

3.1 Socio-economic and Cultural Status of the Highly Marginalized Majhi Community of Panchthar

Background

Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, country full of geographical and bio cultural diversities. The country is home to various ethnic groups, languages, and religions. Nepal has 125 ethnic groups that speak 123 languages as their mother tongue. The country is physically divided into mountains, hills, and plains. In fact, the very Nepali identity and heritage stem from these cultural and geographical diversities.

Among the various ethnic groups living in Nepal, the indigenous nationalities are some of the oldest residents of the country. Indigenous nationalities are communities that have their own language and custom, own distinct cultural identity, social structure and written and/or oral history. The population of indigenous nationalities in Nepal stands at 35.2 percent. The Government of Nepal has enlisted 59 ethnic groups of the country as indigenous nationalities, further categorizing them into five groups—endangered, highly marginalized, marginalized, disadvantaged and advanced. Of them, Shiyar, Majhi, Lhomi, Thudam, Dhannuk, Chepang, Satar (Santhal), Jhangad, Thami, Bote, Danuwar, and Baramu constitute as the highly marginalized ethnic groups.

The Majhi community is one such indigenous group that have their own distinct language, custom, culture, and religion. They have been traditionally living on the banks of the Saptakoshi River and its tributaries. The Majhi community live around the Indrawati River of Sindhupalchowk, Tamakoshi River of Ramechhap and Dolakha, Likhu River of Okhaldhunga, Dudhkoshi of Okhaldhunga and Khotang, Arun River in Bhojpur, Sankhuwasabha and Dhankuta and the Tamor River in Dhankuta, Paanchthar and Terthahum. Likewise, the Majhi community also reside along the banks of Sunkoshi river in Sindhupalchowk, spreading from Kaping Majhi village to Kavre, Sindhuli, Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga, Khotang, Bhojpur, Dhankuta, Udayapur and Madhuban of Sunsari, on the banks of the Sunkoshi and Saptakoshi, along the banks Bagmati River, in Makwanpur, Kavre, Sindhuli, Marin and Kamala river of Sindhuli and the Triyuga river of Udayapur. The Majhi people call Nepal their ancestral land and have been found migrating from one place to another within the country. Also, Majhi elders claim that Majhi people living in Makanaha and Haripur in Poorniya district of Bihar, in Darjeeling and Assam of North- East India, and in Galephu and Chirahad of Bhutan migrated only seven to eight generations ago from these very

Koshi riverbanks. The Majhi elders in India, as well as Bhutan, name the villages and surroundings of the Koshi riverbanks as their place of origin. In the eastern hills of Nepal, the Majhi community is mainly found living in and around the banks of Tamor River. This river also passes through some parts of Paanchthar district, and efforts have been made here to explore the socio-economic and cultural situation of the Majhi community living in this area. As per the current territorial classification of Nepal, Paanchthar lies in Province no. 1 and the erstwhile Mechi zone of the Eastern Development Region. Paanchthar is a district befitting of the larger diversity of the country. In the latest restructuring of the state, this district has been delineated into one electoral constituency for the House of Representatives and two constituencies for the State Assembly. People of Kirant, Hindu, Christian and Buddhist faiths live here. Likewise, people of indigenous nationalities, Brahmin, Chettri and Dalit communities reside here. Local Majhi elders say that the Majhi community migrated here six-seven generations ago.¹

The Majhi community live in close proximity to the Tamor River. In the district, the Majhitar near the confluence of the Tamor and Hewa rivers in Phidim municipality and Hilihang rural municipality-7 are places having larger Majhi settlements. With the construction of the road sections adjoining Phidim of Paanchthar and Aathrai of Terhathum, the daily lives and lifestyle of the Majhi people of these settlements have seen a drastic change. This study of the socio-economic and cultural situation of the Majhi community has been carried out with the intention of drawing the attention of the stakeholders for bringing this community into the national mainstream.

Objective of the Study

- To take stock of the status of the socio-economic and cultural status of the Majhi community.
- To identify problems facing the Majhi community and ways to resolve them.
- To acquire information about the status of implementation of policies and programmes developed by the state for indigenous nationalities.
- To understand the impact of the failure of effective implementation of government's policies and programmes on the target communities.
- To shed light on the problems of the Majhi community and alert the stakeholder agencies for bringing them to the mainstream nation building.

Rationale of the Study

Ethnic Studies is a reflection of the society. Studies like these of any ethnic group is important to understand about the historical occurrence and social origin, to generate a feeling of curiosity to explore the unknown, to gaining actual knowledge about the rapidly changing society and its impact on human nature, and to explore the outcome of cultural mixing.² This study explores the financial status, vocation, language, custom and traditions, and situation of health and education of the Majhi community. In the present situation, it is also equally important to alert the stakeholders by studying the effect and impact of globalization on life and livelihood of such communities. The lack of monitoring and evaluation of the status of the policy and programmes adopted by the state for these communities is also a matter that needs serious attention. Hence, a need was felt for a comprehensive study on the initiatives taken in the socio-economic and cultural sectors,

1. Based on conversation with President of Nepal Majhi Uplift Association, Paanchthar, Jas Bahadur Majhi

2. Madhu Sudan Pandeya, Nationalities of India/pg 14

especially in the wake of political changes that have occurred in the country of late.

With a focus on these issues, an effort has hereby been made to develop a write-up concerning the highly marginalized Majhi community that live in Paanchthar district. This study is expected to generate appropriate resource materials and important documents to understand the status of the Majhi community not only for the district but for the nation as a whole. As a result, this study showcases the current status of the Majhi community and the study could also serve as an important reference material to develop policies, plans and programmes for this community in the future.

Methodology

- Study tour
- Discussion
- Interview
- Explanation
- Study of secondary reference material

Limitation of the Study

- This study is focused on the highly marginalized Majhi community who are listed as indigenous nationalities and live in various wards of Phidim municipality, Hilihang rural municipality and Kumyak rural municipality of Paanchthar district.
- This study features the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the highly marginalized Majhi community.
- Effort has been made in the study to review the state of implementation of the policies and programmes formulated by the state for the indigenous nationalities.
- The information mentioned in the study have been collected from both primary and secondary sources.

- Opinions of the concerned community and other stakeholder agencies have also been incorporated to further clarify the status of the Majhi community.

The Habitation and Demographic Status of the Majhi Community

The population of Majhi community in Nepal was 72,614 in the 2001, which has increased to 86,272 as of the 2011 National Census.³ Sindhuli, Morang, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchowk and Sarlahi are the districts having larger population of the Majhi community. However the people of this community live in more than 68 districts in varying numbers. In Paanchthar district, they live mainly in Phidim municipality, Hilihang and Kumyak rural municipalities. There is a settlement named after the community called Majhitar at the banks of the Tamor River in Phidim municipality-4 and Hilihang rural municipality-7 of this district.

There is no exact updated data about the number of Majhi people in Paanchthar district. As per the 2011 census, the population of Majhi community in the district is 514, of which 276 are women and 238 men. As per the data, there are 445 in Phidim municipality, 135 in Hilihang rural municipality, 220 in ward no. 2 of the same rural municipality and 114 in Kumyak rural municipality-5.⁴ This data however does not include the number of Majhi people living in Ranigaon in ward no. 3 of Kumyak rural municipality. As per the data published by the Majhi Uplift Association, there are 693 members of 118 Majhi households living in the one municipality and two rural municipalities of the district.

Of the aforementioned data, the locals say that 423 residents of Hilihang rural municipality-4 have migrated elsewhere.

3. National Census, 2011, Summary findings/table : 4, Details of caste/ethnicity of population

4. District Profile Paanchthar, 2071 B.S., Statistics Office, Paanchtha

Habitation and population of Majhi community in Paanchthar					
S.No.	Place of Habitat	Houses	Total	Women	Men
1.	Phidim municipality-4	8	32	15	17
2.	Hilihang rural municipality-2	35	208	100	108
3.	Hilihang rural- municipality-7	29	176	89	87
4.	Hilihang rural municipality-4	4	23	11	12
5.	Kumyak rural municipality-3	10	64	29	35
6.	Kumyak rural municipality-5	32	190	96	94
Total		118	693	340	535

Vocation and Financial Status of the Majhi Community

The Majhi people earn their living mainly through fishing. Likewise, boating is also one of their traditional sources of livelihood. Data indicate that the Majhi and Bote communities fish in 395,000 hectares of rivers and streams, 5,000 hectares of ponds and lakes and 1,500 hectares of reservoir of Nepal.⁵ The Majhi community living in Paanchthar district have also been sustaining their livelihood practicing the same occupation. As developmental endeavours gathers pace across the nation, infrastructure development projects have begun to operate in Majhi settlements. This has brought sea of changes to the daily lives, vocation and income of the community. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 states that 'Governments shall ensure that, whenever appropriate, studies are carried out, in co-operation with the peoples concerned, to assess the social, spiritual, cultural and environmental impact on them of planned development activities. The results of these studies shall be considered as fundamental criteria for the implementation of these activities'⁶ but it has been found to have not been fully practiced during the running of development and construction projects in Majhi settlements.

The Majhi community living in

Paanchthar district are also facing the same problems. The Majhi people used to earn three to four hundred rupees a day by providing boating service in Kanchobari and Pinasi ghat or crossing of Hilihang rural municipality-2. Presently, bridges have been constructed in both the crossings. Likewise, the Majhi people living in Majhitar also used to help transport good across the river, fish in the river and provide food and accommodation facilities for the travelers in the Terthathum-Paanchthar roadway. Lately, after a concrete bridge was built at the place as part of the Mid-hills Highway, public transportation came into being, thereby closing down a source of income for them. Also, the Majhi people residing near the Tamor River used to make income by selling fish. But with the increasing use of electric current to fish in the rivers, the number of fishes has declined, putting their source of livelihood into a crisis. In this manner, their traditional occupation is found to have experienced some change. Along with fishing, they are also into agriculture and livestock farming. Their involvement in government service and foreign employment is also increasing.

The major reason behind the lack of a strong financial situation of the Majhi community is that they do not own productive land. The compulsion to work by taking others farm in contract has ob-

5. Nepal Laghu Biswakosh, Nepal Academy/pg 102, Editor Bairagi Kainla

6. ILO Convention 169/Article 7 (3)

Details of the Majhi people living in Paanchthar who are involved in vocation other than agriculture, livestock farming and traditional occupation:

S.No.	Details of employment	Women	Men	Total	Remarks
1.	Teaching	2	0	2	1 private
2.	Hydrology and Meteorology	0	3	3	
3.	Police	0	2	2	
4.	Army	0	1	1	
5.	Child development	2	0	2	
6.	Health workers	0	1	1	
7.	Police cook	0	1	1	
8.	Retired from service	0	3	3	

structed consolidation of their financial situation. The Majhi community people are also found living on others land or unregistered land. One such example is in Majhitar where the Majhi community are living in houses that they constructed without land ownership certificate.⁷

It is presently hard to find a Majhi community member who makes a living out of his/her traditional vocation only. Though the financial situation of the Majhi community is improving by the day, it is not yet sufficient for a quality life. People from the community are found producing and selling local liquor, running grocery, rearing goats and pigs and doing daily wage labour. Likewise, Majhi people are also working in the government service and non-government sector. Though the number of Majhi people working in such sectors is minimal.

Social and Cultural Status of the Majhi Community

Social and cultural diversity can also be found within the Majhi community. They are divided into sub-castes like Danuwar, Kushuwar, Kumale, Bantar and Thaltharu. As of late, the Sahani, Godi, Malaha, Tharu, Dusadh, Halkhor, Dum, Hadimajhi, Musahar, Bote and

some Chettri and Rayamajhi caste in western Nepal have also been claiming themselves to belong to the Majhi community, thereby putting the real Majhi community at risk.⁸ Though there is a minor difference in terms of territory and sub castes, the major culture/traditions that the Majhi community follow are presented here:

a. Birth Custom

After a Majhi community woman starts to experience labour pain, the women who have already become mothers play the role of a midwife. It is the midwives that also performs the custom after the birth of the child. Accordingly, the child is named after five days in case of a daughter and seven days in the case of a son. On the day of the naming of the child, all the relatives who have to observe the birth of the child with certain restrictions purify themselves with Gahunt (made of cow urine and milk). In this community, the child is named by the midwives. There is a practice of naming the child based on the day on which he/she was born. Also, on the day of naming the child, the midwives ties a yellow string in the hands and legs and the neck of the child. With the belief that it helps to lactate, the new mother

7. Based on conversation with President of Nepal Majhi Uplift Association, Paanchthar, Jas Bahadur

8. Dhan Bahadur Majhi, Traditions/Culture of Majhi community/pg 1

is served with rice beer which has been prepared in the home. Only few women go for regular check-up during pregnancy and for child birth to the health centers. As a result of which their health is at risk. The naming of the child is held on an odd day after the birth i.e. on the third, fifth or seventh day as per the tradition.

b. Rice Feeding/Hair Cutting

In the Majhi community there is a practice of performing the Pasni (first instance of rice feeding to the child) and Chewar (first instance of hair cutting) as the child continues to grow. The rice feeding ceremony is held in six months in the case of a son and in five months in the case of a daughter. The cutting of the hair of the child is carried out with the maternal uncle of the child doing the honours. In the absence of maternal uncle, a distant relative who is the brother of the mother cuts the hair for the first time. During both these occasions, relatives gather to give their blessings to the child.

c. Marriage Custom

There are six kinds of marriage custom practiced in the Majhi community—arranged, eloping, marrying an already married woman, a widow, inter-caste marriage and forceful marriage. All the traditions of the Majhi community are found to be practiced in an arranged marriage. During this kind of marriage, there is the custom of the boy's guardians going to the girl's house to arrange the marriage, doing an engagement, going with a marriage procession to the girl's house, performing the marriage rituals and then seeing off the bride to the bridegroom's home. Serving feast to the marriage party guests, meeting among the in-laws and seeking blessings are also part of the arranged marriage custom.

In the marriage where the couple elope, the girl's parents are not informed about it and the boy and girl elope on the basis of an understanding between the two while there is also a custom to accept a married woman as one's wife. There is also a tradition of the younger brother accepting his sister-in-law as his wife in case of the death of the elder brother, and provided that the favorable age and consent is there for the same. It is called widow marriage. If member of the Majhi community marry outside their community then it is an inter-caste marriage while there is a forced marriage where the boy takes the help of others to forcibly bring the girl as his wife into his house, without the consent of the girl.⁹

In the present context, the arranged marriage is performed as per the traditional custom of the Majhi community. The widow and forced marriage are rarely practiced. Earlier, though girls in the Majhi community were married young that is gradually declining. Presently, most of the girls are married after they complete 16 years of age. In this community, there is also a practice of 'exchanged marriage' i.e. the household from where you marry a girl as the daughter-in-law also serves as the family where a boy is accepted as the son-in-law for a daughter in the first family. An arranged marriage also takes place if a boy and girl like each other and want to get married with the parents' consent.¹⁰ In this manner, some of the kinds of marriage in the Majhi community are found to be against the law of Nepal. In the name of the marriage, there is a practice of spending a lot in liquor and meat in the Majhi community, as a result of which their financial condition has become weak.

9. Dhan Bahadur Majhi, Traditions/Culture of Majhi community/pg 21

10. Gurung Sam Prakash Something, Introduction of Majhi community/pg 28

d. Post-death Ritual

The Majhi community have their own post-death rituals. If anyone dies, then the body is covered with a white cloth and the fishing net and carried on a bamboo stretcher to be burnt to ashes in the nearby river bank that falls in the west of the home. Following the cremation, the mourning takes place with various rituals.¹¹

e. Religion

The Majhi community do not give concern and importance to religion. They follow the tantrik religion. They worship their ancestors by sacrificing a pig. This is locally known in Majhi language as *Bhuinbaba*. Since this community worships the wind, sun and forest hill, they are also known as nature worshippers. The Majhi community of Paanchthar also follow the Hindu religion.

f. Language

The Majhi community have their own mother tongue. It is called Majhi bhasa (language) or Majhi kuro (talk). Linguists categorize the Majhi language into the Bharopeli language family. Though the number of mother tongues in the country has increased the number of mother tongue speakers however is on the decline. In 2001, there were 92 mother tongue and 48.6 mother tongue speakers while the 2011 census showed the number of mother tongue as 123 while that of mother tongue speakers at 44.6 per cent.¹² The number of Majhi people speaking their mother tongue in Nepal is 22,422.¹³ There is however no uniformity in the language of the Majhi people who live scattered in different regions. The

alphabets have also been determined for the Majhi language writing. Accordingly there are 11 vowels and 29 consonants. The writing system has begun in this language while a dictionary has also been produced.¹⁴

In the case of Paanchthar district, the language of Majhi community is in a state of becoming extinct. According to a study, 147 people used to speak Majhi language when the population in the district was 470 in 2001.¹⁵ In 2011, the population of Majhi community was 514 but with only 33 speaking their mother tongue. This shows that only 0.02 per cent speak their mother tongue.¹⁶ This is also an indication that the love for mother tongue among Majhi community in Paanchthar is declining. The new generation Majhi people have stopped speaking in their mother tongue. Though articles and write-ups are published in Majhi language in the Gorkhapatra daily, the Majhi living in this district are deprived from reading it as they have no access to it. And even though the local FM radio stations air programmes and news in local languages the Majhi people here don't listen to it.

g. Costume

The women of this community wear traditional costume including *fariya*, *patuka* and *choli* as well as ornaments called *fuli*, *bulaki*, *mundra*, *dhungri*, *tilahari*, *chura*, *pote*, *kalli*, *pauju* and *hari*. Likewise, the men are dressed in *Langauti*, *Kachad*, *Bhoto* and *Topi*. But currently, only a few members of this community are found wearing their traditional costume and ornaments.

11. Dhan Bahadur Majhi, Traditions/Culture of Majhi community/pg 38

12. National Census, 2011, Summary Findings/pg 11, 12

13. National Census, 2011, Summary Findings/table : Population as per 4 mother tongue

14. Nepali mother tongue, Part-I, Nepal Academy/pg 183

15. Dhan Bahadur Majhi, Traditions/Culture of Majhi community/pg 131

16. District Profile Paanchthar-2071 B.S., Statistics Office Paanchthar

h. Festivals

The Majhi community celebrated festivals like Baisakh poornima, Mansir poornima, Sansari, Aitabare, Saune Sankranti, Maghe Sankranti and Gothd-hup pooja. Likewise, they also observe the festivals of Dashain, Tihar and Chaite Dashain. The Majhi people also perform pooja and worshipping. Accordingly, they perform the kul pooja gharni, kul pooja Bhimsen pooja and Koshi pooja. The Majhis living in Paanchthar observed all these festivals and pooja. However, the extravagant expenditure that takes place during this festival and pooja needs to be reduced.

i. Health

The lifestyle, food habits, treatment method etc leave the Majhi community in a poor health condition. Due to lack of clean drinking water, the Majhi people are found suffering from various diseases. Also, as there is no separate kitchen in all the homes, the smoke and dust is having an adverse impact, especially on the health of women. However, even if anyone falls sick in this community, they prefer to visit a shaman/faith healer instead of going for modern medical treatment. Likewise, only few married women and men in this community can be found using family planning methods. As a result, the Majhi women's health condition is poor. And majority of them live in joint families.

j. Education

National as well as international legal instrument guarantee every Nepali the right to education. The International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights provides that 'higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every

appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.'¹⁷ Likewise, the constitution of Nepal recognizes education as a fundamental right and states that every Nepal shall have the right to education in mother tongue and to establish and run schools and educational institutions for the same.¹⁸

Despite these legal guarantees, the Majhi people are left behind in terms of education. As curriculum and text books have not been developed in the mother tongue of the Majhi community, they have not been able to pursue their studies in their mother tongue. However, the educational standard of this community has also not been able to rise because the kids are not sent to school and even those who are enrolled drop out in the middle. Due to poor financial condition also, the community has not been able to give attention to the education of their children. It may be noted the anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista had pointed out that 'it would be difficult for them to survive if they are not conscious and come in equal terms with other with education and skills as per the time.'¹⁹

k. Affiliation to Social Organizations

Various organizations have been established for the protection and promotion of the Majhi community. They include Nepal Majhi Uplift Association, Nepal Majhi Women Uplift Association, Nepal Majhi Students' Association, Nepal Majhi Cultural Forum and Majhi Development and Research Council. The Majhi people in Paanchthar have been included under the Nepal Majhi Uplift Association district chapter. Though politically divided this is a community-based organization, so it binds them all together. They are also affiliated to the Nepal Fed-

17. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Culture Rights, 1966, Article 13/2/c

18. Constitution of Nepal (2015), Article 31/5

19. Dor Bahadur Bista, Garden of all castes/pg. 48

Educational status of the Majhi community in Paanchthar					
S.No.	Level	Women	Men	Total	Remarks
1.	SLC/SEE	1	4	5	
2.	Intermediate/+2	2	2	4	

eration of Indigenous Nationalities (NE-FIN) through this organisation. They also use the budget that the State has appropriated for the indigenous nationalities through this organisation.

Major Problem

The highly marginalized Majhi communities that live in Paanchthar are behind or left behind in socio-economic and cultural terms. The major problems seen in this community are as follows:

a. Poor Financial Situation

Though poverty is a problem of the nation as a whole, majority of the Majhi people remaining poor is the major problem of this ethnic group. As their traditional skills and vocation do not make a good income, it has been a problem for them. The same subsistence vocation is also now in a crisis. In addition to this, the community has also been able to adjust with changing time and situation. As they have not been able to run business that provides them quick profit, that is sustainable and large, the financial condition of this community has not been able to improve. Apart from that their expensive culture and traditions is also contributing to the poverty of this community.

b. Educationally Backward

The Majhi community living in Paanchthar have not been able to uplift themselves educationally. There are few members of the community undergoing higher education. The education level has not been able to improve as children are not sent to school and also because there is high drop outs among those attending school. In addition to this, due to lack of education in their mother tongue, the Ma-

jhi children have not been attracted towards education. This problem has aggravated as there is scarcity of curriculum/text books as well as literary books and reference materials for studying Majhi language at the school level.

c. Endangered Traditional Skills and Vocation

The traditional skills and vocation of the Majhi people here is in a state of crisis. They used to make a living as boatmen but the profession has fallen into a crisis due to physical infrastructure development in the district. Construction of road and concrete bridge and suspension bridge over the Tamor River where they are located as displaced the boat service. As per the norms of the ILO Convention 169, running of infrastructure development projects should not impact the traditional skills and vocation of the marginalized community. Furthermore, programmes should be carried out for their sustainable livelihood. But this aspect was not considered while carrying out development and construction works in Paanchthar. Likewise, use of electric current to fish in river has led to a scarcity of fish in the rivers, thereby directly affecting them.

d. Mother Tongue Endangered

Though the Majhi community have their own ethnic language, it is being less spoken and hence at the risk of extinction. It is also because the elders do not talk to their young ones in their own mother tongue in the homes and there is no provision of studying this language in schools. Also, there is no separate script of the Majhi language, reading materials published in Majhi language are minimal

and media too do not disseminate materials in the language, which is pushing the language towards extinction.

e. Lack of Land Ownership

One of the major problems of the Majhi community is that they do not own arable land. Due to this reason, they are forced to work in other's land for livelihood. In this type of farming, the half produce has to be given to the land owner and hence they are deprived of returns as much as their labour is. Even working for year long in the field is not enough to make a living and hence are forced to sell their produce. It is also difficult for them to build houses, for lack of housing plot of their own. Majority of the Majhi people live on unregistered or other land, by building houses on it. And hence are concerned that they may be evicted any time.

f. Lack of Awareness

Another major reason for the Majhi people to remain socio-economically and culturally behind is due to lack of awareness. Due to this reason they have not been able to adjust as per the changing time, and hence remain backward. They are even not aware about the policy and programmes that the State has implemented for them, and hence are not able to benefit from it. Likewise, the Majhi people too accept that spending extravagantly in daily food as well as for culture/traditions shows that they have not been able to raise their consciousness level.²⁰

g. Disaster

Since the Majhi people live near the rivers; they are highly affected by the floods/landslides that take place especially during the rainy season. Apart from that the farming they do nearby the rivers are also washed away and the irrigation canal too are damaged, inviting trouble to them.

h. Policy Constraints

The policy and programmes formulated by the Government of Nepal has also not been able to address the problems of the Majhi community. The local body resource mobilization and management procedures 2069 B.S. had included budget and programmes for the indigenous nationalities. However, the latest budget formulation guidelines 2074 B.S. does not make it mandatory to allocate budget for the target groups and communities. As a result, it is likely that the Majhi community who have been left backward would be left even further behind from the mainstream of the State.

Policy and Programmes to Uplift the Majhi Community

a. Programmes Organized by Non-government Organizations

The Human Rights Consciousness and Development Centre (HuCODEC) Nepal has been carrying out facilitation work for the socio-economic development of this indigenous community that lives in Majhitar. Under the Local Governance and Community Development Programme of the NGO, sensitization and empowerment efforts are being carried out with the establishment of the Citizens Awareness Centre since Magha, 2066 B.S. Under the same programme, construction of irrigation canal as well as establishing seed capital for income generation have been carried out as part of the livelihood improvement programme.

Likewise, the same organisation has been running social mobilization, capacity development, income generation and small infrastructure development programmes under the poverty alleviation programme with support of the Poverty Alleviation Fund. The Milan Kendra Nepal has organized leadership development training under the local youth

20. Based on conversation with Hilihang rural municipality ward no. 2 elected member Mukta Bahadur Majhi

partnership programme. In Majhitar, the Nepal Janauddar Sangh had also organized income generation activities under the Social Harmony and Democratic Participation Programme, with support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

b. Local Government Budget, Policy and Programmes for the Majhi Community

As per the policy and programmes designated by the Government of Nepal under the target groups development programme, a minimum of 10 per cent of the budget each for women and children and 15 per cent for indigenous nationalities, people with disabilities, backward community, Dalit, elderly citizens, Madhesi, Muslim etc had to be allocated as of the previous fiscal year.²¹ Accordingly, the Majhi community who fall under the indigenous nationalities category had been receiving funds annually from the Phidim municipality until the previous fiscal year.

The District Development Committee Office in Paanchthar also stated that it supported the Majhi community to improve their health condition by helping them build permanent toilets and improved stoves. The budget formulation guidelines, 2074 B.S. enforced along with the restructuring of the State has removed the policy requirement of having to invest in the target groups. The annual budget estimates, policy and programmes of the Phidim municipality for the fiscal year 2074/75 (2018/19) states that special emphasis shall be laid on the protection of the Majhi language, which is near ex-

inction.²²

The annual budget estimates, policy and programmes of the Hilihang rural municipality adopts a policy to protect and promote the endangered languages like Limbu, Majhi, Sunuwar and others. Stating that a documentary would be produced about the culture and lifestyle of the Majhi community to be uploaded in Youtube, the Municipality also adopts a policy to gradually publicize the cultural significance of other nationalities.²³

Likewise, the annual budget estimates, policy and programmes of Kумыak rural municipality states that a policy shall be adopted to give special emphasis to the protection and promotion of the near-extinct Limbu, Majhi and other languages.²⁴ Even though the problems of the Majhi community have been recognized in the policy of the local level government, no separate programmes have been included.

Conclusion

The highly marginalized Majhi indigenous community living in Nepal are not socio-economically and culturally empowered. And the Majhi community residing in Phidim municipality, Hilihang and Kумыak rural municipalities are no exception to it. Along with the change in every sector of the society, their language, customs, traditional skills and vocation are found to be in a state of near-extinction while they have not been able to adjust their day-to-day living as per the changed context. As a result, it is evident that the Majhi people have not been integrated into the mainstream of the State. The policy and programmes formulated

21. Local body resource mobilization and management procedures 2069/pg 13 and 14

22. Budget estimates, policy and programme for F/Y 2017/18 endorsed by the first village council of Phidim municipality/pg 13

23. Budget estimates, policy and programme/culture, religious sites related policies for F/Y 2017/18 endorsed by the first village council of Hilihang rural municipality

24. Budget estimates, policy and programme/culture, religious sites related policies for F/Y 2017/18 endorsed by the first village council of Kумыak rural municipality

by the State for these communities should not only be limited to papers but needs to be effectively implemented in practice.

Recommendations

Recommendations to consolidate the socio-economic and cultural status of the Majhi community are as follows:

- Take initiative to transform their subsistence-oriented vocation to income-oriented and make them economically stronger.
- The Majhi themselves and the State should take the initiative to protect and promote Majhi mother tongue.
- Make arrangement for teaching and learning in mother tongue to uplift the educational standard of the Majhi community. Also create an atmosphere to attract them towards education with the provision of scholarships.
- The Majhi people should themselves be conscious of minimizing the extravagant expenses that is incurred in course of maintaining the lifestyle, traditions and culture of their community.
- Sanitation and awareness programmes should be organised in order to strengthen the health condition of the Majhi people. Also, the women should be informed about reproductive health.
- The Majhi community should be well informed and given an opportunity to participate in the infrastructure development projects carried in the areas of their habitation.
- Artificial ponds should be constructed to help the Majhi ethnic group preserve their traditional skills of boating and fishing, and thereby make it a source of income.

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