their father. The one reason was that at the time of demise of their father, most of these children were very young. Many of these children were less than a year old and only a few were more than a year. Only in four cases, I found children who were aged 10 to 12 years when they lost their father. By the time of the study they had grown up and in three cases they had gone to work in Gulf countries.

As most of the children did not recall an image of their father, it was difficult for them to articulate death and death related trauma. For these children it was the absence of a father that was troubling them. Hence, to learn from them directly about loss and grief was a distant possibility. This led to the realisation that I must use indirect means to learn from these children. The one method that I used was becoming informal and asking them about what they played normally and with whom, where they studied and what they liked doing in their free time. In this way I interacted with them informally and established initial relationship. I walked with them to the playground as well as to the grazing grounds where these children spent their time. Thus I was able to play with them and ask questions about how they managed in the family in the absence of a father. I allowed them to talk about their daily life in the absence of a father. By differentiating on the issues of expectations, I was able to connect them to the death and the disadvantage that it brought to these children. Hence, children's own agency became very important in expressing emotionally charged experiences of their life. It was evident that the post death circumstances and loss had led these children to a vulnerable and disadvantaged position, yet, they appeared resilient. Such observations are also made by James et al. (1998) and James and Prout (1997). They note that children are not only vulnerable but have their own agency by which they tend to manage emotions and become resilient in disastrous situations. However, there were cases when I felt immensely uncomfortable, when children started crying while thinking about their loved father and the comfort and care they used to receive and life after the death of their father.

For instance, one morning, I was visiting a house to learn more from the children and widow about the incident of death and how they had been coping after the demise of their loved one. Being inquisitive, I asked Dip about his father and whether he missed him. He replied, yes he did. Further, I added, 'What do you do when you miss your father?' He said, 'I cry' and he burst into tears and started hiccupping. For a moment, I was shocked and did not know what to do. Everybody became silent and calm; numbness was in the atmosphere. I too went blank. I looked towards his mother and grandfather. They looked numb as well. I took Dip's hand in my hand and held the boy to my chest. While Dip was crying, his mother too burst into tears and his grandfather was trying to control himself while holding back tears. Without it being expressed in words, one could sense how terrible the grief and misery was for the family members who had Sanoj as the bread earner of the family. After a few minutes pause, I gathered the courage to start again but this time I started with the younger one, asking him what he usually played. To divert the attention from silence and grief, I asked if I could take pictures of the boys. By taking pictures and showing the boys how they were featured in camera, again cheerfulness appeared on their faces. The younger one replied, he enjoyed swimming and played hide and seek with other friends. Mischievously he complained, 'but Dip plays stones'. Suddenly the smile returned to Dip's face. Later, I engaged the boys in taking pictures and making fun of the pictures with them. Finally I could see that when they saw the children smiling and laughing again, mother and grandfather could laugh as well. Hence, later, rather than asking directly about death, I asked other questions and related them to death of their father.

On another occasion when I asked what children wanted to do in the future and why in response, some said they would finish the unfinished story that their father had initiated. Others said they would like to find a good job and take care of their family. I heard from a six year-old child participant that she would never get married. She would study and would get a good job and take care of her mother. I was informed by her mother that her daughter had become much more resilient over the passage of time.

In the case of children, even the type of school they attended and the clothes they wore expressed much more than what they would have expressed in words. In this sense, observation served as an important tool to construct meaning when it came to children. I learned from one of my child informants that he avoided going to school because he did not have a uniform which was mandatory to attend the school. Another participant told me, 'I go to school and join class directly. I cannot attend pre-class assembly'. He admitted that he

was not allowed to attend assembly as he did not have an appropriate school uniform. He expressed that he would not have to go through these painful humiliating situations if his father was alive.

Another time, one of my child informants tried hiding the holes and torn patches of his trousers, which were very obvious. I could observe that this boy was consciously trying to hide the holes in his trousers with his hand. When I asked about it, he burst into tears. I got annoyed with myself and for the whole day I could not do much. He did not explain anything in words but the expression said everything. In fact he was missing his father beyond comprehension. It was easy to sense the suffering of this informant.

At times, the games that these children played, the little movements that they produced, expressed much more than these children could literally pronounce. Once, I accompanied some of my child informants to the playground. The day I visited they were playing with a ball made of waste cloths from the house. When I asked what they played in the school, they said 'Ball again, but not this ball'. They had a leather ball in school, that they played with, said one of them. In this case, he had made this ball out of rugs. When, I asked what kind of ball he liked better, a leather one or the one that he had made, he responded, 'The leather obviously'. Before I could ask anything his younger brother replied, 'I miss my dad. If he was here, I would have had at least a ball'. In addition, Jay, the brother of a deceased added, 'Yes, even if my brother was there I would have had a ball as well...'. I realised I should not ask anything and I returned from the field thinking about the way in which these children made sense of

the death of their father and brother. With the children, it became much more important that rather than asking about death which they may not comprehend directly, one must configure meaning through their expressions. From the way these children performed their daily activities, it was evident how these children understood loss and bereavement in daily life situations. In this way I was able to collect information that could explain the perceptions and perspectives of children towards death and grief.

Hence, throughout the research, it was obvious that navigating through different layers of information was complex, particularly while researching death and bereavement in the Nepali socio-cultural setting. However, it was possible to investigate the researched subject while incorporating insights drawn from anthropological discussions, which eventually helped to shape the data collection process. Moreover, multi-sited ethnography provided the strategy and the tools to establish purposeful relationships between myself as researcher and the researched subjects. At the same time it created avenues to connect the researched subjects at different sites to formulate a holistic argument through exploring socio-cultural and political formations within and outside the sites.

CHAPTER 4

Understanding Death in Post-Conflict Nepali Society

Introduction

The notion of death, when it comes to examination in religious, spiritual and social thought in Nepal, appears to be discussed across all historical periods and cultural levels. Several themes emerge, echoing a broader framework in which the meanings of death in post-conflict Nepali society appear useful. These meanings are expressed in various themes and idioms. Concepts around death are formulated from the daily life problems that it presents to people's minds, given their differences, in terms of experience of death and the systematic way in which an individual comes to terms with loss. Although primarily what determines the meaning of death is the context in which an individual formulates its meaning, articulation has typified the meaning in various different ways. To note a few, some suggest death to be a universal truth and accept it, while others see it as a tragedy that brings hardships to life and reject it. When death was articulated in the villages of Nepal, the concept was employed either with an acceptance or a rejection of death or was discussed in a contemplative sense. Those who accepted death tended to approve of it, whereas those who rejected it remained vulnerable to psychosocial and emotional needs. While views on the acceptance or rejection of death remained fixed, it was the pragmatism and self-definition of views that allowed the bereaved to explore their loss in a composite form.

The following chapter thus initially attempts to depict the meaning of death as expressed by the bereaved in various themes. The meaning of death is further articulated in their broad thrusts so as to critically discuss the meaning in which death can be understood. A typology of various stances and themes presents a framework in which to discuss the crude division between those who accept death and adapt to it in a broadly positive sense, those who completely reject death and become cynical of it and those who see death either as an opportunity for spiritual engagement through viewing it as transcendental or as a means to achieve self-actualisation. This leads to the conclusion that if death is to be understood in Nepali society it must be discussed in a holistic sense, inclusive of both subjective interpretation and objective handling of loss.

Conceptualising Death in Nepal

Holloway (2007, p. 52), based on an analysis of western literature, summarises a number of recurring and interrelated themes. She draws out the concepts and the meaning of death from within three broader perspectives and categorises it: first according to the positive view of death; second the negative view of death; and third, the dialectical approach to death. She argues that death can be meaningfully understood broadly through these three broader perspectives. Under the positive view of death category, she points to death as light; death as end; death as the only truly personal act; death as natural event and finally death as hope, whereas under the negative views of death category, she places death as darkness; death as passivity; and death as unnatural event. Under the dialectical approach she categorises death as transition; death as limit; death as

borderline situation; death and life together makes sense; and death as mystery. Some of these typologies present opposing positions; others are either complementary or overlapping with each other and appear at different points on a continuum (Lloyd 1995: Holloway elsewhere).

However, when these typologies are put to test in the context of Nepal, it does not really work to adopt 'positive' and 'negative' categories as described by Holloway. Rather than 'positive' and 'negative' views on death, data from the field suggests more of an acceptance of death and a sense of rejection of death, despite the fact that the categorisations of the positive and the negative views as described by Holloway seem somewhat identical to these in the first instance. Moreover, the category of 'dialectical approach' contradictory and several other idioms seem too incongruous to be placed under the same category. Western ways of understanding dying and bereavement as discussed by Holloway seem very individualistic, at least in their starting points, although they can be translated, and have been over the centuries, into Christian religions, and more recently into humanistic philosophical frameworks. Death in the first instance is understood as how it affects oneself. Ariès (1981) calls this 'my death' and 'death of the others'. This further suggests that the Western paradigm for understanding death does not capture the Nepalese worldview. The data from the field that I am going to discuss later in this chapter suggests that in the context of Nepal, the typology developed by Holloway is not entirely transferable, but it can gives some initial insights from which a typology of death could be considered and further expanded to a broader Eastern perspective on death.

On the other hand, an analysis of informants' accounts from Nepal suggests that the meaning of death is expressed in a holistic sense, which is conceived at different levels consisting of thinking, practice and the experiences of the bereaved. People initially articulate both sides of the argument, the personal and social, when death becomes of immediate personal concern, but ultimately they look for a solution to come out of the reality of death and loss. This further suggests that while being analytical, the bereaved continuously become contemplative and adhere to transcendental references to reframe the new reality after the loss. Hence, in the Nepali context, the death being canonised as dialectical is somewhat binary since expressions of the informants move beyond the dialectical and seek solutions. It seems that, although the dialectical approach is helpful in analysing perspectives, it leaves the bereaved perplexed whilst handling their grief on a daily basis. More than being dialectical, the informants appear contemplative, which I call a transcendental pragmatism that gives a way forward to self-actualise death and loss. By transcendental pragmatism, I mean the process in which a bereaved person engages himself in finding ways of making sense of the pain of death. This does mirror Holloway's dialectical category, but the vehicle for their transcendence differs in that it is overtly religious. The notion of Karma as expressed in terms of fate seems instrumental in defining the individual within the cosmos. This suggests that the underlying world view is a subsuming of the individual within the cosmos. From that underpinning, the concept of death can be discussed broadly in four categories:

- 1. Acceptance of death
- 2. Rejection of death
- 3. Transcending death
- 4. Death as self-actualisation

Drawing upon narratives from the field, a typology of death is presented below with further classifications.

Understanding of Death in Nepali Context – a Typology:

Concepts Meanings

Acceptance of Death

Death as strength Death gives strength and meaning to live on a

daily basis.

Death is a destiny It is a decided fate and a mystery to understand

until one dies.

Death is a natural phenomenon Timely death is a normal death.

Death is like a momentary sleep Death is like taking rest for a while to prepare

for a new life with new energy and freshness.

The human body is a dress and death is leaving

the dress and a transition to the next life.

Death is truth Death is the only reality. Life and death cannot

be separated. It is one of the two polarities of

life. Death is 'abasyambhabi' (inevitable).

Rejection of Death

Death as helplessness Death is an effect of 'papi jamana' (bad times)

that brings sadness.

Death as suffering Suffering and grief are felt within the heart of

the bereaved.

Death as tragedy Death is a tragedy for surviving dependents. It

is a loss on the part of others' being.

Death as destruction It is destruction of one's hope and desire to live

and a damage to the bereaved.

Death as fear Death disintegrates one's self-confidence and

fear of uncertainty overshadows.

Death as an accident Death also occurs due to mistakes.

Death is an end to the life Death is the limitation to one's expectations

process and achievements.

Death' is a demand of 'kaala' Time is decisive in terms of death and death is

(yama/time) seen as unnatural phenomenon. Unnatural

deaths (bikal/ akala mritu) are untimely deaths

and premature deaths, such as those resulting

from political violence.

Transcendental approach to Death

Death is beyond time Once one is born, he has to die. Whether you

fight or not, you die, just maybe a bit earlier or

later.

Death is the whole of human Death is all about thoughts and thoughts

consciousness leading towards awareness of the ultimate

reality.

Death is a glimpse of the divine Death is only a vehicle through which one can

go through different experiences and prepare to

dissolve into 'brahman' - the one.

Death as Self-actualisation

Death as revenge In violent situations, the mind functions in

anger and rage, and revenge leads to killing

others. Hence power and glory for the self

flourishes.

Death as one's own will/choice One is able to make a choice over death for the

greater benefit of human beings.

Death as freedom/liberation Death is seen as a generative power.

Death as martyrdom Death is understood in terms of sacrifice,

prestige and pride and only brave people die in

the real sense.

Although I have presented a schema to articulate the meaning of death in a characterised form, the meaning of death does not conform to the schema alone. In addition, to a certain extent, it is dependent on overlapping views. The meaning is expounded in a wider, diversified frame of reference.

This diversification is clear from the views of the informants that their understanding of the death of their loved ones is radically at odds with their loved ones' views of their own death, and which is particularly evident in the case of martyrs. For instance, elderly parents of martyrs presented the worldview of devout Hindus, while their son or daughter followed the path of a militant Maoist, and their immediate dependents, particularly the wife and children, were nominally Hindus but were primarily concerned with their welfare in the here-and-now. As a result, views of life and death within the extended family often clashed with each other, particularly in the event of an actual death. Taking this idea forward, one may broadly classify the above schematised typology into two broader categories: one is of those who are contemplating their own death and the other of those who are bereaved. The diversification of worldviews in the villages of Nepal also varied in accordance with gender and generation. Nevertheless, being aware of the diversification of views to some extent seems confusing; and lends itself to a potential conflation of the death and the bereavement. This in turn leads to ambiguity; however this is necessary for understanding the complexity of multiple positions and perspectives.

Acceptance of Death

In the views of some informants, death is seen as an episode in the life process which gives strength and a new meaning to the rest of the family members, which enables them to live on a daily basis. For them, within the 'cycle of life and death', accepting death is important. Several of my informants articulated similar views. For instance, one of my informants explained:

"After the incident of death, my family had gone through dark times. But now the situation is improving slowly. For the deceased, it was his fate decided by the god to die like that. We have learned to move forward without him. This feeling is helping us to accept death." (Case 16 Bara)

In another occasion, the brother of a deceased person stated:

"For first few months it was hard to accept his [the brother's] death but as time has passed we have been able to accept it. Death is a reality that one must accept whether it is a normal death or a violent one." (Case 9 Bara)

In another case, a bereaved father described death metaphorically. Here, life and death was equated with the time span between sunrise and sunset in a day. For the ageing father, death was like approaching towards the sunset. He expressed it as follows:

"My time is gone now. My life is slowly moving towards the sunset (*astaundo surya jasto*) and very soon it will be night for me. My life span is moving in a downward direction. For me, passing this time happily is important as long as I live. Death is the only reality that one has to come terms with." (Case 1 Rukum)

Death in this sense is understood as a natural phenomenon and timely death is a normal one. An awareness that everyone has to die once remained as a core to the individual's consciousness. This gives an understanding of the fundamental reality of life that is death – the only reality. Hence, it is equated with the truth. Though death is seen as the truth on a level of thinking and sense perception that one can learn about while taking references from others' deaths, but death as a truth appears beyond people's experiences; a truth of life; but yet a mystery, a decided fate and a destiny. A destiny of which one does not know anything until one dies. Therefore, death is all about thoughts and thoughts leading towards awareness of ultimate reality. Hence, the individuals seemed to remain affirmative about death, even though they could not apprehend their own death.

'Mrytu' (death): 'sarbabhut yathartha' (ultimate reality) – the truth

On spiritual and religious levels death is understood as the only reality of life and therefore must be received with acceptance. One of my informants, a Hindu mystic, had renounced his family and lived alone entertaining visitors occasionally during the day. He lived in a hut on the ridge of a hill surrounded by the dense forest outside the Kathmandu valley. He described the meaning of death in these terms:

"Death and life are two polarities of life. It is like two poles as birth and death, like the North and South Pole. Death is 'abasyambhabi' (inevitable). Death is part of one's life; they are not separate from one another. They are one. This world is governed by the principles of 'duita samsara' (dual world), two opposite polarities - negative and positive, east and west, etc. If there is birth, there is death. Birth and death are not separate from life. Death is like a momentary sleep to take a rest for a while and to prepare for a new life and gather new energy with new freshness to start a new life. It is like a sleep in the night, as it gives new energy to initiate a new day. Mrytu (death) is like a condition of taking rest and birth is the beginning of a new life, so it is not different and separate. 'Life' (jeevan) is for the 'world' (jagat); world is for 'God' (iswar)."

This understanding explores an optimistic view of death by suggesting that the death of a person is in fact nothing but a way to go forward through a variety of experiences, one after another, until one is soaked in experience and becomes mature and aware of one's own existence. Hence, death forms a part of existence. And to 'self-actualise' one's death, an individual must live life in its totality. The three ingredients, 'Life', 'World' and 'God' as suggested by the mystic, together allow existence to flourish. In this sense, object is for

subject and subject is for beyond. This suggests that worldly things are for the 'atma' (human soul); the 'atma' is for the 'parmatama' (god); the sakti (energy) is for the sataya (truth) and the sataya (truth) is for the 'param' (ultimate) and for the samadhan (solution). One needs to go through this realisation to understand what death is. For that, one needs to go through different processes of experience. This is possible only when one's 'atma' (soul) is mature. Death in this sense appears as if only a vehicle by which one can go through several experiences while taking different bodies one after another. It is through continuous experiences that the 'chetana' (awareness) become alive. It is this 'chetana' that goes through several experiences of 'mrytu' (death). And, therefore, in reality the body dies and 'atma' remains.

It is the vital energy – the 'soul' – that is important, which keeps on changing its frame as different bodies; the consciousness – the vital energy –, the soul remains the same. This mystic's narratives regarding how one may experience or experiment with death is derived from his own realisation of the self in relation to death. Obviously, for the mystic to frame the meaning of death, it is not only based on his own experiences but also the meaning that he derives from the Hindu religious and spiritual traditions. Meanings are drawn exclusively based on classical traditions, the mythological and philosophical texts. From *Vedic* scriptures (*Vedas*) to *Upanishads* and *Puranas*, all are dedicated to achieving immortality in one form or another by providing pathways to deal with human consciousness. Vedic sacrifices were designed primarily to turn away death temporarily and preach for the attainment of a full life span; and then seek to conserve the dead being's consciousness after death

(Blackburn 1985). For instance, the hymns of the Rig-Veda, addressed to the God of Fire who burns a dead body, read: "Carry him, O Fire, in your arms gently, give him a perfect body, a bright body, carry him where the fathers live, where there is no more sorrow, where there is no more death" (Vivekananda 1902, p. 23). This clearly suggests that a man is a degeneration of what he was and a human body is perceived as a container that contains all possibilities of life and death. The Hindu hymns like 'aham brahmasmi' and 'shivoham' imply that all the gods and the whole of cosmos are present in a human body, a notion which is mentioned in the Garuda Purana, which Parry (1982) thematically names the 'homology' that is held to exist between body and cosmos. A similar example is given in the Kalika Purana, in which in a ritual, a worshipper begins by symbolically effecting his own death, assuming his death as the death of the world; and, while re-creating his body, he subsequently reconstitutes the universe. Body and cosmos are thus equated as one. Hence, it is of significance to know both the impermanence of the human body and the immense possibilities contained within it. While, on the one hand, a body is seen as a vehicle, to self-actualise one's consciousness, on the other hand, the notion of death is viewed as illusionary.

In Hindu religious thought, death is understood as the transcendence from this world to the cosmos – a more fundamental level of existence – that of Being. The perceived real world is $m\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ (illusion) in reality and is temporal and chaotic in its very nature. Reality is only real to the extent that the individual is ignorant of pure existence (Kaushik 1976). Similarly, views of death as a transition have been discussed by Campbell (1978), which he calls 'an organic

life cycle transition' (p. 268). Death in the Hindu sense is the connecting tool in which the soul is connected to its creator, the divine. This is evident from the views of the mystic where he clearly points out what death mean in terms of the conscious soul and the body, and the paradoxical nature of *duita* samsara²⁷ in which death remains a puzzle for people in general.

In this respect, either death can be conceptualised as a transition to spirituality or understanding death during life can be seen as the gateway to spirituality. Death in this sense is 'life itself' and, therefore, it is necessary for an individual to master the art of dying to understand death. If one needs to realise that death is the only reality, one must first be able to visualise the connectivity of the body and the divine. At the same time, one must also be able to make a distinction between the dual nature of the *samsara* (world) and the oneness of the soul and the opposition of the two. It is in this incongruity that death becomes a tool to adjoin the worldly to the divine. Hence, on a spiritual dimension, it is the realisation of what death is that is crucial for self-realisation. As discussed above, the Hindu religious thoughts too, accommodate similar notions while discussing death. Khare (1967) points out that in Hindu religious practices one gives considerable importance to

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^{27 .} Samsara is the primary tenet of both Hinduism and Buddhism that is first used in Upanishad and later elaborated by the Buddha himself. In popular Hindu culture, Samsara refers to 'the world', which accommodates the various worldly activities that occupy ordinary human beings. It is this Samsara in which the various sufferings are experienced; or where lives the unsettled and agitated mind through which reality is perceived. Hence, the concept of Samsara is closely associated with the belief that one continues to be born and reborn in various realms. Furthermore, in the Hindu religious sense, Samsara is both mind and soul and therefore the whole cosmos. Samsara when perceived in terms of action – the action of entering and moving away from bodies – the continuum of birth and rebirth, belongs to a mind that actually moves. On the other hand, if Samsara is seen within the gamut of experiencing pain and pleasure, it belongs to the soul, since it is the soul that experiences the pleasure and pain and, therefore, Samsara is both a creative force and a destructive one. Ref. Radhakrishnan. 1999, P.149-150.

forecasting the timing of death. It is important, as awareness at the time of death might lead one either to be released from the cycle of birth and death – *Moksha* or to 'bondage' – *Bandhan*. This is also a prevalent practice among the Buddhists. Malinowski, taking reference from the tribes of the Melanesian of New Guinea, contends that the practice of mortuary rituals is used as a tool to transform the dead into the sacred and the other worldly. Malinowski considers such cultural and religious practices as a functional response to death, whereby those who are deceased negate the idea of a final ending. They thus stick to the belief in a spiritual life after death by imagining the salvation of an eternal spirit from the visibly decaying body. Thus religion gives people a comforting sense of immortality (Malinowski 1954, discussed in Robben ed. 2004).

Timely death and untimely death

In another instance, one of my informants, a widow, categorically differentiated between the concept of timely death and untimely death, and construed a somewhat similar meaning of death to that discussed above. She stated:

"Everybody has to die once. Even if I had not been faced with death, I am aware of it. The difference is only whether one died in 'kaalagati' (naturally) or 'akaalgati' (unnaturally). Death is inevitable. One may die early or a bit later. It is a matter of time. Once one is born he has to die. Whether you fight or not you die, just may be a bit earlier or a bit later." (Case 18 Rukum)

In this case, it seems that while thinking about loss and death she came to a point where thinking was being transformed into understanding. This indicates the fact that the way in which death is handled in the family and society ultimately constitutes the attitude towards death. It is important to note that in this case, death had broken her relationships in a way that necessitated a reconstruction of psycho-social transition. While being able to differentiate natural and unnatural death, she eventually developed an awareness towards death. At one level, it is the fact of death that my informant seems aware of, and on the other hand it is the death that reorders her relationship towards her departed husband. An image of her husband, and her attachment to the image, allowed her to understand the reality and to live on a daily basis. For her, the image of her husband remained alive, and through this she regained the vigour to live her life.

The narratives discussed above suggest that the meaning of death may vary according to the individual's experiences and the conditions that may cause a death to take place. For example, one such condition could be death due to torture and violence. One becomes fearful of death because one is not aware of his/her own 'chetana' – awareness. And, therefore, thinking of one's own and others' deaths brings 'dukkha' – sorrow. Death, therefore, is a transition in the life cycle. Although, the way in which the mystic defined the meaning of death may not be the same as that experienced by another informant in which she had intercepted death, she was nonetheless able to understand death. For the mystic, to interrogate death was possible. He could make the distinction between 'samsara' (world) and one's attachment to it. For him, detachment

from 'samsara' was possible only by locating himself in a hut, in the forest. As a result, he could separate himself from the desires of worldly beings, which he could do consciously by looking at them from a distance. However, this is not to suggest that a conscious self-examination is only possible while living in solitude in the forest. Because, for example, on the other hand, for another informant, the realisation and awareness of death was a product of her struggle to live a life in the absence of her husband. Similarly, people in the villages in general may not have that luxury and their daily living reality might differ to that of the mystic. In a number of cases, even though the deceased's family members demonstrated somewhat similar views to those discussed by the mystic, they still framed their own meaning. In both the cases above discussed, they seem engaged in a continuous self examination but in two different environments.

Death: a hope for a bereaved

To a large extent, the meaning of death drawn was also based upon the hope with which the remaining family members could restart a life afresh. In the following particular case and in many others, it was expressed that hope for the future and survival measures after the loss remained a primary motivation for meaningfully acknowledging the death and loss. An old grandfather, whom I always found either silently listening to people or lost in his own thoughts, narrated his tragic story in the light of hope. Even after the tragic loss of his two adult sons in two separate violent encounters, the loss of his wife as a result of the unbearable traumatic loss of their sons, and lately losing his

younger daughter, the only bread earner for the family, due to sickness, he remained convinced that there was hope for the future. He explained:

"I had a big family, four daughters and two sons. I had enough but the enemy took away my two sons and killed them. My daughter who used to take care of us after the death of my sons also died after a long sickness. I am now left with two young granddaughters and an only grandson who is just 8 years old; now studying in the 3rd standard in a residential home in Kathmandu organised for the children of conflict victims. I miss him all the time. He is still young. I feel sad when I think of all that. Everything disappeared due to the tragedy. It is like the old saying that the meat which is slipped from your mouth is much more valuable and precious as well as undeniable than what you have left in your plate. Nobody knows about the future but I fear it.... Life is always a process; a never ending process until one dies. At times we say this is my son, my girl. Take care of them, 'til they become adult, in hope that they would take care of us when we are old. It is this hope that keeps the people moving from one stage to another." (Case 8 Rukum)

In this case, it was the responsibility of taking care of his grandchildren and the hope that he had in his grandchildren of him carrying forward the next generation that allowed this old man to fight the odds of life. Although the dichotomy prevails and he travels in between the difficulties of life and a hope

for future, this narrative suggests that the grief from the loss that he must have gone through has layers of expression. Even though it is limited only to one part of his life story hitherto, it does reflect the way in which the loss reconstitutes meaning for the remaining family members whereby he represents himself as a man who has to take care of his grandchildren. It is hope of future that is productive here. This opens up an avenue in which one may explore and rethink death in a way that is not only limited to one's grief. In this case, it was the responsibility; it was the hope; it was also the livelihood issues of the remaining family members and the socio-cultural patterns of the village. One might suggest here that although this is not the only frame of reference in which a person reasons out the meaning of death, it also contributes to an overall transition from a state of grief to normalcy. Death and bereavement in this case are not only limited in terms of acceptance but also seen in light of the hope that has contributed to formulating the meaning of life in a greater way.

'Mrytu' is 'kaala' – defined fate

Another vital concept that cropped up was fate. A majority of the bereaved members viewed death in relation to fate. For instance, one informant explained the story of the day before his son died. According to him, his son had gone to India to his in-laws' house, where he had some party (Maoist) work to finish. He was an active Maoist member, a strong man, and a trained cadre for guerrilla warfare. He was an active member of the Maoists' armed force wing. After returning from India, he visited all the places where he used to spend time in the past. He went to his rented house in a nearby town, which

used to be one of his hideouts. He met his colleagues in another town and stopped at different places meeting people with whom he was close; finally he returned home in the late afternoon. Next morning he was rounded up by a group of armed forces and killed ruthlessly in the outskirts of the village. In this case, the parents of the deceased viewed the death of their son as his fate decided for him by God. His parents believed that had it not been his fate, he would have been stopped by several people on his way back home; he would have stayed back and would have escaped the 'bloody death'. (Case 4 Bara)

In another instance, a father of the deceased talked about his son's bad fate. Ramsingh was chased, caught, taken away and finally killed by army men and left on the banks of 'Sanovery' river near Banphekot, Rukum, an adjoining VDC of Syalpakha, a neighbouring village of Ching. The bereaved father explained the story. In the early morning, the father of the deceased learned from others that the army men had come to raid the village and that they had gone to the 'Mathilo Ching'. In fear of what would happen, the father told his two sons to go to the jungle to collect fodder for the animals so that they could escape encountering the army men. He thought that if his son went to collect fodder he would not be viewed as Maoist cadre and would be spared. Ramsingh, along with his younger brother had therefore gone to collect fodder in the nearby jungle to escape the army men. Unfortunately, they were caught by army men while escaping to the jungle.

"I thought that if they [his sons] went to collect fodder, they would escape the army and would be able to save their lives. In those days, the army used to raid the village and had randomly killed people in the area. Hence, the villagers were afraid of them. The moment they [the villagers] heard of the army, young men from the village would run towards the jungle to save their lives. Even a little noise coming out of a shutting door would make the villagers feel afraid and men would jump out of their houses in fear." (Case 13 Rukum)

During the time of conflict, death was also equated with violence and fear. In this instance, it was fear of death by violent means that propelled Ramsingh to follow his father's advice. Hence, in fear, death was inescapable. This suggests an interesting paradox in which the mind appears to have played a role. And thus it was fear that invited death. However, according to his father, it was not only fear but also 'fate' and defined 'destiny' that ended his son's life. In reference to fate, Ramsingh's father gave the example of Ramsingh's friend who escaped three bullets and avoided the army men the same day that Ramsingh was killed. But Ramsingh's father lamented:

"They [the army] killed my son while he had gone to collect fodder. I thought he would be alright but they killed my son. Both the brothers were captured by the army, the youngest one severely beaten up, nearly to death while Ramsingh was killed. This time, again the army men had captured twelve people from the village, though they left nine others after abuse and torture. But they took Ramsingh with them along with two other villagers and killed

them. Even my wisdom could not save my son's life. If the *jamadoot* (god of death) surrounds a man then whatever one may do one cannot protect oneself. One will die. But if that 'kaala' (time/jamadoot) has not come then one will survive. The 'Jamadoot' (god of death) had surrounded Ramsigh otherwise he would have survived. I got compensation and we both, husband and wife, used the money to do 'dharama' (pilgrimage) so that a prayer could be offered to settle the ill fate of Ramsingh in the next life." (Case 13 Rukum)

In this case, the parents were able to get compensation money. It was with the compensation money that Ramshingh's parents could afford a pilgrimage and visited Kathmandu for the first time. For the parents, it was their departed son who was indirectly taking care of them. They appeared proud that their son was now a martyr who gave his life for the nation. This death was perceived as Ramsingh's fate that was pre-destined. It was suggested that one's fate decides much about one's destiny and life. In this sense, death is determined by an unchangeable 'karma' – a free will that is predestined and independent of choices and change. For the father, his son's past karma became important to understand his death. In the Hindu philosophy, karma is often viewed as a strictly rationalistic system based on a clear cause and effect relationship. It is determined as effect, but it is creative as cause (Potter 1964; Wadia 1955; Sharma 1973; Rechenbach 1988; Kent 2009). Relying on one's karma can thus enable the individual to anticipate and respond more effectively. In this way a tragic death finds a readymade answer. Death in this case suggests a

subsuming of the notion of karma under fate and destiny, since an individual finds its place within the principles of the cosmos.

However, in contrast, the modern Western mind challenges the idea of fate as derived from 'karma', contesting 'karma' as a deterministic worldview, in the sense that 'karma' flourishes within the rules of institutions, and is therefore dogmatic, which is problematic. To conceptualise death in the Western world, the work of the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, is often taken as a starting point. Holloway (2007) has discussed Heidegger with reference to Macquarrie (1973). For Holloway, Heidegger provides an outlook for understanding 'how death strips away all illusions from life but leaves us with nothing in which to face the cold fact of death' (p. 52). Holloway gives credit to Heidegger for exploring what it means to be human, to be mortal, suggesting that only because of the possibility of 'not being' can 'being' be defined and potential within existence be realised (p.53). Heidegger claims that human existence is constituted by awareness within the human being of the knowledge of death and anxiety pertaining to it. Ricoeur argues that this idea is fatalistic and therefore problematic. Ricoeur (p.183) points out that according to Heidegger: "each person transmits from him- or herself to him- or herself the resources that he or she may 'draw' from his or her past. In this way each of us receive him- or herself as fate.. And thanks to repetition as fate, retrospection is reconnected to anticipation, and anticipation is rooted in retrospection." For Heidegger, fate shapes our destiny and the fact of death is a prerequisite for realising and fulfilling our real potential.

A close or near encounter with death might avail the possibility of bestowing meaning in life. Ramsingh's father and his failed wisdom to save his son is connected with the fate and the 'karma' of Ramsingh, rather than the guilt of not being able to save his son. In the Western experience, this would be looked on as a guilt that might lead to a prolonged grief. Since fate can be connected with religion and spirituality, grief becomes easier to handle. Fate and destiny provide a spiritual as well as a psychological tool for coming to terms with death. In a philosophical sense, fate thus bridges the gap of the transition of death. Therefore, for the bereaved it appeared futile to attempt to change what fate has written for Ramsingh. In this sense, the discussions echo an 'acceptance of death'. A continuous contemplation of death eventually leads to the realisation that life and death are embodied in one being. That is presumably dependent on fate. The explanation lies first in the 'timely death' (kaal gati le marne) and second the 'un-timely death' (akal/bikal ma marne). The timely death is perceived as a normal one, that is, deaths occurring in old age (umer pugera) that may be as a result of sickness and from non violent means, whereas the untimely death includes all unnatural and premature deaths, such as those resulting from political violence. Hence, in a broader spiritual and philosophical sense, death was largely discussed in positive terms while accepting it as being predesigned.

Rejection of Death

In opposition to the acceptance of death, intense negative views also prevailed, indicating a rejection of death counter to the underlying culture and worldviews. Those were from people experiencing ongoing distress and

disturbance who explicitly expressed their sorrow and hopelessness after their loss, showing a sense of rejection of death. Death at times was seen as a helpless situation that was an outcome of a 'papijamana' (bad times) in which the Nepali people lived. Furthermore, this 'papijamana' was seen as a product of an unjust social and political process. It was seen as a politically constructed phenomenon that brought sadness to the survivors. Contextually, this in turn produced continued suffering that was felt within one's heart in relation to others in the community. Death was thus a tragedy and an unimagined loss on the part of the bereaved member's own 'being'.

In such cases, death came as a destruction of the rest of the family members' daily lives. In turn, it destroyed one's hope and desire which further damaged the wellbeing of the surviving members. Fear became a recurring theme in which the rest of the family members had to live their remaining life. In a true sense, death brought a sudden collapse to their stability and fear overshadowed. In many cases, death was seen as an accident without recovery for the rest of the family members.

Akaala mrytu (untimely death)

Regarding death during the conflict, for most of the bereaved, 'akaala mrytu' (untimely death) was a synonym for defining death. 'Kaala mrytu' (timely death) and 'akaala mrytu' (untimely death) were the two predominant broad differentiations in which perceptions regarding death emerged. The parents of Tapta expounded the notion of 'akaala mrytu' in a greater detail. Tapta was killed in Khara's (Rukum) war that took place between security forces and the

Maoist militia where he served as a commander of the people's militia. Tapta was survived by his wife and daughter. However after Tapta's death, his wife eloped with another man. Tapta's five year old daughter lived with her grandparents at the time of my fieldwork. Death is what Tapta's parents called 'kaala' (yama/time). They articulated it thus:

"It is *kaala* (time) that is decisive in terms of death. The time had come for my child in some sense. For a person who was young and would have lived longer, for him it was the time to eat enough; have a good living and live longer, therefore for him it was not *'kaala* (yama/time)' but it was a *'dusman'* (enemy). His death occurred in *'bikal'* (was untimely). It was an *'akaala mrytu'* (unnatural death)." (Case 15 Rukum)

For the bereaved parents, their son would not have met such a fate if it had been a timely death. Death here is talked of as 'kaala' which signifies 'dark time'. It was the power of inauspicious time that brought 'mrytu' [death], which was beyond the people's control. Nobody could help protect themselves at that moment. Time was almighty. Fate was framed within the limitations of time, which appeared as a dreadful mystery that brought death. Tapta being a young man who did not enjoy his life to its fullest, for him death was not the 'kaala' but an enemy. For Tapta's mother, it was the enemy, a security man, who brought death to her child. Paradoxically, she argues that death is a predetermined fate whilst on the other hand she replaces 'kaala' [time] with 'dusman' [enemy]. The cause of the death was inflicted by a 'dusman',

therefore the death was not a death that occurred as per the 'kaalagati' [natural]; rather it was an 'akaal mrytu' [unnatural death]. For Tapta's parents, aside from the fact that death is a universal reality, the death was also a perceived reality for leading a meaningful life. In referring to the time in which Tapta was killed, his parents called it 'papijamana' (bad times). Therefore, in certain contexts, it was people's behaviour that produced the seeds of a changing concept of death and dying.

Tapta's mother further explained:

"Whatever it may be, the way in which death occurred left me inconsolable. Whether we call it a fate or a destiny, live with the reality or ignore it, whatever it is, I am not able to be with it. This is *papijamana* (the age of sinners). What to do with children and grand children? It is 'the times' that have created all the mess. It is the age of sinners, the '*kali yuga*'²⁸ – that is why those who had lived peacefully and happily were displaced and left in tears." (Case 15 Rukum)

For Tapta's mother, the death of Tapta was not only the product of 'kaala' (yama/time) or the 'dusman (enemy)' but it was also a product of the times, 'the age of the sinners', the 'kali yuga'. For her, death was unfair as it took

^{28.} Kali Yuga denotes one of the four ages of cyclic notion of time. In human civilization, the notion of Yuga is explained in ancient Hindu mythology and has identified four major Yugas such as Satya Yuga, Dwapar Yuga, Treta Yuga and Kali Yuga. In the villages of Nepal, Kali Yuga is especially viewed as a problematic time in which all human values and concerns for fellow human beings remain at an all time low. This is the time in which the ethics and values of a society are overpowered by selfish individual desires. This is reflected through violence and suffering.

away a man who was supposed to live longer. It was not only 'kaala' [here she means fate] or the 'enemies', but 'the times' that were powerful, and in which wrong doing had overshadowed the ethics of life. Hence it was not only the time – the moment of the incident, but also the times – the society in that period of time, which was instrumental in death. Therefore, the time in which they lived was an age of sinners. More than the individuals, the passage of time and the space was important as an explanation for her. It was due to this reason that an individual's own self agency was in crisis. It was this passage of bad times that nurtured criminality and violence and eventually resulted in a large numbers of deaths. Hence, death and dying were meaningful in a context where the governing elites and revolutionaries in the Nepali world were seen as wicked. The fate appeared demonic in that it brought more deaths and suffering, but it was deserved.

In another instance, the nature of 'akaala mrytu' brought immense tragedy for the bereaved, and grief was continual. One of my participants, a widow, whose husband worked as a school teacher, in the village, expressed it as follows:

"For me, the death of my husband was a 'bipattai' (tragedy). Untimely death came in between (adhamarma- death came in middle age). Kukur [dogs] came and killed my husband in his early middle age (adhijeevan). We were not stealing things from others. We used to work and manage our lives. Why has this happened to me? When I think, I feel sorrow. So many people died in the conflict. For those families, it would never be the same again. The

families who had lost their family members have to go through lots of problems. See, if somebody dies with health problems there is a space to prepare yourself. The family will even put their full efforts into getting medical treatment for the patient and will be aware of the situation. But in our case, they (the enemy) took him (husband) from home and killed him when he was young and active and helping the family to move. As a result, dealing with the fact of the loss became unbearable for me. People die, but when good people in good health are taken away and killed then it is tough to be consoled. You know whoever would go to the 'satta' (government) my 'satta' (establishment) is gone. I feel angry at times, but what to do? I even feel angry when the Maoists come to visit. I get annoyed." (Case 16 Rukum)

In this case, death was an invariable sorrow, an everlasting suffering. The loss of the individual was not to be recovered. For the widow, death meant the death of a part of her own self, which she could not compensate with anything else. The widow's respect for authority was questioned as a result of the loss of her husband. 'Akaal mrytu' featured as a loss of sense of authority over oneself. In the wake of loss, both a sense of authority over the self, as well as a respect for authority in the community were diminished. 'Akaal mrytu' was thus instrumental in creating a vulnerability of the bereaved family in the community and therefore a sense of rejection of death persisted. This occurred not only in this case, but in several other cases, where widows responded

similarly. Bereaved widows reflected similar feelings to construct the meaning of death.

In particular, the loss adversely impacted at two broader levels; the first on widows' psychological and personal wellbeing and the second on their socio-economic wellbeing. Loss in this context was a tragedy beyond their control. Amalgamation of the two, in turn threatened their overall existence altogether. In the European context, Holloway (2007), in her typology of death, categorises such deaths as darkness. Holloway identifies death as tragedy which destroys the meaning in life. This also suggests that when death conforms to its negative sense it displays a similar essence irrespective of the place, the time and the context, and a tone of rejection of death prevails. On this occasion, undeserved death brought 'dukkha' to the bereaved widow. A fragmentation of the personal self as well as of the family equilibrium prevailed and a 'sense of madness' emerged. Hence death, when discussed in terms of rejection, led to a disintegration of the meaning system altogether.

Death as an inflicted sorrow

Similarly, the close kin of martyrs also envisaged death not only in terms of martyrdom as propagated by the Maoists but also as a sorrow inflicted on the bereaved. For the bereaved, the concept of martyrdom more often only served as a face saver in society. Consequently, killing and sacrificing life were questioned. Distrust towards the Maoists and the Maoist revolution was apparent. They also questioned the ulterior motives behind the revolution. Mangali displayed somewhat similar sentiments while grieving over her son's

death. Her son was killed in a counterassault of security forces during his time as a commander of the operation in Khara, Rukum. She said:

"My child used to say now it is either 'ki mrytu, ki mukti' (death or liberation) for him. 'Death' came for him, not 'liberation'. It was death only. During the revolution people used to use slogans like 'ki mrytu ki mukti'. It is only after death that one would get liberation. But for those who died, was that the meaning of 'mukti' (liberation) for them? For those who managed to escape death it was 'mukti' (liberation). The Maoists talked of 'mukti' in terms of equality, equal opportunity and better living conditions for all. They argued that this liberation of the people was not possible without fighting out the existing socio-political structure, the feudal system and the reactionaries. And fighting was only possible by spilling blood and laying down lives. But for me it was the death of my son. I did not experience 'mukti'. Maybe for him it was 'mukti' from this life. But now we are left in trouble. We are experiencing suffering. It was this Maoist slogan 'ki mritu ki mukti' that united people in the villages. People were persuaded to fight the reactionaries and feudal system. In the process, some lost their lives and others enjoyed liberation. For us it was an irreparable loss." (Case 15 Rukum)

When asked about the phrase, 'ki mrytu ki mukti' (the slogan of "death or freedom") a majority of the bereaved expressed similar feelings. In Mangli's

terms, death cannot be replaced with liberation. For her, liberation is found in living everyday life with full energy and without bondage or discrimination. Mangli contests the view of sacrifice as liberation. In the context of the Maoist revolution she articulates sacrifice in limited terms that are confined to the physical world. Her sense of 'mukti' does not allow a person to leave others in misery and sorrow. Hence, for her, death of her son was more a suffering than a liberation. This suggests that sacrificing one's life was equated with liberation and was accepted on the promise of well being for future generations. Sacrificing life was equated with a prosperous life for the bereaved, diametrically opposite to the views of sacrifice of the Hindu religious texts. Moreover, an asymmetry in terms of death as martyrdom, as discussed by Lecomte-Tilouine (2006) seems contradictory when it comes to the underlying meaning and perception of the Hindu worldviews and the Maoist's ideology and the perception of the liberation grasped by the bereaved. Hence death was meaningful not only in terms of making a sacrifice for a better cause but also in return for assuring a better life for the bereaved. In the absence of any such assurance of a physically better life, a rejection of death resulted and suffering therefore continued.

Death as 'an accident'

There were also cases when people in the villages lost their lives in an undesirable incident, which a bereaved person termed an accident. The death of Gobindbahadur in Bara (case no.10), or of Deep (case no. 3) in Rukum, were accidents. Gobindbahadur was apprehended as a Maoist by security forces whilst he was on his way back home from Kaliya riding his bullock cart.

He was mistaken by security forces for his younger brother, who was a real Maoist, and they shot him dead. In the case of Deep, he blew himself up by touching a detonated bomb flag accidently. The bereaved family members see these cases as accidents that took place due to ignorance, which they also categorised as 'akaala mrytu'.

On another occasion, the father of Manbahadur (Case no. 10 Rukum), saw his son's death as an accident. He placed the blame on the reckless behaviour of the Maoists and called the Maoists fake revolutionaries. In this instance, it appears that it was primarily Maoists that were viewed as responsible for provoking security forces into raids and killing in the village. In particular, on this occasion, death took place out of fear. Suspicion led to fear; fear blocked conscience and transformed into death. The fear was obvious. In the villages of Rukum, the Maoists and the security men were enemies of one another. Any young man, if seen in the village by the security forces, was immediately viewed as a Maoist, whereas any stranger who visited the village was looked upon with suspicion and either labelled as a spy of the security forces or a security man himself. It was a tactical aim of the strategy of the Maoists as well as of the security forces to radicalise people in the villages and towns. In this case, the fear that the man might be a Maoist led to the shooting, costing the life of Manbahadur's son. The father of Manbahadur expressed anger towards the Maoists even though his son was killed by the security men. When I asked how he was doing, he vented his anger with rage:

"I do not care. I feel sad and drink. What to do? I am not able to die. (...). It was the Maoists and Prachanda (Maoist's leader) who taught the people to steal and fight with each other. It was due to this reason that I lost my son. Those who have a couple of sons are still ok if unfortunately they lose one of them. But I lost my only son. I do not know now what will happen to me and my wife. My son was neither a Maoist nor a government supporter. We were working in our fields and managing our lives. Initially my son was targeted by the Maoists when he was working in an EFA care Nepal project. I paid Rs. 15,000 to release him from Maoist captivity. Later he left the job and worked as a school teacher in the village. He had just started this new job. Previously he had also been taken away by army men while he was studying. Again, that time I bribed Rs 700 to the army men to get my son back. Eventually, he was killed by army men. In fact, he had gone to take a shower and wash his clothes at a nearby tap. When he was returning from the tap with his clean clothes he was randomly shot dead by the army men. The man who had fired bullets at my son was suspended later. But what does it matter? Even if he was punished with death my son was not going to return. My son was killed. I am done. I do not know what to do. Now either I get drunk or stay home by myself." (Case 10 Rukum)

It is indicative of the reality that life has its own force, which is decisive when death is measured in terms of accident. Although Manbahadur's death was

accidental it had an immense impact on the wellbeing of his father. The sociopolitical context and the episode in which Manbahadur was killed appeared beyond comprehension. Manbahadur being the only son, his subsequent violent death suddenly dismantled a once cohesive family. It is understandable that in the absence of another male child, his parents were left in disarray and a process of healing and recovery did not start. That would have only been possible in the presence of another surviving son. This led to their rejection of death, resulting in continuous suffering rather than moving forward. The Maoists and the security men had both targeted Manbahadur on previous occasions but somehow Manbahadur's father had been able to protect his son. But when it was an accident, Manbahadur's father was unable to save his son's life. In other words, it was the reckless behaviour on the part of security men and the Maoists that costed innocent lives, and the loss of which nobody had any answers for. The meaning of death in such situations was nothing but the pain and suffering that Manbahadur's father had described. In such cases, death was disastrous and described with distress.

In Manbahadur's father's terms, it was a sudden loss without any prior warning. This loss was not a premeditated event, and therefore was a disastrous one compared to occasions when villagers were taken away from the home purposely, tortured and killed. Attachment to his son has resulted in a prolonged grief for the father. Continued grief advanced into a sense of isolation and meaninglessness in his life. Death in this sense emerged as 'meaningless' and was contested by isolating oneself from others as a mode of

protest. A sense of meaninglessness, arising out of death of a loved one seems to have pushed the bereaved to live an isolated life.

Transcendental approach to Death

Data from the field also suggest another category beyond the acceptance and rejection of death, which has its grounding in the social and cultural practices that I call the transcendental approach to death. In the western perspective, Holloway (2007) has talked about a dialectical approach to death that somewhat mirrors what, in Nepali context, I call the transcendental approach. This is where, through constant contemplation on death, ordinary people come to formulate practical solutions to come out of grief and loss. I call it transcendental also because death in this sense indicates an opportunity for optimism and hope. It points out the possible adaptive measures that the bereaved can explore and their significance for living a meaningful life. Death, when viewed as transcendental, itself becomes a tool for contemplation, and, therefore, in the light of death a totality of life can be perceived. However, to a large extent, the transcendental approach to death complements the dialectical view that the bereaved make sense out of their pain and a sense of acceptance of death prevails. This in return shapes the individual's behaviour in the wake of loss. Hence, the way in which people construct meaning out of death while engaging in various religious and cultural practices first informs and finally structures an individual's behaviour, attitudes and practices.

From this perspective, it is not only the understanding of death that is important and that requires either philosophical or experiential underpinnings,

but it is also essential to understand the socio-cultural and religious practices in which death is dealt within a family and a community. Further, along with the meaning drawn from incidents and experiences of violent death, socio-cultural and religious practices also helped in consolidating the meaning of death. In particular, meaning is drawn directly from the religious and cultural practices. One may also call this a transitional state in which, through ritual practices, one makes sense out of death and dying in a way that eventually allows the bereaved to transcend death into a meaningful existence in everyday life. Ritual practices just before and after death substantially contribute to its meaning. Among many, ancestral worship in the 'saradha karma' is a practice which shapes the meaning of death for the bereaved, and which is derived from Hindu religious worldviews.

In the discussions of death above, it is clear that the meaning of death that my informants have derived is informed by the worldviews in which they frame their social and cultural reality. This is evident, for instance, in phrases like 'death as a matter of time' or 'once one is born, he has to die'. The phrase, 'Even if you fight or not you die, may be a bit earlier or later', reflects the worldviews in which people formulate the meaning. Davies (2002) describes such death transcendence in relation to the adaptive significance of death rites through verbal ritual and Holloway (2007) argues in terms of 'bereavement as psycho-social-spiritual transition'. Both Davies and Holloway have argued to some extent in a similar fashion, in that their argument seems to have initially been grounded in a very individualistic approach. It appears that eventually this is then translated into Christian religious practices with an amalgamation

of more recently developed humanistic and philosophical frameworks which resembles both cultural and spiritual underpinnings. These views as argued by Davies and Holloway, however, differ substantially with respect to the views expressed by my informants on transcending death, which they suggest is possible only through understanding it in its totality, since individuals and their practices cannot be separated because the individual forms the whole of cosmos.

This differs from the dialectical notion of death as argued for by Holloway, in the sense that at most the dialectical notion of death exposes itself for analysis, but remains only a point of disclosure not a departure. Disclosure in the sense that it only expands the avenues through which further explanations could be made. At the same time, it limits such explanations to a dualistic frame of reference. This restricts a bereaved person from attaining perceptual clarity in which one can finally move beyond the duality²⁹. The religious and cultural aspect is therefore vital as it allows a bereaved person to move beyond the duality and to perceive the reality in its totality. Hence religious functions provide the basis for a philosophy of life and death which seeks the highest spiritual aspirations in life. Bereaved person is therefore able to distinguish between the death of a body and the existence of human consciousness. Therefore, human experience gets transformed into daily practice rather than being limited to dialectical interpretation.

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Duality I suggest as constituting the prevailing contradictions of life in which life is defined in concrete terms. This is reflected in the idea that everything must have a cause and an effect. This leads to the point where a distinction has to be made between the external and the internal world of being. This is possible through classification within name and form. This in turn leads to contradictions when one starts to view existence in different forms and creates different images of it.

Body is 'chetana'

The body is perceived only as a vehicle that is instrumental for experiencing reality. Thus, while contemplating death and engaging oneself in practice, one can experience one's own consciousness. And thus all consciousness is represented in contemplation of death. Death in this regard is seen only as a tool for having awareness of one's own consciousness. Hence, death represents the whole of an individual's consciousness. It is being reflective followed with practice that together lead one to experience awareness of ultimate reality.

In an ambivalent manner, a widowed informant explored this reality. While expressing her views with respect to individual awareness, she questioned the violent behaviour of human beings. She became thoughtful and started reflecting about her own worldviews in which she framed her own reality. Pointing at her own 'body', she said:

""Chetana/jyan' - awareness/life is this much (...body) only. The human body is like a dress. Why do we fight with each other for this physical reason? If we are born to live a desirable life, then what is the point of this fighting with and killing each other? I am not satisfied and do not feel good about it. For human beings this body is the only means through which one may experiment to realise consciousness. Only when an individual is faced with reality may one be able to sense divine being. The question is, how do people resolve these issues? It is all about thoughts. It is all about consciousness." (Case 18 Rukum)

In this narrative, she is pointing to the cosmic existence of the human body and life. She seems aware of the fact of 'death' of the human body but not of human consciousness. For her, life is represented through the body. And, therefore, the body is precious to avail one of a higher level of awareness. Although in Hindu religious terms life is described as an illusion [māyā]; death is illusion; attachment is illusion and greed is illusion, to move beyond this illusionary nature one needs to use one's body. But at the same time, to survive in the world one nurtures desire and illusion, and therefore becomes a recipient of 'dukkha' (sorrow). Yet this body is vital to retain life and attain awareness. At the level of thoughts, she seems to be grappling with transcendental oneness – the ultimate reality of life. For her, questioning the nature of 'duita sansara' [the dual world] and the paradoxical character of human behaviour revealed the nature of human existence and the importance of an awareness of death.

Glaser and Strauss (1968) and Holloway (2007) while providing evidence, in terms of death awareness among dying patients in a care unit, suggest that awareness comes through specific trajectories: firstly 'duration' [time] and secondly the shape of death. In addition to the trajectories of duration and shape, perceptions are also important. In this case, perceptions are produced in relation to thoughts dependent on the individual's awareness. A dialogue with the self in relation to the external world is evident in the way in which my informant presented her own world to me. It was this dialogue on death with the self that allowed her to understand the independence of consciousness.

Death is a balancing act

In another case, an old grandfather grappled with the meaning of life and death. A sense of vulnerability prevailed in his words, yet he presented himself as a reflective man. Death for him was a balancing act of existence. He presented his insights accordingly:

"My son died before I could die. What to do? This world is like that. Everybody is neither happy nor unhappy. And one can't be always either happy or unhappy. It is all about balancing how much happiness or sadness one can handle. Life cannot precede either in the absence of happiness or sadness alone. Those who are happy are pushed to experience sadness and the sad needs happiness." (Case 7 Rukum)

It seems that my informant is caught in existential questions of life. From the discussion, one may presume that going through suffering has made him a reflective man. Although his reflections on death seem negative, and to some extent fatalistic, he is able to philosophise about it. On this occasion, the tragedy of death itself became a source of meaning-making which evolved from a negative to a positive one and finally transcended into day-to-day practical reality. The tragedy of death thus provided him with an amalgamation of all experiences, that is, loss, sorrow, reason and practice. And, while moving from one state to another, a balancing act in daily life situations was essential for comprehending existence. Thus phrases like 'death and life are one', 'death and life cannot be separated' were seen as expressing two polarities of life.

When death is 'abasyambhabi' (inevitable)' then only by being aware of death may one prepare oneself to dissolve into the ultimate. Possibly, while trying to do so an individual goes through several religious and spiritual processes. In this case, only by reasoning about death as a balancing act for existence, had a process of spiritual journey finally begun whereby he was able to discretely differentiate between life and death. Earlier, when the mystic expressed his understanding of death, he was confident that only through spiritual processes may one be able to observe the truth of death in its purest form. Perhaps my informants' going for pilgrimage and offering 'barsi' (yearly saradha karma) at Pasupatinath and other temples was a starting point in engaging in a spiritual process that began only after the loss of their loved one. This complements the views of the Hindu philosophy of life, which, in its different forms, is devoted to helping individuals to achieve immortality in one form or another by following a definite path that suits them (Laungani 2005; Ghimire and Ghimire 1998; Filippi 1996; Prasad 1995; Borman 1990; Madan 1987; Bhattacharyya 1975; Turner 1974; Pandey 1969; Radhakrishnan 1926). Hence, death in the Nepali context cannot be expressed only either in terms of acceptance or rejection, but also in terms of seeking a transcendental approach to crystallise the meaning of death for the living.

Death as Self-actualisation

Observations from the field also suggest that death was not only discussed in terms of acceptance and rejection or a transcendental approach but also as a means to self-actualisation. Death in this sense can also be equated as a positive growth trajectory, as it has elements of positivity that Holloway (1995,

p.4) calls 'death as the only truly personal act' and in Kübler-Ross's (1981) terms, 'death [as] the final stage of growth'. However, as will be discussed shortly, in the discussion of death as self-actualisation, a very specific dimension related to political struggle and martyrdom is present, which is generally not the case in Western contemporary dying, though obviously it is a feature of Christian history (Davies 2002).

In some of the cases, it was reflected on by the participants that their family member died out of their own choice. Death was not something they believed to be 'kaala' or fate or an accident, but was a calculated decision and a personal choice of one's own will. Death for them was a desired sacrifice and hence a tool through which individual self-actualisation could be attained. In western philosophy this reflects Marcuse's (1972) espoused argument that human existence is the work of a series of sacrifices, of which death is but the supreme and most meaningful. The people holding these views were mainly the Maoist cadres who viewed sacrificing their life as meaningful to the extent that death became their supreme goal. To a large extent, this realisation was the outcome of the ideological discourse that they were engaged in while participating in the Maoist people's movement.

Consequently, the meaning of a human life was principally focused on death. While the security forces used it to protect the nation state, the Maoist revolutionary used it to defeat the existing power structures, the reactionary and feudal forces. Death in popular Maoist discourse was described as an act of bravery in which it is the brave whose blood is being shed on the ground.

The warrior's sacrifice is not a substitution as in the *Brahmanic* theory but an alternative: to offer sacrifice (to kill) or to be offered in sacrifice (to die), and the person gives a sacrificial gift of their own, which they call giving 'balidan'. This was aimed at creating a better world on earth through its generative power of multiplication that will help realise the 'dreams of the martyrs'. This, we understand, generates more 'śakti' (energy) to fight the enemy. The Maoists' propaganda discourse discusses it as death soaked with the blood of the martyrs, from which the soil germinates, and power grows (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006). In simple terms, it is through the cost of the death of an individual that revolutionary power flourishes.

Therefore, philosophically, sacrificing one's life in the battlefield was an achievement of a lifetime and the value of human life were treated as negligible. Repeatedly, the Maoists' audience was taught that to be born means to die and that self-sacrifice brings a meaning to this inescapable event. It is death that distinguishes the immortals from those whose fate is to be simply 'cleaned' (saphaya garna). If one lives a life without any bondage as if dead, one enters the true life by dying, contributing to its occurrence in the 'material world'. Consequently, all values are inverted: happiness is misfortune, and misfortune brings happiness; life under the existing regime is death, and death in the People's War is eternal life. In a broader frame of reference, this coexisted alongside the Hindu and Buddhist philosophy of death, which the Maoists framed as the ideology of martyrology. Therefore, for the life of revolution to continue, death and destruction were seen as creative strategies

for revolutionaries and dying for a social cause was seen as a means to selfactualisation.

'Mrytu', 'mukti' and martyrdom

Martyrdom and 'mukti' occupy a significant place in the Maoist revolutionary ideology, which defines both the desire of human nature to attain greater possibilities in life and the history of Nepali socio-cultural and religious arrangements where 'mrytu' is seen as a door to accomplish 'mukti' – self-actualisation. Hence, death – mrytu is exalted as 'the image' that revolutionaries adhere to, as a by-product of the process of revolution and to place oneself in a category of the self-actualised being. For example, in case no. 1 in Bara, an informant, herself a Maoist member, expressed the notion of death reflected by her martyr daughter. She recalls the memories of her daughter in the way that her daughter had imagined.

"I used to tell Sunita (name changed), please leave! (the Maoist party) Why are you doing these things? Why you are involved in the Maoists' activities? In response, Sunita would reply, 'hey mother people die. The villagers and others go to attend the feast and for a few days they remember the dead person. But after a few days, they will forget the dead whose feast they had attended previously. There may be big feast and people may be called from different villages to attend the feast if one is rich but that will not last for long. People donate in abundance and free bulls; go to

'Gaya³⁰' to perform 'pinda' rituals but the people will forget them as well, but I will be remembered. If I die, I will be a 'sahid' (martyr). My name will be in the history books and people will remember me as long as the history of this nation will last. Therefore, even if I die during the revolution, in fact [I] am not dying as others die and vanish. I will be always there alive as a 'sahid' martyr. ...The moment one is born, death is in waiting and defined. If I die, I will die not like a coward but as a 'martyr', and a self respecting woman. Well, I am not going to give up and live like a coward but I will choose to die being a proud and graceful girl.'" (Case 1 Bara)

In the case of above discussed narrative, it is obvious that the sacrifice of life is offered based on the fulfilment of an individual desire. The fulfilment of the daughter's desire is to imprint her name in the history books of Nepal when the Maoists' revolution is read. It is clear that death was understood in terms of sacrifice, hence gave pride when it was planned and if the person had opted for it. The family members see such death as status for them when a life is sacrificed for the Nation. Although, the narrative does not appear vocal in terms of her religious beliefs, in which through sacrificing herself she could connect herself to the divine. However, it could be construed that in a revolutionary sense, becoming 'sahid' is to connect herself to the divine in the religion of revolution. Relatedly, literature on conflict-related deaths and their implications in Nepal is discussed by Sales (2003), Ogura (2004), Shah (2008),

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 $^{^{30}}$. A place in northern Bihar of India where people go to offer *pinda* for the dead.

Lecomte- Tilouine (2006, 2009), Ghimire (2009), Dhital (2009) and such deaths are understood in terms of sacrifice when the dead person was a revolutionary. In Nepal, in the past, war was equated with sacrifice. This equivalence was made explicit in the various practices, such as the conventional understanding that death on the battlefield does not pollute the relatives as death normally does (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006). In this instance, death was meaningful in terms of political martyrdom.

Sunita's sacrifice of life equates somewhat to the ideology publicised by the Maoists. Death in the battlefield was rewarding in the sense that it conferred grandeur, shining glory, and finally a sense of immortality on the fallen in the society. Revolutionary families stand on top of everything and rest deep in the innermost emotions of the Nation (for further discussion ref. Lecomte-Tilouine 2006, see page no. 20 of this thesis). This can only be discussed within a wider context where individual space and sentimentalism do not exist. Therefore, loss does not have personal meaning. This indicates that the Maoist revolutionary, in this case, Sunita, was convinced of sacrificing herself for the liberation of the people for a better world to come in the future that she may not be able to enjoy. Sacrificing life was done for a greater cause – a social transformation based on the principles of equality and social justice. Because, sacrificing life for Sunita was to overcome the desire for self by creating hope for others. And, therefore, for Sunita, death appeared as a process for selfactualisation. In either situation, whether one attained 'mukti or mrytu', the path only led to 'mukti' - liberation. This was evident not only in the case of Sunita but also in other cases, particularly when an active Maoist member was

reflecting on death in both Bara and Rukum. Moreover, if a person was killed as a revolutionary, for the bereaved it became a coping strategy in which bereavement could take place. Hence, it was in the realm of death and the notion of martyrdom that the meaning of life was discussed.

Power to choose and sacrifice life

In another instance, Sunita's mother shared a conversation that she had with her daughter just before Sunita's death. Sunita had returned from Janakapur, a district town in Tarai, after a long gap from being a dissident. At that time her mother again requested Sunita to quit the Maoist party and its activities. That day Sunita insisted that her mother promise something to her as the 'word of a mother': she compelled her mother to assert that 'Sunita' would be killed in a war. Sunita perhaps died as a self-respecting daughter, since her mother's word finally came true when she was killed while fighting for the rights of the people. Sunita's mother recalled the incident:

"You have to promise something to me mother, only then will I think about whether to continue with party activities or not' said Sunita and continued, 'hey mother, say with happiness that I will only die there (in the battlefield)'... 'Hey mother! Please say that I will die there as only a Maoist. Everyone will die one day, so why die like a dog? Say mother that I will die as a warrior. ...' She insisted again and again, 'Mother say na (please)! Mother say na (please)! Mother say na! ..Say it with happiness!...Say na (please)! Mother, even if you say I am not going to die tomorrow'. She

insisted continuously... She insisted that if her mother said it, it would work like a wish and would really happen. ..On Sunita's insistence, I said again, 'go, you will be killed in the war'. Once, I said that in a loud voice. In joy, Sunita picked me up in her arms and started dancing with happiness.... It was the first day I had seen my daughter so happy since she had joined the party." (Case No. 1. Bara).

Sunita's story suggests that it was not only fate or an accident but it was also the 'people's will' that became a decisive factor when it came to sacrificing life. In several cases, it was observed that death did not mean much for them. And it was a conscious decision on the part of the victim to sacrifice their life for the Maoist revolution, for which they were prepared at all times. Biardeau (2004) notes that in the realm of mortals, death is the ideal sacrifice, since the sacrificer does not substitute another for himself (Biardeau also discussed in Das 1983). Indeed, the primacy of the act is thus established through perfect sacrifice. While drawing from the Hindu religious texts, it appears that all the rituals performed after death are for the sake of the sacrifice and not for the subject's desire for worldly objects, and this injunction of sacrificial system in the Hindu scriptures is important. This is also discussed by Das (1983) where she presents a theory of sacrifice drawing from the hermeneutic tradition of the Mimamsa School of ancient India. The *Mimamsa* School elaborates a structure in which it is not the sin but the desire of the sacrificer which is taken as fundamental. Fundamental in the sense that the sacrificer is acting as a free agent; and the action to be performed is not contrary to the desire of the agent; and finally it is not contrary to the larger welfare of the agent. Hence, Vedic sacrifice moves on two axes. The first relates to the creation of a cosmogonic order in which, through a sacrificial act, a connection between the visible and the invisible worlds may be made. The second relates to the fulfilment of individual desire. Das further (1983. p. 460) argues that, 'in conceptualising death as sacrifice, the definition of death alters from something forcibly taken to something freely offered'. She contends that in the Hindu religious texts sacrifice has not been separated from the forms of discourse within which it occurs.

The argument might remind us here of a standard Hindu sacrifice, according to which the sacrificial ritual is supposed to generate more life by taking life. In this sense, offering the sacrifice to the God must be for security and protection purposes of the rest of the members in the family and society. However there is an important difference that de Sales (2003, p. 20) highlights: "in a standard sacrifice, the beneficiary of the sacrifice, the sacrificer in Hubert and Mauss' terminology, sacrifices a substitute of himself in order to obtain more vitality or prosperity for him and his people – his family if the sacrificer is a householder, his subjects if he is a king. He himself does not die but instead has the sacrificial victim killed in his place." In the revolutionary Maoist sense, the individual himself was a sacrificer, who gave his own life, since the dead person is a martyr; dying is here and now; and the assumption is of a better world beyond his or her death. S/he displays exemplary behaviour. S/he is not a sacrificial victim whose life is taken away for the benefit of the person who performs a sacrifice. The martyr is the beneficiary of his or her own death

through which s/he will live on, if only in the memory of the people of which s/he was a part. Hence, sacrificing one's life for the nation was a freedom and liberation for the revolutionary.

In another instance, Jaitun presented a similar story, but in a distinctive way. She shared her last conversation with her husband just before he was killed by the security forces. It was the first time that Jaitun's husband had disclosed himself as a Maoist in front of his wife. Jaitun described how sacrificial values were fused into revolutionary slogans that had characteristics of manipulability. Jaitun said:

"I came to know late that my husband was a Maoist. Before he left this world, he explained everything in terms of what he was up to. He said that his hands were already cut. He had already dedicated his life to the people's revolution and for the party (Maoists). He said that the way ahead is filled with bloodshed. There is no certainty of life for me anymore. There is no security of life, whether I will die today or tomorrow. Now I am into it so I cannot return back and even if I drop out I would not be received in a good manner in the village as well as in the party (Maoists). Now it is all left to fate as to what happens to the family and the children. For me either it is *mukti* (freedom) or *mrytu* (death)." (Case 15 Bara)

It is clear from Jaitun's narrative that her husband was not able to reconcile himself with the fact that he wanted to continue being a revolutionary. However, returning back from the chosen path was suicidal for him. He had no option other than to continue as a revolutionary, even though he was aware of the uncertainty of life as a revolutionary. For him, to be a martyr was a superior choice to an absconder, and, therefore, he decided to go with the former rather than the latter. For Jaitun's husband, sacrificing life was not a desired will but a calculated choice. His reasoning that being a martyr he would place him in a category of liberated being assisted him to override his compulsion to lead a life with his family. In this instance, the notion of liberation of being a martyr was a powerful tool in making the choice of sacrifice.

Death as revenge

The desire to take revenge from the enemy also served as a multiplier in increasing the number of deaths. The grief from violence and loss was converted into anger and the anger flourished into energy. This energy was channelled into a power to kill the enemy. The conceptualisation of martyrology germinated. In the face of martyrdom, the meaning of death and sacrifice were consolidated. The characteristics of revenge were based on the construction of an asymmetry between the revolutionaries and government forces. This asymmetry was engineered on the basis of a radical alterity, and the dehumanisation of the enemy. Those who were construed as oppressors, including government mercenaries and the feudal elite of society, needed to be cleaned up to establish a new social order based on equality and social justice.

In the process, revenge was carefully converted into a significant concept that could neutralise the occurrence of death. The concept of death became fused into the concepts of revenge and social change.

Jagbir was a Young Communist League's deputy district coordinator for Dolpa and Rukum. He worked as a training commander during the Maoist conflict. According to him, he had always fancied working for the army but, fortunately or unfortunately, he joined the Maoists' guerrilla fighters' wing. He did not opt to join a fighting wing by his own wishes, but claimed that it was the situation that pushed him to become a revolutionary. First, it was sorrow from the killing of his sister by the security forces and later it was anger that encouraged him to take revenge on those who had killed his sister. His anger and feelings of vengeance appealed to him inwardly to become a brave man and negotiate with the fear of death by sacrificing his own life, if it were to come to it. He shared his experiences and said:

"I fought in major assaults such as Tansen, Kusum, Khara, Pili and Myagdi. Altogether, I fought 32 times at different places against the security forces. When I had to fight, anger used to prevail. Blood burned inside my body and got transformed into the energy of anger and a sense of revenge prevailed. We used to call them (security forces) 'dusman' (enemy), those who killed our friends. And the only thoughts that used to come to my mind were how to take revenge. At that time, death was only revenge. If I killed a 'dusman', I did not feel sorry about them. Whatever I did, I did for

the security of the people and people's freedom. I fought for people's rights."

For Jagbir, joining together the sorrow and feelings of vengeance allowed him to reflect upon life and death. It was the notion of revenge that overpowered his fear of death and transformed the fear into freedom. Eventually, a new meaning of people's liberation was invented in death. Although he agreed that death brings misery to others, he argued that when one is in the battlefield, taking revenge becomes a power to take on *dusman* (the enemy). The power of taking revenge becomes so overwhelming that it overpowers the value of life. Revenge and anger overshadow the existence of others in relation to the self. When others are perceived using the concept of enemy, ethical judgments vanish. Moreover, when this is coupled with the welfare of a greater society, the self acquires embodiment with grandeur. Others as the enemy are seen only as a hurdle in one's path to achieve the goal. In this respect, revenge can be seen as a prerequisite in the meaning-making process and the idea of killing consolidates the process of life.

On a different occasion, a police inspector in Inarwasira, Bara, explained his experiences of an encounter with Maoist fighters. He too described the feelings of anger and revenge becoming amplified and the fear of death vanishing when it came to fighting the revolutionary as an enemy of the state. The inspector said:

"During conflict days it was like, if you meet with a revolutionary you kill them or they would kill you. At that time, the feeling would be to either kill or get killed. In one incident in Harnamari VDC, Makawanpur, we were on a patrolling mission with the army when we were caught in a landmine. Our 11 friends were killed in the same incident. I too had injuries. See, it is like when your life is in danger and at risk you do not think of others, either you kill or get killed. At that point the feeling of loss does not occur. Instead, to overcome the fear of death, I would rather kill whoever I can. At times I felt restless but I did not have many options."

In this case, this inspector views himself as a saviour of the nation state. Therefore, fighting an enemy was his duty and an obligation even though in the first instance he felt uncomfortable fighting. He suggests that in a situation like on the battlefield, the human mind does not respond normally as it does at other times. Thoughts in the mind get preoccupied with the feeling of rage, anger and revenge. The only thought that comes is either to kill the opponent or get killed. In reality the fear of death disappears. Once fear is separated from death, death becomes meaningful.

Death as power to kill

In a condensed form, the district secretary of the Maoist party in Rukum conceptualised death in a revolutionary sense and suggested revenge as being meaningful trigger which gave power to kill. He said:

"To successfully lead a revolution, 'tyag', (selflessness), 'imandarita' (honesty), and 'chamta' (strength), are important. If you see through the lens of humanity and human feelings, killing is a serious issue. But when the establishment (government) is there to finish you, then whatever humanity may think of it, revenge presides over these concerns. Killing is important for establishing an equal society. Anger and frustration towards 'dusman' (the enemy) that prevail in the heart (mana) takes precedence over emotions and feelings. The feelings of taking revenge and anger make emotions and feelings 'samanya' (ease). And slowly sahadat (death) seems normal. When war becomes mandatory, the sacrifice of life is a norm. Birth and death are a 'prakriya' (process). One day even I will have to die, and if that is the truth then why not die for the nation and the people. To give the sacrifice of life is the highest gift to the people and the nation. I know it by my own experience and practice. Change is not possible without paying for it. We feel proud and superior to die when we see that we are working for social equality and human justice."

This district level Maoist's leader summarises the ideology and the strategies on which the Maoists' people's war progressed. Descriptions pronounce the importance of the feeling of revenge that had motivated individuals to become revolutionaries. In the case of Nepal, Lecomte-Tilouine (2006) notes that the rhetoric of martyrdom and sacrifice is stylised with sorrow and the notion of martyrdom is described at length to show how it is transmuted into the energy,

anger, and determination to take revenge. The sacrifice of life is seen as being essential for the revolution to flourish, since the notion of martyrdom provides the revolutionary a broader perspective in which the rationalisation of killing and loss can be discussed. This description of martyrdom is said to bring 'urja' [energy] to the revolution. It is obvious from the above discussed narrative that it was the feelings of anger and revenge that overshadowed feelings of love, care and sympathy towards the enemy. The feeling of vengeance toward dusman (the enemy) emerged as an omnipotence that gave meaning to life. Death was labelled as a final destiny and offering one's own life became easy and normal. In this sense, death was conceptualised as a vehicle to fight with dusman (the enemy). Therefore, the notion of revenge produced a particular set of ideologies. Within the ideology of martyrology, sacrificing one's own life is positioned as a strategy that can finally give a purpose to fight the enemy. In return, being ready to sacrifice one's own life could give revolutionaries a sense of superiority in society, particularly because of their willingness to sacrifice themselves to establish an equal and just society. And finally, the notion of revenge consumed the feeling of fear of death. Of course, on ideological grounds, life could require death, but one may not be able to judge how costly death was for a bereaved person. Metaphorically, the Maoists had adopted the most potent sources of power in Hindu worldviews and had created an asymmetry in the war realm, a relational pattern that had not been known previously in Nepali history. This asymmetry when discussed seems to transform heroism into martyrdom, based on revolutionary tactics.

Conclusions

In post-conflict Nepali society, death is discussed in particularly subjective terms, depending upon the context in which one died. This varied accordingly, ranging from the views of a living person contemplating their own death; the views of a bereaved person coming to terms with the death of a loved one; and death being discussed by guerrilla fighters in the context of a political and social movement. In this regard, the meaning of death that people expressed varied from individual to individual and how they were contextually situated. Moreover, while discussing death this chapter has considered the relevance of social and cultural symbolism and spiritual practices in which the meaning of death is constructed.

Meaning is largely drawn from the examples of others and from religious and traditional ritual practices before and after death that are exclusively dependent on one's beliefs. It is clear from the above discussions that the ways in which the meaning of death is constructed in various cases are interconnected in some visible or invisible form. As the discussion suggests in most of the cases, initially death appeared disastrous in that it brought sorrow and grief for the bereaved. But later on, while some moved beyond grief and a recovery was possible, for others it remained a tragedy and grief continued.

Moreover, people's experiences and perceptions of death varied considerably depending on the context in which the meaning of death was drawn, and the way in which an individual related him/herself to loss. Thus death is discussed as a relative term varying from loss to hope in a continuum. For instance, for a

bereaved person, death might signify a loss compared to a mystic who might view death as continuation of life and a step forward toward liberation and a process of self-actualisation for martyrs. Yet, one cannot deny the inevitability of death that is universally the same. It remains a phenomenon in which observer and observed cannot be the same; hence finality may not be possible.

Apart from 'kaalagati' and 'akaala mrytu', people's expressions and observations suggested that incidents of death depended on three major factors. Or, in other words, people related to political death according to three different perspectives. Deaths in some cases were seen as accidents and had a time factor; on another occasion death was fate and destiny; and finally, death was liberation. And, therefore, one can conquer death by employing one's own courage to determine the meaning of life and death. In this sense there was a continuum, on which at one end death was perceived as hope, was reconnected to spirituality and religion and therefore was the light to life, whereas at the other end, death was an end in itself; and in between, death was darkness and a product of 'papi jamana'. In most of the cases the meaning of death was not fixed or limited only to accepting death or rejecting death, or to the transcendental or self-actualisation, but it moved beyond categories. The meaning of death was perceived in terms of the totality of life.

Furthermore, it is clear from the field evidence that the way in which people construct meaning out of death overlaps from one level to another and varies from accepting death to rejection of death leading to continued grief, suffering and betrayal, and from transcending death to death as a tool for self-

actualisation. Thus, the meaning of death in contemporary Nepali society can be discussed at three different levels.

The first is through religious and spiritual notions of death. To a large extent, constructing meaning out of death was dependent on, as well as influenced by, the worldviews in which a bereaved person framed their socio-cultural reality that were largely informed by their religious and spiritual underpinnings. Religious and cultural aspects surfaced as necessary for the bereaved to reflect upon the death which eventually allowed them to think beyond loss, and a hope for life emerged. Thus, to a large extent, death became a process of transcendence whereby a bereaved person was able to engage in self-contemplation that eventually helped in reconciling the contradictions of life that resulted from violent death. The bereaved finally started to move beyond the duality in terms of the bewilderment that death brought to them, and viewed life in its totality. Therefore, the meaning of life finally emerged in the light of death. Thus death can be either conceptualised in terms of an evolution to spirituality or, in other terms, truly understanding death can be seen as the opening of a spiritual process.

The second level is the pragmatic outlook on death in daily life as experienced by the bereaved. Pragmatism was explored within both optimistic views by accepting death and pessimistic views by rejecting death. Death had broken relationships in the family and society that required a reconstruction through a psycho-social transition. Death, when it occurs, arouses intense emotions in terms of suffering, loss and fear, which then may not leave a space for

reasoning to process the experience. And, therefore, the way in which death was handled within the family and the society finally comprised the attitude towards death. In particular, the experience of loss was articulated at two broader levels: the first in terms of psychological and personal wellbeing and the second in terms of the socio-economic wellbeing of the bereaved. This relates to the discussion of the preceding chapters.

Thirdly, death can also be discussed as a symbol and a tool for manoeuvre in the political and social sphere, to work for social equality and political transformations. This appeared as the frame of ideological discourse in which a growth of the Maoist people's movement was possible. In particular, the Maoist cadres viewed a life as meaningful only in reference to sacrificing oneself for a social cause. Life under the then current regime was compared with death, and death in the People's War was presented as a way forward leading towards self-actualisation, which Maoists called giving 'balidan'. This was advocated as aiming to create an equal and prosperous Nepal through its generative power of multiplication. Death and destruction were symbolised as original strategies for enabling the revolution to continue, and dying for a social cause was presented as a means to self-actualisation.

Finally, death to me is an ultimate reality but also a mystery to explain objectively that carries varied meanings. One may continuously delve on death, yet may not come to a conclusion in terms of what it would be or would mean in its totality except the understanding that one can draw from various cases and the judgments that one makes of them.

CHAPTER 5

Commemorating Violent Death: Ritual Perspectives and

Practices

Introduction

Irrespective of the divergent socio-cultural and religious practices, the most striking feature about death in the Nepali tradition is the importance of ritual obligations pertaining to death that take place just before the death, at the time of death and after the death. In practice, death rituals involve a process. These rituals are also seen as a vehicle that helps a deceased soul to secure a place in the world of the ancestors. Simultaneously, by performing and participating in rituals, the bereaved are assumed to rationalise the loss and hence be enabled to manage grief. The family unit and its bond with the clan and the community members also play a significant role in performing rituals.

Rituals are performed at the time of dying, immediately after the death and cremation, and afterwards on a daily basis for a certain time period to aid the vulnerable soul of the deceased to find its destined abode. After death, 'the soul' is assumed to be hovering between the earth and the in-between worlds. Among the bereaved, a picture of a confused and disoriented soul prevails since the dead has left behind his/her loved ones and has broken all bonds with his/her former physical existence. Therefore, rituals coupled with mythological images that are mostly influenced by the Hindu and Buddhist religious worldviews shape the consciousness of the people in Nepal. Hinduism with its

tradition and culture has also influenced the processes of mourning in a significant way, compared to the Buddhist practices. It is also true that in the recent past, the process of Sanskritization (as elsewhere) has substantially contributed in reformulating the ritual practices of the indigenous Buddhists in Nepal (Gellner 2001:253). In corollary, the Buddhists' indigenous practices have increasingly come to imitate the practices of the high caste Hindus. Hence, Hindu traditional ritual practices dominate the Nepali worldview on death and dying. However, in the context of political violence of Nepal, death ritual as one such mechanisms of coping has been disrupted. This chapter therefore elaborates also on the disruptions of traditional mechanisms of coping with death and how the bereaved deal with this disruption.

The rituals that take place just before the death of a person and continue for another thirteen days after cremation rites play an important role for both the departed soul and the bereaved. Therefore, whether death is understood from a Hindu or a Buddhist perspective, ritual is a necessary tool through which the meanings can be drawn. Since Hindu ritualistic practices absorb the gap between the stages that are produced in transitions from birth - to death - to rebirth, that is important in relieving the grief of a mourner from the loss, hence rituals are expressive as well as meaningful to the extent that they regenerate the meaning in life. Thus in the Nepali context, death cannot be understood in its totality if rituals are set aside as an isolated construction.

However, when it comes to the rituals in a context of violent death, the picture differs from that of a normal one. Death, when it occurs in normal

circumstances, can be grasped by the threefold trajectory of corpse, soul and mourner. However, when death is inflicted through violent means in an incriminating political context, the dead is not grasped only in the threefold trajectory of corpse, soul and mourner but also in relation to the context and the incident that gives meaning to it. Violent death lacks prior preparation, as it is not anticipated. Therefore, the rituals become an indispensible requirement to appease the soul religiously as well as to maintain the community solidarity. Vedic texts like *Satapathá-Bráhmana* too explicitly talk about 'pitrmedha' ritual, especially prescribed for those who have encountered a violent death (Gonda 1977, p. 617).

Particularly in the case of violent deaths in Nepal, leave alone the 'pitrmedha' ritual, even the usual customary rituals were not performed. Instead of the rituals being reassuring and readdressing the disrupted life, the rituals themselves became a matter for political conflict. While death was to be sacralised and the soul of the deceased required a transformation into the divine, instead death and dying was transformed to an important political quandary for both the Maoists and the government. In the villages, at one level death rituals were seen as a status quo between the Maoist's cadres and the security forces and on the other between the villagers and the Maoists and security forces (Shah 2008). Violent death in this sense was anomalous if the meaning of death is to be drawn from a ritualistic perspective.

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^{31 .} *Pitrmedha* ritual is performed for appeasing evil influences i.e. neutralizing the contagion of death through initiating *santihoma* (offerings to fire to avert evil) and *santikarman* (act of appeasement of the *madantī* waters by pronouncing mantras) (Gonda 1977: 617).

Rituals for death and dying

The existing practices pertaining to death and dying indicate four stages in which the rituals are performed in Nepal. They include: 1) rituals at the time of dying or rituals before death, 2) the cremation rituals after the death and 'Dasa-kriya' Karma, 3) 'Barakhi' and 'Masik Sraddha' - monthly rites, and 4) the annual commemoration. In normal circumstances, these rituals are performed in stages by the bereaved family.

The 'Gaudan' (cow gift) ritual is the first to be performed when the death of a person is imminent. The dying person has to be brought out from the house and is laid down on a white linen cloth near a 'tulsi' (basil) plant, on the sanctified ground at the entrance of the house. If the person is still conscious, he/she is assisted to perform the 'Gaudan' ritual (Campbell 1978). In the villages, it is believed that the 'Gaudan' ritual is to keep dying person conscious at the moment of death so that the person may see the worlds - the physical and the divine, with an insight to witness the original source of the soul. This was also confirmed by one of my informants, a priest in the village, who explained that the cow is the mother of the human soul since the human soul is the continuation and progression of the soul of a cow. Hence, the dying

^{32.} Holy 'kush' grass, 'tulsi' leaf, money and 'Ganga' water are put into the hands of the dying person. A cow is brought and with chanting 'Vedic' mantras, a dying person is assisted to worship the cow and donate the money and cow either to a 'Brahmin' priest or to a small girl considering her a 'devi' (goddess). The dying person is also asked to eat 'tulsi' leaf and to continuously pray to god. Pandey (1969: 246) notes that in 'Sastric' sources the cow is supposed to be the conductor of the dead over the stream of the under-world. In Hindu religious practices, the cow is depicted as a sacred animal for human beings. Cow milk and urine are used as purifying agents in all Hindu prayers.

^{33 .} In most houses a tulsi (basil) is planted near the entrance of the house, facing towards the east. The practice is that family members on a daily basis pray to tulsi plant and offer holy water and flowers to the plant which is considered as a holy plant according to the Hindu religious texts.

person is remaining connected with his/her true self, which would eventually assist the deceased while experiencing a rebirth.

Thematically, this ritual is prevalent across the board, performed by both the Hindus and the Buddhists but varies in practices. Among the Buddhists, the mantras of the Buddhists scriptures are chanted instead of performing the 'Gaudan' ritual. They believe in following 'the brightest light' as described in the 'Tibetan Book of the Dead'. It is interesting to note that in most cases, both the Hindu and the Buddhist death rituals appeared congruent to each other and had undergone a considerable transformation based on 'Brahmanic' practices. In the process of becoming amalgamated with one another, in particular the Buddhist rituals had transformed into a complicated form. Similar observations are also made by Witzel (1997) and Levy (1995) in the case of the traditional Newar of Bhaktapur, in Nepal and by Gellner (2001) suggesting that when it comes to death rituals, Hindu 'Brahmanic' practices have become been dominant.

Cremation rites

The second ritual is the cremation rite itself, and the rituals associated with it, followed by a set of obligations known as 'kriya basne' – the thirteen days of rituals regarding death pollution. Once the breath of life has ceased, the next step is to cremate the dead body as soon as possible so that the departed soul could find its next abode quickly and easily. The dead body is then wrapped in a white linen cloth sprinkled with yellow powder, 'kush' grass, flowers and 'tulsi' leaves and is tied to a freshly made bamboo stretcher to be carried to the

cremation ground. In most cases the cremation ground was located outside the village near to a water source, either next to a river bank in the case of Rukum or a pond and river in the case of Bara. Only male fellows may make up the 'malami' (funeral procession) and must be barefoot and clad only in a white dhoti if possible. Four men carry the dead body along with the other 'malamis' pronouncing 'ram nam staya ho sab ko yahi gatya ho' – 'god Rama's name is the only truth and everybody will go through the same fate'.

At the cremation ground, a 'chita³⁴' (funeral pyre) is prepared. Simultaneously, the corpse is given a wash. One measure of rice and some money are tied in a white cloth and placed on the corpse's chest. If available a small piece of gold is also offered in the mouth of the corpse for purification. Holy 'Ganga' water is sprinkled around the corpse and a few drops of holy water are placed in the mouth of the corpse. 'Kapur' (napthalene), 'ghee' (purified butter) and sandalwood pastes are rubbed on the body. The corpse is then wrapped in a new white cloth decked with flowers if possible. Meanwhile, after sanctifying the 'chita' with holy water, the dead body is placed on the 'chita'. Basically, the understanding is that a dead body is a sacrifice to the gods, thus, all the rituals of fire-sacrifices at the 'vedi' (altar) must be followed. After these preparations, the dead body is kept on the 'chita' or 'vedi' and covered with wood, leaving a little space open around the mouth.

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^{34.} Chita (funeral pyre) is being prepared of mango woods if available containing at least a small piece of sacred sandal woods as well as kush grass. Woods are used in preparing a 'chita' (pyre) is depending on the types of woods available locally. In the plains of Nepal mango's woods are used where as in the hills salla's wood are used to prepare the 'chita'. An appropriate place has to be identified to prepare 'chita'. The place for 'chita' must be sanctified first by smearing with the purifying cow-dung and appropriate lines are drawn on the ground with the sacred kusa grass.

The 'kriya Putra' (chief mourner) after taking a bath performs a ritual of consecration. Finally, with a 'dagbati' (firebrand), the 'kriya Putra' walks anticlockwise three times around the funeral pyre and places the 'dagbati' into the mouth of the corpse. Meanwhile mantras are chanted by the priest, requesting the god – 'Agni' to accept the deceased and carry him/her to the divine (Kaushik 1976; Ghimire and Ghimire 1998; Bennett 2002). While performing the cremation rites one must ensure that the final cremation does not take place during the inauspicious period of 'pancaka' and if it is necessary to cremate a dead body during this inauspicious time, then further expiatory rituals must be performed (Das 1976).

'Dasa-kriya' karma

After the cremation rites, the chief mourner – 'kriya putra' in the hill tradition and 'karta' in the Tarai tradition returns to the home along with the 'malamis' who had accompanied the dead body to the cremation ground. Meanwhile, a sanctified place is created for the chief mourner in the house, where he spends the next 12 days performing the rituals. A clay lamp called a 'diyo' (in Rukum) / 'diya' (in Bara) is filled with ghee (clarified butter) and a wick which is

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^{35 .} Only a son or an immediate kin of the dead is allowed to be a Kriya Putra who lights the funeral fire. If the deceased does not have a son or if the person whose death occurred was not married, other relatives give the dagbati.

^{36 .} The 'Dagbati' is made with a mixture of grass including 'kush' grass. There are differences in the mode of practices in the hills and in the Tarai of Nepal. In the hills, the chief mourner shaves his head before giving 'dagbati'. However in the Tarai shaving of the head takes place only on the tenth day of mourning. On the third day of cremation 'astu' (bone) is collected to offer in Holy River when finally the corpse is burned to ashes. However, in the recent past in the Kathmandu valley and other urban areas 'astu' is collected on the same day that cremation is done, due to the scarcity of space near the 'Pasupati' temple where ashes are offered in the river at the same time just after cremation. In the recent past, a demand that even women should be allowed to give 'dagbati' to their loved one was endorsed and women too are allowed at the cremation ground to give final welfare to the dead. However this practice is still rare.

prepared in such a way that it could last for ten days, is lit in the corner of the room in which the chief mourner is to spend another 12 days.

Meanwhile, after burning the corpse, the 'karta' (chief mourner) and other 'malamis' takes a bath. On entering the home, the 'kriya putra/karta' and other 'malamis' pass through a fire ritual initiated at the entrance of the house. A 'ghara/ghaito' (large clay vessel) is filled with water and set outside the entrance of the house. After the dead body is cremated, the period of pollution and mourning begins for the chief mourner, whereas the rest of the 'malamis' purify themselves by touching the fire, stone and iron that are also kept just beside the fire. The 'pindadan' ritual is performed daily during the first ten days after the cremation, which is called the 'kriya' (defilement) period. After the tenth day of the 'pindadan' offerings the mound of clay prepared earlier is ritually destroyed. This ten-day ritual, known as the 'Dasa Kriya' ritual, can also be seen as a secondary burial. This ritual is performed principally by the eldest son of the deceased. However, if the eldest son is not available or the deceased does not have a son, or was not married, then various other relatives including immediate brothers, nephews, father etc perform this ritual.

The 'pindadan' ritual is important for two reasons. The first is that this ritual seeks to imagine the deceased and therefore mourners remember the dead while recreating a body of the deceased which takes its full shape in ten days; and the second is to purify the deceased and the bereaved. During this time the 'kriya putra' feeds the spirit of the deceased each day in its ghost form and every day, in parts, the deceased is assembled as a new body which takes full

shape on the tenth day. The 'pinda'³⁷ offered to the soul is made of cooked rice formed into a ball with curd, sugar, fruits and black sesame seeds. After cremation, the 'kriya putara' and his assistant go to the 'ghat' (the bank of a river) where for ten consecutive days 'pindadan' ritual is performed. For ten days the 'kriya putra' takes a bath in the river or pond near to the 'ghat', and offers water and other food items to the deceased, who is symbolised by a small mound of sand or clay. This ceremony can also be performed at the house itself if there is no appropriate place available.

The mourning and purification of the 'malami' who participated in the cremation takes place only on the third day of 'dasa kriya', when 'astu' is collected from the cremation site and a tomb is made of ashes where the cremation took place. All other 'malamis' except close kin who fall within three generations of relatives of the deceased shave their heads on the third day while close kin shave their heads only on the tenth day. On the third day, food is offered to all the 'malamis'. However, for the close kin who share a tie of three generations, for them tenth the day is the day for the purification of the house, relatives and all other possible things thought to have been polluted by

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According to the 'Gaduda Purana', 'pinda' is divided into four parts. They represent the pitri (ancestors), preta (spirit), jiba (animal) and prakriti (other animal living beings in nature). The first part is offered to the messenger of 'Yama'; the second is used by the 'preta' the spirit of the deceased to survive and the remaining two parts are used to reconstruct a body by means of which the dead can travel to the 'Yamas' abode helped by 'prakriti' and 'jiba' in the 'prakriti'. The preparation of the first day makes the head. Eyes nose and ears are created on the second day. The process is continued till the tenth day until the whole body is completed. It is assumed that this body is a sukshma sharira (subtle body) of the deceased, not a sthula sharira (gross body). This subtle body, when created, is believed that it would be able to travel to the land of 'Yama' for the final judgment. Also refer to (Das 1976) for an elaborated description.

the death. The next two days 'ekodist/yekadasa'³⁸' (eleventh day) and 'duwadist/duwadasa' (twelfth day) are to gratify the ancestors. The rite of the eleventh day is to worship ancestors and 'pindas' are offered to the deceased's father, grandfather and great grandfather. Symbolically, it is assumed that the existing pollution between the deceased and his 'pitri' is removed by performing 'ekodist sarddha'. Henceforth, the soul of the deceased is no longer a 'preta' (impious soul) but is finally transformed into a 'pitri' (ancestral god) that must take a journey to the 'pitralok' (place of ancestors). On the twelfth day, the 'pindadan' karma returns to the home, where it is assumed that the journey of the soul of the deceased to 'pitrilok' has already begun. Now the deceased is released from the status of a ghost and finally the ban on worship is lifted. On the thirteenth day a final prayer is performed and 'sarddha karma' concludes (Bennet 2002).

Considerably more extended and comprehensive restrictions apply to the 'kriya putra³⁹' and his wife in the 'sarddha karma' ritual. In rural areas, especially in Bara and Rukum, high caste Hindus strictly followed traditional

³⁸. On the eleventh day a feast is arranged for the *Brahmins* and others including the relatives and those who had gone to *malami*. Also a donation of materials and goods is offered to the priest called '*mahapatra*' who guides the rite for the '*dasa kriya*' ritual.

^{39 .} For 'karta/kriya putra', a new white dhoti must be worn during the 12 days of mourning by the chief mourner who would sit for 'pindadan' along with one assistant. For twelve days the 'kriya putra' is allowed to sleep only on the ground without using cotton material, survive on self cooked food, eat only in the daytime and avoid touching any person other than selected family members. He will also refrain from all kinds of entertainment. This varies according to the place and existing local traditions. When the chief mourner returns from the daily 'pindadan', he lives in a room which is purified for him with gobar (cow dung). He spends the rest of the 12 days and nights in mourning called as 'koro barne' (Bennet 2002; Ghimire and Ghimire 1998). 'Kriya putra's' restrictions include abstention from eating salt, onion, garlic, soya beans, masur (red lentils), kodo (barley) and meat for 12 months in the case of the hill high caste Hindus and 12 days among the Tarai high caste Hindus. At the same time, if it was a man who died, his wife keeps her hair loose, removes the 'sindur' (red power) from her hair parting; and destroys the bangles that she had always worn after her marriage. This signifies that she is now a widow.

practices in normal circumstances. However, other groups, especially the Tamangs in the Tarai, the Magars and low caste Pariyars in Rukum, followed only a three-day pollution period and 'dasa kriya karma' varied considerably.

Barkhi and masik sraddha as regular rituals of remembrances

The third level of ritual obligation is called 'Barakhi' and 'Masik sraddha'. A series of 'Masik sarddha' - monthly rites are performed throughout the year of mourning. This is also intended to assist the deceased to serenely become the part of the soul in 'ptrilok'. 'Pinda' is offered by the chief mourner once a month while following the purificatory norms. However, 'masik sarddha' practices differ. While some offer 'pinda' others just pray and may not shave the head as a symbolic gesture of remembrance. This rite is more visible among the high caste hill Hindus. It is repeated on the 30th, 45th, 60th, 90th, 120th and 300th days and finally again on the anniversary of the death. These days are calculated according to the Hindu lunar calendar 'tithis', which is worked out by the priests.

The annual commemoration also called as 'ekodhista sraddha/ barakhi', is performed on the first anniversary of the death. 'Pinda' is offered to 'pitra'. It is assumed that with the passage of time in a circle of one year, the soul of the deceased is totally settled in 'pitralok'. After this rite, all restrictions that were still imposed upon the chief mourner in terms of not visiting the temples or not participating in any 'mangalik' (joyful) ceremony i.e. marriage, and wearing only white clothes, are withdrawn. This ceremony takes place on every anniversary of the death for another five years.

The fourth level of obligation is 'sora sarddha' and 'tarpan'. Again 'pindadan' are offered collectively to 'pitris' on a particular 'tithi' beginning from the lunar fortnight before the 'Dasain' (goddess Durga) festival. However, this rite is performed mainly by 'Brahmin' and 'Chetri' households. After performing 'sora sarddha' and 'tarpan', death anniversary rituals become redundant. Water is offered as 'tarpan' and 'pindadan' is performed at various temples of Siva. There are places like Bodhagaya in India and Gokarana in Kathmandu where 'sora sraddha' is performed under the guidance of a priest. These 'sraddhas' performed at different holy places are to consolidate the final transition of the deceased into the status of ancestor that can positively influence the life of the bereaved family. In this way, in Hindu death rituals, rites of passage in terms of separation, transition and incorporation are clearly visible.

As discussed above, by performing rituals, purity is attained which is based on 'dharmic' ideologies. In this way, rituals help in maximizing 'punya' (merit) and minimizing 'papa' (sin). These rituals are seen as the primary 'dharma' of householders. By following householders' 'dharma', it is believed that householders transform their sin into 'punya' (merit) that eventually gets transformed into a pure being which adds to one's good 'karma'. In contrast, in Jewish belief, it is by suffering in this life, especially in and through death, that sin can be removed. They view the process of death, lasting well after 'physical' death, as the most extreme form of suffering, whereas Christians have traditionally viewed the death of Jesus, interpreted as a sacrifice for sin,

and his resurrection, as representative of the death and future hope of all people (Davies 2002: 120 - 125).

Furthermore, in the Nepali social world, ritual defines the behaviour and the rules for the living. It also confirms the rules of conduct for the deceased. Hence, death rituals also reflect the concern for orderly principle of the religious model in defining social organisations, as the 'sanskaras' principally advocate. And therefore, rituals become the basis for designing the social order. The whole purpose of death rituals thus appears to be to define human existence, including life and death, since human existence forms part of a cosmic design and is not an accidental or contingent appearance. For that reason, every birth and death has to be legitimized by integrating life into the microcosmic and macrocosmic system of social and cosmic reality. Death rituals are therefore the tool by which to move beyond the physical existence of human beings to the cosmic one. This is also evident from the case of Ramnarayan, as discussed earlier, where not performing rituals was seen as defiant behaviour on the part of the bereaved family members. This was seen as a discontinuation of the existing cosmic design, whereby the deceased is transformed into the category of 'Pirti'. While on the one hand, the bereaved widow of Ramnarayan by overruling the prevailing rituals, distanced herself from the social norms, on the other she was also restricting the wellbeing of the deceased, which was not acceptable to the rest of the community.

Contrary to the structured standards in which death rituals are formulated, a child who dies before he/she has lost his/her milk teeth is buried without any

subsequent rituals except the observance of the three-day pollution period. Similarly, a saint, if he/she dies, is buried, not cremated. Campbell (1978: 271) argues that the burial of a child is comparable to the burial of a saint, since both children and saints are not the members of a caste society; therefore they do not require cremation in order to be released from the pollution of the body. An alternative explanation is that ascetics, due to their mastery over Vedic knowledge and continuous spiritual practices are able to transcend the customary social categories into divinity, while having a realization of the illusionary nature of the social world. An ascetic is able, by his/her crystallized vision, to separate the true and the false. In respect to a child, incorporation into the social categories has yet to be established. Therefore, they are exempted from the notion of purity and pollution and so from liminality (Das 1976). Hence, a child remains sacred as he/she is not yet integrated into the illusory categories of the social order. Similarly, a saint is believed to be above all these bondages and therefore the pollution principle does not apply to him/her. In this sense, it is not caste interpretations that give meaning to death; instead it is spirituality and the life stages⁴⁰ that constitute such rituals.

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 $^{^{40}}$. For a full account of life stages and rituals in the Nepali perspective see Bennet (2002) in Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters and Campbell, J. G. (1978) in Consultations with Himalayan Gods: a study of oracular religion and alternative values in Hindu Jumla, an unpublished PhD thesis presented at University of Columbia. However these ritual practices stand contradictory to those of contemporary Western society, where death 'involves a tremendous mix of attitudes, beliefs, and opinions, not least as far as death is concerned' (Davies 2002: 37 -38). In the majority of cases, funeral directors and their facilities have taken over the household rituals. Funerary rites are limited to meetings and prayers conducted by established Christian and other faiths denominations. Through funeral rites the dead are consigned to God's domain in a most general sense. The identity of a deceased quickly moves away from their prior domestic identity. Increasingly the services are provided beyond the home for people while they are alive, and thus death simply follows the pattern of other health care, leisure and dining facilities. Community engagement is slowly waning away in the light of professionalism and the growing privatization of life (Walter 1994; Davies 2002; Holloway 2007). Davies (2002: 37 -38) argues that rituals are 'invested with numerous values; these value reflect social relationships as well as the more personal feelings between the living and the dead and are set within the wider cultural framework concerning the meaning of life.' Davies goes on to

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From the above discussion, it emerges that some idea of transcendence is held intact when ritual is interpreted in the Nepali context. A sense of meaning for life is not only maintained through the death rituals but is also enhanced. This was also reflected in the previous chapter while reasoning what death means to people, where death embodies a sense of transcendence. Furthermore, rituals' essential features resonate with adding a dynamic to society to foster ongoing social life. When these ritual processes are represented in concrete form as the stages of death 'sanskaras' suggest, they illustrate the human existence as a part of cosmic design which is carefully crafted and necessary for the deceased as well as for the bereaved, to engage in a process of searching for a greater possibility as human beings.

Variations in Death Rituals

The above discussed traditional ritual practices are those of the high caste Hindus, especially practised in Bara in the central northern plains of Nepal and in the hills of Rukum. However, on the other hand, many of the indigenous and lower caste families had only tenuous links with the religion of the upper caste. For example, in Bara, indigenous groups like the Tamang follow the Buddhist way of mourning. Nevertheless ritual practices are largely influenced by the high caste Hindus. Among various rituals, death rituals have a strong undertone of propitiation and exorcism. Belief in malevolent souls and appearing them with offerings remains prevalent in their ritual practices. This too varies from place to place in terms of practices. Even amongst the high caste Hindus, practices differ markedly from region to region and caste to caste both in the Tarai and in the hills. Therefore, the problem remains in terms of

generalisation. Awkward practice for one group can be the principal practice for another. For instance shaving the head on the tenth day during mourning of 'dasa sarddha karma' in the Tarai would be uncomfortable practice for the hill Brahmins. Nevertheless, the importance of the orthodox rituals of the high castes has always been influential (Bayly 1981; Gellner 2001).

Contradictory rituals in troubled times: the case of a little know

Pranami sect

As discussed earlier, in addition to the other difficulties faced by the bereaved, on several occasions, incongruous practices contributed to the complexity in carrying out the rituals. Particularly, the notion of death rituals was usually limited and linked with the individual families rather than the community mourning. The sense of shared social value was absent. Moreover, ritual practices were either diluted or absent in several cases. Those who still managed to follow the traditional ritual practices were either pushed into practical hardships or rites were performed in confusion. The nature of violence and the state of a dead body also created ideological and practical concerns whether to cremate or to bury the dead body and to follow a particular ritual.

One of the informants explained the painful memories of her husband's cremation ceremony and the confusion surrounding the procedures. Krishnasen was found dead in a nearby paddy field the day after his kidnap. He was shot dead while his hands were tied and there were cuts all over the body. Once the dead body was found, it was taken to the police office for a post-mortem.

When the police returned the dead body to the bereaved family, the dead body had deteriorated and looked too unpleasant even to have a view of it.

Kaladevi followed with tears, "The body was in such a shape that I did not have my last view of him'. What to see that cut body?"

She refused to see her husband's dead body for the last time, saying that it was her fate. She did not agree to participate in any rituals that she had to do as a wife to perform 'dasa kriya krma'. However, Krishnasen's cremation and other rituals were performed with respect and grace. People from the village gathered and the cremation rites were performed appropriately. In this case, family members decided to follow the traditional Hindu cremation rites and later made a 'Samadhi' where Krishnasen was cremated, although he himself practised the norms of the 'Pranami' sect⁴¹ of a Hindu tradition.

According to the '*Pranami*' tradition, a corpse has to be buried in a wooden coffin in a sitting position. However, as Krishnasen's body had several cuts, and he died due to violence, his death was seen as an unnatural one; therefore it was not appropriate to pursue the rituals followed by the '*Pranamis*' Instead of being buried, the dead body was cremated and rituals were performed according to the traditional Hindu ways. Followers of the '*Pranami*' tradition also claim that upon death, the dead body of a devotee of the Lord

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⁴¹ . This is a little known Hindu non-caste reformist sect belonging to the *bhakti* and *sant* streams that rejects life-cycle rituals and sacrificial rites. Particularly they believe in devoting themselves to the Lord Krishna. The expansion of this sect has come about over the last few decades in the Tarai of Nepal.

⁴² . The understanding is that once an individual becomes a follower of '*Pranami*' sect, he would have higher achievements in terms of spiritual wellbeing as they claim to be Hindu reformist and place themselves in the category of '*sant*' streams. It is a common belief among the followers of '*Pranami*' that by devoting themselves selflessly to the Lord Krishna, they are able to connect directly to Him.

Krishna who followed the '*Pranami*' lifestyle would have a special aura that must be preserved. Hence, when a dead body is laid to rest in burial, the body's energy would remain in the surroundings. However, to follow this practice one must have had higher achievements in terms of spirituality. ⁴³Therefore, for them, life-cycle rituals and sacrificial acts have little meaning in respect to spiritual wellbeing.

The ritual obligations also differ compared to the cremation rites of a 'sanatan dharmi' Hindu since a follower of the 'Pranami' sect differentiates himself/herself from other Hindus, their ritual obligations also vary. Instead of reciting 'mantras' and performing 'dasa kriya karma' with 'pindadan' offering, a follower of the 'Pranami' sect only engages in daily prayer by singing devotional songs and reciting the 'Bhagavad Gita' (one holy book of the Hindus). Thus, during the twelve days of prayer, the bereaved members are not obliged to organise different things and materials to offer as a gift to the priest who initiates and guides the ritual processes, as compared to other Hindu death rituals. Instead, in 'Pranami' ritual, flowers are offered with prayer and the recitation of the 'Bhagavad Gita' is arranged for 12 days and finally on the thirteenth day ritual would come to an end. However, in Krishnasen's case, the recitation of the 'Bhagavad Gita' was organised only on the 13th day of mourning while 'Dasa Kriya karma' was followed for 12 days. In this case, Kaladevi was convinced on the issues pertaining to the performance of the

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^{43 .} There is an underlying belief that a person of such divine energy would not meet an accidental death; instead he would have a desired death. There were incidents in the past when the dead body of a Hindu saint who had attained 'moksha' was buried. Cases of such a nature had appeared occasionally in Nepal and India. The very idea of 'Samadhi' – to become one with the divine originated from the ascetics who had became one with the divine at the time of death.

final rite for Krishnasen. She agreed of doing whatever she was advised by the community people to do. In this way, Kaladevi performed Krishnasen's death ritual properly. However, she regretted not being able to pay homage to her husband according to '*Pranami*' norms.

This suggests a clear difference in terms of the rituals followed within the 'Sanatan' Vedic dharma and the 'Pranami' sect of the Hindus. The differences are in terms of the nature of mourning. As previously described, in traditional Vedic Hindu practices, the notions of purity and pollution dominate the process of ritual, whereas in 'Pranami' ways, it is only in relative terms. In addition, 'Pranami' rituals allow the bereaved members to get engaged devotionally, followed with celebration, as compared to the strict mourning norms ascribed in traditional Hindu practices. However, this is not to suggest that the latter is more influential than the former as both the groups present their own arguments. This point to the fact that even within the Hindu belief system, the ways of handling the dead and relieving grief can be qualitatively different depending upon the practices. In the case of the final rites and consecutive rituals of Krishnasen, it can also be argued that the Hindu rituals performed were seen as customs and socio-religious events to which the mourners were bound as Hindus and which they were obliged to perform in order to retain their social position. This also indicates that in times of conflict, family members were not able to negotiate ritual positions in the community that might be possible in normal circumstances and finally they succumbed to the long prevailing 'sanatan' Hindu rituals rather than engage in the choice of their own. Toffin (2007) in the case of 'Parbatiya Pranamis' notes that they

also celebrate in their fullest forms the prescribed Hindu funeral rituals and observe all the rules of pollution that 'sanatan' Brahmans are required to observe, including the ancestor pitir cult and 'pinda' ball offerings to the dead. This further suggests that, while the boundaries of rituals were being blurred, confusion prevailed in the way in which rituals were performed. Thus, rituals that were already complex and contested appeared further complicated when it came to violent death.

Death rituals of Magars: flexibility to choose

The Magars of Syalapakha VDC, of Rukum, practise somewhat similar death rituals to those of the high caste Hindus, although, in the past, contrary to the cremation rites of the Hindus, the Magar followed burial practices (Oppitz 1982). However, I was informed that in the last few decades Magars have opted to cremate the dead body. It is presumed that the changes in ritual practices must have come about as an effect of the interactions with the dominant upper caste culture that prevails in the area. Constant contact with the dominant group has eventually blurred the boundaries of ritual practices. These changes in practices are also reflected in the language that these Magar spoke. I learned that none of the Magars in this area were able to communicate in their original *Kham* language, whereas the Magars of other parts of Rukum did speak the *Kham* language.

Although the Magars followed the dominant culture, nevertheless the cremation rites and daily 'dasa kriya krma' differed qualitatively compared to those of the dominant Hindus. The Magars of Syalapakha did not completely

adhere to the pollution norms and performed 'dasa kriya krma' rituals only for three or a maximum for five days, compared to 13 days for the high caste Hindus. Moreover, in the case of violent death, rituals were followed only for three days. Also in Lampakot and Syalapakha, cremation was an accepted norm, yet in cases of violent death, corpses were buried in haste. This suggests that Magar practice two forms of corpse disposal: interment of the corpse and cremation on the bank of a river. Interment of the corpse seems to be more traditional, having been practised for generations, whereas cremation must have become a practice due to the Hindu influence.

The normal practice is that after the cremation rites, the ashes are covered only on the third day after cremation, in what they call the 'agnimar', 44 ritual. This practice differed in the case of violent death, as in most cases, the dead body was not cremated but buried. Also whereas following natural death, normally after covering the ashes, a feast continues for at least two days, in violent death cases, either a feast was not organised or concluded the same day rather than extended for another two days. To perform these rituals, instead of calling priests to guide the ritual proceedings, a married daughter and her son were called and offerings were given to them in the name of the deceased. In this case, the son of the deceased's sister was the main service provider during the ritual process. I was informed that if a *Brahmin* priest were to be called to guide the death rituals, it would be necessary to donate quite a large amount to the priest. Hence, in most cases the Magar called a married daughter and gave

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⁴⁴. On the third day after cremation, a ritual is followed by the Magars of Syalphakha, called the 'agnimar' ritual in which homage is given to the burned ashes, which are collecting together and covered to make a tomb. This is followed with a general feast for the kin and those who had gone as *malami* to cremate the dead body.

her whatever donations they could afford, instead of calling a priest. This arrangement was prevalent among the Magars. In the past too, only where a family could afford a priest, would call them; otherwise the families would manage the rituals with their daughters.

The other concept that occupied a central position in these rituals was the symbol of 'Kuldeuta' (ancestral god) similar to that of the dominant Hindus. On the third day the 'Pato phalne' ritual is performed, in which the chief mourner makes plates out of the leaf of a local tree called Salla; a prayer is chanted and cooked food items presented in the name of pitris and finally offered to the water of a nearby river. To please the 'pitiris' and 'Kuladevata', the 'Dhaja Phalne' ritual is performed whereby white cloths are tied to a bamboo pole and put on the doorstep of the house. Hence, for the Magars 'Kuldeuta' was the most important deity to whom regular prayers and offerings were made. This suggests that for the Magars of Syalpakha VDC, death rituals are an amalgamation of two sets of procedures, ancestral Magar rituals and the dominant Hindu rituals. Although these ritual practices existed side by in harmony, what is important to note is the comfortability and the choice that Magars opt for, which remains at the centre of the ritual performance of Magars, although the boundaries of rituals seem blurred. At the same time, the basic ideology of performing rituals is intact as is obvious in the concept of *pitri* and the importance of *pitri* in the daily life of Magars.

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^{45 .} In this *Dhaja Phalne* ritual, pieces of white and red cloths are used to perform the ritual. With prayer these little pieces of white clothes are tied on a bamboo pole that is to be kept in front of the house. However, in some cases, these white cloths were tied to a tree near to the house as well. For the death ritual particularly, white cloths are used while on other occasions, both white and red cloths are used.

Buddhist Tamang death rituals after a violent death

In Buddhist Tamang imagination, 'Lamas (Tamang priests) through their ritual acts, preside over all rites de passage, whether calendrical or life cyclical, and exorcistic rites which ward off or drive away evil, putting evil out of sight' (Holmberg 2006:89). Tamang believe that this knowledge and power is derived from Tibetan Buddhist texts. The 'lama' activates the power of the texts and performs actions while engaging in ritual performance. 'Lamas' thus form the central part of Tamang death rituals. The concept is that the deceased, now a departed soul, must be helped through rituals in a jovial manner so that he may be transmuted into the divine with grace. In normal circumstances, along with recitation of Buddhist texts, for at least three days, the funeral feast too constitutes a major part of the mourning (Aggarwal 2001; Holmberg 2006). Recitation of the texts begins just after the cremation and continues for another three days. On the third day, after covering the ashes and creating a tomb, recitation of the texts concludes. However, in a violent death scenario these rituals did not take place as desired.

One of my Tamang informants explained how he managed the death rituals of his two sons. In fact, both of Sunbir's sons were killed ruthlessly in two separate incidents. One was tied and shot dead while another was chased and caught, and a bomb was attached to his body and exploded. Even the scattered part of the dead body had to be collected in pieces. Davies (2002) also notes how the dead body is important for rituals, suggesting that the dead body in a social context holds numerous values ranging from social relationships to personal feelings. This is meaningful for the living and the dead. Further he

argues that 'catastrophe often elicits the response of help, almost echoing the 'flight or fight' response triggered by personal fright' (p.67). Sunbir expressed his helplessness in words, somewhat similar to the manner noted by Davies, raising the question what he could have done when people did not turn up to help. The burial place was located just next to the house opposite to the road where his son was shot dead. He explained,

"I performed rituals but only after an interval of a few days. When my sons were killed in two different incidents, on both the occasions, people in the village became so afraid that nobody from the village turned up even to bury the dead body. Therefore, in haste, instead of cremating, we buried the dead body at the same place where he was shot dead." (Case 6 Bara)

Sunbir expressed his concerns that he was not able to manage financially to perform the rituals just after the burial. Although he was eligible for support from the Maoists, with Rs. 1000 for rituals, he did not receive the money and came to know about it too late. He had to organise finances to perform the rituals. Therefore, he could not call 'Buddhist Lamas' (Buddhist priests) immediately to perform the recitation of scriptures to continue the rituals immediately. The recitation of the scriptures was only possible a few days after the burial ceremony.

"If I had not performed the rituals as per the traditional norms which we have been following for generations, people in the

village would not have accepted us. They would have rather pointed out that we did not even perform the rituals according to the norms and I would have been isolated. They [villagers] might have shunned us in the community. Hence, it was a must to perform the death rituals. And I did the same. I felt sorry, but what to do? Even in tough times one has to abide by the norms." (Case 6 Bara)

In Buddhist Tamang tradition, death is primarily associated with a period of ritual pollution that poses a potential threat not only to the bereaved family members but also to the community as a whole. It is in this context that Sunbir was suggesting the necessity to perform the rituals, despite not having the resources to do so. For Sunbir, ritual appeared mandatory, even when he was not prepared to carry it out. Because of the violent nature of his son's death, it was difficult for Sunbir to initiate the rituals immediately, and therefore he could only organise the rituals afterwards. Here, it was the long held traditional practices and the fear of being isolated in the community that pushed Sunbir to engage himself in ritual performance for which he was not prepared psychologically after the experience of a devastating disaster. In these extreme circumstances, rituals appeared a burden for Sunbir, yet it was necessary to appease the soul of the deceased and to maintain community solidarity. In this regard 'pleasing the dead' was a necessity for the welfare of the community and to overcome the period of pollution.

Muslims' way of mourning

Performing death rites always appeared problematic for those killed due to the Maoist conflict. In most cases, either the absence of a dead body, a dead body in pieces or the fear of being tortured for participating in death rites were reasons why the rituals were not performed immediately after the death. This was the case for the Muslims in terms of death rituals. Death in Islam is understood as the end of life on earth, and life after death will continue in a form for which the preservation of the body is essential. Therefore, Muslims clean the corpse and prepare it for burial, maintaining the purity only during the burial period. They prepare the corpse for the continuation of a bodily existence after death. Hence, burial is a special ceremony among the Muslims. However, in most cases of violent death, during the burial, cleanliness and the issue of maintaining the purity of the corpse were not followed properly, where the dead body was available.

One of my Muslim informants described that she came to know about the incident of her husband's death only after 5/6 days, first through a local newspaper and finally through a radio news bulletin. When she was asked how she performed the death rituals of her husband without getting the dead body, she kept quiet for a while then replied:

"The body was not available; therefore we did not perform burial rites. In the absence of the dead body, I called a few young men and kids to read the 'Kuran⁴⁶ 'and do 'kadampak'⁴⁷. I called the

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⁴⁶ . The *Kuran* is the Holy book of Muslims.

village 'maulabi'⁴⁸ and students of 'madarsa'⁴⁹ to read the 'Kuran' in favour of my husband's departed soul so that his soul would rest in peace." (Case 15 Bara)

She pointed out that in a normal situation, the interment of the dead body would have taken place. During the interment everybody (relatives and villagers) would put a handful of soil over the body in homage to the departed soul. While doing so, people would pray for the wellbeing of the departed soul and the bereaved family. Following that, family members would call the people who had gone to the 'dargagh', 50 during the burial ceremony and offer them food and some 'dakshina' (some money in hand as a gift). They would also call local 'maulabi' and students at the 'madarsa' and the people who had gone to the burial to recite the holy book of 'Kuran' so that the soul of the person, who had died, would rest in peace. According to this widow, she could not go to find out the whereabouts of her husband. Being illiterate, ignorant, and in the absence of a male guardian she was not able to face security men. Thus it was not possible for the widow to find any information about her husband. In the absence of a dead body, it was a distant reality for her to perform burial rites. In trauma and fear, she somehow managed basic things

⁴⁷ . 'Kadampak' is a religious recitation of the 'kuran' by young adults, those who go to 'madarsa' and study religion in 'madarsa'.

⁴⁸ . 'Maulabi' is a religious teacher in the Muslim community usually a teacher in a local 'madarsa' who regularly initiates prayers in the 'masjids'.

⁴⁹ . 'Madarsa' is an educational institution where the 'kuran' is taught to young Muslims along with other courses such as maths and science, but the focus is largely on religious teaching.

⁵⁰. Burial ground for Muslims.

and arranged for a recitation of the holy book of 'Kuran'. She further expressed her helplessness.

"I did not have money to perform rituals. I had received a thousand rupees from the village committee to perform the rituals. The rest of the money and things I got from the villagers and performed the ritual. It depends on the wealth and what one has and according to that they give offerings. At that moment people came together, helped with rice and lentils and other things and prepared food to be served to the people who had recited the 'Kuran'." (Case 15 Bara)

These accounts suggest that in the situation in which death had occurred, ritual appeared a secondary thing to think about. In the cases where the bodies were available, somehow family members gave the dead a final rite, while where the dead body was not available, final rites only appeared as illusory. However it is worth noting that in this case, the Maoists themselves advocated payment of Rs. 1000 for ritual purpose, which contradicts the Maoists ideology of denouncing rituals, which they called a mechanism through which the dominant Hindus concurrently perpetuated discrimination and inequality.

'Durgati' of the Dead Body and Hasty Cremation

In another case, one of the informants expressed his vivid memories of the cremation rites of his son, which was disheartening in many ways. Dipdas was a Maoist and a close aid of Rambabu, a high ranking commander in the

Maoists' revolutionary army. The family members said that both Dipdas and Rambabu had just returned home from Rolpa and Rukum region after a successful assault operation against security forces. Both Dipdas and Rambabu were killed in the village by the security forces while holidaying.

When asked about the incident and the death rituals, Dipdas's father suddenly raised his voice and expressed himself angrily, bursting with emotion: "What shall I tell you about the incident? Do you not know about it? Everybody knows in this village. Babu, (pointing out at my assistant interpreter) said he knows about it." Suddenly, my informant lowered his voice and started to unravel the story of the day Dipdas was captured and killed by the security forces. Dipdas's father explained his painful memories of what he had gone through while bringing back the dead body of his son and his other colleague from the district police office. Dipdas's father somehow managed to perform the rituals which were not lavish, but somehow, to a minimum degree, he performed his socio-cultural duty. He went on talking, repeatedly stressing that his heart was made of rock, but at times with a choked tongue; at others trembling and taking a pause now and then:

"When he [Dipdas] died, I did not even have anything to perform his cremation rites. I had asked my relatives to get the necessary clothes from the market needed for the ritual. It is all 'god' who takes care at such times. The police took the dead bodies from the village to the Kalaiya police office for post-mortem. Nobody came even to rescue the dead bodies. I waited alone with one of

my relatives at the police office for hours to get back the dead body of my son and his colleague. During bad days nobody would be there to support us. Now what did you want to know? This [pointing at his heart] is my heart is made of stone; this was my heart; my heart was of stone. I alone brought two dead bodies from Kaliya to Barewa [some 5 kilometres from Kaliya towards Inarwasira]. I carried the dead bodies on a bicycle. Once, the dead body was about to fall down from the bicycle near a tree to Barewa. I had only my son-in-law to help me. I kept the dead bodies on a 'gamacha' – a piece of cloth, and went to ask for a tractor in a nearby village. I shouted by name hey Jibach.. hey Jibach, [name of a local who owned the tractor] but nobody came out from the house. Everybody became silent. I shouted again and again but nobody replied." (Case 4 Bara)

The father of Dipdas suggested that in that time of 'bipatti' (chaos) people did not come to the fore to help, even when he was asking for help to carry the dead bodies nothing else. In fear, people were not able to rationalize what he was asking for. Yet, he assumed that people may not have been so insensitive and they must have thought to help in the first instance. But it was the tricky situation that they wanted to avoid. Probably, it was the fear of being tortured by the security forces that detered people from coming out to help. For him, that chaotic time had now passed, yet he was still left to live a life in misery and suffering. He continued further:

"When nobody responded, I told Ramchandra, 'let us go'. But by then we were four people. I sent three of them to the village and I kept the two dead bodies together. You see! Is it not that my heart was one of rock? When these three people went to the village and told that I was alone waiting with the dead bodies, a few people came along with them and finally, I could take both the dead bodies to the village. Nobody would have faced such reality. I have gone through it with a heart like rock. It happens. God does it in its own course. Life moves on but it is all struggles. Even people and relatives did not help during the ritual performance after cremation. You know others are like that. I was the one to perform 'kriya' and had become 'karta' so I could not move. I asked some of my relatives to get things that I had to donate to the 'pundit' (the priest who recites the mantras for the ritual). At the last minute even my relatives turned their backs on helping or even getting things. Relatives must have thought if they got things they may not be able to get back the money that they had to spend while organizing things. Somehow the 'sarddha karma' was performed." (Case 4 Bara)

In this case, the Maoists from the area did visit the cremation ground but only after Dipdas was cremated in the dark night. Family members were able to recognise this only the next day when they saw the red flag on the grave. I learned from others in the village that in a hurry, Maoists put a red flag on the cremation site, saluted and disappeared. As both Dipdas and his colleague

Rambabu were Maoist guerrilla fighters by training, for them, personally and organisationally, life after death had no meaning whatsoever, since death for them was a sacrifice for a real cause. Hence, if ritual was to take place in line with the Maoists ideology, it was limited to a swift burial while covering the dead body with a red flag and a collective owner red salute - 'lalsalam'. From next the day onwards, life had to proceed as normal. For the Maoists, the contribution that these commanders had made while sacrificing their lives was more important than the ritual itself. This appeared contrary to the views of the bereaved family members, for whom performing the death ritual was of the utmost importance. On the other hand, for the Maoists, the death of one of their cadres was a motivation to fight for equality. Death in this sense remained a symbol; a symbol of inequality, discrimination, courage and sacrifice that was useful for continuing a war for political change. For the Maoists, death of a physical body was merely reduced to a thing with its characteristics limited to the physical world, but the symbol of death was powerful to the extent that it could bring about social change while they engaged in continuous struggle.

For the bereaved family members, performing the death rituals was also a responsibility that they must fulfil without any failure. The way in which Dipdas's father handled the situation suggests that for the family members, performing ritual was something that could finally connect Dipdas to the divine, so his soul could rest in peace. Therefore, the rituals were the only tool that could lead the departed soul to the divine. I assume, it is in this regard that Dipdas's father had reflected that 'it is all god and his creations'. For him, going through the processes of ritual, from the death to its final conclusion,

allowed him to remain a strong man who was capable of discriminating and understanding the natural law of the world. For him it was 'god'. It was through 'god' that he was able to intercept the nature of the ultimate reality to which he was forcefully exposed. It appears that for the bereaved father, it was the notion of death that eventually pushed him to connect himself to 'god', and thereby regained the vigour to continue life after the loss of his beloved son. This was only possible while courageously handling the dead and engaging in death rituals. Death of a son in this instance proved a transcending device to enable him to know 'truth' – 'death' – 'god'.

Effects of 'Dosa' in 'Sarddha Karma' (Death rituals)

'Sarddha sanskara', varied considerably depending upon the types of death, including the killing after capture or death on the battle field; the context in which death took place; the caste and the ethnic group; and the means of the deceased family. Nevertheless, traditional practices remained outwardly similar as well as dominant, even though the attitudes to the rituals and their institutional contexts were questioned and challenged in retrospect.

At one point, one of my informants expressed her disheartening experiences. The widow of Ramanarayan started crying while she explained how the villagers treated her and her family members after the death of Ramanarayan, although nobody knew whether Ramanarayan was dead or alive. The widow remained adamant on not assuming that Ramanarayan was dead without having

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⁵¹. The term *Sarddha* is derived from the Sanskrit wordś *raddhá*, which literally means 'faith'. *Sarddha* indicates an offering made with faith toward the dead. The central symbolic action of the *sraddha* is the gift of a body of food called *pindadan*.

appropriate information regarding his killing. Late one evening, Ramanarayan was taken away by a group of Maoists on the charge of being a spy for security forces who worked against the Maoists. He never returned home again. The widow repeatedly approached a few local Maoists cadres whom she thought were behind the scenes and had plotted the kidnapping episode. When she inquired about the whereabouts of her husband, at first, she was ignored; next she was beaten up in public; and finally she was consoled and offered any help other then the information regarding Ramanarayan which the Maoists claimed they did not have. From a Western bereavement perspective, Worden (2003) talks about the problems of grieving when there is no body, somewhat similar to the case of Ramnarayan. Worden also provides a model for grieving, naming it as tasks of mourning. In the absence of a dead body, grieving became problematic for the widow of Ramnarayan and was handled privately on an individual level.

In this instance, the widow of Ramanarayan waited for almost two years to get any evidence about her husband, hoping that someday she would come to know something about her husband's whereabouts or his death. She postponed her husband's last rite, assuming that if she came to know about the death of her husband, she might be able to get any remains of her husband's dead body to perform the rituals. She, along with the rest of her family members, were outcaste by the villagers and prevented from attending any cultural and religious ceremonies, since they remained polluted after the death of Ramanarayan. Finally, Ramanarayan's widow was compelled to perform the

death rituals without having any information about the death of her husband. She explained,

"Because we did not perform the cremation rites, our family members were not allowed to participate in village gatherings such as marriage ceremonies and other festive feasts. Even if a family invited us to participate in the family feasts, other villagers opposed it and subsequently threatened to boycott the family who had invited us. So much so, that I was not allowed to marrying my elder son because of this reason. It was only after performing 'Sarddha Karma' that my elder son got married." (Case 13, Bara).

The notion of death pollution dominated the social dynamics in the village. Death rites were seen as a necessity to negotiate social status. Like other 'sanskaras' such as birth and 'upnayana' initiation, death is an 'organic' life cycle transition coupled with the notions of purity and pollution. However, death 'sansakara' is not a 'mangal sansakara' (joyful event) as compared to birth or 'upnayana' initiation and marriage rituals, which are observed as 'mangal sansakaras' (Campbell 1978). The purpose of the death ritual is to ensure an orderly and spiritual transformation of the deceased from one life cycle to the next. In the case of timely death, transition is from living to oneness with the divine or reincarnation through rebirth. The purpose of the ritual is to ensure that this transition is accomplished meaningfully so that the soul is either placed in heaven or ensured a peaceful rebirth or gets an

exemption from the life cycle, does not get lost between worlds as a 'bhut/pichas' (evil soul) or fall to 'narka /patal' (hell). The inauspiciousness of untimely death makes this proper spiritual transition problematic and uncertain as death is classified as 'akal/bikal mrytu'. Hence, the danger of the soul remaining between the worlds as a soul remains high and it might haunt the living beings in this world. Therefore, throughout the death rituals, the purpose is to contain pollution and attain purity.

The deceased was polluting for the rest of the family members in the village and only by performing death rituals they were allowed to participate in the cultural life of the village. For the family members of Ramanarayan, restoration of purity following the death pollution was determined by performing the death rituals. It was the rituals which served as an intermediary between life and death that could finally connect the soul of the deceased to the sacred. Since, by performance of the rituals, the deceased was placed in the category of the sacred, the rest of the family members became pure.

In this case, death was seen as polluting for the rest of the clan members. Hence, performing rituals was mandatory for the bereaved. This was in opposition to the views propounded by the Maoists, who strictly disregarded the notion of purity and pollution and ideologically opposed performance of any rituals. In this sense, the death of a Maoist fighter was political and negotiated at the Maoist party level. In contrast, Ramnarayan's death was to be negotiated in the community. The traditional social practices were seen to be in conflict with the ideology propagated by the Maoists. Although the

Maoists defied ritual practices and gave them a political colour, yet social norms prevailed beyond politics and death rituals remained a matter of concern in the villages. While politically rituals were condemned, yet socially, they remained vital to maintain social status in the community. At the societal level, the notions of pollution and purity remained of immense concern and rituals were crucial to dealing with the dead. In this case, Ramnarayan was not a Maoist revolutionary but an opponent - an enemy. Therefore, for his widow, a politically derived meaning and associated approach was not decisive. Instead, traditional practices pertaining to death rituals remained mandatory for the bereaved family.

Ritual Power and Local Politics

In most cases, the bereaved family was left independent to choose the way they wanted the rituals to be taken care of, on the assumption that the death was a calamity for the bereaved family. Rituals were limited to a minimal version of the traditional norms. Yet, at times, ritual was seen as a means to maintain social status in the community. The power of ritual was played out politically when the bereaved had to find a priest to guide the ritual obligation.

There were cases when performing ritual surfaced as a matter of great import. Such a case was the death rites of Lalgobind in Bara where the priest was reluctant to guide the death rites initially. When the family insisted, the priest demanded a heavy 'dakshina' (money as gift) even when the loss of Lalgobind was a loss beyond imagination and therefore the ritual obligation was not a desired one for the bereaved family. It was also the only case of its kind when

to guide a cremation rite and 'dasa kriya karma' rituals required heavy donations. Motilal, the father of Lalgobind talked about Lalgobind's final rights and issues pertaining to them.

"I had a hard time to convince the 'mahapatra' (a priest who guides death rituals) to help me finish the rituals. It was tough to find a priest who could guide the rituals. The 'mahapatra' started asking for too much of donation (dan and dakshnia) to initiate the ritual. Priests created too much hassle while initiating ritual performance." (Case 10 Bara)

As described in chapter four, Lalgobind belonged to a family that was known as a Maoist family, as his elder brother was a devoted Maoist cadre. Initially it was feared that the priest would not be safe at a Maoist's home to perform the rituals, as there might be an army raid in waiting. Secondly, during the Maoist days, performing rituals was banned by the Maoists. Given this context, the priest who had to guide the ritual was very fearful of security forces and also confused by the conflicting ideologies of the Maoists regarding death rituals. Apart from the psychology of fear, for the priest, ritual performance was not only a socio-cultural obligation but also a political disadvantage. Thus, the death ritual became a powerful tool for the priest that could be used to negotiate a heavy donation, which was contradictory to the Maoists' political ideology.

In this case, the death was a tragedy for the bereaved family. Hence, to ask for more payment was perceived to be insensitive on the part of the priest. For example, if an old person dies of natural causes, there would be family members who would take this death as joyful and celebrate it with an open hearted donation. Moreover, there is a prevailing religious and traditional belief that the more one donates in the name of a dead person, the easier it would be for the departed soul to get settled in 'pitriloka'. The donation would serve as sharing the problems of a departed soul. Of course, this would apply to other cases as well. However, when the effect of death is chaotic for the bereaved family, donation issues are normally downplayed and rituals are performed as a sorrowful event. In such circumstances, to organise and manage a large donation would help increase the grief, whereas otherwise it is taken as a relief from grief. It seems that the context and the way in which death occurred and the obligation to perform rituals were in contradiction.

Rituals appeared as an obligation drawn from a strong religious and traditional belief whereas the context was limiting when it came to performing rituals. However, the rituals overpowered the context. Moreover, they raised questions, in that on the one hand the Maoists opposed rituals and on the other, they themselves followed them according to the Hindu norms. As for the priest, it appears that his social power while guiding ritual was threatened by the Maoists. For the priest, refusing to guide the death ritual was a way to protest against the Maoist's ban of performing socio-cultural practices and to reclaim the lost social power that a priest could gain while guiding cultural

practices. Hence from a micro perspective, death when viewed through the lens of rituals was not only a social course but also a political problem.

Rituals amidst Fear

In another instance, a widow vividly expressed the distress that she had to go through while initiating the death rituals of her husband. Although in this case also the victim was an opponent of the Maoists, he was a political rival, not a spy. Tankabahadur was a member of the Nepali Congress party, the governing party during that time. Hence, he was labelled as a feudal and a reactionary who must be eliminated to establish an equal society. Here, it was not social pressure to which the widow of Tankabahadur had to succumb, as was the case earlier. On this occasion, the matter of concern was the constant fear of being watched by the Maoists which appeared an obstacle to peacefully performing the rituals. Tankabahadur was killed by the Maoists in his village when he refused to leave the village after repeated threats. Sitadevi, the widow of Tankabahadur, recalled the memories of the days of fear in which she had to perform her husband's death rituals.

"It was scary to perform the rituals. My husband was found dead near the village 'dhunge dhara' (traditional stone tap) next to the main road. I myself, along with my younger son was there to take custody of the dead body. For three hours, I waited with my five-year old son along with a policeman to take the dead body to the cremation ground. Only in the evening my elder brother-in-law and my brothers came to help us. In the dark of night they finally

took the body to the cremation ground instead of bringing it home. Only a few villagers came to help when they saw my brothers handling the dead body by themselves. My husband was killed for political reasons. The Maoists did not want any opposition against them. Nobody was allowed to talk against the Maoists in the village. This pushed the family kin to remain indifferent to provide help. As I had to sit for 'kriya', I stayed in the village and carried out the ritual obligations. After the death of my husband we only stayed for 15-16 days in the village that is just to finish the ritual obligations. Later I moved to my mother's place. Hardly anybody from the village visited us during 'dasa kriya' time. Also, 'Maobadis' always spied on us to know whether villagers were coming to see me and offering any help. They used to come in the middle of the night to inquire from the people whether, what and to whom I had talked. It was scary and I felt always fearful to stay in the village. They did not even allow us to be left alone to perform the rituals". (Case 18 Rukum)

Sitadevi's narrative clearly suggests that for her, performing the death rituals was a must. Hence, amidst fear, she continued to perform the rituals even though she received constant indirect threat from the Maoists by means of their spying on her. Nevertheless, she remained collected and courageous as she envisaged the rituals as a plausible means though which the dead could be placed into the category of the divine. Ritual for her was a predicated assurance that connects the visible to the invisible.

The above narrated case gives a glimpse of the difficulties in which the death rituals must have been performed. It reveals that although during the days of the Maoists' conflict performing rituals was not an easy task, nevertheless the bereaved family did manage to abide by the ritual obligations. It is perhaps worth noting that whatever might have been the contexts in which someone died, ritual constituted a significant aspect of Nepali people's life during the conflict days. A disrupted funeral was in fact a reflection of a broader conflict, dissolution and attempted reintegration, which in one form or another had become characteristics of Nepali society.

'Soka - Surta' led to Ritual Confiscation

For the bereaved, violent death initially evoked uncertainty and desperation and finally regret. The bereaved were in a severe emotional state reflected in 'soka' (nervousness) and 'surta' (loss of thought resulting in losing one's consciousness) that followed for several days after the death. Suraya's case is one of those where final rites did not take place as per the traditional practices. Maya, Surya's widow, described the day's incident and the chaos that followed afterword. For Maya, the day of Surya's death was a disastrous one in the history of the village. That day, altogether twelve people were captured from the village, of whom nine were prosecuted ruthlessly. According to Maya, when the 'dusman' [army men] approached her house, it was 6 'o clock in the morning. Darkness was about to vanish in the background of a slowly rising sun. Maya had just finished milking her cows and was ready to prepare tea in the kitchen to start her day. Before she could continue with her kitchen work

she was approached by an army man who inquired about her husband. Seeing heavily dressed army personnel, she became cold and fearful. In fear, she lied that her husband had gone to 'maita' (wife's parents' house). As the conversation with the army men was unfolding, her husband tried to escape through the back door. But the 'dusman' caught Surya while he was escaping. According to Maya, in fact, there were army men everywhere and in moments she could see six of them in the courtyard of her house. Finding Surya in army custody, she could only fear the inevitable. However, hoping to normalise the situation, she offered milk to them that she had collected moments previously. The army men did not refuse and drank the milk happily and then they inquired if Maya could fetch some 'ganja' (marijuana/cannabis) for them. In the hope that her husband would be released, she hurriedly went to search for 'ganja' and got some from another house. After receiving the 'ganja' the army men started interrogating her about the rest of her family members. They inquired about her son and threatened that if she did not get her son they would instantly kill her husband. Although, she had lied about her son, replying that he had gone to get fodder for the animals, as the security men looked violent she hastily brought her elder son, hoping that if she got her son they might leave her husband. But unfortunately, after seeing her son the army men did not ask much. They asked her husband to put on his slipper and accompany them. While leaving they assured Maya that her husband would return after some time, but he never returned. She described in tears:

"I became restless. I could sense the unavoidable, and so in rush I left for my parents place as one of my brothers was a VDC

secretary and another was a lawyer. I thought informing them would be helpful and they could get back their brother-in-law. I asked if they could do anything to help save his life. I was so restless and afraid but still I managed to go to Khalanga, the district headquarters of Rukum, a two and a half-hour walk from the village. ... My brothers too looked fearful after learning about the incident and told me to return to the village, assuring me that they would do whatever possible to get back Surya. I could sense that my brothers were very fearful of a situation. What if the army men come to know that they had a family relationship with Surya? They too would be in trouble. ...Finally, in the evening while I was returning from Khalanga, on the way I learned from others that near the Kailideu Khola [river], all of those who were captured from the village were killed and were left abandoned. I rushed towards the sight. The dead bodies were lying here and there on the bank of Kailideu Khola. I could not control myself after seeing my husband's dead body and became unconscious. I was not aware about who brought me home. For a few days I remained unconscious...Mortuary practices were not performed. It was too tough to get the dead body and burn it. In fact, even to give the final rites to the dead body was impossible. In the evening, somehow other villagers managed to bury the dead bodies. Other rituals were not performed either. It was such a chaotic time that we did not have much choice. Of course it was not good not to perform the rituals but we were in disaster. Later

I organised a small prayer and now on every death anniversary we pray to 'pitri' and offer 'dhaja' (clothes) in his [husband's] name. Feel regret when I think of it. It is true that if the rituals are performed it helps in reducing suffering and promotes mental peace." (Case 14 Rukum)

According to Maya, traditional Hindu rituals had been followed for generations. However, in this particular case, it was a time of conflict and confusion, what villagers viewed as a time of 'soka - surta'. In such circumstances the survival of the rest of the family members was more important than the rituals. Death rituals were overshadowed by the complexity of handling daily risks of living, where ritual did not appear as a social problem. It was an accepted norm in the village to bury the dead body at the place where the person was killed. In most cases, it was the Maoists themselves who took responsibility for burying the dead bodies by offering the deceased an honourable 'lalsalam' (red flag salute) as a tribute to the dead. In this case, Maya was able to offer yearly prayers to the 'pitri' and a 'pindadan'. For Surya's family, although they were not able to perform the rituals as per the desired norms, trust in rituals regarding offering to ancestors remained uninterrupted. The trust in 'pitri' which I see was built over the generations of which ancestors formed a central part and continued above all difficulties. This belief that the deceased will be finally transformed into an ancestor - a god, was the means of connecting the living to the dead. In this context, the bereaved were able to connect to the macro perspective of the cosmos, of which 'pitri' formed a central part.

'Preta' and 'Pitri' equated to part of the Divine

As discussed earlier, the deceased remains a 'preta' for a period ranging from three to forty five days depending upon his caste and the ritual practices the community follow. Only after correct performance of the rituals, is the deceased incorporated among the category of the ancestors. It is possible only through the crucial rites of 'pindadan' which convert a 'preta' into a 'pitri'. Only when 'preta' is transformed into 'pitri', it is assumed that s/he has achieved 'sadgati', a good end, since the offering through 'pindadan' to 'preta' was accepted.

Opposite to 'sadgati' is the theme of 'durgati', a bad end. In the case of victims of violent or unnatural death, it is assumed that the person met a 'durgati'. Due to this reason, the soul of the deceased would remain a 'preta', hovering around between the worlds as his/her unfulfilled desires remained dominant at the time of his death. Hence, it is possible that he/she might not find a place in the category of 'pitri'. Therefore, the deceased would remain in permanent liminality. The concept of unfulfilled desires of a dead person was repeatedly expressed by the bereaved when they talked of death rituals. The concept of 'pitri' was apparent among the bereaved as they viewed the deceased as a 'pitri'. However, it was not in many cases that the bereaved were able to perform the rituals in totality as per the customary traditions that could assure the deceased a place with his 'pitris'. I presume it was due to this belief that the family members of the deceased were not completely at ease when it came to death rituals. In such a context of violent death the ritual of 'pitrmedha' is prescribed in the Vedic rituals, where 'santihoma', a fire

offering is needed before cremation to ease the evil effects from the departing soul, so that the departed soul is accepted by his 'pitris' (ancestors).

In most cases, informants talked about the regular prayer that they offered to their 'Kuldevata- pitri, ancestors. This was evident in one case where an informant vividly expressed how constantly he prayed to his 'Kuldevata⁵²' to save his son from the security forces. When Rupsingh's father learned that both his younger sons had been taken away by the security forces, he started praying to the god to save his sons. He tried to perform traditional rituals in his sons' names and prayed to the god. Rupsingh's father, Dalbir, explained:

"To offer the 'pitri' a prayer, I started collecting white and red cloths. I tore them into pieces and tried to tie them to the 'kuldevata'. While I was praying, there came a big wind and the cloths that I was trying to tie to the 'Kuldevata' were swept away by the storm. At that point I realised that something wrong was going to happen. I started crying. Later, I came to know from others that my younger one had been killed and the other was tortured mercilessly. We did not find the dead body. Nobody even came to search for my child's dead body. In those days, the Maoists did not allow performances of the 'kriya karma' (ritual), but against the Maoists' will I performed Rupsingh's rituals, not fully but partially, so that the soul of Rupsingh would be settled. I donated things in his name so that his soul would rest in peace. I

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^{52 .} In Rukum, *Kuldevata* is a *pitri* that is equated with an ancestral god. The villagers offer prayer to the *pitri* regularly by tying red and white cloths to the house deity, which is called the *dhaja phalne* ritual.

only performed the rituals for three days instead of thirteen days. Later, I got compensation and used the money to do 'dharma'. We, both husband and wife, went to Kathmandu to pray at 'Pasupatinath' temple and other religious places and offered prayer and 'pindadan' at Gokarna temple (a sacred temple in Kathmandu where ancestors are offered yearly pindadan) in Rupsingh's name to ease the soul of Rupesingh so that he could find a place among the 'pitri'." (Case 13 Rukum)

According to Dalbir, his son had been chased and caught, and finally taken away and shot dead. The dead body was left on the other side of the bank of the Sano Very River near Banfekot, Rukum, an adjoining VDC of Syalpakha, a neighbouring village of Ching. It was only on the ninth day that Dalbir came to know about the dead body, but the family members were not able to recover it. In the same incident, another villager was also killed by the security forces. In fear of being caught by the security forces, all young men had abandoned the village and escaped to the jungle. The rest of the villagers were very fearful, hence, nobody was there to help. Since there were not many people in the village except the elderly and the children, nobody went to find and collect the dead body. After getting the news of his son's demise Rupsingh's father fell unconscious and regained normalcy only after five days. Once he became conscious, he went to search for the dead body of his son. It was there that he found Damai's son Jagbahadur's dead body [the other villager who was killed along with Rupsingh]. Jagbahadur's dead body was lying near the river basin; his hands were tied and he had been shot dead. He could identify Rupsingh's

'Doko' (bucket made of bamboo) and 'Hasiya' (knife) lying a few meters away from Jagbahadur's body. However, he could not find his son's dead body. In dismay, he abandoned hope of finding his son's dead body, assuming that dead body must have been swept away by the flowing water of the river. Finally, on the ninth day, Dalbir came to know from others in the village that Rupsingh's dead body was laying on the other side of the river from where the army men had crossed the river. As Dalbir himself was unable to cross the river in the absence of a bridge and due to the pain caused by grief, he sent his two older sons to go and bury the dead body. On the way, they were asked to return, as Rupsingh's dead body had already been buried by the villagers on the other side.

In this case, the bereaved family members of Rupsingh could not perform the rituals as prescribed in the Hindu ritual texts. Hence, they always felt uncomfortable as they believed that Rupsingh's departed soul might not have acquired a place among the 'pitris'. This feeling of being uncomfortable remained deep seated among the parents. It was due to this reason that after eight or so years, Rupsingh's parents went on a pilgrimage to perform 'pindadan' rituals to the 'pitris' in the name of Rupsingh. In addition, in the name of Rupsingh, they built a temple for the 'Kuldevata', next to their house, so that Rupsingh could finally be placed into the category of the 'pitri' and henceforth would be able to receive prayers regularly from the rest of the family members. For bereaved Dalbir, rituals were significant in the grieving process. In this case, rituals were viewed not only as a transitional category, but also a continual category whereby offering 'pindadan' at sacred places and

building a temple for 'Kuldevata', the bereaved were able to continuously connect life with death. Moreover, the death of Rupsingh became meaningful for Dalbir since he was able to connect himself in a spiritual process. At one level, ensuring that 'pitri', transmigrated into the 'Kuldevata' was a spiritual endeavour, whereas at another it reflected the desire to ensure the health and wellbeing of the rest of the family members.

This was also evident in another instance. While I was still in the field, Dalbir became seriously ill. Before he could embark upon modern medical treatment, he reassured himself by performing rituals to influence 'pitris' in his favour, which would eventually bring health to him. A ritual was organised. Villagers gathered at Dalbir's house in the evening. Offering substances were arranged. A 'Jhankari' (a person who performs a ritual to influence pitri) was called. Fire offerings were made. Mantras were chanted on the drum beats; and finally the 'Jhankari' entered into a trance and started exploring the cause of Dalbir's sickness and the solution to it. The, ritual ended with a rooster being offered to 'pirtis' as a sacrifice, which then served as 'prasad' (gift from pitri) to Dalbir that could finally help to settle the 'dosa' (evil soul) that might be responsible for his sickness. The belief prevailed that it could be a 'preta', a hovering spirit in the surroundings that had brought illness to Dalbir through 'dosa'. It was assumed that this 'preta' was the unsettled soul of Rupsingh; hence this hovering spirit must be appeased to deliver health and wellbeing to Dalbir and the rest of the family members. This 'Jhankari lagaune' ritual continued for two days. Since there was no improvement in Dalbir's health, finally he was taken to the local hospital for treatment. In fact, among a majority of the villagers, this ritual is practised in faith. When the 'Jhankari', who was also one of my informants, was asked about the ritual, he explained:

"Last night I was trying to release the spirit of Rupsingh that had possessed Dalbir. Rupsingh did not have a normal death. He was killed purposely and left beside the river for days. Due to this reason his soul did not reach heaven or 'ptriloka'. He was young and it was an untimely death, therefore instead taking a straight path to heaven his soul roamed around in 'bhuloka' [the surroundings of men and nature] and has become a 'preta'. It was that 'preta' that had come to possess his father.....'roga' [illness] and 'dokha/dosa' [possession of evil spirit] are two different things that can be identified by holding the nerves of an ill person. Those who are affected by dokha/dosa, spirit possession, in their nerve there would be a different flow of rhythms than the ones who have 'roga' [bodily sickness]. Patients need to go to the hospital if the problem of 'roga' [physical/body sickness]. But I would be able to help those who have sickness due to 'dosa'. In Dalbir's case, I have done my bit to settle the 'dosa'. If the sickness is due to a 'dosa', he will be cured but if it is due to 'roga', he will have to go to the hospital for treatment." (Case 13) Rukum)

In this instance, it was assumed that the unsettled soul of Rupsingh was harming Dalbir, since the soul of Rupsingh remained limited to a 'preta' and

lived in 'pretalok' (the world of evil souls) surrounding the 'bhulok' (the world of human beings and nature). It was through the 'Jhankri lagaune' ritual that spirit possession was released from the victim's body. However, 'Jhankri' admited that it is not always that a sick person is cured; rather, it depends on the principle of 'dosa' and 'roga' compositions. Yet, he claimed that this ritual helps a sick person to regain energy and strength psychologically as well as physically by transmuting divine energy from the 'Jhankri' to the sick and by releasing negative energy from the person while the 'Jhankri' is in trance performing the ritual. It was for this reason that a Jhankari had to wear a particular type of dress made of feathers and animal skins to fully cover himself. Drum beating and chanting mantras help in creating a circle of positive energy around him so that negative energy could not enter into his body. Meanwhile, by chanting mantras, divine energy enters into the body of the sick person and negative energy is released. In 'Jhankari's' term it was divine energy that kept him shivering while he remained in a trance. Also he admitted that if he was asked later about what he had chanted during the time of the ritual, he would not be able to express it as he gained insights only at the time of performance that went away once performance was over.

For *Jhankri*, first it was the preparation itself that was crucial to perform the ritual. Traditional means were put together. Instruments and materials for rituals were chosen carefully. He was dressed up, wearing a hat made of vulture's feathers; his jacket was made from animal skin; his 'daura surwal' (trousers) were of white linen cloth and the drum had small bells fixed around it. The purpose of chanting the mantras with drum beats was to call the divine

energy to surround him and the way in which he had prepared himself was an offering to the 'pitris' so that he could get insights from them and divine energy would surround him. Creating positive space around himself was only possible by putting on a ritually accepted dress, and meditating upon the cause of sickness and the possible ways in which it could be cured. Hence, this ritual construed itself as a homology in which body and cosmos came into contact with each other.⁵³ It seems that the ritual was represented as a cosmos that included various worlds within it. If that was the case, then it would appear that ritual represented a totality of life within the existing life. In this respect, it is clear that ritual conforms to life on a daily basis and is intricately interwoven as a necessity in ordering life in society. This is consistent with the argument given by Bloch (1992) and Davies (2002) who are of the view that death rituals usually transform human awareness to a greater level, which they suggest leads to an encouraging commitment to life. Furthermore, it can be argued that death rituals thus symbolize a totality of social and cosmic reality by defining the divide between the duality of social eternity and physical mortality.

Thus it is clear that, symbolically, death rituals are significant in linking the social order with the divine, where rituals as a liminal category mediate between the social and the divine; what Das (1976) in the Indian case calls liminality and Levy (1995) in the case of the Newar of Bhaktpur calls Mesocosm. Witzel (1997, p. 503) referring to the *Brahmana* thought of

^{53 .} The concept of homology is a recurring theme in the ancient Hindu texts of *Gadura Purana* and *Kalika Purana* which is also discussed by others like Beck 1976; Goudriaan 1979; Gupta 1979; Parry 1982; and Oestigaard 2004. A discussion of the concept of homology is also presented in chapter two under the heading of '*Death sanskar – a cosmogony*' on page 56 in this thesis.

Puranas argues this in line with the multifaceted nature of the world and identifies it in three realms: the macrocosm of gods, the microcosm of humans and the mediating realm of rituals. However as discussed above, in relation to the ritual practices in Rukum and Bara, the realms of existence go beyond the categorization proposed by Witzel (1997). Rather, it forms an additional category as the realm of 'preta'- unsettled souls including the world of humans, the world of gods and the world of rituals. This is conclusively reflective of the categorization of approaches to death as discussed in the previous chapter. Transcending death, as discussed previously, is dependent on the capacity of a bereaved to explore the significance of living a meaningful life. An individual's personal, social and cosmic explorations finally structure the behaviour, attitudes and practices of a bereaved person. The process of reformulating reality runs through various transitional states, of which the realm of 'preta' - unsettled souls' exists as a transitional state between the macrocosm of gods and the microcosms of humans that appears to be mediated by the realm of rituals. Thus, the 'realm of *preta*' seems imperative when death and dying is discussed in the Nepali context which forms another category inclusive of the categories discussed by Witzel (1997), one that eventually allows a bereaved person to transform death into a meaningful practice in everyday life.

Violent Death resulting in Ambivalence of Faith

In contrast to the organised traditional practices, in a few cases, death rituals appeared meaningless and at the same time self-contradictory. The bereaved looked ambivalent when death was an exposed reality to them. The family

members exempted themselves from practising ritual obligations. However, rituals appeared important when an imagined reflection on the death of one's own was discussed. Lloyd (1996: 299) presents similar views that showed ambivalence of faith, terming it as 'irrelevant', in the face of the death of her husband, what was a particularly horrible event for a 'practising Catholic'. In the case of Nepal, for instance, on one occasion, the concept of giving 'dagabati' (funeral fire) was viewed as a central aspect of the death rituals. But at the same time, the parents did not perform the rituals for their only son. One of the informants was a father who was experiencing severe grief and appeared frustrated over the issue of the death rituals of his only son, who had been killed randomly by the security forces. In anguish, he articulated:

"I have lost faith in god. That is why I did not perform death rituals for my son. I felt sad so I did not care much. The Maoists buried my son's dead body. My son met an 'akal mrytu' [untimely death] so 'kriya-kaja ma pabitrata paina' [the death ritual would not be pure]. You see, when I will die, I will not have anybody to give 'dagabati'. A daughter, when married, automatically falls into another 'kula' (family/clan) – 'pitri'. Now my daughter is married into the Oli clan, therefore she belongs to the 'pitri' of Oli root. I belong to the pitri of Bohara root; therefore she is not allowed to give 'dagbati' to me. My girl would be responsible only for the three days of 'kriya-karma' (ritual). We perform 'kriya-karma' to get 'punya' [merit] but nobody knows what this 'punya' [merit] means and how we

inculcate it. Therefore, it is all illusion. Ritual is for those people who are around to enjoy themselves in the name of a deceased [he meant the feast offered to *malamis* during the ritual]. My son died, I did not carry out any ritual. He has not come to ask me why I did not perform his rituals since his soul has not yet reached peace. It is all false belief. I did not even go to bury him. You know as long as a person is alive, he should have enough to enjoy life. Who knows what happens after death?" (Case 10 Rukum)

In this case, at one point the victim's father denied the value of rituals and argued that rituals were just false consolations for the bereaved. At another instant, he himself was worried about his own final rites, as he had lost his only son. For him, the validity and the purity of ritual performance without having a son to give 'dagbati' was in question. Indirectly, he was referring to the importance of a male child in maintaining the continuity of the lineage.

This has also been a pertinent idea that is retained from the time of the Vedas through the Epic to the present day. For instance, Witzel (1997, p. 507) gives an example from the *Mahabharata*, where he talks about 'a childless ascetic Jaratk $\overline{\mathbf{a}}$ ru who meets his ancestors hanging on a string that is gnawed at by rodents. They are in danger of falling into a deep abyss.' When the ancestors are asked why they are in such a condition, the 'ancestors explain that this is so because they have no descendants beyond Jaratk $\overline{\mathbf{a}}$ ru who could take care of them in the next world. Hence, Jaratkaru quickly marries a woman – also

called Jaratkaru – and procreates' to preserve and continue the progeny. Rig Veda (7.104) also talks about the possibility in which if this continuum of descendants is broken, a series of darkness of 'Nirrti' would threaten, an abyss which will have no light, no food and no children. Therefore, whether in heaven or in Yama's realm, the departed souls have to be fed by 'sraddha' ritual. It is through 'sardhha' ritual that one pays the debt of their ancestors, which is one of the three debts including the debt of 'prithvi' – soil and the debt of 'guru' – teacher that a person must pay according to Hindu thought.

From the expression of this informant, it is clear that he was having difficulty believing in god after the death of his son. He had lost faith in God. In reaction to his lost faith, ambiguity surfaced. Hence, he refused to accompany the dead body of his son to the burial ground, let alone perform any death rituals. In this case, although he argued that his son was not a Maoist and it was because of the Maoists' presence in the village that his son was targeted randomly, when it came to give final rites to his son, it was the Maoists who came to the rescue and buried the dead body in Maoist style.

In this case, for the bereaved parents, the concept of faith and belief in god was decisive in whether to perform death rituals or not. Loss of faith in god allowed parents to escape the ritual obligations. Losing faith in god was dependent to the loss of the only son. Death in this sense was perceived as 'past' which was meaningless to reflect upon. For them, the present was important. It was the present in which they could make meaning of life. However, the present was not disassociated from the self. Instead, the self was

dominant in the sense that it raised questions as to who would look after them, who would perform their death rituals and how they would be placed in the category of 'pitris' after their death. Hence, they suggest an ambivalent reality. On the one hand, while rejecting the prevailing concept of ritual practices they were able to refute the existing linkages between the human being and the cosmos, while on the other, they were conscious of their own self and its connectivity to the totality of the cosmos. This reflection was only possible in relation to the self. This indicates that the death of a son was a constant struggle for them. In this process, they ventured into the world of being – 'the self'. And finally, it was the compelling questions raised about their own self that provoked them to find a meaning in life for themselves.

Conclusion

As discussed above, it is important to stress that the rituals with which Nepali society understands the death of one of its members is not only about the traditional practices that take place in a physical and material set up. The pattern of rituals reflects the individual's mode of organisation. Hence, in the post-conflict Nepali context, rituals regarding death can be in many ways summarised by highlighting several emerging broad themes.

From the discussions, it emerges that the consciousness of the people is partly shaped in reference to death rituals that engage a process which is mainly derived from religious worldviews and is merged into socio-cultural practices for generations. Death rituals in many ways organise the social order while absorbing the gap between the stages that are produced in transitions of a life

cycle of birth - to life - to death. This is viewed as concluding in relieving the mourner from the loss. Death rituals are expressive and are seen as carrying great weight, to the extent that they raise a bereaved person's awareness of greater possibilities in life. Thus, to understand the Nepali social and religious world, rituals pertaining to death are important.

In some sense, ritual practices affirm power structures in which social acceptance of the bereaved in the society is ordered and traditional social ties are maintained. It is obvious that during death rituals, social hierarchies are undermined and social equity is maintained through various practices of donation and offering of feasts. Moreover, death rituals serve as an intermediary by which the physical and cosmic worlds are connected. The intention behind them is clear; to harmonize and integrate the social into the cosmic in a psychologically enriching environment, thereby demonstrating the manner in which ritual preserves the social and psychological structure of people in the society.

However, in a context of political conflict, disrupted funerals were an accepted norm. Rituals were largely overshadowed by the complexity that violent conflict brought to them. To a large extent, rituals, rather than being encouraging and settling the disrupted life, themselves surfaced as a matter of socio-political concern. Furthermore, ritual practices were usually limited and linked with individual families, rather than a social mourning, which contributed to the complexity in performing rituals. The long standing shared social values were continuously questioned, which led to rites being performed

in confusion. The state of a dead body or the absence of a dead body added further uncertainty. Thus, rituals, which were already complex and contested, became more complicated. Nevertheless, for the bereaved family members, performing death rituals was of the utmost importance in dealing with the dead, although the Maoists defied ritual practices and tried to give them a political colour.

Moreover discussions also suggest that in some sense rituals also embodied an idea of transcendence. A belief that the dead is being transformed into an ancestral god eventually connected the living to the dead, linking the bereaved to the macro perspective of cosmos, whereby rituals regarding the 'pitris' appeared essential to appease the departed soul. The ritual constituted a cosmos in itself that included various worlds within it. Death rituals thus represented a totality of life in which human existence could be investigated. In this sense death rituals were reflected as a means of transcending death. This goes in line with the concept of death as discussed in terms of categories in the previous chapter. Thus, for the bereaved, death rituals in their totality enhance a sense of living a life meaningfully.

CHAPTER 6

Understanding Grief and Bereavement following Violent Death

Introduction

The most outstanding and obvious feature of death is often its power to inflict extreme emotional impact on the bereaved. The case of Nepal indicates that the reasons for such deep emotional reactions can be of numerous types. For instance, shock due to death of a loved one, fear of one's own death induced by comparison to the deceased, anger towards an unknown and invisible power, external threat and struggle of everyday life can be seen as the overriding characteristics of grief and bereavement in post-conflict Nepal. These reactions are somewhat similar to those revealed in studies across the world, which indicate that crying, fear, loneliness, anger, preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased and feelings of disbelief are the most common reactions in all societies (Prigerson et al. 1999; Bonanno et al. 2007; Lobb et al. 2010). Particularly in the Nepali context, the experiences of loss and grief are perceived in the mind and reflected in one's behaviour and attitude towards life. Loss and subsequent grief are then translated into strong reactions and finally reflected through images, words, feelings and memories as and when the bereaved experience flashbacks of the absence of the deceased. Predominantly, these reactions are naturally configured.

Besides that, the nature of violent death has disrupted the conventional ways of handling grief. Kinship bond and community support as mechanisms of coping were absent. In addition, the social status of the bereaved in the community was compromised in a newly arisen social context. This new social scenario was influenced by the political ideology, and hence those who adhered to the differing political values compared to the dominant one were isolated in the community, which had an adverse impact on community cohesion as a support mechanism. Thus, the social situating of the bereaved person and the social context in terms of supportive mechanisms available in the communities emerged as important determinants of grief, since the position of widows and elderly persons without adult children to support them were extremely vulnerable. This chapter therefore elaborates also on the disruptions of the preexisting social mechanisms of coping with loss and how the bereaved individuals deal with this disruption. The unexpected circumstances in which family members had lost their loved one and the conditions in which they were left to cope with their life situations in the aftermath of the death further complicated the process of bereavement. Grief reactions appeared dependent on the timing of death and the context in which death occurred. Thus, grief was mainly dealt with based on the bereaved member's reasoning and their conscious effort. Hence, the consciousness of a bereaved person was decisive in redefining practice and in turn in constructing a new meaning for the living.

This chapter thus builds upon the experiences of the bereaved, the processes of bereavement that they adopted and the grief reactions as experienced and reflected in their daily interactions. This is articulated broadly in the way in which the bereaved re-imagined their daily life in the absence of a loved one. Many dealt with grief by engaging themselves in a set of multiple bereavement

processes including daily experiences, pre-designed socio-cultural and religious practices and individual reflections to make meaning out of loss. This leads to the conclusion that the process of bereavement in which a recovery from loss is possible remains case specific. Hence, an attempt is made to present different constructs and to discuss the complications, challenges and hopes that constitute the process of bereavement and grieving as conceived by the people in post-conflict Nepal.

'Dukkha': a Complex Concept in the Struggle for Meaning and Insight

The way in which feelings of grief and the experiences of bereavement are articulated suggests a dominant explanatory construct in which the bereaved express their new world after the loss. 'Dukkha' is articulated as a complex phenomenon which leaves the bereaved with psychological, sociological and emotional challenges. These experiences are socially constructed and so require social accommodation. Moreover, they present the bereaved with existential and spiritual challenges (Holloway 2007). A struggle for meaning making continues, providing the bereaved with a framework in which to make sense of grief that leads individuals to become conscious of their own being. The question still remains as to whether the struggle for meaning making is an evidence of spirituality, regardless of the fact that it may share some of the features commonly accorded to spirituality as argued by Neimeyer et al. (2010). They suggest that making meaning out of loss is influenced by various factors including psychological interpretations, the practical disadvantage in the wake of loss, personal reflections, existential quests, and spiritual

engagements (Neimeyer et al. 2010). However, its relevance in reference to individuals who had extreme experiences of complicated grief can be questioned. One may ask how it might be helpful in a situation in which an individual is unable to make sense of what has happened. Nonetheless, cases from Nepal suggest that extreme grief eventually leads an individual to philosophize over the reality of his/her own being, resulting in spiritual engagement. One of my informants expressed on somewhat similar lines:

"'Atma' (spirit/soul) and 'sarir' (physical body) are different from one another. The intelligence of 'atma' is instrumental in dealing with grief. 'Atma' is universal to all, even to dogs and other animals. 'Dukkha' is already decided. God divides duties and responsibilities for individuals. It is the intelligence of an individual 'atma' to perceive these decisions." (Case 3 Bara)

In this case, a differentiation between 'atma' and 'sarir' is made. It is through the intelligence of 'atma' that one perceives the reality of one's own being. Although my informant accepts that the characteristic of an 'atma' is the same for all, yet he suggests a subtle difference between the intelligence of an individual 'atma' and the universal one. For him, 'dukkha' is an experience of 'atma' that has a spiritual aspect to it, and while engaging in spiritual processes one comes to perceive the intelligence of 'atma', which is important to deal with grief.

In another instance, 'atma' was rationalized within the margins of heart and mind. One of my informants reflected 'atma' as a union of thoughts and emotions. For him it was observing the nature of thoughts and emotions that was necessary to understand life as well as decisive in making sense of grief and bereavement. He stated:

"An individual's 'mana' [heart-mind] is not always at one place. It changes every moment. This 'mana' keeps on moving from one thought to another. Sometimes to do this and at other times something else. This is the nature of the mind and the emotions which constitutes an individual's consciousness. Now it is about keeping this mind calm, cool and constant. At times, it becomes painful and grief surrounds one all over, but again, one has to see and observe the very nature of this instability of mind-heart. Once one is aware of this reality, 'dukkha' disappears and 'santosh' [self containment] surrounds one and one moves on." (Case 12 Bara)

Kohrt and Harper (2008) in psychological terms elaborate on the concept of 'mana' and 'demag' and note that Nepali thinking distinguishes between the 'mana' (heart-mind), associated with emotional response and 'dimag (brainmind) associated with thought. However, in this case by controlling 'mana', my informant was intending to control 'mana' and 'dimag' together to control 'oneself' and move away from suffering. In this regard 'mana' was important to deal with grief, and 'dimag' is conceived as a supplement of 'mana'. This suggests that the concept of 'mana' was vital in dealing with suffering. Hence

'mana' seems instrumental in constructing meaning for life. However, when 'mana', and 'dimag' come together to respond to loss, grief reactions become complex to comprehend. To come to any decision, 'mana' and 'dimag' need to be in unanimity with one another. Here, 'santosh' [self containment] is central in life, in order to move forward. This could only be achieved by having control over one's own 'mana' [heart-mind] and 'dimag' [thoughts-brain]. To some extent, Robins (2010, p. 405) is right to argue that this arises at least partly from the traditional obligation to follow well-defined roles within family and community that restricts the range of choices available in most Nepali communities. Nevertheless, in this case, it was not only the obligations that my informant meant. Instead, he was suggesting the beginning of a spiritual process for him in which he was able to perceive the instability of 'mana' and therefore he was able to comprehend the fragility of human life.

At other times, a realisation of how to overcome 'dukkha' came from the religious scriptures. For instance one of my informants revealed:

"Dukkha" [suffering] will not go away while one is crying and regretting loss and being loud about it. Even people in the village will laugh at our condition. They will say my son was involved in all kinds of wrong doing and now we have got the real punishment in return, and are facing the real time. Crying and regretting is not a solution. When I was young, I studied 'bhupal' [Tamang Buddhists spiritual scripts]. The reading of those scriptures provided me with moral guidelines regarding what to do and what

not to do in life. If I had not studied them, by now, I would have either jumped from the hill top or hanged myself or drowned myself in the river and been killed. But these scriptures do not approve such death as right death, so I cannot do that. Therefore, whatever I am left with, I have to live with it. I must live it and live it with courage and grace. Whatever has happened, now one must accept and live with it. It was the knowledge of 'bhupal', that's why I have been so courageously facing the situation and moving beyond it [loss]." (Case 6 Bara)

According to my informant, one must resist the situation and cope with what may come next. It was this belief that allowed him to cling to life, even during extreme situations. At the same time, he did not want to prove himself weak and submissive in front of others, so that others would make fun of him and his family. He was suggesting that one must not become a victim of self-pity and allow others to judge them. Rather, he was of the view that one must face one's own reality of life. For him, being conscious of his own reality was a means to manage his grief. In this instance, Buddhist scriptures were the source from which he drew the meanings to deal with the loss of his two younger sons. For the bereaved, a clear direction on what to do and what not to do is based upon the moral code drawn from religious scriptures. These reflections provide sufficient evidence to depict a tentative argument that the meaning making process and the meaning itself which people gather were embedded in a spiritual dimension, irrespective of the means of engaging in spirituality.

Engaging in 'Ghar-byabhar': a Coping Tool

In the majority of cases, coping with grief was possible while engaging in daily activities. For many, more than grief reactions, it was life situations that were important to deal with. The immediate concern for the bereaved family members was to manage daily livelihoods in the absence of a breadwinner. In this process, for some, engaging in 'ghar-byabahar' helped them to reduce grief. For instance, one of my informants articulated the ways in which grief was handled by the bereaved. He suggested different ways in which coping with grief was possible for the bereaved family members. According to this informant,

"There are different ways to reduce 'dukkha' (sorrow) which require certain actions to be performed. There are three different ways to deal with it. The first and foremost is getting engaged in 'ghar-byabahar' (family matters). Most of the time people get engaged in their daily 'byabahar' (activities) to deal with and manage daily life situations. 'Byabahar' can be different depending upon the means of the family – some people get engaged in 'kheti-grihasti' (agriculture and housework) and looking after mal-jal' [animal husbandry], others get engaged in business and other activities. Even these daily 'byabahar' can reduce 'dukkha'. One has to perform the 'karma' and it is the karma that is essential for daily living that represents the activities on a daily basis. For my granddaughter Asha, it is though her daily activities that she eventually deals with her grief. There are a few

who engage themselves in 'dhyan' [meditation] - one might get engaged in spiritual processes and the third way is 'puja-patha' [daily offerings to god, also termed as karmakanda] – and one may get engaged in daily religious activities and traditional rituals." (Case 3 Bara)

This old grandfather draws clear pathways, in which there is perhaps a possibility to reduce 'dukkha'. According to him, in such circumstances, an individual must decide what is appropriate for him or her. In many cases, getting engaged in regular activities on a daily basis was seen as a process in which an individual, with the passage of time, overcame their suffering and sorrow. In some cases, this process was further strengthened by investing faith and belief in religious and spiritual practices. For those individuals, meditation or making daily offerings with prayer helped in handling grief. In fact, the experiences of people suggest that dukkha' is reduced in various ways including engaging in daily activities, meditation and prayer or taking into account a combination of all. This conceptualization of dealing with grief seems mainly derived from the Hindu and Buddhist religious practices, where it is advised that it is the mixture of right thinking, right activities, actions and devotion that leads an individual towards greater achievements, if one understands life as a process of self-realisation.

A mixture of both performing daily 'karma' and engaging in religious and spiritual practices seems appropriate to handle grief and bereavement. Coping in this context can be examined in two different but mutually intertwined

orders. First, the bereaved cope with grief by re-establishing attachments with the personal self and the outside world. This is possible through engaging in daily work that sets them into a daily routine and therefore a bereaved person is able to maintain relationships with the 'self' and 'others' after the loss. However, a second order suggests that rather than establishing attachments, dissolving attachments is also helpful in coping with grief. This is attained through practising meditation, observing religious rituals and contemplation with one's own philosophical outlook.

Somewhat similar feelings were expressed by another key informant:

"I miss my son. I feel sorrow but whatever I do, he is not going to come back. I know he is gone, so even if I cry or think of him, it does not make sense. It is now for me to move on and take care of these children. Now I have accepted the fact of the death of my son, and I am living with daily activities. I work in the field, get wood from the jungle; get hay for the animals. Mother prepares food and gives food to the children. You know one has to eat, and hence has to work daily to earn a living, whether one is in pain or happiness. I have to do that on a daily basis. Nothing happens even if I am in pain. My son is gone and my pain and suffering is with me only. If I manage with my own earning that's great; if not I get from the 'sahu' (money lender) to manage daily living. I am managing life with 'dukkha' (pain). Dukkha and sukkha is like that. What to do? I have no choice. I have to work. Family is there,

relatives come at times. As long as breath runs through the body and I am not dead, I have to live. As long as I live, I have to work hard to manage our livelihood. My departed son would not help me in any way to let go my life. My problem is not going to leave me whatever I do. Hence, there is no point being in sorrow. I have to find two meals and clothes. And to get all that I have to work. I do not have many options." (Case 11 Bara)

A sense of realisation to move away from loss is coming in respect to the daily struggle to manage the livelihood of the rest of the family members. For the informant, daily survival and social and cultural obligations are important to live. The loss of a son, in this sense seems a past memory that does not have much significance in the present. It is this understanding of the present and the struggle to live continuously that gives meaning to life even though the family had faced tragedy in the past. Here, the bereaved informant disassociates himself with the past and establishes attachments with the present, as he views this as the only option to overcome grief.

Hope leading to Meaning Making

In a different situation, one informant was always found either silently listening to the people or lost in his own thoughts. One may presume that this was his way of grieving. Successive losses including two adult sons killed by security forces in two different incidents; the loss of his wife as an effect of the unbearable trauma of losing their sons; and lately the loss of a younger

daughter due to sickness, must have hard-pressed this informant, making him become silent and contemplative.

"Everything seems to have disappeared due to the tragedy and the grief that I have gone through. At times the thought come to my mind, why did I ever get married? Just to continue with suffering? It would have been much better if I had not got married at all. I would have been free and responsible only for myself and my body. Life would have been so easy. What have I got now?" (Case 8 Rukum)

One can sense the concern and the way in which this informant was expressing his frustration. To some extent it was the responsibility for taking care of his grandchildren and the hope of his grandchildren growing up, taking care of them and carrying forward the next generation that was a concern for him. The dichotomy prevailed and he travelled between hope and loss. He went on questioning the 'self' and was continuously lost in thought. This was his way of grieving while remembering his lost family members. In this way, he raised existential questions for himself. His experiences of loss troubled him all the time. In fact going through suffering due to loss had made him a reflective man. His desorption of the process of bereavement that he went through contains layers of expression. It reflects the way in which the grief and loss occupied his mind and the process in which he presented himself as a man who had to take care of his grandchildren. In this case, death and bereavement were not only expressed but could be observed in his actions, which were much

more than the narrative expressed. Therefore grief is not the only frame of reference in which a person functions, even though these processes emerge in terms of bereavement. Moreover, it is also livelihood issues and family and social responsibility that breed hope in the living.

Similarly, a key informant expressed her thoughts on 'dukkha'; what she made out of it, and how she remained resilient towards handling her life situation, while linking it to hope:

"We need to deal with 'dukkha' [problems]. We need to live it and overcome it. When there is 'sukkha' (happiness) time passes so quickly that one does not even realise that she is living in 'sukkha'. But to bear 'dukkha' is tough. When managing livelihood becomes an issue then 'sukkha' is a dream. I did not go with another man. You know, I have a family and children to look after. Anywhere I go, I will have to work. The memory of my husband will remain with me. Therefore, I thought, if I take care of my children and they grow up and become adult, they will be able to take care of me so I decided to be with them and take care of them. In any case, if I had gone with somebody else, I would have had to start a life from the beginning. These are the thoughts that helped me to be with my children and family. I have a friend and I do share my feelings and thoughts with her." (Case 9 Rukum)

In this instance, for a widow, 'dukkha' was related to problems in terms of handling daily life situations, rather than grief and emotional suffering per se. She too viewed 'dukkha' in opposition to 'sukkha', which she termed a dream. For her, the dream of living in 'sukkha' was dependent upon her children's prosperity. For that reason alone, she was able to cope with trouble whether be it living alone as a widow or odd comments passed on to her by other villagers. Instead of regretting her past experiences and present condition, it seems she had found a meaning in life through taking care of her children and other family members. It was 'the hope' that she had in her children that brought the meaning for life to her. The meaning was drawn from the hope of the future, helping her to overcome the grief of the loss of her husband. In hope she framed a new beginning that kept her confident to handle the grief graciously. Frankel (1959) makes a similar point, that we can endure any suffering if we have a meaning and hope in life. In this case, hope created meaning and the meaning was to continue a new life even if there were hardships to face.

Difficulties in Accepting Death and Continued Grief

As discussed above, many managed grief by engaging themselves in a set of bereavement processes that included a mixture of both daily experiences and a set of designed practices available in the community. In most cases, once the bereaved shifted their focus on daily life situations and the challenges that they had to face on a daily basis, their attention to loss and grief appeared secondary compared to the everyday struggle. The focus shifted to daily survival, which helped the bereaved to manage their grief, although this is not to suggest that they discontinued the bond with the deceased. However, contrary to these

expressions, there were a few who remained unsettled when it came to loss of their loved one.

For instance, a father who had lost his young son, a Maoist cadre, grieved continuously even four years since his son was killed by the villagers. His grief continued alongside the daily struggle for survival. He described himself as a hardworking man who had accepted the challenge and managed it accordingly in his young days. But now it was extremely difficult for him to handle sorrow and grief in his old age. For him, 'dukkha' persisted. The death of his son came as a blow to his old age hope, as he had always thought that he and his wife had a child who would take care of them when they grew older. For him, old age problems were the real problems, which needed a support system that he had suddenly lost after the death of his son. It was this concern that allowed a continuing bond with his son which led to continued grief. He narrated:

""Muskil se chalata' (It is all tough). When I remember him [son], in the night, I can't sleep, I keep crying. If he was there, I would have peace. He used to say before his death, 'babu' [father] now you do not have to work. You just take your meals and go to 'Masjid' to offer 'Nawaj' and pray to 'Allah'- god. I still remember, a week before his death, he told me, 'You know a very good person will die in the next few days in the village and people will mourn his death'. I said 'Who is that person' but he said it would be sudden. It was he himself who left us. Forget it! This world is like that. If I continue, I will be in pain and grief. It will be

too much pain. Just leave it [he choked and after a pause he continued sorrowfully] If he had not joined the Maoist party he would not have been killed. Who cares for us?" (Case 17 Bara)

In this case, for the father, his son was his remaining hope for future support. The death of his son had taken away his only available support system. Hence, not only was his physical survival was at stake but also grief appeared as a potential barrier to his regular religious practices, although he acknowledged that he had no-one other than 'Allah' with whom he shared his suffering and grief. His regret that if his son had been there, he could have devoted himself fully to religious practices, was evident when he remembered his son suggesting that he utilise his time to pray to God earlier.

Field and Filanosky (2010) have also produced similar findings in violent death situations, suggesting that a continuing bond adversely affects a grieving person. For the bereaved father, the continuing bond with his deceased son appeared counterproductive and a barrier to manage grief. The bereaved was having difficulty in accepting the death of his son and continued grief was a consequence of it. This implies that when an individual's daily survival was at stake, loss of a son, or a husband, or a breadwinner became crucial in sustaining grief and experiencing sorrow over a longer period of time. Although they continued to rely on God for help, even so, they were never free from grief. Coming to terms with the reality of loss remained for them an image. The bereaved members constituted meaning of 'dukkha' in reference to the process of bereavement in several different ways. A multifaceted approach

to deal with grief was used that included ranging from making meaning out of religion and spirituality to philosophy and from expressing emotions to getting engaged in livelihood issues that gave meaning to life.

Traumatic Loss resulting in Problematic Grief

Death was chaotic for the bereaved family members, coming unannounced and as a sudden blow to their life. Death took place by violent means for which families were not prepared in advance. Further, the bereavement process unfolded in an environment of looming uncertainty and fear. In most cases, grieving through ritual obligations was not followed. Tragic memories of the incident remained, in turn regenerating the picture of the deceased and the unfolding events that followed during the killing. The traumatic effect of loss was recurring and continued for years. Continued grief thus appeared in multifaceted forms that shaped the meaning subjectively at different junctures in multiple ways. Traumatic loss is argued objectively suggesting the suddenness of loss and trauma are the subjective aspects of the survivor's experience (e.g., Norris 1992, Currier et al. 2006). Jacobs et al. (2000) and Prigerson et al. (2000) argue that trauma continues for the bereaved whose attachment dependency is high, who might be vulnerable to separation and loss. In the context of Nepal, although at first instance, death might appear to be one incident, it is enclosed by the subjective expositions. Attachment dependency with the deceased seemed prevalent, which increasingly made the bereaved vulnerable to continued grief. For instance an informant, a widow, recounted her grief in a complex form. She said:

"It is always 'dukkha'. As time go by pain increases, as I feel my need for him and feel helpless in his absence. I feel sad. Even my hand (left) is not functioning properly. 'Satru' [enemy] made me handicapped. At the time of my husband's death I fell unconscious. And since then, I have had pain in my hand. When I feel and miss him, tears follow. I have to do everything. I have to educate my children. Three of my sons are yet to get married. I have to bear so much a burden. I do not have anybody to support me. I will have to do it all myself." (Case 19 Rukum)

At another juncture, she expressed her continued attachment with her husband while pointing out a *sari* [clothing that women wear in rural Nepal] given to her by her husband, that was hanging on a wire tied by two corners.

"See that 'sari', my husband got it for me. I have still kept it with me. I still use most of my old clothes bought by my husband. I have not bought many clothes. I have kept it as his gift, a source of pride for me. Also to feel good if my children say that they have been doing much for me I can tell them that even the clothes that I wear were of my husband's that he got years ago. These are all now old but I had more than enough to manage untill now. I keep it clean and wear it regularly. Suffering is not going to be reduced ever; he is every moment with me in my thoughts, in my actions, and in my sleep. I miss his wisdom and care [A sense of frustration prevailed with silence]." (Case 19 Rukum)

This, narrative suggests that the trauma brought by violent death remained in different forms. It appeared unbearable at the time of the death of her husband, but over period of time she had tried to cope with it. However, it continued for ever. Keeping a 'sari', as a gift of her husband was one example. As she grew older, her need for her departed husband was increasing as she required more help than she had needed before. Grief continued as she repeatedly found herself alone in fighting all difficulties. It seems that, for her, suffering and trauma appeared and contributed in many forms, ranging from the issues of personal support to belongingness and social obligations to livelihood. In this instance, the complexity of daily life and its intertwined relationships within personal, familial and social limits were operating at the same time. Not having a support system had resulted in continued attachment with her departed husband, leaving her to grieve more than ever before. It was through the subjective nature of trauma and grief that she construed her meaning for life.

In a different case, one of my informants showed similar reactions to those discussed above. Latiya, the mother of Brijkishor, always appeared confused. This looked obvious while observing her situation. How, after the death of Brijkishor, the whole family had fallen apart was apparent, and regaining normalcy appeared a difficult task. One could sense that the whole family was on the verge of collapse. After Brijkishor's demise, his wife and children left the village and stayed with her parents. Later, Brijkishor's father died as he could not cope with the trauma and loss. In the absence of livelihood options, one of her sons left for India and never returned. Finally, Brijkishor's mother was left in the village with two younger children. Once, when I asked Latiya

about her memories of Brijkishor, instead of answering me, she counterquestioned whether I had seen him lately. Since Brijkishor was killed in an encounter with security forces, the remains of his dead body were never found. Although Latiya had been informed about the incident and that her son had been killed, yet she was not able to accept it. I presume that it was in this context that she must had asked about Brijkishor. After a while, Latiya replied in tears:

"People are not very supportive in this village. I am identified as a mad woman. Due to this reason, I do not interact and talk much with others in the village. I do not like talking to people. When I am not doing anything, either I sleep in my hut or if I feel restless, I go and sit by the roadside and keep an eye on people who pass along the road. It is now a usual thing for me. It is the feeling and grief that comes out through tears." (Case 3 Bara)

In fact, while I was talking to Latiya, it did not appear that she had had a mental breakdown as indicated by other villagers. It appeared as if it was an inbuilt grief that had disrupted her thought process, which was problematic for others. In most cases, the bereaved repeatedly became confused and constantly contemplated on the deceased. In Latiya's case, her grief reactions were severe. For this reason, she was disparaged in the village, leading her to live in a vulnerable state. It appears that, for Latiya, having two meals a day and a place to live would have reduced much of her pain and suffering, but that never materialised. Grief and suffering had an everlasting impact, where managing

grief was far from reality. Hence, a concept of moving beyond loss and grief did not exist. It was for this reason that she preferred either sleeping for long hours or quietly watching people in the street. Lobb et al. (2010), when reviewing empirical studies on complicated grief and Burke et al (2010) from the findings of a study on African American homicide victims, suggest that depressive symptoms are positively associated with the bereaved's anticipation of negative exchanges. The actual receipt of negative interactions eventually results in increased levels of complicated grief, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression, which require a greater attention to be paid to the impact of social negativity following homicide. In the case of Latiya, it was the traumatic loss that was puzzling her beyond comprehension, which continued even after a decade, whereby meaning making out of loss was a far- fetched reality. If this is considered medically, one may suggest, grief can result in sickness, which could be post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, as pointed out by Lobb et al. (2010) and Burke et al (2010). In a similar light, a bereaved father stated his condition after the death of his only son.

"People laugh at us after the death of my son. Even if we ran away, where would we go? We can't die. The only possibility that we have is to stay here and live. We [wife and husband] do not go anywhere. Even if somebody gets married or if there is prayer we do not go. Where to go? It brings pain and tears all along. It is wiser to stay home and cry than to show others our pain. Due to continuous crying, I have developed trouble in my eye sight [started crying again]. You know while eating we cry. Both of us

keep crying. Now my work is either to get drunk or stay home by myself. I am a proud man. I worked hard to earn and added to my wealth. We had enough to live our life. I never went to others to ask for anything but after the death of my son I have become disoriented."

The sister of the deceased added:

"The grief inside you never goes. It will only go after we die. We received compensation Even if people do support us yet life is not going to come back. The pain inside will remain fresh. If there is wealth but there is no person, what is the use of this wealth? In fact we are losing it." (Case 10 Rukum)

In this case, grief reactions were further complicated and problematic, as they had led the family members to isolate themselves from the rest of the community. Losing their only son was traumatic for the parents, which led to continued grief, and, hence meaning in life was lost. Shear and Shair (2005) conclude from their study that persistent and disturbing disbelief regarding the death is responsible for the painful situation persisting for longer periods of time. Lobb et al. (2010) suggest that complicated grief is an outcome of chronic separation distress. In such situations loneliness prevails, which leads to detachment from others. Further, Holland et al. (2006) argue that the role of sense making is critical in mediating between the cause of death and prolonged grief. In this case, traumatic and prolonged grief was responsible for the disorientation of the bereaved, which led them to a situation where sorrow and isolation were the adaptive mechanisms to deal with grief. However, contrary

to Neimeyer's argument, sense making in this case appeared as a futile reality for the bereaved. This also points to the fact that if prolonged grief is an outcome of a traumatic event there is a likelihood that sense making may not exist at all. Nonetheless, this seems case-specific and in this instance loss was destructive to the extent that the bereaved saw loss as the destruction of one's own life.

In another instance, the mother of a deceased explained why the loss of her son had resulted in a prolonged grief that she would never overcome in her life. She expressed:

I miss him. It is a mother's loss of love and nurture [kunika ko maya]. Every mother has the same love for her child. It is 'kunikako soka - bhitri ko soka - atma ko soka' [heartfelt sorrow]. You know, if you get a cut or hit or if your shirt is tattered everybody can see it. But if one is sad from within or feeling sorrow in her heart, nobody will see. A mother losing a son is like that. Whatever trouble comes, as long as you live you have to live with it. Love and attachment remain and sorrow prevails. It never goes. You know my son never raised his voice to me. He was a simple man. My heart burns inside and pain remains. How can I explain? It's not possible to express it. It is all inside. Whatever happens one has to live. I have become hopeless. Everybody has

lost their son, so I console myself looking at others." (Case 18 Rukum)

In this case, the continuing bond with the deceased seems inseparable for a mother. Here, the departed son was symbolised within a relationship that was indissoluble, the relationship of mother and child. Hence, grief was prolonged, even though she could console herself by looking at others. Grief remained, which the mother claimed was never going to go. In the above narrated cases, grief and bereavement emerged in extreme forms. Grieving for the bereaved was continuous irrespective of time and context. Grieving continued and unceasingly distorted the thought process of the bereaved, hindering the process of recovery. The enormity and intensive of the emotions were generated from the continuing bond that the bereaved maintained with the deceased. The meaning that one could draw from loss was existential in nature, which had pushed the bereaved into a condition of self suffering and cornering themselves in isolation.

Individual Bonds and Grief

As we saw in the previous section, in most cases, the continuing bond⁵⁴ with the deceased was a triggering factor in reconstructing meaning out of death.

[.] This particular theory which originated in the US bereavement literature - the theory of 'continuing bonds' (Klass et al, 1996) - has been developed through cross-cultural comparison (Klass and Goss, 1999) and resonates with the finding of this study, which focuses on the question of maintaining bonds rather than relinquishing bonds and defines continuing bond as a response to loss. Thus the nature of attachments and bonds and the ways in which relinquishing and retaining bonds are promoted and hindered are important for healthy adjustment (Stroebe and Schut 2005; Holloway 2007; Field and Filanosky 2010). This suggests that for some, depending upon the circumstances and nature of death,

However, in a few cases, a discontinued bond instead of a continuing one appeared persuasive in constructing meaning. This was evident from the narratives of Ganga's younger siblings. They suggested:

"Why remember? The person is gone. I have to do my work by myself. Nobody else will come and do it for me. Why should I remember and mourn? See whatever was to happen has already happened, so why think about it? The one who had to go is now gone. The incident has already taken place. There was nothing much that we could do about it. You know, even if we feel about her for a long time it does not make sense. We will be the sufferers. People may be able to help for a few days but not forever, so one needs to come out of tragedy. You know it is better to be mad than to die." (Case 5 Rukum)

In this case, the entire family member of Ganga knew that she was involved in the Maoist activities. People in the family were pre-informed repeatedly that at any time she could lose her life, as she had chosen to live the life of a revolutionary. Ganga being away from the house most of the time had also helped in weakening her bond with other family members. Family members suggested that Ganga, since her engagement in Maoist activities came home occasionally late at night. This suggests that she did not participate in the hardships that the rest of the family members shared together. This resulted in continuing bonds can be a part of successful adaptation for the deceased or maladaptive

under other circumstances and therefore an attempt to objectify grief work is bound to fail.

a weak bonding relationship with the rest of her family members. Absenteeism from the house probably had an adverse effect in establishing a continuing bond with her. Hence, continuous grieving was meaningless for the rest of the family members.

The narratives elucidate how grieving depends on the family bond and a deceased individual's relation with the family members. One could conclude that remembering the deceased would only lead the family to continuous sorrow. Therefore, being in grief was not helpful for the surviving members. In this case, it was daily activities and the practicalities of life that had shaped their thinking and ideas about her deceased sibling. The issue of practical life on a daily basis thus shaped the collective family agency. It was this collective agency that helped in reconstructing the meaning of bereavement. It was this collectively constructed meaning in a family structure that brought practical issues to their daily life. This helped them shape their feeling towards progress and engaged them continuously while setting aside their grief. The other reason could be the hardships that they were going through every day, that made them in a way stronger emotionally and psychologically. That positively contributed to reducing the grief to the level where they did not bother anymore about death and the loss of an individual to that extent.

Stages of Coping with Grief

In contrast to the above for many bereaved persons moving beyond loss and grief appeared as a strength. In another case, the sister of a deceased person who took responsibility for her household after the death incident described the

way in which she came to terms with the death of her brother. She explained coping with grief in terms of stages. According to this informant,

"For almost six months everybody in the family used to talk about him [brother]; and discussed the issues related to the incident and what went wrong that resulted in his killing. Even he [brother] used to come in my dreams basically of his body and death event but slowly the frequency of thinking and remembering reduced. That does not mean that we have already overcome the sorrow of his death but we have learned to move forward without him. Now we have developed a strong feeling that we have to live without him and it is helping us to move forward." (Case 16 Bara)

On another occasion, one of my informants expressed similarly:

"While looking at others, I feel at ease. For me, what desire do I have? I would say nothing. Now I am about to die. My time has come. However, I say conflict must not take place again and peace must prevail. I don't have much to do. In the morning, I go to collect fodder and wood, prepare food and in the afternoon, I stay home. Grief goes away step by step [kramik rupma]. In the beginning grief was like swallowing a hot chilli. The similarity is that the feeling of chewing a chilli goes away slowly; so does grief. In fact, while trouble and pain go away slowly, memory haunts again and again." (Case 2 Rukum)

In another instance, in a similar light, one of my informants expressed:

"It is like the one who is not there seems important and big just as the meat that is sneaked out from the mouth becomes precious. The death of a son is like that. Whatever I say and whatever I do the grief and memory of the dead son are not going to go. However, I have a little space to breath. I have another son and three daughters and three grandsons. I have a family to fall on to. I see other people around me who do not have a son and had lost their son and console myself. The person is gone now but we need to take care of those who survived." (Case 12 Rukum)

In these cases, grief was intense initially, but slowly got settled over the period of time. This suggests progression of grief in a linear form varying from intense emotional reactions to a rational reflection to a state of moving beyond the grief state. Bowlby's (1969, 1980) stage theory of grief and Averil's (1968) stages of grief present a framework suggesting that a bereaved individual moves from the initial impact of loss to a state where they assimilate loss. However their conclusion is based upon biological variables which do not incorporate the social and the daily life strategy that a person might take into account when grieving. From the narratives discussed above, it is clear that the stages of grief are dependent more on the dependency attachment, social and daily life strategy of a bereaved than on biological variables. Once a bereaved person is able to disassociate dependency attachment to the deceased, grief becomes a matter for rational interpretation and slowly a state of moving

beyond the grief situation emerges. Based on individual and social demands as well as daily life strategy, a bereaved person makes judgement in which grief and loss are assimilated. This process involves a period of time in which grief is slowly transformed into strength that helps family members to deal with their daily life situations.

Grieving for Loss of a Young Child

Grief and the bereavement process differed qualitatively when the loss was of a child compared to the loss of an adult. From observations, it was clear that the issues pertaining to loss and grief remained at the centre when the loss was that of a young earning man. The age at which an individual was killed remained vital when it came to continued grief. For the bereaved, the loss of an adult was irreplaceable compared to the loss of a young child. This was evident from the expressions of a mother and a father of a child. While touching a planted bomb by mistake, Deepak blew himself up when he was only of 10 years old. Deepak's parent expressed how they had dealt with grief and loss over the period of time.

"Life has moved on since then [the time after death] and we have been able to come out of grief. Initially it was painful. My wife [mother] went through a tough time after the death of my son. At some point she was even saying that she would die as well. But we survived with another four sons. Taking care of them was important rather than being in sorrow for the lost one. We have managed to cope with loss."

Following from the bereaved father, the mother continued:

"If he [dead son] had survived he would by now have been in 10th standard. I got psychological problems and became depressed after his demise. After that tragedy, I never got rid of anxiety problems. He was hard working. Whatever I would ask him to do he would do quickly. I got compensation but my son is not going to come back [tears followed]. A son is like an ornament of a mother's heart. I gave birth to seven sons and I am only left with four now. It is a harsh reality to live with. You know I have not ever been again to the place where he was buried. Deepak was buried near his school on our own land. After he was buried there I did not go again to that piece of land. It is not that I always miss him but when somebody talks about him or if there is a gathering of his friends I miss him." (Case 3 Rukum)

Similarly, in another case, the bereaved mother said:

"I gave birth to my son so only I can know the pain and what pain I had gone through after his death but now we have engaged in our daily life. I have another four kids so I need to take care of them. Nevertheless I miss him when I see boys of his age in the village." (Case 4 Rukum)

From both the narratives, it is clear that parents were able to deal with the loss of a young child. It is significant to note the difference of coping in term of grief of father and mother. From the expressions particularly of the father, one can draw a conclusion that for him a recovery from the loss and grief was quick compared to that of the mother. Compared to the father, the mother showed extreme grief reactions. Research suggests that a child, living or dead, plays many roles within the family psychic. The interactions with the inner representation of the dead child of a parent give a sense of presence. Deceased children actively influence the thoughts or events of a parent's inner self (Klass 1997). Moreover, in the Western context, a parent's bereavement is seen as complicated and prolonged and the grieving process is one of the most difficult.

However in the Nepali context, on the contrary, parents seemed to adapt to the loss over a period of time. Loss appears to be compensated by another child, as in both cases, the parents survived with a few children. Hence, they saw life in their surviving children. Grieving for the departed one was therefore seen a hurdle to taking care of the other surviving children. While in the beginning it was hard to comprehend the loss, eventually family members had managed to move on. In this case the presence of the deceased child in the thoughts and events of parents seems to have been replaced by thoughts and events related to surviving children contrary to the findings presented by Klass (1997). Schwab (1990) suggests that mothers report higher rates of crying, writing about loss and grief, reading, attending support groups, and helping others than fathers. Bereaved mothers reported using emotion-focused strategies, but bereaved fathers focused on handling problems (Murphy, Johnson and Weber 2002).

In the case of Nepal compared to the mother, the father was able to come out of grief in a shorter period of time. It is evident that although the mother was able to handle grief eventually, yet she was not able to replace memories of her child. The grieving period was much longer and intense for the bereaved mother. Handling grief appeared ultimately possible as parents were concerned with another growing child who needed care and love, rather than mourning the lost one. Feifel (1959) had described this process in terms of grieving individuals redefining and reintegrating themselves into life, terming it a recovery from the loss. However, people like Balk (2004) and Paletti (2008) term this transition as to manage, adapt, deal with or adjust and heal, given the experience of the profound nature of loss. Loss was managed by being replaced with another growing child. However, this does not imply that parents were fully recovered from the loss, but only that they were able to deal with it accordingly. In the process of grieving, the mother of Deepak in particular became prone to continued anxiety after continuous depression as a repercussion of losing Deepak. It is clear that although the parents were able to handle the grief comparatively sooner and recovered from the loss faster, yet they remained prone to anxiety disorders that emerged just after the death. This suggests that grieving can move in many directions and total adjustment is probably too complex to predict and too dynamic to measure. Nevertheless, the bereaved's attachment and continuing bond with the deceased, their family and social responsibility, and the practical considerations of daily living substantially influence the process of grieving and bereavement.

Widows and their Constitutive World

In general, while taking various cases into consideration, I have tried to present different ways in which grief and bereavement were conceived by the people in post-conflict Nepal. This suggests various different processes at work at one time, which the bereaved go through to deal with loss. These multiple processes of bereavement and grieving, by their nature and practices, present a complex whole in which complications, challenges, and hope constitute pathways to handle grief, leading to a particular bereavement process being followed. This complexity as it appears is a feature of distinct cases. A process of bereavement and grief in which a recovery is possible therefore remains case specific, although to some extent a generalised categorization can also be argued. To discuss these complexities and understand grieving and bereavement better, let us make a shift from a generalised view of the bereavement types that emerged from earlier discussions to the more specific category of widows, and the role that a bereaved widow played while grieving and subsequently in coping with grief. Here, I have treated widows as an imbeded case study while presenting five core narratives, in which grieving and bereavement can be discussed further.

Throughout this research, widows, particularly formed a distinct category and in most of the cases served as key informants. These widows were the ones who most severely reflected their psychosocial and emotional reactions to grief and bereavement. Moreover, they acted as the head of the family, a position that they were pushed into after the loss of their partner. It was impressive how, most of the time, widows continued explaining how they had managed

life after the death of their loved one. They expressed how they would have been better off at present, if their guardian was still alive. While explaining the misery, bereaved widows often went silent, showed choking reactions while explaining their story and finally were overpowered by tears. For instance, on one occasion, a widow who lived with her father-in-law with her two children, when asked about her husband's demise, became silent. It was only the tears in her eyes that could speak on her behalf. This was a regular feature in the field, in which the bereaved widows expressed the grief of their loss silently. Widows' enunciation of grief appeared too obvious. In another instance, in case ² of Bara, it was impossible to talk to the bereaved widow on several occasions. In one such instance, when I talked about her husband, she went blank without any response and started crying. It took quite a long time for her to come to normalcy but she remained silent. Later I learned that she had lost her psychological balance after the death of her husband. Although she lived in her own half built house with the younger brother of the deceased, at all times she was being cared for by her sisters and brothers-in-law. This indicates that whatever might be the situation, in most cases, widows framed a constructive world of 'self' to come out of the grief of loss.

Losing husband was a 'bipattaiparnu' - a tragedy

The frustrations of loss were at times expressed by the bereaved widows. On one occasion, Sonia, the widow of Manshah, shared her disappointment. For her, it was Manshah on whom the whole family was dependent. He was the one who used to get money and organised things that the family needed for

their daily living. After the demise of Manshah, suddenly the family members found themselves in a hand to mouth situation.

"I was aware since he [husband] was active in the party [Maoists] he could lose his life at any moment. But as long as he was with us it did not appear that I would have to face such a problem. Now I am experiencing it. I am not educated so there is nothing for me. I go to work in another's field. I earn five kilograms of grain per day. Somehow, I manage to live. There is a difference when a person [husband] is around and when he is not around. 'Dukkha' is all around. My best friend, with whom I could talk, laugh and be cheerful, is no longer here. At times, in the night while in bed if I recall the problems of the day his memory won't allow me to sleep. I would go on thinking that if he had been around; I would not have had to face the issue as he would have managed it. My eyes go wet and itching, tears flow. I keep thinking for hours. When tired of thinking everything, I console myself that one day I too will have to go to the same place where he [Manshah] has gone. I will go alone as well. He was fast, I might get late. But one has to go eventually. And again I would come to reality. [Pointing towards her elder son] If he studies well, he will have a job. That is the hope I have." (Case 12 Bara)

On this occasion, managing livelihoods surfaced as a challenge for Sonia.

Being uneducated and having no other skills she was compelled to work as a

daily labourer in another's field. For her, it was 'dukkha' all around - a tragedy for her and her family. It was the daily hardships that repeatedly propelled her to imagine her best friend and continuously establish attachments; in this case, it was her husband who was no longer there for her. Continuing attachment with her husband was in one sense a process in which she was able to come terms with the ultimate reality of life as well as the immediate reality of daily living. At the same time, on the other, it was in imagined talk with her husband that she could vent her frustrations. Hence, she was able to finally release her emotions and collect the courage to continue living. Hope remained the guiding principle to ponder on the ultimate reality and the immediate reality in which she framed her constructive world.

In another case, a widowed informant lamented in similar fashion as discussed above:

"When I remember all the events from the beginning, tears would flow from my eyes. At that time, I cannot control it. For me, nobody is there to share the sorrow and happiness. I do not know how things will move. Now, everything I have to do by myself. If not for this 'Andolan' [revolution] that took place earlier I would not have lost my husband. For me, it was like a 'bipattaiparyoni' - tragedy. So many people died, for those families it will never be the normal again. 'Dusman' [enemy] took people from their homes and killed them while they were young and active in their life. The realisation of the reality of death was tough to accept. I feel angry

at times but what to do? I also feel angry when Maoist's people come to visit. I get annoyed. I feel afraid at times whether the situation could be repeated. At least now we have moved a bit from our past situation. It is like after removing a branch from a tree, now again new branches are coming and I am happy that my children are growing. I do not want a similar situation again where people might lose their lives. They [security men] were 'apradhies' [criminals]."

In this case too, the death of her husband was termed as a 'bipatti' – a tragedy that was inflicted by the 'apradhies' – the security men – the criminals, as a consequence of the Maoist revolution. The reactions of grief were reflected in terms of anger towards Maoists, feeling afraid and getting annoyed with herself. For her, it was not possible to return to normality as it was before the incident, which she claimed was the case with all the families who had lost a loved one. Although she suggested that now she was been able to manage grief and had moved on from her past situation, she was afraid of the same situation returning again if Maoist conflict remained. For her, slowly it was getting better as she had hope in the better future for her children, who studied in Kathmandu.

Particularly in this case, most of the time when I visited her she was found either smoking while working in the field next to her house or started smoking while talking about her situation. For her, cigarettes were her best friend, a source of company to recreate her ruptured world.

"You know, to deal with my emotions and suffering, I smoke cigarettes. I smoke more than a packet a day. Earlier I did not smoke that much, but now I do. I even wake up in the middle of the night and smoke cigarettes, at least three or four times in a night. You know, when I am alone there is a range of thoughts that come to my mind. At times I keep thinking and then I would get up and smoke cigarettes. Smoking cigarettes is to help me control my mind. There's nobody from whom I can seek advice and discuss family and personal issues and make appropriate decisions. These cigarettes are my only friend. Sometimes I am overwhelmed with the situation and become tired and lazy to do anything. Being alone is tough. When he [husband] was there everything was going well. Our family used to be of six people, we have displaced ourselves. Now I have to live alone and it is very tough to pass time. You know even food seems tasteless. When everybody is there then it is interesting to prepare food and it is tasty. After preparing food, I would remember my husband and my children and would not feel like having food and I would cry thinking of all that. The situation has changed. Our family structure is disturbed. Everything has fallen apart [chat-bichat]. Even if I am sick I would lie down in the house and there would be nobody who would help me or come to ask how I am doing. It is all about helping myself." (Case 16 Rukum)

This tragedy distorted her family system and resulted in dislocating her from the rest of the family members. In the absence of her children, she experienced continuous suffering. She felt alone, and there was nobody around with whom she could share her emotions and feelings. Experiencing loneliness led her to rely on cigarettes, which had become her coping strategy to avoid pain and suffering.

A widow turned revolutionary

Premkumari, the widow of Ramawatar, gave a glimpse of what it was like being a revolutionary and how bereavement was disguised in form while people were actively involved in the Maoists' activities. Premkumari, after the death of her husband, joined the Maoist guerrilla wing and fought several offensives against security forces at different locations in Nepal. She expressed how she was denied the opportunity to grieve after the loss of her husband while becoming a Maoists fighter. Just after the death of Ramawatar, and his being acknowledged by the party as a Maoist martyr, party people pressurised her to join the Maoist party. She was persuaded by the district Maoist cadres to attend a party meeting where they motivated her with immense pressure to join in party activities by provoking her to take revenge from her husband's killer. Since then she lived an underground life for almost eight years. She expressed her grief in a disguised form.

"I joined the party only to take revenge on the security men who killed my husband. I felt sad and disorientated. But I had little time to think of all that. I was trained like that. It was all about taking

revenge. Yes, at the time of sleeping I would feel the loss. When I was left alone, emotions would come. Being a revolutionary, it was not good to show one's emotions to others. I had to swallow my grief. The only difference is that some people show grief to others, I did not. I was not in a position to grieve openly. To encourage people I never showed anyone my emotions. Whatever is in my heart, it is there, it is with me. You must know it how people go through grief. When I was in the party, it was all the same whether my friend died or my partner. But it is a bit different when you miss your partner. If now I use to tell you how I feel and think of my partner, it would be a history book. And it would not look good to share personal being. It is awkward for others to listen as well. Living as a revolutionary was to live in a battlefield. It was like if you die for the revolution you will be a martyr. If you live you will be the role model for others. So in a way we were never allowed to grieve over death. It was up to me whether I convinced myself or got carried away with it. The only option that I had was to convince myself and move on. Who knows, next day might be tougher than the previous one. You know, the grief of loss will always be there." (Case 14 Bara)

Premkumari's narrative suggests that self-sacrifice in her case was a sacrifice for a greater cause. For her, grieving was overcome by the notion of self-sacrifice, which was insulated as a motivation to take revenge. Grief was transformed into hope, a hope of being called a revolutionary and a hope of

taking revenge on her husband killer. Also displaying emotions were always viewed with fear that it would counterproductive to attracting people towards party activities, which could hinder the growth and expansion of the party. Hence, it appears that grieving expressively was a distant reality. Her departed partner was very personal and therefore grief for her was beyond anything that she could openly express. Grieving in this sense reflected always a hidden conversation with the 'self'.

A widow called 'badachalan'

In most cases, widows lost their husbands at an early age, and as the widows were young, people in the villages looked towards them with suspicion. Widows, if seen talking to a man, were presumed to be having a relationship with the man. Party cadres did not protect widows in the village. Instead of party activists protecting widows, they (party people) tried to demoralise widows for their so called indulgence in misconduct. Especially in Bara, it was suggested that rather than protecting widows and supporting them, party members themselves raised problems in public and indulged in punishing widows in a humiliating way. They tagged these widows as 'badachalan' standard and exposed [badanam] them publically. This was evident in the case of Taimul. She had to prove her innocence in front of the village council. People in the village suggested that since she was alone and her children were young, people could harass her. In some sense, she required an adult male guardian to protect her family. It seems that in the absence of a male guardian, people felt confident to accuse her of misconduct. According to Taimul, families who had

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⁵⁵ . *Badchalan* is used in the society to imply misconduct, which has a sexual connotation.

lost family members had a tough time to manage their life, especially widows who were heads of households. She explained how she was victimised both by the party men and by her own relatives.

On another occasion, she was pressurised by the Tarai armed group, 'Jantantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha – Jwala (JTMM-J)', and while under pressure, Taimul had to marry her daughter in a hurry when her daughter was only 14 years of age. Munna Ansari [Parbej bhai], a villager, had joined the group after deserting the Maoists. Also, the district in-charge for the group JTMM-J insistently pressurised Taimul to allow her daughter to join the group. As a pressure tactic, Taimul was tortured psychologically and emotionally as armed group members regularly came to her house and threatened her verbally so that in fear and under threat she would be persuaded to allow her daughter to join the group.

In fear of the insecurity of her daughter, in a rush, Taimul had to find an appropriate boy for her daughter, so that she could hand over her daughter to the boy as his wife and therefore the person who married her daughter could take care of his own wife. Since the only option Taimul had to get her daughter married as quickly as possible to avoid the threat of armed group members and be secure in society by protecting her daughter from falling into the hands of underground armed group members, she found the son of her own elder sister to agree to marry her daughter. The fact remained that she was not in position to afford to pay a reasonable dowry to bridegroom. Hence, she resorted to

marrying her daughter to her cousin. In this way she could avoid financial burden, and it would further strengthen the pre-existing familial relationship.

As Taimul had to arrange the marriage ceremony of her daughter, she had to negotiate and discuss with the father of the bridegroom several times before a date for the marriage ceremony could be fixed. To give the marriage ceremony a final shape, she had to interact with others as well as to get various other support. People, especially her late husband's elder brother, suspected these interactions of Taimul with different people to be a growing relationship between Taimul and others. The one that he could see most obliviously was her close relationship with her samadhi [bridegroom's father], so he started pointing the finger at her about her misconduct. Once, when she protested, she was abused physically and a rumour about her misconduct spread in the village. It became a big issue in the village. A meeting in the village was held to settle the issue. People were called from five surrounding villages to decide upon the rumour of misconduct and the reason for the physical assault impinged upon her by a distant family member. To pulverise the social image of Taimul, instead of settling the issue on a family level, it was extended to the village council. Purposely, party men fuelled the process, instead of protecting Taimul. Hence, people in the village sat for five consecutive meetings over a period of one month to settle the issue. Although she was cleared by the village council on the misconduct issue, nevertheless she was exposed insensitively among the villagers to talk about her relationships, even though the rumours were untrue. It was indicated that in this case even party members,

especially *Jansarkar* [district in-charge of Maoists in the area] supported those who tried to malign Taimul's character instead of supporting her.

The other plausible reason that surfaced for assassination of Taimul's character among other villagers was as a ploy to isolate Taimul from the village women's Maoist wing group of which she was a member. In this way, if the local leaders of the Maoists party were to succeed in labelling a person as not of good conduct, that person would be ignored in the party and hence they may not get their position in the party. There might have been several reasons for this. One prominent one could be the threat to leadership, as these martyrs' family members could create problems for the credibility of a leader if they did not support the family members. The other reason of which I was told by my informants was to avoid the assistance from the local leaders that might have come for a martyr's family.

In Taimul's case, her mother was a patron, a therapist, a guide and a support who could console her with moral values, psychosocial realities and religious principles. Her mother could console Taimul with her wisdom, suggesting that 'in life there is time where there will be trouble, pain and problems and one should take it as it comes'. One has to receive it and go with it. After going through the misery, one gets happiness, so one should take life as it comes. Nothing is achieved by crying. The person who is dead will not return. The pain and suffering that is there is not revertible. A widow like Taimul who does not have a man will always be weak and will have to adapt to others' satire criticism. But a woman who has her man will be strong and can argue

because she has the backup strength of a man. It seems that for Taimul, her mum was the only support that she had.

On another occasion, Taimul was found having a verbal argument with her neighbour. When I went and talked with her, in fact the argument got settled. Taimul explained:

"When people come and talk to me I feel released. It is like strength. Of course the trouble and suffering that I am going through would not reduce as long as I am alive but for time being I feel that I am cared for. I get motivation and strength to handle life situations. I feel that there is somebody out there for me to support me. I feel released from past experiences. People don't show any concern also because they feel that it was because of us and because of my husband particularly that the villagers were harassed again and again by the security forces during the conflict days. It was because of him that the village was known as a 'maobadi' village. It was for this reason that security men usually came to the village and abused, punished, and tortured villagers. If he was not in the 'maobadi', then the villagers might not have received such treatment from the security men. Villagers retain this feeling until now. But I have not done anything wrong to them, so why this treatment of me? Where to complain? I need to pass my time and I am doing that. The days used to be easy and mine are now turned like a mountain, filled with hardships, never ending. Now we have

become dependent on others. Enjoyment is perhaps a dream."

(Case 15 Bara)

It appeared that my presence gave Taimul a sense of support and strength. Basically the argument was about the issue of harvesting the grain. Taimul claimed she had just asked her neighbour why her neighbour was angry with Taimul and did not ask Taimul to help her in harvesting the grain. On this issue they got into an argument. In tears, Taimul was fighting back with her neighbour insisting on her of her good intention to ask her neighbour about helping her in harvesting the grain. The argument got settled only when the neighbour realised that the researcher (whom she thought might be a party man) had come to see Taimul. The possibility of the researcher being a party man could create fear or respect that led to settling the argument. It was learned that party men were decisive in settling arguments in the past, which had left some effect in the village, but in the case of Taimul it does not appear that she had good experiences with her own party men, on whom her husband had relied until he was killed.

'Santosh' and 'saboor', a word of contemplation

Both in general and, particularly, in the case of widows, the concept of 'santosh' (self containment) and 'saboor' (patience) featured as a point of departure from grief. These words and concepts provided the bereaved with an outlook through which they tried to halt a process of continuous grieving. These words contained multiple meanings and appeared interchangeable. One widow reflected upon these words in a philosophical tone:

"Since they killed my man, I have lost my mind. When his memories come I go like mad, forget everything. I lose sense. But I retain 'santosh' [self-containment] so that the children would not get into it, and I can do things for them. If I start crying everybody will be upset and nobody will work. We may not get food. It is all 'dukkha'. People in the village created suffering for us. When somebody is in sorrow others help them to come out of that sorrow but nobody helped us with any support. Sadness and suffering vanish when there are people around to help and console [santosh]. One feels cared for, that creates 'saboor' [patience] in you. It gives you strength to fight back against suffering. If there is nobody to console you, sadness will not disappear, it rather will increase. Now it is all to deal with 'self' and console 'ourselves'. Now I have to be aware in mind and content myself with the fact that in my fate, that was my share, to have my partner. I am sad from the roots. The suffering that I am going through cannot be explained. There is nobody in this world as sad, abandoned, and helpless as me. See, my daughter has reached of age to get married. If he [husband] was there she would have got married by now. She never went to school after the death of her father. We are here in this village with 'dukha' (sorrow). I don't want to stay in this village. " (Case 13 Bara)

The words 'santosh' and 'saboor' carried a notion of relief for living that was expected both on the behalf of the bereaved herself and from the other people around her. When it was expected on the part of someone bereaved it provided ease and confidence; therefore a new strength was there to lead a new life after a loss. However, when it was expected from others in the community, it denoted care and support that she would have received and the feeling of empathy that others would have shown towards the bereaved. In the case of the widow of Ramnarayan, the empathy of others towards her grief was missing. This disrupted the social aspect of coping to allow the bereaved to continue with her daily life course. This seems to be the reason why she carried continued prolonged grief. The widow's own wisdom rather than others' wishes was thus helpful in coping. It seems that in the absence of the community's approval of the loss and grief, the widow of Ramnarayan felt isolated in the community that allowed her to question her own wisdom and to reach to an answer. As she was not able to relate with others in the village, she presumed her approach remained problematic. Her efforts to come out of grief remained fragmented. It was for this reason that she continuously felt a sense of disbelief and therefore was always in 'dukkha' and hence she did not want to reside for long in the village.

Another time, she expressed the following concerning disbelief:

"The only thing is that people caused suffering knowingly and there is no space of respite or sigh of relief. Now, I would only feel happy if somebody sends a letter about the fact of his [husband] death. We have isolated ourselves from the rest of the villagers to the extent that I do not visit others house. I have got a few buffalos so that when my children return from school they must get engaged in taking care of the animals and keep busy, not to feel isolated." (Case 13 Bara)

The major concern of the widow was other villagers' attitude and behaviour towards her family. This reflected conflicting family values that emerged due to the nature of the death that her husband met with. Family values were conflicting due to the stigma that was attached to the notion of political death. In Tarai this type of death was heavily stigmatised. The person living in a value system of togetherness in the community suddenly observed an explosion that conflict and consecutive death brought to the surface. For the bereaved family, the political ideology that the deceased had followed was problematic and therefore stigmatized. In this case, isolation of the family from the rest of the villagers can be seen as a tool of value negotiation. On the contrary, where the deceased was involved in Maoist activities, an association was seen as a tool to negotiate family values and make a balance in the society. A family, like that of Rmanarayan, who had no association with the party was left vulnerable in society, which was problematic as it was attached to local village politics. It further brought the family out of existing social values of peace, tolerance and non-violence which compelled them into a new culture and a new value system that had emerged out of political violence. Especially, in Tarai, this symptom was perceived as a cultural trauma for the families, where a death constituted a factor that had broken relationships in a way that

necessitated a reconstruction of lives and a change in everyday understandings to guide interactions.

Gift rejected as 'rando ko kapada'

Apart from social issues, at times, villagers also discriminated against widows on cultural grounds. In one instance, a widow was rejected by the villagers when she offered some clothes as a gift in the name of the departed soul. Her offering of clothes was returned, suggesting that they did not feel comfortable about receiving a gift from a widow. This gift offer was termed 'rando ko kapada' that was previously used as culturally defamed. My informant, a widow, expressed her dissatisfaction at being insulted by the villagers. She stated:

"A problem is there but what to do? It is like that. 'Pida' [suffering] is 'pida' [suffering]. Nobody can do anything about it. As long as I am alive it will be like that [a silence prevailed]. I did not get the support of the villagers. Nobody came out to support me even with words [bolibachanko]. People disowned me to the extent that the clothes that I had offered to people as a donation in the name of my husband was returned back to me, suggesting that a widow's [rando ko kapada] offer is not worthy of acceptance. I still face odd reactions of people due to the superstitious belief, as people try to avoid me if they see me, as they say their days will be useless [saitabigrancha] if they see a widow. However, it was not

all the people but only a few who viewed me in such a way". (Case 18 Rukum)

In this case, the widow was viewed as bad luck that must be avoided to see if a person is about to start something new. It was due to this notion that widowhood is a sign of bad fate that people did not receive her offer of clothes. Here, being a widow itself was stigmatized. It was a long existing cultural superstitious belief towards widows that was still present among a few, which resulted in humiliations and added to continued grief.

Widows and their personal self

Apart from psychosocial aspects and handling daily life situations, in most cases, bereavement processes of widows in respect to their personal self also gave an impression of concealed agony. Grieving within 'oneself' was limited to one's 'own being', at times either reflected through silence or with overflowing tears. Grief was either not shared openly with others or was suppressed with overpowering thoughts camouflaged within oneself. This surfaced in terms of either controlling one's own personal desires or venting them out through various other means. Among different means, a pertinent one was philosophising on one's own reality and constructing a larger worldview in which personal grief could be negotiated. In this regard, children were seen most importantly as a source of hope to override personal suffering. For instance, if a query was made about personal issues in relation to loss, most of the time informants responded in flat answers e.g. 'I suppress hurt feelings

within myself'; or 'What to do? 'It [world] is like that'; 'It is all upon god now'; and very often they helplessly questioned themselves.

For example in one instance a widow shared:

"I always think of him [husband] in my heart and mind. When I remember him [husband] I get into 'soch' (thoughts). I then do something or other to come out of his memory. I either go to my friend and talk to her and spend my time but I hardly share about my husband. At times, I go to attend the meetings of the party (Maoists) when they call me to attend. But as time passes by it is becoming usual".

The next time, when she was asked why she had decided not to get married again, she replied:

"No! It does not appear so strongly to get married. Although, yes the thought does come to mind that I should have somebody personal when I am very tense and when there are issues and problems that I can't solve by myself alone. The thought comes suggesting that it would be nice to share 'oneself' with somebody dear, but there come my two young kids and the prestige and social status issues. What may people think about me if I do so? It stops me from going forward and there I stop. When grief is too much, I

simply go to collect fodder or I get engaged in daily activities related to the family and farming." (Case 4 Bara)

A widow, who was also an active Congress [a right wing political party in Nepal] leader of the women's wing in the district of Rukum, described her way of dealing with her personal grief. She explained:

"See, as long as you live you are not going to forget it, but while getting engaged in different activities you may overshadow your feelings. You act like you have forgotten as you get engaged in activities and politics. Sorrow of loss and remembrance is not going to go. It will not go. I can only imagine that I have reduced my 'pida' [grief] and 'dukkha' [suffering]. Memories come in again and again. I pretend that I am alright to others to show them that I am fine but I am not really. Anywhere I go; anything I do; I never enjoy doing anything. His [husband's] memory haunts me again and again. He comes always in my mind. I become puzzled and do not know what to do when I remember my partner. I do not know how one should reduce this sorrow. The only thing one may do to reduce suffering is looking at children and their development. I do not share anything with anybody. I keep everything to myself so 'dukkha' increases. For the children's sake, I pretend that I have forgotten him [husband]. It is not like somebody will help me and I will be relieved. It is all about 'reassuring the self'. I feel much more pain when I talk about it to people as I re-visualise the event and feel sorry about it. The memory becomes fresh and I feel more pathetic to myself." (Case 18 Rukum)

The above narrated expressions suggest that for the widows, loss and grief were reflected not only in terms of their material well being but also in terms of their social and psychological wellbeing. This also echoes the way in which grief and loss occupied the widows' minds and the process in which they presented themselves in the family and society. While containing the grief in their daily life engagements and the thoughts, to some extent, they eventually managed their grief, but at the same time they remained vulnerable in the core of their 'being' when it came to the loss of a husband. At times they were disowned, humiliated, and termed 'badchalan' by the people, which had further fragmented widows' interaction with others and limited them to consoling themselves, which led to a continued vulnerability of a widow. This type of bereavement constituted this vulnerability because of ostracism, fear, stigma, and the consequent withdrawal of informal and formal support systems, since the position of widows without an adult person to support them in the family, is extremely vulnerable.

For widows to construe their personal self to negotiate grief was important for them as they felt isolated and unable to discuss their problems openly with others. Although at the time of death and after the death, for some time, widows expressed their grief openly in a chaotic trope, later they secluded themselves from others and were limited to the 'personal self', which can be argued in subjective terms. This subjectivity of the self seems to have developed within the interplay of socio-cultural and embodied sources of the self. ⁵⁶ Thus, as time passed by, grief and suffering were only deposited in the storehouse of the individual's psyche. This suggests that within the studied socio-cultural context, widows mainly focused on the daily struggle and came up with creative responses. Widows thus offer a complex and nuanced account of how bereaved persons struggle and make hard choices in ambiguous worlds, with outcomes that are open ended and often unresolved. The process of bereavement and grieving appeared complex with layers of expression.

'Dukkha' – a Model of Grief

As discussed throughout this chapter, in the context of the Maoist conflict and precipitating violence, bereavement outcomes of grieving persons present mixed results. Instead of getting social support, bereaved members were forced to deal with grief privately. In addition, in the absence of modern therapeutic assistance and with a lack of community resources, the bereaved were left isolated to handle their grief. In such a situation, an immediate concern remained to protect the 'self' and the rest of the family members. The meaning of living was reframed pertaining to the demand of the situation, which was mainly confined to one's own 'self'. This self-perpetuating phenomenon as a result limited the boundaries within which the bereaved experienced their life after loss. Thus, while violent death was seen as instrumental in breaking the existing processes, it was the bereaved member's self-consciousness that

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^{56 .} In reference to Nepal, Skinner and Holland (1998) also argue selves in relation to self, calling it 'person-in-activity'. This is further argued by Skinner and Holland (1998); Ortner (1984). They suggest that, while framing self, people do share an emphasis on history, power and practice and on the struggles of individuals and groups to forge self – understanding, within local relationships and the larger socio-historical and political context.

constituted the process of bereavement and the ways in which to handle the grief of loss.

In the context of violent death, the means of coping with loss seems somewhat similar to modern Western practices, which may force individuals and families to deal with grief privately. This way of coping with grief is nevertheless shaped in Nepal by socio-cultural practices which are markedly different from the techniques and therapies that are used in the western world. Modern Western practices are based on the assumption that individuals' emotions must be channelled in such a way that they could adjust to new roles and frame a new identity in the aftermath of loss. This understanding has influenced the social world of the bereaved. The process of grieving has been in a continuous transition ever since the modern conception of death and mourning has come into practice (Walter 1999). This is evident from the literature on Western practices which suggests a variety of ways in which grief is managed, including the paradigm of grief work (Bowlby 1980; Parkes 1996; Kubler-Ross 1975), the categories of coping (Wortman and Silver 1989; Stroebe and Schut 1999; Folkman 2001), posttraumatic growth (Calhoun and Tedeschi 2006; Bonanno 2004) and sense making through meaning construction (Neimeyer et al, 2006).

However, as discussed in previous chapters, in Nepal, death in general and death related grief in particular is normally dealt with not only at individual and family level but also collectively in the community. As is evident from chapter five, when death occurs in normal conditions, rituals are seen as an

appropriate tool in reducing the impact of death. However in the wake of violent death, traditional ritual practices were seen as losing ground. Grieving through ritual was obstructed and the bereaved were found at a complete loss, as the conventional ways of grieving were impossible, while a modern bereavement approach was absent. Moreover, it appears that grief and bereavement are dealt within psychosocial, practical, and spiritual and religious contexts rather than through the modern medicalised approaches.

'Dukkha'- a Nepali concept

As emerged throughout this chapter, grief in the Nepali social world is constantly discussed in terms of 'dukkha', which denotes at least two corresponding meanings. First, it reflects emotional and psychological suffering, and secondly, the socio-cultural and economic hardships that people go through. Therefore, the concept of 'dukkha' has both spiritual and secular meanings. In terms of emotional and psychological suffering, a bereaved person seeks for spiritual intervention, whereas in terms of socio-cultural and economic hardships, they look for a secular interpretation. 'Dukkha' was therefore discussed primarily in a macro perspective, when it came to people's livelihoods. Concurrently, it was also experienced at micro level while responding to grief and bereavement, whether it was psychological, socio-cultural, or material. 'Dukkha' was thus seen as opposite to 'sukkha'- 'a state of wellbeing and happiness' which is represented through the psychology of desire to live a struggle and hardship-free life.

Although 'dukkha' appears in opposition to 'sukkha', and both are seen as binary as well as contradictory to each other, in practice, 'dukkha' is perceived as finally being diffused into 'sukkha'. Hence, in the light of religious and philosophical perspectives 'dukkha' and 'sukkha' are seen in continuity and finally an end in itself. This binary imposition was expressed by informants regularly. Informants in the field perceived the meaning of life either in terms of 'dukkha' or 'sukkha'. 'Dukkha', as informants suggested, was the experience of sorrow arising out of loss - 'loss of a male support' - 'a guardian'- 'a bread earner', suffering, sadness, melancholy, grief, loneliness, threat posed by others in the community, fear and anxiety and insulting behaviour of others. These emotions and feelings had implications on the psychological well being of an individual that required spiritual intervention. On the other hand, obligations of life in terms of physical and material wellbeing such as food, a proper house, a job and a piece of land to harvest, education for children and good health were seen as issues of daily concern that required secular rationalization. In this respect, 'Sukkha' was articulated in relation to having good nutritious food, good health, clothes to cover the body, companionship, ease and comfort in life and freedom from fear and anxiety to take care of the family.

March (2002), referring to rural Tamang women, and Leve (2009) in reference to women Maoist cadres in Gorkha in Nepal, observe this opposition of 'dukkha' and 'sukkha' within the psyche of an individual. According to March, Tamang women narrated life situations as a balancing act between these emotions and located actions and events in relation to them. In the case of

Maoist cadres joining the Maoist revolution in Gorkha, Leve argues that women Maoist cadres viewed the opposition of 'dukkha' and 'sukkha' in relation to personal 'self-interest' and providing their children with an easier life. The experiences were evaluated in terms of suffering and joy that had moral groundings. Similar to March and Leve's finding, in the case of Bara and Rukum, this opposition of 'dukkha' and 'sukkha' is seen both as a balancing act and a state of managing daily life situations which had an undercurrent of 'self' negotiation. This was reflected more in terms of contradictory worldviews of helplessness and destiny, and less of a choice.

Here, 'dukkha' was not inflicted by one's own choice, but imposed by enemies. When it was Maoist family, the enemies were the security forces who inflicted killings, whereas for the other families, it was Maoists who killed their family members due to opposing political views. It is interesting to note that in both situations, 'dukkha' was a product of righteous responsibility and corresponding acts of an individual towards their community and nation. It was argued that getting involved in such acts of killing was one's responsibility towards one's nation. Sacrifice of one's own life for the greater good of the society was a predominant image that was derived from a secular religion. This suggests that grief and bereavement in Nepal is articulated within a broader framework of 'dukkha', coming from a bereaved person's own held positions that included psychosocial interpretation, practical consideration and religious and philosophical engagements. Here a bereaved individual's held position is largely dependent upon the typology of death, as discussed in Chapter Four,

that is, acceptance of death, rejection of death, transcending death and death as a means of self actualization, in which meaning for life is derived.

Furthermore, in the context of the Maoist conflict particularly, if grief is to be considered within the parameters of 'dukkha,' then this can also be interpreted in relation to psychosocial and political transitions; psychosocial in the sense that 'dukkha' has bearing on people's thinking and emotions, whereas the notion of political transition indicates a need for equality and social change. This notion of political change is hence negotiated upon death and subsequent grieving. Therefore, a bereavement process, in this sense, will have little meaning if discussed in isolation. The focus of analysis will thus have to shift from psychological and therapeutic intervention to psychosocial and political interpretations together with daily practical considerations and religious and philosophical engagements. Also, existing interrelationships and individuals' interpersonal dependence on one another in society are important, contributing substantially to the patterns of individual adjustment to grief and bereavement. Grief and bereavement, therefore, if reflected in terms of 'dukkha', will require a holistic configuration. Hence, the concept of 'dukkha' appears as a broader conceptual framework in which narratives pertaining to grief and bereavement were expressed by the bereaved. A model of 'dukkha' would thus clarify the meaning of grief and bereavement in the Nepali context.

So far I have discussed that the way in which Nepali society understand and respond to grief and bereavement contributes to, and is shaped by the prevailing discourse of 'dukkha'. Hence 'dukkha' as a predominant concept

needs to be conceptualized based on the expressions of the informants. Broadly speaking this seeks to explore grief and bereavement in two broader frames of reference. The first draws upon philosophical underpinnings, and the second, on experiential and coping ways to come to terms with loss and grief, which include both positive and negative features. Hence, grief and bereavement in the Nepali context are not limited either to socio-cultural practices and philosophical reasoning or to a predominantly psychological set of understandings and interventions, but are discussed as a totality. For the purpose of further discussion, while drawing upon grief and bereavement narratives, I have categorised the meaning of 'dukkha' so that the conceptualization of grief and bereavement could be possible in the Nepali context. The grief reactions that constitute the meaning for the bereaved are categorised in three broader areas, including the philosophical and spiritual meanings of 'dukkha', the meaning pertaining to daily life considerations and finally, the aspects of psychosocial negotiations while coping with grief. Thus, I have tried to clearly distinguish these in the meanings attached to the term 'dukkha'. However attempting to separate them out underlines the complexity of grief; there is, of course, considerable overlap in their usage because they remain, to a significant degree, entangled in individual experiences.

Expressions and meanings of 'Dukkha'

Philosophical and spiritual expressions Meanings

'Dukkha' is related to 'atma' (soul)

It is the spiritual intelligence of

'atma' which perceives 'dukkha' and

reacts accordingly.

'Dukkha' and 'sukkha' are products of An individual's mind [mana and

mind dimag] changes every moment, which

brings 'dukkha'.

'Dukhha' and 'sukkha' are life's two Everybody experiences 'dukkha' and

polarities 'sukkha' in life.

Expressions pertaining to daily life Meanings

considerations

'Dukkha' must be accepted Crying will not reduce 'dukkha';

courage is required to handle

'dukkha'.

'Dukkha' brings people near to the As long as there is breath in the body

reality of life one will have to live.

'Dukka' is an individual construction This can be managed through

'byabahar' (daily activity),

'pujapath' (religious practices) and

'dhyana' (yoga).

Consolation reduces 'dukkha' Sadness and suffering vanish when

there are people around to console

(santosh) one and thus acceptance

increases.

Personal responsibility helps in reducing Taking care of rest of the family

'dukkha' members has helped in reducing

'dukkha'.

Engaging in social activism reduces Interacting with people on a social 'dukkha' platform has created confidence in the bereaved.

The aspects of psychosocial

Meanings

negotiations

'Dukkha' leads to the impoverishment of In 'dukkha', family members are not the family able to lead their family properly.

Continuous grief leads to abnormal Anger, ignorance, isolation and behaviour forgetfulness have been the predominant behaviour patterns.

Level of attachment and dependency is Loss of a loved one is a loss of a part decisive in the enormity of 'dukkha' of the self.

Loss is translated into continued grief

The deceased person is not going to come back, so 'dukkha' and 'pida'

(suffering) will continue.

'Dukkha' is a creation of others -'the 'Dukkha' arising from violent death enemy' is not accepted by the people.

'Dukkha' brings fear and uncertainty People feel unsecure about their life

and future.

The meanings of 'dukkha' as expressed by the bereaved, clearly point out that coping with grief is only possible by understanding 'dukkha' in its varied forms. When we look at the different ways in which the feelings of grief and the experiences of bereavement have been conceptualized, not surprisingly, we

can see a reflection of the dominant explanatory construct in the concept of 'dukkha', in which the bereaved have lived after the loss. On a continuum of life, 'dukkha' draws meanings from spiritual and religious practices and society at one end and the inner being of the self at the other, whereas, the daily life negotiations mediate between the two. An individual exists in between and makes sense of society and religion to understand and cope with 'dukkha'. 'Dukkha' is experienced at individual level raising existential questions for the bereaved, who seeks for an outlook in which it can be dealt with appropriately.

Here, the work of Parkes (1993, 1996) is of a great significance. Parkes offers a useful framework arguing that individual experiences become meaningful when interpreted through a series of 'assumptive models'. The bereaved make sense of their world, which is constructed out of bereaved person's internal world – that manages intra-psychic processes - and their external world - the reality of the outside world. Parkes argues that since bereavement represents a threat to both sets of models - the inner world and the outside world, it is the interaction between the inner reality and the reality of the outside world that is important for the bereaved, which shapes their bereavement experiences. This process of relinquishing or adjusting to past realities and establishing new ones to make sense of altered reality (private and public) is described by Parkes as 'psychosocial transition'. Lifton's (1979) typology of bereavement suggests five modes of death transcendence – the bio social, creative, religious, nature and the mystical. Holloway (1996, 2007) drawing from Lifton, suggests that the individual engages in these five spheres of activities in which one

transforms grief and bereavement caused by the death. She suggests that the biosocial, creative and nature instantaneously help in reconstructing meaning, whereas the religious and mystical pose existential questions. Holloway (2007) argues that bereavement also threatens the existential reality of a bereaved and proposes that grief and bereavement be discussed in a framework of psychosocial-spiritual transition. The work of Parkes and Holloway indicates that there exist significant social and cultural diversity in which people grieve. This suggests that grief is not only limited to individual psyche but is also a social construction which requires social accommodation; and at times this also creates existential and spiritual challenges for the bereaved. Hence, the work of Parkes and Holloway resonates with the findings of this study, regardless of the western provenance of their work, because this study shows that grief and bereavement in Nepali context is not only reflected within a psycho-social, and spiritual transition but it also accommodates a bereaved person's livelihood options.

First and foremost, in the context of the Maoist conflict, 'dukkha' is not a self creation but imposed upon the bereaved by others. Secondly, once an individual is pushed into the experiences of 'dukkha', the individual shapes meanings through particular reactions that vary from philosophical or spiritual to pragmatic and negative ones. The grief and bereavement reactions are constructed out of both the individual's inner reality and their external world. While personal reality shapes the psychological processes of the bereaved, the external environment shapes a bereaved person's interactions with the outside world. Third, when reactions are reflected upon, such reflection connects to the

soul and probably to religion and one's own fate and destiny. When the realisation is settled, an individual begins to think of ways in which to deal with grief. Consequently, an individual designs a mechanism that is not only limited to psychosocial transition as suggested by Parkes or Holloway's psychosocial- spiritual transition, but also incorporates the bereaved individual's practical considerations of daily life in which 'dukkha' is managed. This process of initially understanding 'dukkha', and finally managing it, is significantly influenced by several other external factors including an individual's attachment to the deceased, feelings towards the enemy, engagement in family and social activity, and the consolation and support that the bereaved receive from others in the community. Hence, while social and natural processes help in grieving, philosophical and religious processes give it a direction, in which bereavement can be dealt creatively in its totality, whereas practical considerations mediate between the two. Thus balance is restored in life after the loss. The bereavement process thus expands its boundaries beyond psychosocial and spiritual transition. Seeking existential answers, finally leading to search for creative reflections, allows a bereaved person to transform their grief into a pragmatic approach while considering individual responsibility and their daily engagements. Hence, coping with grief and bereavement has its groundings not only in psychosocial, religious and spiritual practices but also in practical considerations and personal responsibilities or what I call the 'dukkha model of grief'. It appears that it is only in the light of daily practical considerations, and the struggle to cope with individual responsibility, that the bereaved in reality get to the root of understanding 'dukkha'. Thus knowing, 'dukkha' in its totality finally

transforms grief into a hope in which coping with grief seems possible. In this proposition, 'dukkha' is not only limited to psychosocial – spiritual transition, finally resulting in existential questions. Understanding 'dukkha' in its totality ultimately leads a bereaved individual towards making meaning in life and therefore managing it, starting from daily life activities to engaging in spiritual practices.

Thus I would argue that understanding 'dukkha' is necessary to manage grief. Particularly in the case of Nepal, 'dukkha' was a product of violent death and therefore death itself became primary in reflecting upon 'dukkha'. In this perspective, understanding death in its totality, as discussed in Chapter Four, appeared as a necessity to understand 'dukkha' in its entirety. Hence one may conclude that death brings 'dukkha' and knowing 'dukkha' leads to understanding of life in its totality. Once the relationship of death and 'dukkha' is clearly reflected upon, a process of bereavement starts. Finally, while struggling to manage daily life, one understands the totality of 'dukkha', and therefore they come to understand death - a reality, that frames a reconstruction of life in new light. Thus, in the light of 'dukkha' a hope in life emerges. And therefore it is 'life' and its 'living force' that finally constitute the process of bereavement.

Conclusion

Finally, grief and bereavement in violent conflict situation present a complicated case. At the primary level, one may conclude from various narratives that the reactions to loss and grief were to some extent similar to

those discussed universally (Jacobs et al. 2000; Prigerson et al. 2000, 2009; Neimeyer 2002; Field and Filanosky 2010; Steffen and Coyle 2011). However when grief and bereavement were discussed in relation to specific cases, the intensity of grieving differed, ranging from continued grief to managing grief and moving on in life; and the practices to cope with loss varied depending upon socioeconomic and daily life considerations, psychosocial, existential, religious and spiritual sense making.

The discussions until now have therefore been focused the intensity with which grief contributed either negatively or positively in daily life. At the time of death, it was a shock; fear prevailed among the family and the community members, which adversely affected the grieving process. Questions pertaining to the contexts and the episodes in which people lost their lives remained at the core of grieving, and finally contributed in the bereavement process. Thus grief and bereavement were determined by the social positioning of a bereaved person and the social context in terms of supportive mechanisms. Thus the social and emotional ties of a bereaved person in the community emerged as an important determinant of grief, since the position of the widows and elderly persons without adult children to support them, was extremely vulnerable. Further, this type of bereavement compounded this vulnerability due to ostracism and stigma that was present in the community. In addition, fear and the consequent withdrawal of informal supports of the people in the community and absence of formal support system were instrumental in reinforcing vulnerability.

This leads to the conclusion that grief and bereavement in general, and particularly in the case of the widows, involved multiple layers of coping strategy. These engagements seem to have derived from the existential questions that were imposed upon the bereaved resulting from the loss and grief. In parallel, while grieving, the bereaved simultaneously went through experiences that contributed to answering their existential questions of which death and 'dukkha' constituted a part. While self reflecting upon existential questions, and experiencing life after loss, the bereaved constantly experimented with the ways in which they could manage their grief efficiently. Hence, grief and bereavement reactions were reflected in three different layers that were constituted existentially, experientially and experimentally. I argue that the existential questions raised were very much the product of people's experiences of loss of their beloved ones and the reflection in which they engaged while grieving.

In the process of bereavement, experience was an important factor that contributed in raising certain fundamental questions of life. Existential questions raised by several informants were complementary to each other, and simultaneously one was the product of another. People's own experiences were important to frame their worldviews in which they finally came to a realisation of life. Loss had created a sudden vacuum in the life of the family members that continued, but the degree varied as time passed. It was bereaved members' disillusion, absolute despair, and hopelessness that had allowed them to think that life is meaningless therefore; existential questions became powerful. A sense of presenting oneself to god was reflected there. In many cases, fate also

played out as a means of connection to spiritual wellbeing coming out of sorrow, while in others, on the contrary, disbelief towards faith increased.

In the wake of loss, for the bereaved, to create hope in life became vital. In due course, something new had to be created, so one should look forward to life. This led to the understanding that 'dukkha' is the cause of all suffering and death is the reality of all living. It was something that the bereaved repeatedly experienced. In this process, their experience was instrumental in negotiating between existential issues and a new hope for the future to continue living. The very notion of tomorrow and future that the bereaved created was meaningful in terms of bereavement and supportive towards an existential approach to life.

To come out of these existential and experiential concerns, the bereaved started experimenting with self. In this way, a frame of reference for the world that they wanted to construct emerged. An inside experiment began to set aside loss, which was reflected in their daily activities. I would presume bereavement was thus an experience and how to manage it inside or outside was an experiment with the self as well as with the external environment, that most of the widows seemed grappling with. Hence, one may argue that bereavement was not only loss but also an experience, a development of existential thought processes and finally an experiment within the self and in relation to others.

Hence, drawing from the observations and discussions, one must argue that in the Nepali society, death and bereavement have been dealt with in a particular way. Death due to political violence has contributed to the extent that the mourning process had been altered, where the circumstances of death determined the process of bereavement. Socio-cultural patterns of grieving and social networks of support were mostly disrupted but remained important. This was much stronger in the Tarai districts than in the hills of Nepal. The recovery from grief was only possible while understanding death and precipitating 'dukkha' in its totality, which started slowly after grieving for a few months. A sense of hopelessness resulted in existential issues. Hence, meaning construction became important for the surviving family members. This allowed family members to see grief and loss in psychosocial, and religious terms and in consideration of daily life perspectives. While meanings were derived in a religious and social framework, livelihood issues were imperative for continuing life in a new light that mediated between the loss and grief. Finally it was the concept of life rather than the concept of death that helped the bereaved to draw their own worldviews, which was only possible through constant interrogations and reflection on death and subsequent 'dukkha'.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion – towards a Framework for Understanding Political Death in Nepal

Death is one of the most powerful realities of living human beings, and it is probably due to this reason that the search for a dynamic and sophisticated understanding of death and dying continues. The hunt for convincing knowledge pertaining to death has gone on from time immemorial, and is reflected in religious texts and philosophy and more recently discussed in social sciences. Over the past few decades, especially after the 1960s, a growing enthusiasm to discuss death and dying based on empirically textured data has surfaced. In the process of contributing to the knowledge of death and dying, in this study, I have discussed death arising out of political violence from a Nepali perspective. The insights for the discussions throughout this thesis are particularly drawn from the anthropology and sociology of death and bereavement which inform the processes of data collection, explorations and discussions of findings and the conclusions of this study. In the Nepali sociocultural context, the importance of traditional coping mechanisms such as rituals in general, and death rituals in particular, and the formal and informal supportive mechanisms of the communities, are influential. Therefore, the ways in which those powerful pre-existing social and cultural patterns of coping were disrupted, led to reinforced vulnerability. Thus, in this type of bereavement where formal or informal support systems were not available, how a bereaved person dealt with such disruptions and came to terms with

death and loss is examined. Thus here, I bring together the thesis by contending that death as a concept and an ultimate reality of life must be understood in its multifaceted approach, as is apparent while reflecting upon death arising out of the Maoist conflict in Nepal.

Findings suggest an overarching complexity in which the people of Nepal continue to make meaning out of death and are able to make a judgment to move beyond loss and suffering to continue their life. When careful attention is paid to visualise the pretext of death during Maoists conflict, it becomes apparent that death has multiple meanings coinciding with multiple layers. It was shown in the narratives of the deceased and discussed previously in chapter four, chapter five and chapter six, that death brings immediate destruction which involves a continuous process of self-negotiation on the part of the bereaved. In this process of negotiation, one continuously formulates meaning out of loss within one's thought process in which emotions associated with the deceased guide the waves of reactions including suffering and consolation, fluctuating at times at a peak and at other times at its lowest level. Given the emotional complexities that surround daily life situations, the constant efforts to overcome those complexities require a balancing act involving both subjective understanding and objective handling of the situation. This leads to the contention that any imposed limitations while defining and understanding death are questionable. It seems virtually impossible to objectify the meaning of death as it varies substantially from case to case. In this way, a composite understanding of both subjective analysis and objective management to deal with situations is sought to make meaning

out of death, and it is not an easy or seamless process to arrive at a mutually accepted conclusion. However discussions within various chapters at least suggest that four broad conclusions can be drawn concerning death and bereavement in Nepali society.

Death understood Holistically

The earlier discussion, particularly in chapter four, 'the understanding of death in post conflict Nepali society', explored the meaning of death as dependent upon individual scrutiny. The meaning echoes the three consecutive dimensions of a bereaved individual personality: the thinking, the practices, and the experiences that seem to overlap with one another. The thought process of the bereaved, the practices for dealing with loss and grief, and the experiences of loss are reflected in various different ways: having a positive outlook to death while accepting it; the depressing experiences suggesting a rejection of death, resulting in pessimistic views on life; and engaging in a transcendental approach to handle death and death being a choice, hence a tool for self actualization. This indicates a process in which the bereaved gets engaged in formulating the meaning of death, which is largely a result of his/her engagement with their inner world and the impressions that they collect from the outer world on an everyday basis. This is further put to the test with daily life processes and beyond, in relation to the inner self and the outer world of the bereaved. At the level of thoughts, religious practices and a philosophy of life and beyond are instrumental in translating death as a living consciousness that needs to be conserved on a higher level of life. This relates to the methodologies adopted by which the bereaved articulates upon death.

The emphasis, however, is on the importance of the process that must help to shed light on life rather than death. Questions are also being raised against a desire to be happy with the modern material world, to make ourselves happy in the external world of the senses, while in reality everything is evanescent.

Within the Hindu and Buddhists religious contexts, it is clear that death is a discarded notion which is promptly replaced with life instead. Death is seen as a transition in one's life cycle, a transition from a lower awareness to a higher one or vice versa (Rahdakrishnan 1926; Parry 1982; Blackburn 1985; Madan 1987; Witzel 1997; Desjarlais 2003). Apart from religious belief systems and traditional practices, a bereaved person's socio-political engagements and most importantly a continuous self-reflection in the wake of loss finally consolidates the meaning of death for the living. It appeared that traditional and religious practices created a context in which grieving was possible. But to make meaning out of death was only feasible while engaging in thought processes in which the bereaved was able to investigate the truth pertaining to death and bereavement, that was largely limited to the individual psyche. This calls into question the contradictory nature of the thinking mind that presupposes death as a singular event that requires an objective interpretation but that can only be fully comprehended by the one who is dying. Nevertheless, primarily, death can be seen as a singular event but an exploration into the meaning of death remains subjective in nature. The individual self appears instrumental, with individual contemplation overpowering the prevailing meanings that were primarily designed in a socio-cultural context.

Death as a negotiated concept

In the post-conflict Nepali society, the views of a bereaved person in coming to terms with loss, a bereaved person contemplating their own death in relation to the deceased, and a Maoist revolutionary interpreting death in the context of a political and social movement, are reflected in subjective terms and varied qualitatively from case to case. These articulations broadly relate to at least three different levels of interpretation. The first is conceived within the religious and spiritual notions of death; the second relates to practical views pertaining to daily life experiences of a bereaved; and finally death is symbolized as a tool for social and political transformation. The way in which people articulated the meaning of death overlapped from one level to another and varied in perceptions ranging from self realisation to continued grief, suffering and betrayal, which I argue can be discussed within the categories of acceptance of death and rejection of death, a transcendental approach to death and death as self-actualisation. I have discussed this in chapter four, concluding that the understanding varies from case to case and is contextually situated.

I conceptualise death within four broader positions. While views pertaining to an acceptance of death and the rejection of death featured largely as fixed, a transcendental approach emerged that gave meaning to suffering. This can be seen as a continuation of the dialectical approach that Holloway (2007) draws in a Western perspective. Being dialectical while contemplating on death and dying, led to a deeper self awareness and therefore a bereaved person was able to self actualise the meaning of death and loss. Reasoning on death and dying

henceforth turned out to be a pragmatic solution to handle grief and loss in their life course. The value of life and death thus became meaningful within a conflict context.

While acceptance of death was to seek for an explanation in which one was to understand death, a sense of rejection of death produced a somewhat nihilistic attitude whereby the bereaved denied that death made any sense to them. They felt unused to the past and the future and claimed to live in the present. But in contradiction, they appeared ambivalent to the present as well. Death of a close kin was a tragedy for the rest of the family members and can be argued as a destructive force for their own life, which constantly brought immense suffering and put them into a situation of helplessness. That eventually was submerged over a period of time with the challenges of daily life situations but loss was never erased from their psyche. In between appeared a third category, what I have called a transcendental approach to death. Most of the bereaved remained helpless to face the daily reality of life in which they were forced to live, but they constantly contemplated on loss and suffering. Finally they reached a point where a transformation of grief and loss was possible. They slowly engaged in a dialogue with their inner self that allowed them to perceive suffering as a natural phenomenon and helped them to eventually modify their life course according to the growing demands of their daily life situations. Also, a fourth category emerged whereby death can be discussed as a tool for self-actualisation.

Death as liberation and identity

Many bereaved persons rationalised death as a self sacrifice for the nation and therefore death for them was liberating and a tool for self realization. This was also featured in words like 'mukti' - a final 'liberation' and 'sahid' - 'martyrs' of the people's revolution, that can be called a process of self-actualisation. The conception of death in this context can be articulated in terms of an identity that will eventually provide equity, equality and justice to the downtrodden and neglected in society. Sacrificing one's life through death is seen as liberating since it would be instrumental in achieving freedom for those who had been oppressed in society for generations. In this respect, the word 'mukti' was purposefully connected with the concept of liberation. This view makes a particular distinction from above discussed three categories in claiming that for a revolutionary, dying while being a cadre was liberating as he/she became a martyr forever. Thus, dying for them was self-actualising of one's own being. Therefore death as a concept must be symbolized as a necessity.

In Hindu religious and spiritual life, the expression on sacrifice constitutes a fundamental position. Das (1983) notes that the hermeneutic tradition of the *Mimamsaka School* of ancient India explaining the configurations of sacrifice seems appropriate to shed some light on how the word 'mukti' was transfused with the concept of liberation that prevailed within the deceased revolutionary's family members. The *Mimamsa School* supposes a 'structure in which it is not the sin but the desire of the sacrificator which is taken as fundamental' (p.445). In this presumption both individual desire and

renunciation take centre stage of a sacrificial cult that seems contrary to the anthropological discourse⁵⁷ on sacrifice. In theory, an individual's desire of renunciation, that is understood as sacrifice, is being imposed upon itself. This comes from a desire to free oneself from the slavery of objects, which leads an individual to connect with the divine. And the person is 'mukta' (free) from worldly attachments. In the revolutionary popular culture and in the processes of providing training to the people in the villages and towns in Nepal, death was produced in a somewhat similar fashion as discussed above. The Maoists borrowed concepts and ideas from indigenous religions. Then they blended them with the politics of Maoist communism and finally symbolized martyrdom as liberation and self-actualisation. Subsequently the Maoists were able to connect this formulation with religious belief, and therefore they were able to motivate their cadres to sacrifice their lives. Their articulation on death was limited to liberation in respect of sacrificing one's life for greater humanity. Moreover the Maoists collectively attached themselves to worldly power rather than equating sacrifice with union with the divine. Therefore, in the popular discourse, death became a symbol for 'mukti', not only for the 'self' - the 'revolutionary' but also for the 'others' - the rest of the family members and society. Sacrificing one's life was a choice based upon one's own will. For the individuals themselves who sacrificed their lives, death was not something that they 'believed in', conceptually. Instead, death appeared as a desired will to taste the fulfilment of life. In another way, death came as a

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⁵⁷ Anthropological discourse on sacrifice by Hubert and Mauss (1964), Evan-Pritchard (1956) and Turner (1977) presumes that the sacrificator is the one who is shocked and possessed with sin and the sacrificial cult provides the means for cleansing the person or the social body of this tarnished image. Immolation of the victim is seen as the renunciation of a significant object which captures the central moment in the sacrifice, which appears fundamentally contrary to the articulation of the Mimamsa School of ancient India.

product of 'kaala', but with a self decision. In this sense, for those who were craving for 'mukti', death became a symbol of individual dignity and respect, and therefore they must be worshipped as 'sahid'.

The word 'sahid' became a prerogative that was meaningfully described within the notion of death. The concept of 'sahid' captured the immediate imagination of the people and was then in turn transformed as a symbol of sacrifice. The individual who is now a 'sahid' is presented to be a brave one who was able to embrace death for others' benefit. For many, dying for the cause of the people appeared as a superior option to any others. In this perspective, offering death was viewed as a righteous act to which the rest of the society should bow down. It was the concept of becoming martyrs that connected the present to the past and the future, which in some sense would never be diminished. Therefore, becoming a 'sahid' or a family having a 'sahid' became a unitary identity in the larger social and political arena and death became meaningful. It is in this elaborative process of continuously reformulating meaning that death and dying became important. This ultimately provided the motivation for the individual to opt for revolution and death became a point on which they were negotiating life. Hence, death became the focus in which the meaning of life was drawn.

Death Rituals - an important Religious and Cultural Framework

In spite of the challenging views of the Maoists regarding death rituals, seemingly the traditional orthodox practices remained important among all the groups including the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Muslims, across caste and

ethnic groups, even if the attitudes to the rituals and their institutional contexts were questioned retrospectively. Rituals turned out to be immediate reference point in which the meaning of death was contemplated. Death rituals were placed as an important practice in Nepali society, whether for the Hindus, the Muslims and the other ethnic groups. It was reflected that this in practice assuaged the suffering of the living by assisting the dead with their otherworldly journey. For this reason, rituals appeared meaningful and expressive, to the extent that they reconfigured the meaning of life. I contend that if rituals were set aside as an isolated construction, the meaning of death would lose its applicability. Therefore, if death to be understood in Nepali perspective, rituals serve as a necessary tool by which the meaning of death is reflected.

The rituals are there to negotiate the transitional space between 'life - death and life'. The departed soul is placed within a transitional category in which a departed soul is either re-established on another plane or re-incarnated as a continual category. This transitional space is negotiated through various rituals starting from 'gaudan' to 'dahasanskar' – the cremation rite to collection of 'astu' and 'dasa kriya karma' and further continued by giving offering to 'kuladevata' and 'pitris' and performing 'tarpan', 'masik sraddha' and 'barkhi'. This suggests that the whole purpose of death rituals is to define the human existence in terms of life and death as part of a cosmic design and not as an accidental or contingent appearance. Similarly, the continual category represents birth and death in a cyclical continuum. This in turn is integrated into the system of social and cosmic reality within a broader realm of

microcosm and macrocosm⁵⁸. Therefore, rituals form a web of moral and ethical obligations for the bereaved family members that in return legitimizes rituals in general and death rituals in particular. In this process, ritual connects bereaved family members to the ultimate truth of existence, 'death'. Therefore, I argue that performing death rituals is a plausible means by which the deceased is placed into the category of divine. Accordingly, rituals can be argued as a predicated assurance that connects the visible to the invisible and harmonizes as well as integrates the social into the cosmic.

Disrupted Rituals and Dismantled Social Engagements led to

Self Awareness

Death rituals were seen as a necessity, not only in normal circumstances but also during the troubled times following violent death. Rituals even if performed in tokenistic sense compared to the traditional norms, were important. This reflected the commitment and the responsibility of the bereaved which they must fulfil without any doubt. Nevertheless, rituals in respect to violent death were mostly limited to and linked with the immediate family members and close kin. This largely disrupted the established social principles and practices of social mourning and the notions of shared social values.

[.] Levey (1990) and Witzel (1997) have argued for a multifaceted picture of the world within the Hindu worldviews. They suggest three divisions, categorising it in terms of the macrocosm of gods, the microcosm of humans and the mediating realm of ritual the mesocosm. However, they failed to notice another category in between the macrocosm and the microcosm, which I suggest constitutes together the world of *pitris*, or the world of *kuldevatas* and evil spirits or the wandering souls that remain in the transitional category for sometimes as long as they are not placed ritually into the categories of *pitris or* reincarnated. This omission reflects the exclusion of evil/darkness/lostness – almost an exocosm, coming from the nether regions of the cosmos and untimely/ political death opens it up. This suggests that the macrocosm is the ultimate design from which emerge all other categories of the world and death seems a deciding factor in framing various different categories.

The rituals were performed in confusion. Those who still managed to keep up with some form of traditional ritual practices did so while experiencing psychosocial and socioeconomic hardships. The nature of violence and the state of the dead body were also responsible for diffusion in ideology and practices. On the one hand, death ritual was connected to social status in the community, while on another it was a test of one's perseverance and courage. It was also an assertion of the practices that were in place from ancient times and an enriching experience to understand the natural law of justice. Hence, there remained a tension between culturally defined norms and a bereaved person's ability to engage in such norms.

Notably, social status was attached to prosperity and the willingness to donate and in return to claim a boosted social image in society. Further, it was also to earn a 'punya' (good deed) by donating candidly while performing rituals. On the other hand, while going through the ritual processes and its complications, a bereaved person was able to discriminate between the natural law of the world and the reality of death. This reflection allowed a bereaved person to remain strong and courageous during tough times. It can thus be concluded that the patterns of rituals strengthened an individual's existing mode of organisation. This finally sustained the power structures in which belongingness in the family as well as in the society was ordered. This was purposefully maintained by the traditional socio-cultural practices and was featured within the boundaries of social and kinship ties. However, at the same time, social hierarchies were diluted and social equity was maintained.

Especially in terms of bereavement and funeral practices, traditionally accepted descriptions were no longer holding the grip that they had in normal circumstances, although on the contrary, family members were virtually able to get away with the ritual practices or they performed rituals in a rudimentary sense. However they remained dissatisfied over the ways in which they had no option other than to bypass a more systematic ritual process. It seems that, given the circumstances in which the bereaved were left to grieve the loss, they accepted the shortcomings of not having completely engaged in the ritually defined mourning process. That also hindered a possible initial release of grief. In this way people were neither able to totally discard traditionally accepted practices, nor did they prepare to embrace the modern ideology of moving beyond rituals. Among the bereaved, confusion continued regarding rituals. A bereaved individual had to negotiate with 'the self' as well as with others in society to meaningfully understand death. The boundaries between life and death as a concept therefore appeared diffused. Social formations of thought moved beyond the normative features of traditional socio-cultural practices to socio-political change. This led to social formulation taking its conception in fluidity, influenced by hope, fear and revenge. In this sense, death and dying became merely concepts on which societal negotiations could be bargained. Once death was seen merely as a thing in a context of social self, the meaning of death began to shift with much fluidity from a socially derived meaning to an individually reflected meaning.

The logic, norms and ethical guidelines that were fixed and were the deciding factors in the past began to crumble, replaced by a liquidated concept of death

maintained by the logic of presentation, modification and re-modification. A chain of command followed whereby the individual self seems to have been caught in social self, whereas the social self was influenced by and further trapped in the political self. A social response to the meaning of death was framed in a political contour. It seems that in this process of negotiating death, a bereaved personally initially lost touch with 'the self'. I argue that while looking at death first as a symbol, then an experience and a reality of life, finally the bereaved reached a point of interrogating their own inner self in respect to death and dying. This led to a deeper understanding of one's inner being, the 'self'. In this sense, death became meaningful in its narrowed endeavour to the extent that it guided the future life course. However, in a broader sense, in the absence of a real signifier, death remained a puzzle. Therefore, to understand and make meaning out of death in its totality, it was discussed conclusively at various different levels. This seems qualitatively different from the description of Western academia, especially as pointed out by Walter (2000) and Holloway (2007), where postmodern ideologies are seen as the deciding factors compared to the traditionally accepted norms.

Disrupted Grief: tensions between Traditional Practices and Political Death

While the processes of recuperation go hand in hand in various different ways, whether by formulating meaning out of death or engaging practices in return, yet the foremost aspect of death is its immense potential for intense emotional impact on the survivors. Strong reactions such as disbelief, fear to continue life after the death of a loved one, rage and anger towards those who were involved

in killing, helplessness and acceptance of fate, and questions coupled with submission to the unknown and invisible power were seen as the overriding characteristics of grief and bereavement in regard to death. This was experienced in 'mana' (heart-mind) and 'sarira' (body) by reflecting through 'mana' (heart) and 'dimag' (mind) in a framework of 'dukkha'.

Further, in the absence of the traditional ritual practices and social support, along with guidance to deal with pain and suffering, bereaved members were left to rely on their own conscious efforts to comprehend grief. Violent death fractured the existing processes while constructing new meanings for the bereaved by restricting the bereaved to their confined kinship boundaries. Protection and survival of the rest of the family members were surfaced as an utmost concern which persisted beyond traditional ritual practices and social norms. This in return isolated 'oneself' from the social norms, restricted to the personal 'self'. This suggests two parallel interpretations in which people had possibly processed subjective states in relation to grief and loss or as Giddens (1991) terms it, 'double hermeneutics'. At one level, one may note the lack of psychology (discipline, profession, treatment, technology absorbed by all) in Nepal. That might have affected whether and how people process subjective states. On the other, one may argue that it was the religion and philosophy around religion that produced the psychology of the people, by which the bereaved processed their subjective states.

This displayed a tension between drawing on tradition as a spiritual resource and social framework and the challenges to those traditional sources of support posed by the type of bereavement experiences resulting from violent death. Thus, on the one hand, for some, a tragedy of death provided a combination of experiences: loss, sorrow, reason and practice. Moving from the state of suffering and grief to a state of recovery required a balancing act in the daily life situations that was essential on the behalf of a bereaved to comprehend his/her existence. Possibly, while trying to do so, a bereaved person went through several religious and spiritual processes and therefore they could finally transcend death to living and life.

However, on the other hand, there were others who were unable to do so because of the hardship and social exclusion which they experienced and thus remained in chronic grief. This was particularly evident in the case of widows as discussed in chapter six. Widows were the ones who most severely reflected their psychosocial and emotional reactions to grief and bereavement. At times, these bereaved widows explained the misery, while at others, they remained silent and very often choked while talking and were finally overpowered by tears. Silently, these bereaved widows expressed their grief of loss. Thus, for many, grief continued forever, irrespective of time and context.

Loss as losing a part of 'self'

Continued grief was a recurring phenomenon in very discreet ways, particularly in the case of widows, since, in most cases, widows instead of getting social support to cope with loss, had fallen upon their personal self. This, as a result, rather than allowing the bereaved to move beyond grief, pushed them into continued suffering. This gave an impression of concealed

agony, where grieving within the 'self' seemed limited to one's own being, at times either reflected in silence or allowing tears to overflow. Grief was therefore either not shared openly with others or suppressed with overpowering thoughts camouflaged within oneself. This highlights the fact that there exists a multidimensional approach in which a grieved member may try to understand the process of bereavement and grief. As discussed earlier, in chapter six, it emerges that the layers are grounded mainly in philosophy and religion, logic and science and practices and possibilities.

In the Western context, what is termed as prolonged grief resulting in Prolonged Grief Disorder⁵⁹ (PGD) primarily is an outcome of complicated bereavement that requires a therapeutic intervention (Prigerson 2009; Gray et al. 2004; Vanderwerker and Maciejewski 2008). In the absence of any such possibility in terms of identification and intervention in the case of Nepal, bereaved members applied their own minds to deal with continued grief. Moving beyond the situation was seen as reflecting the strength of the family members. However, that did not replace the memory of the dead person, which continued to haunt the bereaved not frequently but occasionally. For them, the concept of moving on did not exist. The enormity and the intensity of emotions seemed to be generated from the continued bond that the bereaved maintained with the deceased. Similar findings are drawn by Shear and Shair (2005) and Jacobs (1995) in the Western experience where they point out that it need not

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⁵⁹ This is discussed by Prigerson et al (2009), Vanderwerker and Maciejewski (2008) and Gray et al. (2004) as a complicated form of bereavement that arises out of a significant interpersonal loss that requires professional help. However in the case of Nepal, although some of the symptoms that they talked about were seen among some of the bereaved widows, they were not discussed in terms of professional help. Instead bereaved individuals managed their grief largely on their own.

be violent death that could trigger continued grief, when the loss is personally devastating with or without violence is enough for continued grief. In response to the loss and grief, the bereaved constantly contemplated on the dead. The meaning that one could draw from loss was one of existential nature, that triggered in the bereaved a condition of self suffering, further cornering themselves in isolation.

This in a broader sense raises questions pertaining to the existential nature of human life that require a convincing answer. It is this seeking nature of the mind that creates a basis on which either life could be cherished or left to be diminished. In the case of Nepal, it emerged that somehow existential queries of the human mind had helped in formulating guidelines in which grieving members had drawn purpose in living in the wake of loss of a loved one. This process has its root in the experiences, both internal and external, to reach a logical conclusion to proceed in life. I argue that to come out from these existential tests and experiential mental concerns, individual started testing-out with the self.

Hence, they were able to frame a larger worldview for themselves. An internal experiment therefore began. Grieving became a meaningful experience, and managing it inwardly and outwardly was an experiment within the boundaries of the self and society. Therefore, the bereaved were able to recollect themselves to experiment with their life which allowed them to keep going. Moreover, a final departure away from grief begins only when existential

issues become obvious, and experiences are the collective juncture in which experiment begins.

Framework of 'Dukkha' is reflected as the bereavement process

As discussed in previous chapters, violent episodes of killing and torture remained attached, in turn regenerating pictures of the dead in which the catastrophic killing unfolded. Vivid pictures of the dead body rested in the memory of the bereaved, fresh forever and repeatedly came to haunt them, resulting in the loss turning to a trauma that continued for years. This form of continued grief appeared in multifaceted forms that shaped the meaning of life subjectively at different junctures in multiple ways. That was seen in numerous ways, ranging from the issues of personal support to the sense of belongingness and social obligations to livelihood issues.

For them 'dukkha' was a powerful word, extensively used to express emotional and psychological suffering as well as socio-cultural and economic hardships. 'Dukkha' was seen primarily, as a product of violent death, and therefore, death itself became central in reflecting upon 'dukkha'. Hence 'dukkha', can be argued as a powerful concept, in which bereavement became apparent, and finally a process of recovery started. This suggests that death carries a notion of 'dukkha' with it, and while knowing 'dukkha', one understands the reality of life. It is this relationship of death and 'dukkha' when reflected upon, a process of managing grief starts. Therefore, to draw on a framework of 'dukkha' is necessary to manage grief that is presented in the struggle of managing daily

life situations. Thus, in the wake of 'dukkha', a hope in life emerges that finally constitute the process of bereavement.

In this sense, labelling the bereavement process for bereaved individuals in the way it is represented and discussed in the West appears limiting in reference to Nepal. Further, to restrict the bereaving processes to one particular course such as incorporating psychosocial therapies, as used and advocated by the professionals, appears impossible as well as dangerous, given the complexity and intertwined relationships of various characteristics operating at the same time. Hence, in this perspective of continued grief, the bereavement process seems to be moving in many directions at a time. Therefore, a total adjustment is probably too complex to predict and too dynamic to measure. However this study has contributed to laying the foundation for further development of bereavement theory outside of the Western paradigm.

In summary, reactions to death are universal to a large extent, irrespective of death in Nepal. However, when it comes to the level of intensity of reactions, it differs qualitatively and the practices to cope with loss vary substantially. Coping becomes much more complicated when coupled with political violence and conflict. It is for this reason that death in the post-conflict context of Nepal presents a complicated case. In short, there are many echoes in this study of the effects and process of grief described by Western theorists. However, the accounts of these bereaved families are framed within a fundamentally different worldview. This case study of political death shows them struggling to accommodate their subjective experience in a socio-political context which

challenged previously assumed philosophical constructions and social structures.

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Glossary

Abran Outside protection for a thing which is also known as

khol. In the case of death, body is seen as an abran or

khol for atma.

Adhijeevan Unfinished life when a person dies in his middle age.

Advaita In Vedanta, advaita means undivided one – non duality.

In this sense God is eternal to self.

Akal Premature time for death.

Akal mrytu A death that occurs suddenly and accidently may be due

to the conflict and violence.

Akash Ifinite space - cosmos.

Andolan People's protest.

Antariksh Infinite space.

Antarloka The in between world, the world within and beyond us.

Antyesti Rituals pertaining to cremation rite.

Abasyambhabi Somthing that is unavoidable like death.

Akaalgati abruptly.

Allah Muslim's God, prayed by Muslims in Nepal.

Agni Fire.

Agnimar Giving respect to burned ashes by performing special

rituals to cover the ashes and collect bones for offering it

A person who meets unnatural death that occurs

to Holy River.

Apradhies A criminal. In the case of Maoist apradhies was a

security men while for a Maoists victim was a cadre of

Maoists. They are also called as apradhis and these

terms over lapped with each other.

Astu Remaining ashes and bones after a funeral fire.

Atma Atma or Atman a Sanskrit word that is translated in

English as Soul.

Aum The divine sound.

Badchalan An women who is engaged in illicit sexual behaviour.

Balidan One who sacrifices his life for the people's cause.

Barkhi Celebration of death anniversary on yearly basis.

Bikal Premature time for death.

Bipattiparyoni Extremely chaotic time mainly caused due to a death in

the family.

Bitepachi Time after death of a person.

Bhagavad Gita One of the holy books of the Hindus.

Bhupal A Buddhist holy scripture used by Tamangs of Nepal

which is seen as a text that have an ethical and moral guideline prescribed for the followers of Buddhism.

Bhuloka The world in which we live.

Bhut/pichas Ghost.

Brahmin The highest rank in the caste hierarchy.

Byabahar Daily interaction patterns and behaviour of an individual

in the family and society.

Chat-bichat bho Everything fallen apart.

Chada-parva Cultural festivals.

Chetana Human awareness.

Chita a funeral pyre - a pile of wood on which a corpse is

burned as part of funeral ceremony.

Congress Party Rightwing political party of Nepal.

Dabaune Keeping one's feeling with oneself.

Dagbatti Firebrand that is used for giving fire to dead body during

cremation rite.

Dakshina Money as gift.

Damai This is an occupational caste traditionally involved in

stitching clothes for others in the community and are

categorised as sudras the lowest rank in the caste

hierarchy.

Dan Donating gifts and money.

Dargah The place where Muslims bury dead body.

Dasain Hindus main festival in Nepal that takes place during

September- October every year.

Dasa – Kriya Ten days ritual performance that takes place after

cremation rite.

Dehanta Death of a person literally means the end of the

physical, material body.

Devi Different Goddesses are known as Devi.

Dhajaphalne a ritual in which a piece of red or white cloth is tied to a

bamboo or a tree as an offer to ancestral god.

Dharmic A person who is spiritual is called as Dharmic.

Dhungedhara Traditional stone tap connected natural water roots.

Dimag It is the mind of an individual where it is understood that

all thinking of an individual emerges.

Diyo/diya Diva is an oil lamp usually made from clay, with a

cotton wick dipped in ghee or vegetable oil.

Doko A bucket made of bamboo, used for collecting fodder

and woods from jungle and carry luggage from one

place to another in rural hilly areas of Nepal.

Dosa/dokha Possessed by evil spirit.

Duita sansara Dual world in which nothing exist independently.

Dusman The literal meaning of the term is enemy. This term is

especially used by the victim's of Maoists conflict against those who killed the family members.

Dukkha It means suffering. This is used regularly in all forms of

suffering including economic, emotional, psychological,

social and religious.

Durgati A bad end.

Duwadist/duwadasa Twelve day of mourning during death ritual.

Ekodist/yekadasa Eleventh day of mourning during death ritual karma.

Ganja Marijuana / cannabis.

Ghara/ghaito Large clay vessel to keep water.

Ghee Clarified butter. This is also a pure ingredient that is

used for any ritual performance.

Ghat Bank of the river where daily death ritual is performed

after cremation rite.

Grhya Sutras Rules of Vedic domestic ceremonies spelled out in

hymns as guidelines.

Ganga The holy river that flows from Nothern Himalaya of

India.

Gaudan Cow gift ceremony that is especially performed just

before death of an individual.

Gunas Qualities of an individual.

Hasiya Locally made knife of iron rod used for collecting

fodder for animals.

Jagat The living world.

Jamdoot Ambassador of the god of death.

Jansarkar People's government that was established by the

Maoists in certain areas of Nepal during Maoists

movement was called Jansarkar.

Jantantric Tarai - Mukti Morcha - Jwala

This is an armed group which is active throughout Tarai

with the aim of freeing the Madhesis from Pahadi

domination and rule.

Jeevan Life.

Jhankari A local traditional healer who performs rituals to

influence pirti and other evil spirits that might have caused ill health to an individual. This practice is

commonly used in Rural villages of Nepal.

Jiba Animal being.

Jyan Knowledge of life.

Kadampak Recitation of Kuran by Maulbis in the name of departed

soul.

Kala Time, basically attached to time of death.

Kalgatile marne One who dies in the old age.

Kali yuga In the Hindu scriptures the concept of yugas are

described as the stages through which world passes in a cyclic motion. Kali yuga is one of the four stages (staya yuga, dupar yuga, treat yuga and Kali yuga). The Kali

Yuga, which is also known as the dark age as it is

believed that in the Kali yuga people will have less and less attraction towards god. In the villages of Nepal, for some the present day represent the Kali yuga and for some it was seen as 'papi jamana' or the age of sinners.

Kailasha One of the holiest place for the Hindus where lord Siva

is believed to have done his yoga. Kailasha is presently

the part of occupied Tibet.

Kapada Clothes in Nepali.

Kalapahad Black mountains of northern Indian Himalayas. This

includes parts of Himanchal Pradesh and Uttarakhand states in India. This is also known as difficult places available for migrant worker of Rukum where people go

to find jobs.

Kapur In English Naphthalene that is purposely used in ritual

performances.

Karma is a Sanskrit word means performing actions in

life. According to Hindu philosophy an individual is in this world by his her own actions - karma. This means that human beings are uniformly bound by his or her own actions, good or bad. However, over the period of time the meaning of Karma is being mystified with the

fatalistic notion attached to it.

Karta The person who helps the principal mourner during the

death ritual period.

Kheti - grihasti A commonly used expression for farming and household

works.

Khus Today Khus (also pronounced as Khas) are largely the

groups comparing of upper caste Brahmin, Thakuri and

Chhetri ruling elites of Nepal.

Kriyaputra Principal mourner who gives firebrand to the dead body.

Kukur Dog is called Kukur in Nepali.

Kush Holy grass which is used to perform rituals including

death ritual.

Kuldevata Ancestral gods.

Kunikako An expression means somebody attached to heart. This

is used as an expression among the mothers of martyrs

in Rukum Nepal.

Kunikakomaya Love arising out of keeping a baby in the womb.

Kuran Holy book of Muslims.

Lalsalam Red salute, the greeting and respect expressed through

salute in Nepali Maoist's culture.

Lila An illusory act mainly performed by god himself and

talked in mythology.

Lama Buddhist monk who recites Buddhists text.

Latomanche A differentially able people.

Madanti Holy water mixed with Ganga water, basil leaf, cow

urine, cow milk etc.

Madarsa a Muslim School run by an expert of Kuran a maulbi

where Kuran is taught in Urdu.

Mahabharata Ancient Hindu religious text which includes act of

Krishna and war of Kauravas and Pandavas.

Mahapralaya Cosmic dissolution and the disappearance of the entire

creation.

Mahapatra Brahmin priest who guides death rituals.

Maita Birth place of a women.

Mangal sanskara Purificatory life cycle ritual which has positive notion of

life to it.

Maoists/Maobadi A Nepali who follows the ideology of Mao of China.

Maobadi is a Nepali translation of word Maoists used in

Nepal.

Mana Heart feeling of an individual.

Manakokura One's internal feeling.

Mangalik A literal meaning of word Manglik is joyful. However,

it is usually referred to a person's planetary positions at

birth. In regards to life cycle sanskara, Manglik sanskaras refer to all other ritual except death rituals.

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Manmanai One who talks with self.

Mantras/ Suktas Mantras and Suktas are synonyms. These are the Hindu

hymns written in ancient Hindu scriptures also understood as one of the three major instruments,

'tantra, mantra and yantra' through which vital energy –

that is the 'soul' is transformed into divine being.

Manu A great ancient sage. In Hindu belief, Man is the

progeny of Manu.

Masik Sarddha Monthly rituals after death.

Maya Generally it is used to denote illusion or delusion.

Mal-jal This denotes animal husbandry as a means of livelihood.

Malami One who accompanies a funeral procession is called

Malami.

Maulabi Muslim priest.

Moksha/Nirvana The one who has attained a state whereby he is free

from the cycle of birth and death. This word is also used locally once a person has left this world which attaches

respect towards departed soul.

Mukti Mukti that means one's liberation from life and death is

the word used by the Maoists to motivate local villager's to join in the Maoists movement and fight against the

government establishment for their rights.

Muskil Difficulty/obstacles.

Nanda Nepali word for husband's sister (sister-in-law).

Narak/patal Hell.

Nawaj Muslim's prayer to God performed five times in a day.

Newar A dominant ethnic group in Nepal.

Nisthuries A person who does not show any sense of love towards

their own people.

Pahadi People who live in hilly and mountainous region of

Nepal. They are also seen as dominant group in Nepali

politics and administration.

Pancaka Inauspicious period after cremation rite.

Papi jamana Bad times.

Param One that is above all is called as Param - god.

Parmatma The atma that is above all is parmatma an ultimate atma

of all beings that is God, also called as Iswar.

Pasupatinath Famous Siva temple in the Kathmandu.

Pida Emotional and psychological suffering that one go

through.

Pindas The balls of rice flower that is offered with 'mantras' on

daily basis during twelve days of mourning during death

ritual.

Pindadan The offering of balls of rice flower to the departed soul

is called pindadan.

Pitramedha This is a special kind of ritual performance in which

holy fire is burned, mantras are chanted and special

offerings are given in the name of ancestors.

Pitri The departed soul that is being placed in the category of

ancestors.

Pitralok a world of ancestors.

Pitrmedha It a special ritual that is performed for appeasing evil

influences i.e. neutralizing the contagion by death through initiating offerings to fire to avert evil.

Prakriti Nature.

Prakriya A process of doing something.

Prasad A gift offered to god and shared among individuals after

it was offered to god.

Preta Evil spirit.

Pretaloka The world of evil spirits.

Prithvi Earth.

Punarmrtyu continuous death and rebirth.

Punya Merit.

Rand An women who had lost her husband. This word is used

in a derogatory sense that stigmatise widows in the

villages of Nepal.

Rasjas Majestic.

Roga Illness or bodily sickness.

Saboor Bhojpuri word for patience.

Sadgati A good end of life.

Sahadat An Urdu word for death but used in Maoists literature

having a notion of martyrdom.

Sahid Individuals who were killed fighting for the rights of the

people were called sahid.

Sahu Local money lender

Sakti Sakti literally mean strength. The word is used in the

Maoists literature whereby giving balidan and flowing of blood in the battlefield suppose to give strength and

energy to the movement.

Samadhan Solution.

Samadhi This is a state of an individual whereby an individual

transforms himself as one with divine. However here in the local village term Nepal, the place where cremation had taken place is called as Samadhi of the dead person.

Samanya Ordinary and simple.

Santihoma Offerings to fire to avert evil by initiating special ritual.

Santosh being self containtained.

Sarddha karma Twelve days ritual performed after cremation is called

sarddha karma

Sanatan Dharma

immemorial.

Religious practices that is coming from time

Sanskara Hindus Life cycle rituals

Santikarman An act of appearement of the holy waters by

pronouncing mantras to create a peaceful atmosphere.

Saphaya garne A word used in Maoists vocabulary to kill a person who

had appeared as an obstacle in the people's revolution.

Sastric The understanding of sastras – the ancient scriptures.

Sari A long one piece women's cloth that women in Nepal

rap around her waist and cover herself.

Satta Ruling authority and establishment of Government

mechanism.

Sattvik Pure and good.

Satya Truth.

Shreeman A Nepali word for husband.

Sindur Red powder. That is mainly used in performing rituals.

This is also a symbol of marriage that a married woman

put on her forehead.

Soch Ongoing thinking in the mind which has negative

impression on life

Socha - Sanskara Death ritual is called socha Sanskara which has a notion

of pollution and purity attached to it.

Soka One who is in a mode of mourning.

ancestors.

Sora saraddha

This is a yearly pindadan offering ceremony to

Sthula sharira Gross physical body.

Sudras lowest in caste hierarchy.

Sukkha Denotes to happiness and well being opposite to

Dukkha.

Sukshma saarira Subtle - pure body and mind.

Tamas Dark and base.

Tantras The mystic techniques by which vital energies of an

individual are transformed for higher attainment.

Tarpan Yearly pindadan offered at a holy place in the name of

departed soul.

Tithi This is the auspicious dates on which festivals and

rituals are celebrated that are calculated by priests based

on astrological knowledge of stars. Also, tithis are calculated for monthly prayer for newly departed soul.

Tola This is a sub category in a village where a particular

caste group or an ethnic group live in one particular

location within a village.

Trimurti Hindu Trinity.

Tulsi This is a basil plant which is considered as holy plant

that every Hindu household plant in the front side of the

house and perform daily prayer.

Urja An individual's internal energy what gives strength and

helps him to perform his karma enthusiastically.

Upnayana It is one of the Samskaras in which an individual's

purification process begins and he inters into the

categories of twice born.

Vedi Alter. This word is usually used for in relation to

performing snaskaras.

Yama The god of death.

Yantra Yantra are the sacred instruments which are used to

perform ritual while transforming vital energy.

Acronyms

ANRCC All Nepal Revolutionary Coordination Committee

CVICT Centre for Victims of Torture (CIVIT) Nepal is a

nongovernmental organisation works to provide psychosocial counselling to the victims of torture.

CWIN A non-governmental organisation called Child Workers

in Nepal (CWIN) works to protect the rights of the

child.

EFA Education For Action, an education support program,

was a care Nepal project that run in Rukum during

conflict days.

INSEC Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) is a non-

governmental organisation works in the area of

protection of Human rights in Nepal.

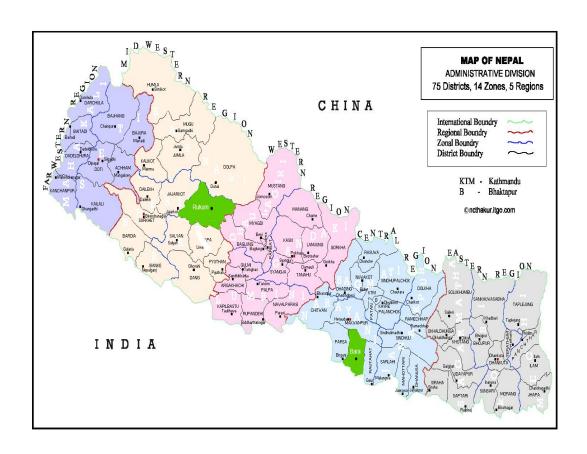
JTMM-J Jantantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha – Jwala.

NGO Non-governmental Organisation.

VDC Village Development Committee.

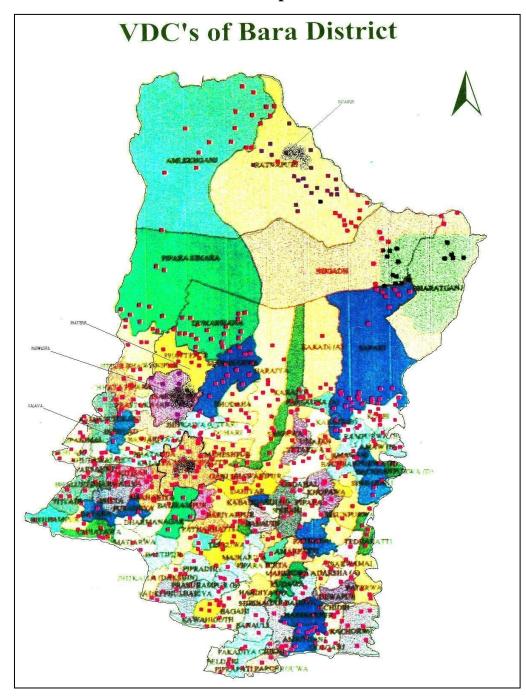
Appendixes

Map of Nepal

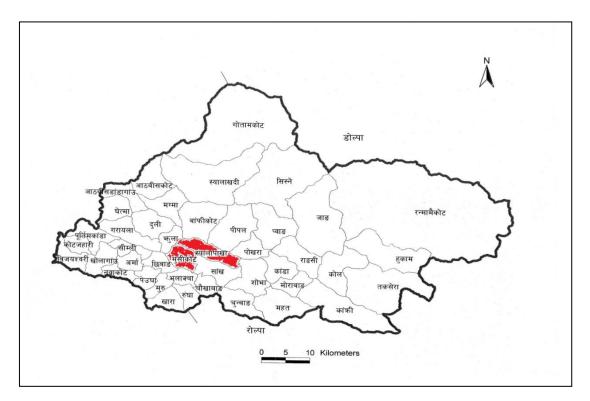


Appendix 1: Districts Map of Nepal

VDCs Map of Bara



VDCs Map of Rukum



Appendix 3: VDCs of Rukum District

Data s	Summary of Inarwasir	a/Bara									
S.N.	Victims name	Status	Occupation	Name of Informent	Relation with victim	Location	Gender	Age group	Education	Household size	Remarks
				Prema Paswan	wife	Inarwasira	F	28	Literate	3	
	Rameshwor			Shyam Sunder							
1	Paswan		District	Paswan	Brother	Inarwasira	M	27	10	6	Seprated
	, as man		Incharge	Bid Kumar	Brother-in-	Inarwasira/					
		Married	Maoists	Paswan	law	Basudilwa	M	22	Literate	5	
						Inarwasira/					Killed by security
				Taimur Khatun	wife	Mathurapur	F	35	Illilerate	4	forces/Farmer
2	Shaim Ansari	Married				Inarwasira/					
_	Silainii	Married		Muna Ansari	Son	Mathurapur	М	12	2	4	
						Inarwasira/					
			Maoists Cadre	Rirshad Ansari	Son	Mathurapur	М	14	2	4	
						Inarwasira/					killed by security
3	Birshkishore Kurmi	Married	Maoists Cadre	,	Mother	Mathurapur	F	50	Illilerate	4	forces
3	Patel	Iwarrica	Widorsts Caure	Asha Deve Patel	Wife	Manaharawa	F	27	Illilerate		
				Bishal Patel	Son	Manaharawa	М	11	3	4	
											killed by mob in a
4	Taj Md. Ansari	Married	Maoist Cadre	Father	son	Mathurapur	М	60	Illilerate	3	fun fair
		Married (Member	JTMM-J/ex-	Mother / wife/		Mathurapur/					
5	Munna Ansari	of armed group)	Maoists	father	/father	Surahi					
				Matiya Yadav	Wife	Inarwasira	F	45	Illilerate	7	Killed by Maoists
				Chandrashahib							
6	Ramangiya Yadav	Married	Farmer	P. Yadav	Son	Inarwasira	М	16	9	7	
				Ramadar P.							
				Yadav	Son	Inarwasira	М	14	6	7	
						Inarwasira/					
				Koresha Khatun	Mother	Muslim Tole	F	52	Illilerate	13	Killed by Maoists
7	Jaid Ahmad Ansari	Unmarried	Tractor Driver			Inarwasira/					
,	Jara Allillaa Allisatt		Tractor Briver	Dil Gir Ansari	Bother	Muslim Tole	М	25	Illilerate	13	
						Inarwasira/					
				Lagina Khatun	Sister	Muslim Tole	F	29	Illilerate	13	

Appendix 4: Data Summary of Inarwasira/Bara

	1	I	ı	Г							
						Inarwasira/			_	_	
			Maoists Cadre	Rirshad Ansari	Son	Mathurapur	M	14	2	4	
						Inarwasira/					killed by security
3	Birshkishore Kurmi	Morriad	Maoists Cadre	Latiya Devi Patel	Mother	Mathurapur	F	50	Illilerate	4	forces
3	Patel	Marrieu	Madists Caure	Asha Deve Patel	Wife	Manaharawa	F	27	Illilerate		
				Bishal Patel	Son	Manaharawa	М	11	3	4	
											killed by mob in a
4	Taj Md. Ansari	Married	Maoist Cadre	Father	son	Mathurapur	М	60	Illilerate	3	fun fair
		Married									
		(Member of	JTMM-J/ex-	Mother / wife/	Mother/wife	Mathurapur/					
5	Munna Ansari	armed group)	Maoists	father	/father	Surahi					
				Matiya Yadav	Wife	Inarwasira	F	45	Illilerate	7	Killed by Maoists
				Chandrashahib							
6	Ramangiya Yadav	Married	Farmer	P. Yadav	Son	Inarwasira	М	16	9	7	
				Ramadar P.							
				Yadav	Son	Inarwasira	М	14	6	7	
						Inarwasira/					
				Koresha Khatun	Mother	Muslim Tole	F	52	Illilerate	13	Killed by Maoists
7	Jaid Ahmad Ansari	Unmarriad	Tractor Driver			Inarwasira/					
/	Jaru Anmau Ansari	Unmarried	Tractor Driver	Dil Gir Ansari	Bother	Muslim Tole	М	25	Illilerate	13	
						Inarwasira/					
				Lagina Khatun	Sister	Muslim Tole	F	29	Illilerate	13	
						Inarwasira/					
				Yubraj Paudel	Son	Paharitola	М	14	8	6	

				Budhau shah							
13	Dinandra Chah	Married	Maoists			Fathepur/					
13	Dipendra Shah	Marrieu	fighter	Muni Devi	Wife	Pipariya	F	24	Literate	5	
				Bina shah							
				Bhailal Shah	Brother	Inarwasira	М	25	Graduate	5	Killed by Maoists
						Simara/					Killed by security
14	Birendra Shah	Married	Journalist	Sabita mondol	sister	Kailaya	F	20	SLC	7	forces
				Gharbharani							
				Mandol	mother	Kalaiya	F	50	literate		
			Secretary/								
15	Babita Mandal	Unmarried	Maoists			Simara/					
			Women	Ranjit Mondol	Brother	Kailaya	М	18	12std	7	
				Ramasharya		Inarwamal/					Killed by villagers/
				Yadav	Brother	VDC	М	28	Literate	6	Security forces
16	Rambinaya Yadav	Married	Farmer	Jagiya Devi		Inarwamal/					
				Yadav	Wife	VDC	F	26	Illilerate	6	
					Brother-in-	Inarwamal/					
				Jaikishan Yadav	law	VDC	М	25	Literate	8	

	Name of			
S.N.	Informents	Involvement	Location	
1	Inderdev Yadav	Ward Level/Congress Representative	Inarwasira	
2	Shanker P. Yadav	Villager	Inarwasira	
3	Bhola Kusbaha	Head Teacher/Inarwasira School	Inarwasira	
4	Muslim Ansari	Teacher/Inarwasira School	Inarwasira/village	
5	Mukti Yadav	Management Committee Member/Nera Ma B Inarwasira	Inarwasira	
6	Sudeer Upadhaya	Teacher/Sri Saraswati Nera Ma B Inarwasira School	Inarwasira	
7	Paanalal Shah	Plan Volunteer	Inarwasira	
8	Dipendra Chhetri	President/School Management Committee Member	Inarwasira	
9	Suman Tamang	Teacher	Red Cross Tole	
10	Rabindra Singh	Journalist/Press Union Bara/President	Kailaya	
11	Roshan Ariyal	Insec/ Representative/ Bara	Kailaya	
12	Ramesh Chaudhary	UML Party Leader	Inarwasira/Matihar iya	
13	Dinendra Chaudhary	Villager/Teacher	Matihariya	

Appendix 5: Stakeholders - Inarwasira/Bara

14	Gaijapati Devi Chaudhary	Anmi/Sub Health Post	Inarwasira
15	Jiten Thakur	Assistant Health Worker/ Sub Health Post	Inarwasira
16	Mantuj Chaudhary	Supervisor/Hudec (Local NGO)	Inarwasira
17	Shiyaram Yadav	HIM Rights (Local NGO)	Kailaya
18	Manish Das	ICRC Representative	Birgunj
19	Uday Nepal	Red Cross Nepal	Bara/Kailaya
20	Shambu Shah	HUDEC (Local NGO) Bara	Kailaya
21	Mahindra P. Chaudhary	UML Party Leader/Baudilba	Inarwasira
22	Jadab Lal Paswan	Villager	Baudilba
23	Lal Babu Kusbaha	HIM Rights (Local NGO)	Kailaya
24	Lila Sapkota	ECCD teacher	Inarwasira
25	Hasan Jan	Leader Muslim Sangh	Inarwasira

Data Summary of Ratanpuri/Bara

S.N.	Victims name	Status	Occupation	Name of Informent	Relation with victim	Location	Gender	Age group	Education	Household size	Remarks
			-						İ		Lived with
											grandparents/
				Nir Bahadur Gole	Son	Bhaktalal 6	М	14	4		Mother eloped
											Lived with
											grandparents/ Mothe
1	Jai Bahadur Gole	Married	Maoists Cadre	Narayan B. Gole	Son	Bhaktalal 6	М	12	3		eloped
-	Jan Januara Gore	laea	masists c aare	Sun Bir Gole	Father	Bhaktalal 6	М	60	Illiterate		
				Iti Maya Gole	Mother	Bhaktalal 6	F	55	Illiterate		
				,							Lived with
				Itha B. Gole	Son	Bhaktalal 6	М	11	2		grandparents
											Lived with
				Palsan Gole	Son	Bhaktalal 6	М	16	6	8	grandparents
											Lived with
				Chirang Gole	Son	Bhaktalal 6	М	10	2	8	grandparents
2	Surya Bahadur Gole	Marriad	Maoists Cadre								Works in Bricklin
2	Sur ya Barradur Gole	iviairieu	iviaoists caure	Udab Gole	Son	Bhaktalal 6	М	14	drop out 4	8	factory
				Dil Bahadur Gole	Brother	Bhaktalal 6	М	25	Literate	8	
											Domestic worker in
				Dolma Gole	Daughter	Bhaktalal 6	F	12			Kathmandu
											Leaves with
				Bhudiman Gole	Son	Bhaktalal 6	M	11	3	5	grandparents
											Leaves with
3	Man Bahadur Gole	Married	Maoists Cadre	Sun Bahadur Gole	Son	Bhaktalal 6	М	7	1	5	grandparents
J	Man Bahadur Gole Married			Harka Bahadur Gole	Father	Bhaktalal 6	М	55	Illiterate	5	
				Maili maya Gole	Wife	Bhaktalal 6	F	25	Illiterate	5	

Appendix 6: Data Summary of Ratanpuri/Bara

Stakeholders- Ratanpuri/Bara									
S.N.	Name of Informents	Involvement	Location						
1	Binayak Thakur	Head Teacher/ Bhagwati Primary School	Ratanpuri						
2	Siyaram Kuwar	Head Teacher/ Bhagwati Primary School	Ratanpuri						
3	Shuk Bahadur Ting	Villager	Ratanpuri/ Padamlal						
		Villager/School Management Committee/							
4	Surendra Ting	President	Ratanpuri/Kolgaon						

Appendix 7: Stakeholders- Ratanpuri/Bara

Data	Summary of Rukum										
S.N.	Victims name	Status/Age	Occupation	Name of Informent	Relation with victim	Location	Gender	Age group	Education	Household size	Remarks
1	Til Bahadur Pun	Married (39ys)	Teacher	Direndra Pun	Son	Ching	М	25	Intermediate	7	Teacher
1	III Ballauur Puli	iviai i ieu (59ys)	reactiei	Yogendra Pun	Son	Ching	М	23	8	7	
				Krishna BC	Wife	Ching	F	43	Illiterate	4	Farming
2	Tek Bahadur BC	Married (36ys)	Teacher/ Maoists	Sapna BC	Daughter	Ching	F	14	8	4	Studying in Kathmandu
			Supporter	Jalak BC	Son	Ching	М	16	10	4	Studying in Kalanga
				Arjun Pariyar	Father	Ching	М	62	Illiterate	4	
3	Jung Bahadur Pariyar	Married (28ys)	Tailor	Hira Pariyar	Daughter	Ching	F	13	5 drop out	4	Staying with grandparent
				Lal maya Pariyar	Daughter	Ching	F	11	4	4	Staying with grandparent
4	Jug Bahadur Pariyar	(24 ys)		Arjun Pariyar							
				Bir Jungi Pariyar	Mother	Ching	F	59	Illiterate	4	
5	Bal Bahadur Pariyar	Married (23ys)		Bimla Pariyar	Wife	Ching	F	30	Illiterate	4	
				Sharmila Pariyar	Daughter	Ching	F	12	4	4	
				Aviskar Rokaya	Son	Ching	М	15	8	7	
6	Surya Bahadur	Married	 Farmer	Gomata Rokaya	Daughter	Ching	F	16	8	7	
O	Rokaya	(19years)	rarmer	Gokarna Rokaya	Son	Ching	М	17	9	7	
				Pampa Rokaya	Wife	Ching	F	39	Literate	7	Farming
7	Rup Lal Rokaya	Newly Married (18ys)	farmer	Dal Bir Rokaya	Father	Ching	М	71	Illiterate	6	Farming
8	Man Bahadur Bohara	Unmarried (20ys)	Maoists Commender	Bimala Bohara	Sister	Ching/Mulkola	F	25	Literate	7	
9	Ganesh Ole	Infant (3 years)		Hadhake Ole	Father	Ching	М	48	Literate	7	Farming
		l la maa wwi a d		Pare Bhudathoki	Father	Ching	М	68	Literate	7	
10	Narbir Bhudathoki	Unmarried (18ys)	Farmer	Mangali Bhudathoki	Mother	Ching	F	58	Illiterate	7	

Appendix 8: Data Summary of Rukum

				not interviewed but							
11	Harka Bahadur Bohara			data from							
				neighbours							
12	Bhadrabir Ole	Unmarried (18ys)	Farmer	Ghambir Ole	Father	Ching	М	57	Illiterate	4	
12	briadrabii Ole	Offinatried (10y3)	arriter	Ek bahadur Ole	Brother	Ching	М	18	Intermediate		
				Mangale Bohara	Father	Ching	М	56	Illiterate	5	Farming
13	Lal Singh Bohara	Unmarried (19ys)	Teacher	Mani Ole	Sister	Ching	F	25	Literate	5	Staying with parents
				Nagni Bohara	Mother	Ching	F	46	Illiterate	5	
			Maoists	Pratikcha Budha	Daughter	Lampakot	F	6	1	3	Staying with grandparents
14	Tapta Bahadur Budha	Married (24ys)	Commender	Bir Bahadur Budha	Father	Lampakot	М	60	Illiterate	3	
				Rati Budha	Mother	Lampakot	F	57	Illiterate	3	
				Padam Bahadur						_	
15	Dal Bahadur Budha	Unmarried (20ys)	Farmer	Budha		Lampakot	M	54	Illiterate	4	
				Changri Budha	Mother	Lampakot	F	50	Illiterate	4	
				Indra Bahadur Budha Magar	Father	Lampakot	М	57	Illiterate	3	
				Mammi Budha Magar	Mother	Lampakot	F	51	Illiterate	3	
16	Tek Bahadur Budha Magar	Unmarried (22ys)	Maoists Cadre		Brother	Lampakot	М	17	9	3	
				Tika Ram Budha							
				Magar	Brother	Lampakot	М	23	6 drop out		YCL Member
				Palshingh Gharti	Father	Lampakot	М	61	Illiterate	3	women's wing commander

				Laxmi Gharti	Sister	Lampakot	F	23	Literate	4	Farming
17	Ganga Kumari Gharti	Unmarried (20ys)	Maoists Cadre								
				Nandkumari Gharti	Sister	Lampakot	F	25	Literate	4	Farming
											Nepali
	L		Leader Nepali								Congress,
18	Tek Bahadur Ole	IMarried (40vs)	Congress								Women wing/
				Sita Ole	Wife	Kalanga	F	46	Literate	4	President
											Villager/(killed
19	Deepak Bohara (13ys)	Unmarried (13ys)	Student								in planted
	2 3 5 7 mile (13 y 3)	J		Bhadra Bir Bohara	Father	Kawlideu/ching	М	53	Literate	7	bomb blast)

Stakeholders - Rukum S. N. Name of Informents Involvement Location											
S.N.	Name of Informents	Involvement	Location								
		Teacher/Lower									
1	Sabitri Budha	Secondary School	Lampakot								
		Ward									
		Leader/Nepali									
2	Indra Bahadur Malla	Congress	Ching								
3	Kuwar Singh Bohara	Villager	Ching								
4	Dil Kumari Pun	Ex- Maoists	Ching								
5	Dil Bahadur Ole	Ex- Maoists	Ching								
6	Sushila Budha Magar	Ex- Maoists	Lampakot								
	Narsingh Budha										
7	Magar	Congress Member	Lampakot								
8	Kumari Budha Magar	Villager	Lampakot								
		Vaidiya									
		(traditional									
9	Gyanendra Shah	healer)	Lampakot								
		Maoists/Ward									
10	Thal Bahadur Sarki	Leader	Syalapakha								
		Nebi Sang									
		Kendriya									
11	Khadka Dhangi	Shadasiya	Kalanga/Rukum								
		YCL Deputy									
		District									
12	Jagat Bohara	Cordinator	Kalanga/Rukum								
		Head District									
13	Yadav Raj Uprety	Police Office	Kalanga/Rukum								
		Hurplus (Local									
14	Saradha Dhangi	NGO)	Kalanga/Rukum								
		Rukmali Samaj									
	Nar Bahadur Nepali	Bikas Kendra	Kalanga/Rukum								
16	Damodar Gautam	HREDCRC	Kalanga/Rukum								
17	Dhan Kumar Shahi	Journalist	Kalanga/Rukum								
		Journalist/ Sani									
18	Tek Bahadur Ole	Veri FM	Kalanga/Rukum								
19	Siddhi Raj Paneru	CWIN	Kalanga/Rukum								
	Ramsur Budha	Secretary/									
20	Magar	Maoists Party	Kalanga/Rukum								
		Constituent									
21	Bimala KC	Assembly Member	Kalanga/Rukum								
22	Sudin Regmi	Maoists Member	Rumkot								

Appendix 9: Stakeholders - Rukum

		Hurplus (Local	
		. ,	
		NGO)Social	
23	Kamala Budha	Mobilizer	Kalanga/Rukum
		Hurplus (Local	
		NGO) Social	
24	Sangita KC	Mobilizer	Syalapakha
		Hurplus (Local	
		NGO) Social	
25	Niraja Devi Pun	Mobilizer	Kalanga/Rukum
		Hurplus (Local	
		NGO) Social	
26	Maya Bohara	Mobilizer	Kalanga/Rukum
			_
27	Krishna Kumar Chhetri	Red Cross Kalanga	Kalanga/Rukum
		Red Cross Kalanga/	
28	Pratima Ole	Social Mobilizer	Kalanga/Rukum
		Local traditional	
29	Jhankri Pariyar	healer	Ching/Rukum
		District Leader	
30	Kali Bahadur Khadka	NEMAKIPA	Kalanga/Rukum
		Student	-
31	Karna Singh Rawat	Leader/Ching	Kalanga/Rukum
		Local ex leader/	
32	Bagh Bir Bista	ching	Ching
	=	Communist	
33	Krishan Khadka	Commune Centre	Dhape/ Rukum
		Villager/pariyar	
34	Amrit Pariyar	tole/	Ching/Rukum
		Psychosocial	
35	Krishna Chand	Counsellor/CWIN	Kalanga/Rukum

Stakel	Stakeholders - Kathmandu				
S.N.	Name of Informents	Designation	Organization	Location	
1	Subodha Pyakural	President	INSEC	Kathmandu	
2	Gauri Pradhan	Member Sceretary	NHRC	Kathmandu	
3	Mandira Sharma	President	Advocacy Forum	Kathmandu	
4	Govinda Dahal	Head MEI Programme	ICRC	Kathmandu	
5	Navraj Updhayaya	Director	TPO Nepal	Kathmandu	
6	Jean-Paul Corboz	Protection Cordinator	ICRC	Kathmandu	
7	Madhav Pradhan	President	CWIN	Kathmandu	
8	Tarak Dhital	Coordinator/Children at risk	CWIN	Kathmandu	
9	Sumnima Tuladhar	Director	CWIN	Kathmandu	

Appendix 10: Stakeholders - Kathmandu

Total number of cases per site	Number of informants per site	Number of interviews with other stakeholders
Inarwasira - 13	36	25
Kaliya - 3	5	6
Ratanpuri - 3	14	4
Syalapakha - 18	40	35
Musikot - 1	1	

Appendix 11: Summary of Cases per Site