



Social Families

In the Empowerment of Marginalized People


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An astonishing change In the scheduled caste residing area

I was surprised to visit the area where dalit, untouchables and marginalized community in Siraha and Saptari (Sagarmatha zone) live. They are the people who are differentiated, not allowed to enter into a temple and banned to go to the place considered worse even for a dog to go. But the same people possess an immense belief in and awe of God. The reverence for god harbored by the people who are edged out by others citing them to be untouchables is sure to wrench the heart of the cruelest person ever and make him shed tears!



The dalits, who are not allowed even to pray and worship in the temple, chose to name their group after god's name. After all, why did they do so? Because the job commenced by chanting god's name is sure to turn into a success.

Sarswati, Sriram, Durga, Ma Durga, Bajrangabali, Durga Bhawani, Krishna Dev, Shiva Shanti, Devi Jagaran, Bhagwati, Lakshmi, Shiva Baba, Belpatra, Devdoot, Chandra Surya, Arati, Manakamana, Rajdevi, Kamana, Shri Thakur Baba, Santoshi, Mahadev, ShriKrishna, NavaDurga, Nandababa, Dayalu, Shri Sasiya Maharaj, Chandrabhoga, Dinabhadri, Mahadeveshwar, Jagadumba, Ma Bhagawati, Rajaji, Shiva-Parvati, Shiva Shakti were the names they chose to call their groups.

However, the social families at Lamjung, Dhading and Gorkha have revolutionary names like Pragatisheel, Deepjyoti, Chetanshil, Shubhalabh &

Namuna. Only a few were found to have named their group after god, for instance Kalikamai, Sridevi, Chandiswari, Chandisthan, and Kotkalika.

The dalits are known to be organizing a movement against the ban they have been suffering regarding their entry in the temples to make holy offerings. Let alone the hilly area, the dalits of Terai & inner Terai who are subject to even more discrimination. Even today it is very difficult for the dalits at the Terai to pray overtly and worship god freely. But who would not be surprised at the sight of the dalits being organized in the name of god and goddesses. There exists a campaign among the dalits to be grouped as social-family. There are 25-30 to 50 -60 such families. When I heard about the unique works performed by 'Samagra Bikas Sewa Kendra (Holistic Development Service Centre)' which has been working in a team with the marginalized people, I reached the poor locality where people with their children have been dragging a meager life streaming high and low just as the rivers and springs of Udayapur district. It can be clearly seen that the caste system having the provision of untouchables together with disease, hunger, unemployment has troubled the people there just like an epidemic. The poor and the dalits who were found to have settled on a land cut off to be secluded by flood in the rainy season were found to have settled in the "fire – hot" river bank during the summer. Moreover, there was a heartrending land-slide with the mixture of water and the mud of Chure flowing all around. Their life elapses with such kinds of ups and downs. 'Samagra' has chosen the work area in these slums. Going to the place imparted a feeling that there can be no life worse than these in the district.

As we learnt, 'Samajik Pariwar (Social Family)' is the organization of the marginalized people of the village. When they are identified, a group ranging from 20-25 families to 40-50 families is formed in which the number of women members exceeds 80%. The presence of more women in the group has made it possible for the complete adherence to the strict rules of the group, otherwise the rule of complete abstinence from liquor and quarrels would have proved to be a flop immediately after being

formulated! The poor, marginalized and dalits organized in a group are distributed by the workforce of the society a booklet which mentions everything about the people's rights, the responsibility of the state, human rights, legal provisions, the list of works and duties of the government and non government organizations in the district, the sector in which budget has been allocated and the amount of it, etc. Similarly, they are also made aware of different organizations and agencies and what the people receive from such agencies.



Moreover, the members of the social families are also taught the democratic way of expressing one's opinions. They do not clatter at a time but one by one. It is forbidden to present oneself in an argumentative style. Everyone should begin speaking with a greeting to others present, address the chief of the meeting and end by thanking all for listening.

Everybody should listen quietly while any member is speaking and all should take turns to speak rather than letting only the smarter ones speak every time.

These are merely a few examples. More than three hundred social families have already been formed in Siraha, Saptari and Udayapur district. The works done by such families are clearly visible in the marginalized families in these villages as 80% of the members of these families are women. The most interesting thing about the families is that five people related to these families are the members of the constituent assembly as said by the Regional Coordinator of 'Samagra' Mr. Durga Mahato. The five CA members are Ramani Devi Ram(Saptari), Durga Pariyar(Udayapur), Ram Rati Ram(Saptari), Sewaki Devi Das(Siraha), and Lakshmi Pariyar(Udayapur). Similarly, Ram Kishun Mandal, a member of the 'social family', has been elected as the central member of National Dalit Commission (Rastriya Dalit Ayog). Moreover, social family has

transformed more than twelve marginalized people to effective leaders of the district. Those who speak fluently and continually can present their views effectively. Kago Devi Sada(Siraha), Narayan Sada(Saptari), Sataun Devi Sada(Saptari), shiva Dev Sada(Saptari), Durga Bahadur Nepali(Udayapur), Gadhai Ram(Saptari), Jagendar Ram(siraha), Asheshwar Mandal(Siraha). There are numerous such names of emerging leaders who do not concentrate on making speeches only. They are really devoted in social reforms and social justice. They are really devoted in social reforms and social justice. There is no doubt that these leaders, who are quite aware of their rights and responsibilities, are the asset of the country. They do not believe in talking only, they have immersed themselves in leading the movement for establishing the rights of the marginalized people despite themselves facing adverse financial condition.

The dalits and the poor people of the place, where there are 'Social Families', are so united that no one has the courage to dominate these people. The situation at such places is such that others won't be able to survive without these marginalized and overshadowed people because the absence of these people won't yield any product from their land.

The third achievement of social family is that the marginalized dalits are no more support-less, they have their self confidence increased after being involved in the social family. Now these families enjoy even the district leadership. However difficult be the problem, they can solve it with their combined effort. For instance, the dalit labors used to receive paddy against their work of reaping the paddy field, while doing so, they had to cut off the paddy plant six inches below the twig bearing rice. Then after the labors had to go to the field again and cut off the remaining portion of straw without receiving any wage. But the labor movement demanded the wage for cutting the straw as well. Their demand was fulfilled and they began to receive one stack of straw against cutting eight stack of it. Now they have straw to feed their cattle, mend their roof and light the fire. This story looks simple but this success has not only induced a lot of courage and inspiration among the poor dalits, but also taught them the lesson of receiving their right through struggle. There are several stories of such achievements in the dalit residents of the remote Terai. This class of people has been enlightened with the knowledge depicting the power of unity. Now no one needs to be surprised at the sight of the dalits

raising the question of their rights with their heads high with dignity.

(Extracted from Krishna Murari Bhandari's article published in "The Annapur Post", Wednesday, 21st Poush 2067, i.e., 5th January 2011)

An insight of the concept of Social Family (SF) in action

In a village called Lalpata in Triyuga municipality, there is a women Jyoti SF in operation comprising members drawn from 24 households, representing a wide range of castes, namely, Rawat, Dhungana, Basnet, Bohara, Shrestha, Karki, Biswakarma, Thapa, Niraula, Dhakal, Poudyal and Khadka. Formally organized in 2062, the SF has been regularly conducting meetings and been raising consolidated voices/including advocacy against violence from the village level to the district level. They are also active in propagating self-reliant economic growth. In this connection, they raised joint fund collected through individual savings that are mobilized every month and the fund is loaned out amongst the needy member entrepreneurs. They have been solving common problems in unison. They demand for



employment-oriented skills /vocational training. They have the ultimate aim to undertake businesses that generate self-reliance. It gives an impression that this is a typical SF representing the whole rural Nepal. Nepal, with its wide range of communities, is compared to a garden growing a variety of flower-plants.

The first grade training for SAMAGRA-Volunteers

A training program on institutional development of SF was organized for a group of 25 SAMAGRA-Volunteers, comprising of 10 females and 15 males. They were selected by various VDCs representing five districts of the eastern



Terai, namely, Udaypur, Siraha, Saptari, Dhanusha and Mahottari. The 10 female volunteers-trainees

were drawn from various communities - 3 dalits, 5 Janaajatis, 7 madhesi and two others. And the 15 male trainees represented 7 dalits, 4 janjatis, 1 muslim and 3 others.

Volunteer selection

The selection process for volunteers came to end with the selection of 18 volunteers for Dhading, Gorkha and Lamjung districts. The selected candidates will be given the basic training in the next month.

MOU with DDC

A formal agreement was co-signed by SAMAGRA and Lamjung DDC to implement the Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCDP) in four VDCs of the district, namely, Bajhakhet, Hiletakshar, Chiti, and Bhujung.

An observation tour

SAMAGRA's Chairperson Bal Krishna Lal Joshi, and Surendra Lal Shrestha, the Executive Committee member of Bio-Gas Support Programme (BSP) - Nepal, paid an official visit to Harkhapur, Benighat VDC in Dhading District. The objective was to observe the operation status of two drinking water projects under implementation with the financial and technical support from the Rainwater Harvesting technology by BSP-Nepal in partnership with SAMAGRA, which is represented jointly by one local SF and the district SAMAGRA office. The two projects were observed to have been completed, directly benefiting 500 school children and the teaching staff of the two schools.



Monitoring visit

A monitoring team, consisting of Durga Datta Ghimire, General Secretary of SAMAGRA, and Om Prashad Poudyal, Officer of Poverty



Activities carried out in Poush (Jan-Feb)

Activities		No. of Participants		
Title	No.	Female	Male	Total
Human rights monitoring at the local level	62	1068	309	1377
Awareness campaigns against human rights violation	32	1034	484	1518
District level training (OD)	1	10	20	30
SF level Orientation (OD)	107	1319	721	2040
Network / Linkage / Lobbying	3	45	19	64
Participatory Planning and Resource mapping	43	662	218	820
Conflict management events	18	228	85	313
Events on peace & harmony	16	649	187	836
Orientation to SFs on cooperatives	1	5	20	25
Resources / Rights claiming	8	113	46	159

Alleviation Fund, along with SAMAGRA's field officer Lokesh Rai, visited Pokharichour and Salle in Tasarpur VDC to observe how the joint programme is in operation. The team conducted an interaction meeting with the members of two local SFs, namely, Shramjibee SF and Makhamali SF. It reviewed the progress made by the SFs and the lessons learned and the team members also addressed their various queries raised by the SF members.

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