**Feminism in Action**

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| What, if anything, would feminists agree on in response to this article? | The fact that women are dying shows that intervention is needed. Equal legal rights are required in order to serve justice. Women shouldn’t be oppressed and exiled for something as trivial as human nature, especially menstruation, a biological process that every woman endures. Nepalese women should have the same rights as men and shouldn’t feel afraid of protecting those rights. |
| What, if anything, might liberal feminists say about this article? | Liberals think that intervention should stop at the front door. If the female agrees that this is how she wants to undertake domestic life, the government shouldn’t intervene. However, it depends on the case. If women are dying and it therefore becomes abuse, something should be done. Also, if it’s not done with the approval of the female, this is also unjust, as they have the right to say ‘no,’ if the ‘no’ isn’t listened to and she doesn’t consent, that’s also abuse. |
| What, if anything, might socialist feminists say about this article? | Socialist feminists, would argue the point that women should not need to be paid in order to use a shed and that a male dominated capitalist society has led to this being the case.  More state intervention necessary to cut out the exiling problem, not just minimal fining for crimes. |
| What, if anything, might radical feminists say about this article? | Radical feminists would use this to exemplify their point that the inequality is deep rooted in society, and while women are aware of their rights, they won’t act on these. They would argue that the law to change the circumstances for women has clearly not worked and there is need for a more extreme approach to restructuring society |
| What quotes from your key thinkers are relevant to this article? | Millett- “Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different.”   * “one is not born but rather becomes a woman”- De Beauvoir * Perkins Gilman - “women accept [man-made] conventions, repeat them, enforce them upon their daughters; but they originate with men” |

Menstrual Huts Are Illegal In Nepal. So Why Are Women Still Dying In Them?

This month saw the first arrest in Nepal connected to the practice of exiling women to sleep in a hut behind their home during menstruation.

On Dec. 6, police in the western district of Achham took Chhatra Raut [into custody](https://kathmandupost.com/national/2019/12/06/police-arrest-brother-in-law-of-parbati-budha-who-died-in-a-menstruation-hut-in-achham) for questioning after his sister-in-law, Parbati Buda Rawat, 21, was found dead in a menstruation hut, apparently because of [smoke inhalation](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nepal-menstruation-arrest/nepal-makes-first-arrest-over-menstrual-hut-death-idUSKBN1Y91OF) — after her blanket caught fire while she slept.According to press reports, he is being held while investigators determine if he forced her into the hut.

Several [women are killed every year](https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/15-girls-women-died-in-chhausheds-in-13-yrs/) in Nepal because of *chhaupadi,*the practice of exiling women from their homes to bare-bones huts or sheds during menstruation because they are believed to be "unclean." Exact numbers are difficult to obtain, as many fatalities and injuries go unreported, but while sleeping in the huts, [women are at risk](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/05/13/721450261/why-its-so-hard-to-stop-women-from-sleeping-in-a-menstrual-shed) of snake bites, physical assault, freezing temperatures and suffocation because of lack of ventilation.

Forcing women to use the huts was [criminalized last year](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2017/08/10/542585664/law-in-nepal-sets-penalties-for-forcing-a-woman-into-a-menstrual-shed). Chhatra's arrest sent a signal that the tide may be slowly turning against *chhaupadi,* which has been widely condemned by human rights activists.

But it's unclear if the law will be an effective deterrent. For one thing, even if Chhatra is charged and convicted, the penalty is light: a three-month jail sentence and a fine of 3,000 rupees (about $30).

There are other problems with the law,according to [a study](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/26410397.2019.1684231) publishedlast weekin the journal *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters.*

The study found that 77% of west-central Nepali girls and young women actively practice menstrual exile, based on a survey of 400 14-to-19-year-olds. And while 60% of themwere aware that *chhaupadi*is illegal, that knowledge made them no less likely to practice it.

"On the optimistic side of things, that result suggests that girls are aware of their rights," says study author [Jennifer Thomson](https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/persons/jennifer-thomson), a lecturer in comparative politics at the University of Bath. "But they don't feel able — or they are unable — to exercise those rights."

Menstrual taboos, the study found, are "most keenly enforced" by elder family members, "including mothers, grandmothers and other senior women," as well as religious leaders and traditional healers.

"We found that arresting somebody is a quick and easy measure, but changing attitudes, changing mindsets, changing practices, is going to take years," Thomson says.

Sociologist [Saruna Ghimire](https://miamioh.edu/cas/academics/departments/sociology-gerontology/about/faculty-staff/saruna-ghimire/index.html), an assistant professor of sociology at Miami University in Ohio, who grew up in Nepal, agrees that legal interventions can only go so far. The fact that it took nearly 18 months for the first arrest to be made is proof that the law will be extremely difficult to enforce, she says. And she points out that the practice was actually first declared illegal by the Nepali Supreme Court back in 2005 — but it wasn't until August of last year that criminal penalties were assigned.

In a separate [2018 study](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0208260) of 107 adolescent girls on the prevalence of *chhaupadi*in far-western Nepal, Ghimire cites a previous "well-intentioned" attempt earlier in the decade by government and nongovernment agencies to solve the problem by demolishing the huts. The result, the study found, was that "sheds were either rebuilt or menstruating women and girls were exiled to even more unhygienic and dangerous structures," such as sheds shared with livestock.

Ghimire's study found that while 72% of adolescent girls in a far-western Nepali province practiced menstrual exile, 100% of the girls were restricted by some form of menstrual taboo.

"The problem goes beyond the huts, and it's not just a problem in the rural, western part of the country," Ghimire says. "In the cities, many women still follow 'untouchability' taboos. As a young woman in eastern Nepal, during my period I was not allowed to touch food, touch the water tap [according to the taboos, menstruating women can eat and drink only when food and water are offered to them], watch TV with my dad or play with my brother. I gave those taboos up when I went off to do my undergraduate. But my mother and sister still follow the taboos. Every other woman in my family does."

While the women in Ghimire's study reported that they adhere to menstrual taboos primarily because of societal and familial pressure, they voiced willingness to discontinue practicing them "if given a choice."

That choice could come in the form of a cash payment, for women in one rural province. The chairman of a rural western province announced in early December that he would give a cash reward of 5,000 rupees (about $44) to women who reject the use of the sheds, according to a [Thomson Reuters Foundation report](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nepal-women-menstruation/deaths-prompt-nepal-to-offer-cash-to-women-who-shun-menstrual-huts-idUSKBN1Y71VG). (The chairman didn't respond to a request for comment.)

Ghimire says this plan is reminiscent of a 2005 Nepali government initiative that offered cash to women to give birth in a medical facility, instead of in a menstruation hut, where many traditional births take place.It was part of a multipronged campaign to reduce Nepal's then-high maternal mortality rate. The cash incentive program [did seem to contribute](https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8625.pdf) to the decline in childbirth-related deaths in the country.

"These punishments and incentives are symbolically positive," says [Radha Paudel](http://www.radhapaudel.org/), a Nepali nurse who has been advocating to end the taboos and stigma surrounding menstruation for 40 years. "But they do not address the underlying cause of why women follow restrictions during menstruation. And that is lack of education, and fear."

Paudel founded the [Radha Paudel Foundation](https://www.radhapaudelfoundation.org/) in 2016 to educate women, girls and men about menstruation and to endthe perception that the menstruating body is "impure" and "dirty." She says she's frustrated by solutions that start and stop at the huts, since that's only one of many menstrual taboos practiced by a majority of Nepali women, such as avoiding touching male relatives.

That means arrests and dismantling huts can only go so far, she says: A deeper cultural transformation is ultimately required.

"These taboos perpetuate the idea that women are less powerful than men," she says. "This is about human rights, and dignity."