

Social Families

In the Empowerment of Marginalized People

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Speaking with Thoughtfulness not with Pinches

This refers to a SF in Bawanna village, formed at the joint initiative of 30 housewives. In December 2008, they gathered together at one venue and named their SF as Pragati Women SF and, soon after, it went into action. The members were drawn from families of seven castes, namely, Pandey, Karki, Basnyat, Thapa, Kshetri, Ram(Chamar), Chowdhary and Magar. Within Magar caste, there are six sub-castes namely, Garanja, Pulami, Khapangi, Ale, Burja and Mirinchi.



Every year a chairperson is elected. During one year term, one goes into action utmost as per one's capacity. For this year, Dayakumari Karki has been elected as chairperson. She says she is a migrant from another place. The SF, comprising of 30 household representatives, calls a meeting every month, and raises a monthly contribution/saving of Rs. 25 from every member, which collectively goes to add up to the joint fund. Currently, the total fund has amounted to Rs. 25,000.

Located at Bawanna Danda, ward-8, near Chure in Saptari district, the village has a settlement of people originally coming from the hills/mountains and terai. In reply to the query as to how the SF is faring, the patron chairwoman Rita Thapa Kshetri says, as follows, "In the first place, we got a venue for gathering together, prior to that, we didn't even have the place to meet together, we are now organizing meeting every month, attended by all members, where we share with one another stories of pleasures and pain. The contribution from each is activated to be accumulated to the collective fund. The most needy members borrow loans from their collective fund, avoiding, thereby, the need to resort to the local money lenders, who charge 5% interest rate per month.

This new facility helps us tide over our petty financial requirements. Women, who were hesitant to move out of their homes, have now come out to forge unity amongst themselves. Besides, only a very few conflicts have arisen amongst ourselves unlike in the past".

In this connection, Dil Kumari Basnet adds, "In the past, I spent Rs. 25 on the smoking of cigarettes every month; now it has turned into saving. The interest that accrued from the money, loaned out, adds up to accumulate our collective fund. Now-a-days, the market rate of interest has also gone down to 3% per month; our rate of interest is further lower, which is fixed by ourselves collectively". Manmaya Khapangi says, "We have learned a lot; in our quest for rights, we took the initiative, starting at our own family and then we extended our efforts to the district headquarters at Rajbiraj. We raised strong voices against exploitation and discriminations against women. In the past, we were treated as voiceless people and were thus debarred from public speaking. Now we have started raising our voices in the public. Consequently, in my quest for vocational training, I have attained a three-month training course in tailoring business funded by the VDC. I have started my own tailoring business. I have also started hug farming, but it did not succeed as expected. I acquired agro-seeds from Agricultural Department and started growing vegetables which yielded satisfactory returns. All the children of the school age do now attend schools. After the formation of SF, we have begun to gaining new knowledge. We have started taking actions against those who indulge in human rights violation. We learned that we should increase the sources of income. We attended training classes/seminars in the field of human rights advocacy and we have been oriented about it. We aim to make more tangible progress in this area in future. I have been selected as a voluntary worker for SAMAGRA, of which I feel very proud. I will share my knowledge that I have learnt with my fellow lady colleagues. In case you happen to visit us next time, you will witness far more progress that we would achieve. The local beneficiaries related positively to it in response to queries.

Chandramaya Ghimire, treasurer of Jankalyan SF of Hardiya village- 6, shares her past experiences in the following words, "In 1996, a hot discussion flared up amongst the villagers on the question of sending their women out to join an observation tour; they commonly rejected the proposal of sending their wives/daughters-in-laws/daughters in the mission, questioning who would be responsible in case those who join the team get lost or go to elopement in the city.

But in my particular case, my husband, however, decided to send me on the tour contending that if she wishes to elope there, let her but she will get an opportunity to see around as a tourist in the city. I thus joined the observation tour, leaving behind my new born baby at home. On my return from the trip, I reported to all like this, "I was taken around with great respect, I visited new places and interacted with the advanced people and delivered on how the women in Kathmandu were making progress. All were surprised to learn that they treated me as their sister and with high esteem". My little girl has now grown up and is doing graduation course in her student career. While deliberating on the past experiences, Chandramaya's face suddenly became bright with cheerfulness.

Similarly, two ladies from Makhamali SF in Hardiya VDC- Geeta Burja and treasurer Surya Maya Karki, related to how her SF has been making progress. Chairwoman Dayakumari Karki observed that the people living in/around the SF were pleasantly surprised to observe that we were working in unity.

The traditional habit of looking down the women is waning. Women have now felt they have the capacity to handle businesses involving from Rs. 2,000 to 4,000 on the strength of their collective savings that is in possession with the SF.

The people in general are now compelled to listen to when women speak following a certain discipline. The tendency to despise women is slowly declining. A new

habit of speaking with thoughtfulness rather than with sarcasm has grown in the society.

Finally, a question was addressed to Arjunraj Khapangi, who was standing aloof from the women, sitting in an



oval shape. In response to the query as how he felt about the meeting, Arjunraj, who is currently assuming the position of the chairperson of Community Forest Committee replies in the following words, "While we are in the 21st century, our women are having a lifestyle that prevailed back in the 18th century. In

the first place, it is praiseworthy that they haven taken the initiative to organize the SF. I do appreciate this. Women have demonstrated their unity through the formation of SFs. I am sure that the local violence would be reduced as well. The incidences of local conflicts have evidently declined. Meetings are being held once in every month and I feel very happy to observe that the local social issues/problems are discussed regularly.

Discriminations between Dalits

It is a common knowledge that Dalits are being exploited by high-caste people. To counter the prevailing social injustice, Dalits are being empowered by SAMAGRA by organizing rights-based trainings for them. The empowered Dalits have now started conducting by themselves various kinds of rights-based trainings. While engaging themselves in approaching the so-called high caste people for an access to their rights, they have also engaged actively in fighting discriminations that exist between dalits themselves.

In this connection, Soma Pariyar from Lamjung, Shimpani-6 said, "In the past we were discriminated by *Bishwakarma* communities." In 2004, when a Saraswati SF was formed at the initiative of SAMAGRA, she became a member. In 2007, representing that SF, she attended a rights-based training held in Dhading. She was oriented on the need to abolish the practices of discrimination amongst the dalits. On her return from the training, she explained *Bishwakarma* communities on the social vice. Observing the process of gradual eradication of the practice of discrimination within the communities, she explained the changed situation in the following words, "When SAMAGRA/Lamjung's senior motivator Bala Bhadra Raut and regional coordinator Binod Thapa visited their village and organized a group duet song competition in dialogue between *Bishwakarma* and



Pariyar communities and when the *Pariyar* represented by Soma won the group duet song competition, the *Bishwakarma* communities were required to discontinue the discrimination practice as per the pre-set agreement. Binod persuaded both the parties to do away with the social vice with the result that the practice of discrimination was abolished from the communities. Within *dalit* community, in terms of caste hierarchy, *Bishwakarma* caste is inferior to Sarki (cobbler), and *Pariyar* caste lies below the *Bishwakarma* caste as explained by Aitajung B.K., secretary of Laliguras SF in Lamjung Ghanapokhara-5. Soon after the formation of the

SF in 2007, all the members unanimously agreed to discard the practice of discrimination between *dalits*. Under the plan to strengthen the *dalits*, inter-caste co-feasting is being organized by *Pariyar, Sharki*, and *B.K.* castes, turn by turn; whereby all the invitees commonly join the sit-down lunch, as reported by Aitajung *B.K.* The resulting benefit is that they began to realize that with the united voice emerging from the *dalits*, they can effectively claim/access rights from other dominating castes, as asserted by secretary *B.K.* According to him, *Pariyar* persons freely enter into the homes of *B.K.* and *Sharki* families. For example, he adds that Aitajung family members have not objected to their free entries. Located at the mid-point of physical locations of two neighbouring communities of *Sharki* and *Bika* caste families, the SF has successfully eradicated the practices of caste-based discrimination. But some kind of discrimination between some *dalit* communities is in existence in Baglungpani, Lamjung, despite the counteracting activities of Chetanshil SF in the locality, as admitted by Bimaya Pariyar, vice-chairperson of the SF. Replying to the query as to why the issue was not brought

to the light in the SF meeting, she told that the issue was not correctly addressed despite that it was tabled in the meeting. Indira Bika, the treasurer of the SF, admitted that they could not raise their voices against the ongoing caste-discrimination in the meeting for the fear that their families would take action against them. Nevertheless, *Bika* has a unanimous opinion that they stand together to gain their rights from the non-dalit communities. She goes on, "She and Bimaya go together in hand-in hand, including taking lunches together." However, chairperson Jamansingh Duwal (sarki-cobbler by caste) observed that the issues related to caste-based discriminations are addressed in the meeting; to put that into effect, all joined to take food in the house of a *Pariyar* family. Yes, a few cases of caste-based discrimination do arise, but such incidences occur exceptionally.

In substance, the rural *dalits* have fought not only against non-*dalits* but also within *dalits* to eradicate caste-based discriminations.

The landless Ramchandra became a Landlord

Ramchandra Bika, born at Shobhapur in Siraha, has now reached 64 years of age. He spent 35 years in Pipra ward, called Sada tole, in 8 ward. From his first wife, he got three daughters and two sons. Due to untimely death of the first, he got married once again. From the second wife, he got two daughters and one son. He had acquired the traditional skill in manufacturing iron vessels and sharpening the iron-made tools. Engaging himself in that profession, he was able to bring up all his children to their adulthood. It has provided him financial resources to rearing up his whole family of six members. He joined Dalit Kalyan SF that was formed in 2002. He says, "In 2003, Chahaka stream swollen up, the resulting floods swept away the Sada community's 40 houses, devastating the residing families including my own. We were completely helpless. SAMAGRA and the related local NGOs came to their rescue. They procured 1.5 bighas of land, wherein a new settlement named Sundarpur was established. All the affected families got the land entitlement certificates. The land in which I am residing now belongs to Ramprashad Shrestha. In fact, I don't own the land legally, I got this land use privilege on the merit of my emergency need. Now I got the ownership of two kattha and two dhoor area of land of which I also got the land ownership certificate. With a smile in the face, he added, "It cost me Rs 27,000; Did you understand? I managed to collect the money partly from the sale of goats / poultry products and partly from



the earnings of my sons. For the rest of the money required to patch up the deficit, credit goes to Mukunda Kattel and SAMAGRA. I am most thankful to them. I got the place to erect the pillar of my house. Now I can build my own shelter. I feel extremely emotional with self-pity when I recall my past life. In the past, I was not allowed entry into the temple for worshipping the deity; my turn to fill in water in the jug from the public tap used to come only after all the others have taken their turns. The traditional practice of looking down on the people based on caste status has been eliminated to a large extent. My SF did not allow anybody to live like a landless. With its assistance, all the members managed to live independently in their own small thatched roofed huts. Besides, they raised the common fund and the fund is loaned out to the needy members to meet emergent needs. As a result, he continued, "I don't feel I am alone; SF has assumed to be a collective home". Had we formed the SF earlier in the past, no one could dare to look upon us and discriminate against us."

The visit to SAMAGRA by the first Secretary, the Embassy of Denmark

A visiting team led by the first secretary of Danish Embassy, Ditte Bjerregaard interacted with



SAMAGRA’s staff in the office. In the interaction process, SAMAGRA presented an overview of SAMAGRA’s programme-related activities, achievements made so far, including challenges it has been facing; and the lessons learned. It demonstrated its cost-effectiveness in the sense that maximum results have been achieved in diverse fields with minimum of inputs. It has currently entered into partnership with Lamjung DDC to implement Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP). Appreciating this achievement, the First Secretary Ditte Bjerregaard advised to intensify/extend the partnership activities at the initiative of the SFs at the local level. Amongst the visitors, there were Saroj Nepal, programme officer of Danish Embassy and Mukunda Kattel, advisor of DanidaHUGOU.

Training on OD of SFs



An organizational development training was organized at Gorkha bazaar from 28-30 January and the trainees comprised of volunteers for SAMAGRA, selected from various VDCs of Dhading, Gorkha and Lamjung districts. There were 26 participants, including 18 females drawn from the three districts. The training addressed such topics as concept of SF, including its formation and operational procedures, SF's institutional ethics/disciplines, statute formation,

Activities completed in Magh (Feb-Mar)

Activities		No. of Participants		
Title	No.	Title	No.	Title
Awareness campaigns against human rights violation	4	91	93	184
District level training (OD, Human rights & monitoring)	1	21	13	34
SF level Orientation (OD, Human rights & monitoring)	36	560	91	651

preparation of workplans,, meeting minutes keeping and its implementation, resource management, record keeping and report writing.

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