

## A Girl's Future

Child marriage is said to have been abolished in Nepal long ago, but was it? According to one report from 2022 April 11, shockingly, the child marriage rate in Nepal under the age of 19 is 47.1% and 3.84% for the age group under 15. For 17 years, I resided in a remote village in Nepal, and this statement proved totally wrong to me. Sadly, the people around my village area still practice this tradition to this day.

Imagine being married at a young age when you haven't even had the chance to explore life. As a child, I loved playing with the kids out in the fields, and the small girl named Kabita, who was just 8-9 months old, was my favorite one to play with. Growing up, she wasn't allowed to go out of the house anymore and was pushed into household work, where she was taught to do chores like washing the dishes, mopping and cleaning the whole house, cooking for everyone, waking up earlier than anyone at home and preparing tea which she had to give to every household member in their bed. She was sent into a governmental school known for its poor educational system and was often called back home to perform chores like massaging her mother-in-law or taking the cattle out for food and water. To my surprise, she was then married off at 8; even at such a young age, she was sent out to someone else's home and was effectively sold. Yes, child marriage cases in Nepal can also be considered the equivalent of selling one's daughter, as the groom's family tends to ask for a lot of money, items of furniture (like Sofas, Tableset, and shelves), vehicles, and many other goods. This system is also known as the dowry system, and it's demanded by the groom's family as the price for taking care of the other family's daughter for the rest of her life. Later, I found out Kabita's family was asked to contribute around \$10,000, a whole wooden furniture set, and a motorcycle that cost about \$5000. It was a total shock for me because Kabita's family are impoverished villagers that live in a mud-walled and tin-roofed house, and here arises the other problem that follows the child marriage practice; Kabita's family took out an enormous loan from the bank and now will be paying it off for the rest of their life.

The girls that are married off are often tormented in their house. They are beaten by their husband without reasoning, abused by their mother-in-law, and forced to do everything she is told. Not only that, in some cases where the bride's family can't pay the dowry, the bride is often beaten so severely that she has to be taken to the hospital for being unconscious for too long, and in the worst case, the bride being burned alive.

So why are people not standing up against this? In my case, my mother is an International governmental officer. Plan International, which promotes women's empowerment and child education, is where my mother works. However, even after working for a big organization like that, we couldn't do anything but sit back and watch as the villager often bribed the police officers. Once, my mother and I complained again about a women abuse case in our neighborhood. The police did arrive and went back doing nothing; later that day, we were warned by the villagers that we better keep up with our own business or it might get us in trouble.

Child marriage practice directly affects society and the whole nation itself as it results in overpopulation, illiteracy, and a mortality rate (as the woman or the child is unable to survive as the child's body isn't developed). Kabita's family is still to this day in massive debt and has no income source except the small piece of land where they grow crops, and Kabita is still being forced to work at an age where she's supposed to be going to school and pursuing her education to find out her life goals. Many cases like this are still happening in Nepal and a lot of movements by the public requesting the government to look out for the issues more seriously and take action. The government should impose a hefty fee on child marriage cases, the public should be awarded if they inform about such activities they see happening nearby, and the education system should be promoted. It should be free and mandatory for people living in remote areas, more information about the harmful and dangerous health problems, physical and mental stress that falls upon the child should be taken more seriously and programs informing all about this should be held in the village area every month. Heavy actions should be taken against the family if they are guilty of having their child married.

