

## SOCIO-CULTURAL SUBJECTIVITIES OF LANDLESSNESS IN NEPAL: A CASE STUDY OF SARKI PEOPLE FROM NAUBISE VDC OF DHADING DISTRICT

**Jailab Rai \***

### **Introduction**

Land is a primary resource for an agrarian economy in underdeveloped countries like Nepal. More than 85 percent of Nepal's population lives in rural areas and more than 60 percent of the economically active population is involved in agriculture (HMG, 2003). Rapid population growth and increasing pressure on land resources to earn the much needed calorie is a major challenge in the country (Graner, 1997). In this context, the study of landlessness remains an important aspect of national agenda (Shrestha, 2001), particularly in the national inclusion process (Gurung, 2006). Moreover, the study of landlessness has become a policy debate and an issue of concern in the debates on national economic development (Shrestha, 2001). The sociological and anthropological understanding of landlessness has its own importance since it requires the analysis of cultural dimensions (Caplan, 1970 and 1972) as socio-cultural subjectivities in a historical context. The access to land resources or landlessness is an important social issue, which can be linked with social and cultural aspects of landless people as socio-cultural subjectivities in drawing out the implication of their access to land resources.

This study deals with the socio-cultural subjectivities of landlessness with a focus on the *Sarki* people in the central hills of Nepal who are among the extremely marginalized groups of people in terms of the access and ownership to land resources. It reviews the process of

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\* Jailab Rai holds M. A. in Anthropology from Tribhuvan University. He teaches Anthropology at the Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology.

landlessness among the *Sarki* people and examines the social, economic and cultural process of the landlessness of *Sarki* people in the historical perspective. The paper is primarily based on a review of existing literature on the land resource distribution and management in Nepal supplemented by information obtained from a field study carried out during September to November 2007 at Naubise of Dhading district. The study has used both quantitative and qualitative information obtained from the field.

### **The Study Area and Methodology Employed**

Naubise is one of the 50 VDCs in Dhading district, which touches the Tribhuvan Highway. *Sarki* people of this VDC are settled in four villages, viz; Tappu Danda, Charghare, Barthumki, and Subedithok. The climate of the study area (Naubise) is comparatively warmer than that of the other villages in the VDC. But in contrast, the lands settled and owned by *Sarki* people are dry terraces with less productivity. They are settled very closely even somewhere sharing the same compound, with the exception of scattered households in Charghare and Barthunki villages. The study village is purposively selected for the study because of the high density of *Sarki* population in the area, easier accessibility from the road and relative security during the political insurgency in Nepal. A total of the 96 *Sarki* clustered households are taken as sample households. The household survey was conducted to obtain the quantitative information and the formal and informal interviews were conducted to obtain the qualitative information. Similarly, participant observation was used as a basic ethnographic tool. This study methodologically excludes the other ethnic groups living vicinity of the study area.

### ***Sarki* People and their Population**

The recent population census records a total of 318989 *Sarki* population in Nepal, which is 1.40 percent of the country's total population. According to the population census 2001, Nepali society consists of 101 identified caste/ethnic groups and 1.78 percent unidentified people. Among them, *Chhetri* occupies the first position in the highest ranking order covering 15.80 percent of the total population. It is followed by 12.74 percent of Hill *Brahmin* and 7.14 percent of *Magars* respectively. Similarly, *Sarki*-which is one of the occupational castes in the Hills

occupies the fifteenth position in terms of its population size (HMG, 2003).

The population census 2001 shows the distribution of *Sarki* people in almost all of the Hill districts of Nepal. This population census records *Sarki* as one of the four largest caste groups in two districts in the country. They are Jumla district of Karnali zone occupying 3<sup>rd</sup> largest position (6.5% of district population) and Dadeldhura district of Mahakali zone occupying 4<sup>th</sup> largest position (5.35 of district population) in caste/ethnic composition. It is 7<sup>th</sup> in Dhading district (of total 338658 district population), which constitutes 4.02 percent of the total district population. In this district, *Tamang* occupies the largest proportion of district population. It covers 21.48 percent (i.e. 72746 of total 338658) followed by *Brahmins* (57449), *Chhetris* (52552), *Newars* (32429), *Magars* (28675), and *Gurungs* (26224). The *Sarki* household in study village occupies fifth position (3.72 %) in the largest category (VDC, 2004). It seems that *Sarki* population is not a larger compared to others, but their settlement history in the study area with the marginal landholding size and distinct socio-cultural history are more important in the anthropological study.

### ***Sarki* People: A Context of Origin**

Nepal was legally a Hindu kingdom until 2006. The people's movement of 2006 triggered to establish Nepal as a secular state. The discrimination of caste hierarchy rooted from the Hindu religious philosophy came to an end after this movement. The caste hierarchy based on Hindu religious philosophy has been deeply rooted into the socio-cultural, political, and religious domains of the people. It is historically imposed in the name of *Varna* system, <sup>1</sup> under which there was stratification of society into four *Varnas*. It was traced from the Manu's version as bodily part of *Brahma* into a racial element as the ritual status (Chhetri, 1999).

The *Varna* system introduced in 5<sup>th</sup> century was reorganized into four-fold-occupational hierarchies in 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> History shows that Ram Shah (1605-1633), the king of Gorkha, also adopted the caste system- a function of his theocratic tendency. He also considered it as a bulwark against the *Muslim* hegemony in *Mughal* India and Christian faiths of

British colonizers later in South Asia (Gurung, 2005). Similarly, *Muluki Ain*-the first national legal code of Nepal, enforced in 1854 by the first Rana Prime Minister- Junga Bahadur Rana, classified the Nepali society into five hierarchical caste divisions.<sup>3</sup> These historical evidences of Nepali society have introduced and continued the tendency of caste discrimination in Nepal. According the *Muluki Ain*, the first three caste groups are kept in the pure caste category (*chokho jat*) or water acceptable castes or *pani chalnya jat* and the last two caste groups are kept into the impure caste (*paninachalnya jat*) or water unacceptable caste.

The historical construction of caste hierarchy in Nepal has placed the *Sarki* people into the untouchable caste category, which more recently is termed as *Dalit* (Gurung, 2005). Gurung says that the caste discrimination and untouchability has remained as a fact of everyday life in the Hindu kingdom. The term *Dalit* referring to untouchability seems to reflect the reality of their relative political, economic and social dominance, which is a recent entry in the Nepali socio-cultural space. They are subsumed as disadvantaged, downtrodden, marginalized, and oppressed groups. There may be diversified meaning of *Dalit* but the explicit meaning of the term is accepted as "*oppressed*" with the etymological link of Nepali word *dalai* or *dalnu*, which means to cross, exploit, oppress or suppress. The bases of such oppression of *Dalits* are rooted in the caste discrimination in Hindu myths and practices, although the *Dalits* belong to the same racial (Caucasoid), linguistic (Indo-Aryan) and cultural (Hindu caste) group as the wearers of holy cord.

Gurung (2005) has mentioned three *Dalit* categories comprising of 18 *Dalit* castes in Nepal. They are: (i) *Parbate* (Hill) *Dalits* (*Badi, Damai, Gaine, Kadar, Kami, Sarki*); (ii) *Newar Dalits* (*Chyame* and *Pode*); and (iii) *Terai Dalits* (*Bantar, Chamar, Chidimar, Dhobi, Dom, Dusadh, Halkhor, Khatawe, Mushahar*). The ideas of caste and concept of touchability-untouchability rooted from *Licchavi* period to *Malla* period and there up to modern Nepal (i.e. after the unification in 1769) has numerous impacts upon the *Sarki* people. They are historically excluded from the prestigious occupation, access to the resources, participation in politics, and equal respect in religious domain. It is believed that they were de-hierarchized (Gautam, et.al. 1994:215) because they failed to follow the Hindu religious norms and values by breaking the religious

code set by their ancestors, i.e. food taboos of eating dead carcasses (*Sino in Nepali*) of animals. Such religious and cultural myths and history of caste system gradually have forced them into the down-trodden group.

### **Political History of Land Resource Management in Nepal: Exclusion-Inclusion Context**

In Nepal, the ultimate ownership of the land is vested in the state. But the historical records show that the traditional land product was distinguished into two shares: “the *Talsing boti*, i.e. the share accruing to the state, and *Mohi Boti*, i.e. the share accruing to the tenant of a respective piece of land” (Regmi, 1978:660-660). It is essential to understand Nepals’ economic surplus extraction from land resource. The political history shows that the share accruing rights (*Talsing Boti*) was handed over to the individuals for remuneration that is traditionally for both settlement and economic purposes. But the traditional land ownership is limited to the state itself.

The formal and organizational efforts on land resource management have obviously excluded the presently emerged and identified landless groups in the extraction of this resource and to hold the access upon it. In this process, the different forms of land tenure systems were introduced and practiced in Nepal (see Regmi 1978). The occupational castes throughout the country are directly and indirectly excluded from owning and cultivating more new land for the long history. The *Jagir-land-assignment*,<sup>4</sup> was limited only to the government employees, as state’s share accruing mechanism. Regmi (1978) states that there was 98 percent of irrigated land handed over to the *Jagirdars*.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, 83 percent of such land was given to the military personnel and other was for civil servants, which is not recorded for the occupational castes in the political history of Nepal. Table 1 shows patterns and extent of the distribution of irrigated land until 1852/3.

The history of traditional land arrangement system reveals that the group of people who were excluded from the state functionaries were excluded from land ownership rights. The *Birta*,<sup>6</sup> appears to have been started by king Prithvinarayan Shah in 1772. It is a form of land grant by the state authorities in favour of priest, religious teachers, soldiers,

**Table 1: Jagir Land Distribution in Nepal, 1852/53**

Category	Irrigated land (in Muri)	%
Army	3178110	83.37
Royal Palace Employees, civil servants, village employees etc	532135	13.96
Rana family	59570	1.56
Miscellaneous life time grants	23003	0.60
Employees of Defense establishments	19002	0.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>3811830</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Regmi (1978:468).

members of nobility and royal family. In Regmi's words;

There was a tax exempt and inheritable land grants to learned *Brahmins*, teachers, and priests. A *Birta* grants made by a king of Jumla in western Nepal as early as 1358 stated that any person who bequeathed land to *Brahmins* would dwell in heaven for 60,000 years, while anybody who confiscated land granted by himself or by others would become a worm living in human excrement for the same period. Such injunctions are found in later grants also. In several cases, the grants also invoked the blessings of the recipients for the spiritual well-being of the donor as well as his relatives and successors (1978:269).

*Guthi*<sup>7</sup> as land endowments by the state authority laid down the Hindu and Buddhist religious foundations on the basis of *Talsing Boti* system to the religious institutions (Regmi 1978:639/67). It shows the exclusion of occupational caste from the extraction of land resources. Similarly, *Kipat*<sup>8</sup> a form of communal land tenure system also accounted as the process of excluding occupational castes from accessing the land resources. These traditional land arrangement systems are abolished with the conversion of those land-holdings into the *Raiker*<sup>9</sup>. Caplan (1972:86) writes that the mortgaging of cobblers- that is pledging of the property to their high caste creditors as security for the payment of debt in west Nepal, became the process to enforce the cobblers to lose lands to the *Brahmins* and become landless. It was because of the mobilization of land capital and needs of the cash income.

Fragmentation of farm lands and wide disparities in land ownership has remained critical and problematic for the country (Seddon, 1987). After the abolition of land grants ownership, the redistribution of land resource has become almost exclusive in the form of *Raikar* (Graner 1997:81). Later, indebtedness and mortgaging have become important components in determining land ownership for the rural people (Caplan, 1972; Graner, 1997; Caplan, 1970). The needs for cash and the lack of access to a formal credit system have become a major cause of debt and mortgaging in most of the rural Nepal. In this context, the debtors agreed to hand over the land in case he is unable to repay his debts within the stipulated time period. The land reform program was implemented in 1964 with a view to do away with the prevailing disparities in land ownership. Prior to this, the government also promulgated the *Birta Abolition Act* in 1959 with the same objectives. More recently, the government has adopted the policy of eliminating the dual ownership of land with a 1997 amendment of the 1964 Lands Act. An official statement issued in 1951 declares:

Unless the land tenure system is improved, the condition of the peasantry and agricultural production will not improve. Land-ownership is passing from the hands of peasants to those of money lenders and other rich people. But the actual cultivators do not have security of tenure. This has reduced agricultural production and increased the number of landless peasants (cf in Regmi, 1999:179).

The tenancy rights granted under the promulgated Acts did not bring change in the peasantry life. The measure became largely ineffective because of the lack of appropriate measurement of land and ineffective implementation of land policies. The most notable decision in the Act of 1964 is its address to the prescription to hold up to 25 *bighas* of land by a family, which includes parents and unmarried children. Similarly, the compensation to the tenants at 25 percent of the value of the land (Regmi1987: 203-305) was non-divisible (i.e. no rights to alienate) and the full authority to increase and decrease agricultural rents by landowners weakened the tenancy rights. Such attempts just limited the undesirable pattern of land ownership which did not make the rights of the real tenants secure and could not increase the access to land for the alternative opportunities.

### Demographic Feature of *Sarki* Population at Naubise

The district profile (2003) has recorded 91 *Sarki* households in the study village, which has increased to 96 households at present. The 96 households comprise of 448 people with 205 (45.76%) females and 243 (54.24%) males. If the population between the ages of 20-59 years is taken as productive work-force, it will come to be 51.52 % of the total. Similarly, it will be 40.18 percent of 1-19 years of age and 8.3 percent are of 60 and above. The distribution of sample study population by their age group indicates the sufficiency of productive work-force. Table 2 presents clan-wise distribution of *Sarki* population at Naubise.

**Table 2: Distribution of Sarki Clan Households and Population in the Settlement Villages**

Clan Categories	Nubmer of Households Under Settlement Villages				Total Households	Total Population
	Tappu Danda	Barth unki	Char ghare	Sube dithok		
Rokka	31	7	-	-	37	179
Acchami	34	1	1	-	37	166
Tolange	-	-	7	-	7	26
Ramtel	-	5	-	-	5	26
Purkoti	-	-	-	4	4	19
Magaranti	-	2	1	-	3	18
Bisunke	-	-	2	-	2	9
Bayalkoti	-	1	-	-	1	5
<b>Total (Hh)</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>96</b>	-
<b>Total (Pop)</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>19</b>	-	<b>448</b>

Source: Field work, 2007.

The settlement pattern of *Sarki* households in different villages is clan-based. Settlement pattern at Barthunki and Chorghare villages shows that there are more diverse clan groups. However, the different clan groups inhabit in particular geographical areas of the villages. Ramtel, Magaranti, and Bisunke are the first *Sarki* settlers in the villages, whereas Rokka and Acchhami migrated from Tappu Danda village very recently (some about 30 years ago) because of the lack of agricultural lands in their previous settlement area. The average family size in 4 different

villages and 8 clan groups (out of the total 74 *Sarki* Clans identified by Jana Utthan Pratisthan 2007:63) are also not insignificant in comparison to national and district level. It is 4.67 persons on average (ranging from 3.71 to 6 persons) which is a bit less in comparison to 5.44 in national level and 5.40 persons in the district level (HMG 2003:1). Of the total 448 *Sarki* population, 315 are occupationally grouped *Sarki* population. Rest of them (133), handicapped (4), students (90) and children (39) are occupationally not grouped. Majority of the occupationally grouped population is dependent on the farming occupation. It means they rely on income or production from this sector. But none of the *Sarki* households produces sufficient foodgrains to meet their living. So the income from wage labor is identified as their main source of livelihood.

*Sarki* people have almost given up their traditional occupation of leather-work. Those who are involved in leather-work are working in different private companies owned by non-*Sarki* or other people in Katmandu and other places. It indicates that they are only the employed labourers in the factories. Except farming, the other occupations (see Table 3) have recently emerged as easily accessible occupations. They

Table 3: Distribution of *Sarki* Population by their Occupations at Naubise

Occupation Categories	As Primary Occupation		As Secondary Occupation	
	Number of persons	%	Number of Persons	%
Farming	190	60.32	120	38.10
Labour	42	13.33	191	60.64
Driving/Conductor	22	6.98	-	-
Bussiness	21	6.67	2	0.63
Shoe-making	21	6.67	2	0.63
Servant/worker	8	2.54	-	-
Catering	5	1.59	-	-
Jana-Sena (Maoist)	3	0.95	-	-
Guard	1	0.32	-	-
Policeman (Govt.)	1	0.32	-	-
Abroad labour	1	0.32	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Fieldwork, 2007.

are involved in these occupations as the option of their livelihood. Table 3 presents occupational distribution of *Sarki* population at Naubise.

There is a stone-crusher at Tappu Danda village. In this working place, the stones are crushed into the pieces for construction materials. *Sarki* people are the major work-force in this stone-crusher. The large quantities of crushed stone are exported to Katmandu and other city areas. They receive 100 to 140 rupees per day from their work. Some of the *Sarki* farmers reported that they are also employed in the village as farm labor on daily wages. It is very notable that none of the *Sarki* has been employed in any of the government services except one aged 21 who is recruited into the Armed Police Force in 2006. It indicates that they were not employed in government services for generations. This has overwhelmingly affected in different facets of their socio-cultural life.

**Table 4: Distribution of *Sarki* Population by their Educational Attainments at Naubise**

Classes	illiterate	Primary	6	7	8	9	10	SLC	Total
Female	171	24	1	3	2	2	2	-	205
Male	160	60	4	9	4	3	2	1	243
Total	331	84	5	12	6	5	4	1	448
%	73.8	18.8	1.1	2.7	1.3	1.1	0.9	0.2	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2007. Note: Illiterate in this study means those who cannot read and write. And primary class means 2 to 5 classes.

According to Table 4, *Sarki* people have very low educational attainment. It is identified that, of the total 448 *Sarkis*, only one person is SLC passed (in 2007). The literacy rate of the *Sarki* population is very low compared to the national average. It is only 26.2 percent in comparison to 34.8 percent in total *Dalits* in the country, 54.1 percent in national population and 59.9 percent in higher caste Hill (Gurung, 2007). Moreover, the females of *Sarkis* are more disadvantaged from educational status. Among the illiterate *Sarkis*, majority are the females and the number of females in educational enrolment categories is also low in comparison to the males. Gurung (2007) writes that education is one of the basic indicators of the level of human development in which

literacy provides access to information while educational attainment provides scope for new opportunities. It is an incidence of *Sarki* people that they neither have higher educational attainment nor do the access and involvement in good economic opportunities such as employment based on the regular salary and or with provision of pensions. They could not get employment in good and prestigious services because of (one of the many causes) the low educational status. They are compelled to be the labourers in different fields. Most of the *Sarki* people dropouts from their schooling at the primary level to join the work to meet their foodgrain needs.

#### **Social and Economic facets of Landlessness of *Sarki* People at Naubise**

The average annual foodgrain production of *Sarki* people roughly comes to be calculated as 4387 kgs per household, whereas their average buying of foodgrain is calculated as 487052 kgs. The rough calculation of annual per person production and buying comes to be a 94 kgs and 104.47 kgs, respectively. This calculation indicates that they are largely dependent on the market for their daily foodgrain consumption. If we relate their foodgrain production, consumption and buying with their occupation, it brings the picture of their socio-economic status. It is interesting that there is no *Sarki* household who does not buy foodgrain to meet the normal annual foodgrain demand in the family. It is because of the insufficient farm lands. The total land owned by *Sarki* people of 96 total households roughly comes to be calculated as only 274.1 *ropani* (i.e. 89.1 *khet* and 184.2 *bari*) which is only 13.98 hectares (*ropani*= 0.051 ha). So, the man-land ratio comes to be 32.05 persons for per hectare land. It is very less compared to 5.7 persons at national level and 5.6 persons at the district level (HMG, 2003). Table 5 shows very minimal land holdings for majority of *Sarki* households. Moreover, 11 households do not have their own farm lands. It indicates that their land do not support their living independently. More than 50 percent households own less than 2 *ropanis* (0.302 ha) of land. They seem to be very disadvantaged from the land ownership even though they are occupationally farmers.

The landlessness of *Sarki* people is also reflected in the incidence of poverty. The national poverty incidence report shows the *Sarki* people

**Table 5: Distribution of *Sarki* Households by their Landholding Size at Naubise**

Land Size (in ropani)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	13	16	Tot
No. of Households with Bari	18	36	19	10	4	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	-	-	96
No. of Households with Khet	47	24	16	5	-	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	96
No. of Households with Both Bari & Khet)	11	22	19	19	10	5	-	-	2	3	2	1	1	1	96

Source: Field work, 2007. Note: *Bari* means unirrigated field and *Khet* means irrigated fields.

with high poverty incidence. It is 65 percent compared to 34 percent for the *Brahmins* and 45 percent at the national level (HMG 2003). Harka Gurung (2007) has stated the landlessness of *Dalits* as economic problems of exclusion, identifying the alternative livelihood as agenda for inclusion. The traditional occupations of *Sarki* people could not uplift their economic status for the long history. Their living standard is very low in comparison to the per capita income. It is only \$39 compared to \$240 at the national level (CBS, 2003). It is obviously very low compared to the other caste/ethnic groups too. The depressing status of *Dalits* in Nepal is evident in their low levels of literacy, low income and low life expectancy (Gurung, 2007). The caste discrimination has marginalized them from economic opportunities for the long history, which, in turn, is leading them to further dependence and destitution. Haka Gurung (2007:48) writes;

According to the population census 2001, upper caste constitutes 35.4 percent of the total economically active population. By major occupation, they dominate in professional/technical (62.2%) and legislative/administrative (38.3%). On the reverse, *Dalits* who constitute 11.9 percent of economically active population have only a nominal representation in such occupations: 1.6 percent in professional/technical 1.3 percent in legislative/administrative, and 3.9 percent in clerical. Among those engaged in elementary occupation, 36.1 percent are *Janajatis*, 22.6 percent *Dalits* and 19.1 percent upper caste.

The practice of Hindu caste discrimination in Nepal has discouraged *Sarki* people into a part of state functionaries. It is resulted into the less

access to economic resources like land resources. Consequently, the economic growth has become fruitful for only the state elites those who had already an access to the land resources. The *Dalit* people-like *Sarkis*, have used two alternatives; either to increase their access to land resources or to increase their access to other income generating activities to make their living in substitution of their traditional occupation. But *Dalits*-like *Sarkis*, could not dare to claim any possible opportunities and benefits (if any) under the caste discrimination. Dor Bahadur Bista (1991) discusses the fatalism persisting in the mind of people that is leading to the behavior of persons. He (1991:4) writes;

The most important effect of this has been the absolute belief in fatalism: that one has no personal control over one's life circumstances, which are determined through a divine or powerful external agency. This deep belief in fatalism has had a devastating effect on the work ethic and achievement motivation, and through these on the Nepali response to development. It has consequences on the sense of time, in particular such things as the concept of planning, orientation to the future, sense of causality, human dignity and punctuality.

The *Sarki* people in study area are still fatalistic in their economic, social and historical change. The Hindu caste discrimination system based on the religious ideology is deeply rooted, because of which social, economic and cultural life of *Sarki* people are influenced. They could not claim their possible and justifiable rights to access on resources in response to their absence in the political and economic participation. The state functionaries promulgated a number of decisions, plans and policies on land resource management part. However, *Sarki* people are excluded in the distribution and ownership of land resources because of the discriminatory nature of religious, political, and historical processes. They have failed to access the land resources and other sectors as well.

### ***Sarki* People: The Historical Facets of Landlessness**

The settlement history of *Sarki* people in the study area reveals a kind of compulsion to be migrated from their place of origin. The *Sarkis* in the study area are encouraged to settle by the Hindu high caste groups with the interest of encouraging them to cultivate their *Birta* land-fields. The

different *Sarki* clans are settled in specific villages and village area, which have the meaning of their settlement history and their kin networks to make them settle. Besides, their socio-economic life in their place of origin is another factor for this reason. By settlement history, Rokka people are the first settlers in this village followed by Acchami and others.

The settlement patterns of the *Sarki* people in these villages have different historical evidences. It has then become the cause of settlement distribution of *Sarki* households in different villages. Among the 8 *Sarki* clan groups settled in this village, Rokka *Sarkis* were the first settlers. They had settled in this village in 1880s followed by the Acchami *Sarkis* in 1900s; Tolange *Sarkis* in 1920s; Bayalkoti *Sarkis* in 1950s; Magaranti *Sarkis* in 1960s; and Ramtel *Sarkis*, Purkoti *Sarkis*, and Bisunke *Sarkis* in 1970s. Among them, Achhami and Rokka *Sarkis* are settled at Tappu-Danda village. They migrated from Sanga gorge (western coast of Katmandu valley) and Thansing Belaspur (a part of present Nuwakot district), respectively. They migrated to this village to cultivate the *Birta* land of a *Brahmin*. Additionally, Achhami *Sarkis* were brought by Roka *Sarki* as priest to perform death rite (they call it Jau Til Dinu). Tolange *Sarkis* were invited by *Birta* land holders to cultivate their *Birta* land. Thus, they migrated from Tamasatar-a part of Nuwakot district. Bayalkoti *Sarkis*, Ramtel *Sarkis*, and Bisunke *Sarkis* were brought by their maternal uncles (Maoli Mama in Nepali) to settle there because of the landlessness in their parental settlements. For instance, Ramtel *Sarkis*, migrated as their mother could not take care of them after the death of their father. Magaranti *Sarkis* were brought by *Birta* land holders from the western part of present settlement area. Similarly, Purkoti *Sarkis* were brought by *Birta* land holders. They migrated from the North West village of present settlement area. They all migrated to these villages because of their landlessness in the places of origin. They migrated to these villages in search of their survival means. Their migration was followed with no parental property and land but just for the survival.

### **The Network Access of *Sarki* People for the Occupational Choices**

*Sarki* people have very less access to and recruitment in the governmental and other jobs to obtain regular income. The field work records 21 *Sarki*

people involved in vegetable business. It is to buy and sell vegetables from and to Kalimati market in Katmandu. The people involved in these works are mostly the close kins of Tappu-Danda village. They are inspired by their elder brothers. One of the Rokka *Sarki* in Tappu Danda has five sons. Among them, four are involved in vegetable business at Kalimati. They regularly supply vegetables to Kalimati. This business was started 20 years ago by their eldest brothers and followed by his younger ones. In the same way, the network access is also observed in shoe-making and driving. Of total 21 occupationally shoe-makers, 10 of them are in Katmandu valley. They accessed there through their kin networks for 13 years. Similarly, 22 persons are involved in transport service (driving and conductor) by their kin networks. Interestingly, a case in Tappu is found that there are 6 drivers in a family of two generations (i.e. two fathers out of 5, 4 sons out of 11). The next evidence of kinship ties is applied in catering services in Katmandu. Similarly, settlement history of 8 *Sarki* clans in this VDC itself is an initiation of kinship ties.

The close kin network (for Berreman 1997, a function of kin groups) is a survival mechanism of *Sarki* people at two levels: (i) the first employee makes good relationship in his working field, and (ii) he can train his kin to be perfect in his task. So the *Sarki* people are found mostly working in Katmandu for driving, business, and shoe-making. Besides, they are also working in Chitwan, Pokhara and other places. The analysis of their occupational access through kin ties can help to bring a historical process of how they were excluded from the participation in the state functionaries and other prestigious occupations as well. It is a noteworthy instance of the lack of network access in the high status occupations for the more disadvantaged groups (Seddon, et al 2001). The field interaction concluded that they had no relatives to encourage and help them in recruiting into the governmental services. The new generation or the successors of *Sarki* people just have been socialized into the field accessed by their predecessors and have been enjoying it by their consent. But they have no access and expectation to be involved in the good jobs because of their perceptions and means of kin ties to influence them into the highly prestigious occupations. It is acknowledged that if the predecessors had access to the high status job, their new generation would have employed in the same sectors.

### **Concluding Remarks**

*Sarki* people are considered as the occupational caste, which are traditionally pronounced to be relied on their hand-skills, which confined them into a limited periphery for their economic survival. Consequently, it has affected upon their rest of the other dimensions of social life. The observation on the history of Hindu caste and caste discrimination indicates that it is surfaced into the multiple dimensions of the nation and the process of nation building, which is more often termed as syncretism (Bista, 1982) of diversities, resulting into the massive structural and functional inequalities (Sharma 1979). In this minute observation, the analytical opinion of Sharma (2004:135) "the law-makers showed great concern for reserving certain high Hindu value symbols throughout the kingdom," is more relevant in the context of ethnographic observation of *Sarki* people at Naubise of Dhading district. By the history, they are down-trodden group in terms of social, economic and political status. The state apparatus influenced by Hindu religious ideology has surfaced into the processual causality of *Dalit* mores and morality in relation to access on land resource.

It has to be acknowledged that the *Dalit* people, including *Sarkis* are disadvantaged, downtrodden, marginalized and oppressed groups (Gurung, 2007). It began from the articulation of caste system into structural principle of "distinctive opposition" (cf in Pandey, 2005:64) in the form of an element of a larger system, which was and is responsible in putting and pushing them in the bulk of their walk over the years, decades and until recently. It needs to be changed for the smoothening of the state apparatus for the process of inclusion. A number of legal attempts are formulated and implemented to address the issues including landlessness of the peasants but in vain. The *Sarki* people are not an exception. The socio-cultural and historical process to look at *Sarki* people as "distinctive opposition" of the larger system has been impacted on the moral dimension of social system. The socio-economic condition of *Sarki* people in the study area is very worrying in comparison to that of the other groups in the same area. The settlement history which is influenced along with the kinship ties supplies the meaning of their nothingness in the the place of origin. Their acceptance of servitude (e.g. farming without own land) without any alternatives and the role of kin networks in the

access of resources and benefit accumulation are also a part of process to their marginalization. It indicates that the magnitude of social and cultural impact from religious and historical roots have largely deepened into the access to land resource, for which Harka Gurung (2007:35) has the opinion of providing the alternative livelihood as agenda for their inclusion. It is very difficult to make equal and equitable distribution of land resources since the different land polities, acts and plans have been formulated and implemented across the political, economic and cultural history in Nepal. Similarly, in the present socio-economic context of the world, the distribution of farm land itself is not an ultimate solution to such problems. The social and economic analysis shows that the *Sarki* people who are landless are categorized into farming occupation.

The process of change, which more often is termed as "modernization paradigm" (Uprety 2005:169) of the world is very intangible, for which such of the marginalized group under the womb of history should be stepped along with the emerging new job opportunities, so that they may become a part of local, national and global paradigm to share the equal benefits, otherwise the history which has to be created again will have a chance to create the same cycle of exclusion. In this proposition, the notion of "putting people first" (cf in Uprety, 2005:169) may be a better method for the different stakeholders but which is a challenging job because of the recent political and economic liquidity in Nepal. Similarly, formulation and implementation of "socially-engrained" (Devkota (1994) policies for the social development of such groups are great challenges in Nepali society.

The case of the *Sarki* people discussed in this study may be a more symptomatic tragedy of the larger society across the length and breadth of the country. Put in other words, *Dalit* people in the country are particularly subjected to the historical and ideological discrimination. This study is ethnographic description of *Sarki* people. But the interaction of *Sarki* people with non-*Sarki* people may be the important matter in decoding the reality of *Sarki* people. For Chhetri (2006), the behaviors and practices of different groups of people as their way of interaction are the most important for sociologists and anthropologists. Their interaction may be the result of their local adaptation strategy (like detailed study of the interaction of *Sarki* people with non-*Sarki* people) or the

influence of national and global process of change. For this study, these issues are not taken into the consideration, which may be the important dimension of sociological and anthropological study of landlessness in Nepal.

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### **End Notes**

- i. The *Varna* system as religious, cultural and political imperatives and the earliest inroad of Hinduism was introduced in 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., i.e. during the *Licchavi* rule in Kathmandu valley (Sharma 2004 and 1979; and Gurung, 2005). It was a result of Hindu religious orientation into the Nepali socio-cultural and political milieu, which developed a hierarchical division of Nepali society influenced of *Vedic* (religious-myths) importance. It was philosophically imbedded into the origin of four *Varnas* from the lord *Brahma* i.e. *Brahma* from mouth; *Kshatriya* from arms; *Vaishya* from thigh and *Sudras* from feet. It is impacted into the social, cultural and political life of people (see Chhetri 1999 and Sharma 2004).
- ii. Caste system was reorganized into the *four-fold* occupational hierarchies i.e. *Brahmins* as priest; *Kshatriyas* as warriors and administrators; *Vaishyas* as

traders and farmers; and *Sudras* as service providers, by Malla king Jayasthiti (1382-1395) of Katmandu.

- iii. Muluki Ain- the first national legal code of Nepal, enforced in 1854 by the first Rana Prime Minister Junga Bahadur Rana classified the Nepali society into five hierarchical caste divisions:
- (a) Wearers of holy cords or *Tagadhari*: *Upadhyaya Brahman (Parbate)*, *Rajput (Parbate Thakuri-Warrior)*, *Jaisi (Parbate Brahman)*, *Chhetri (Parbate-Warrior)*, *Deo-Bhaju (Newar Brahman)*, *Brahman (Tarai)*, *Sanyasi (Parbate-asetic sects)*, *Jaisi*, lower (Progeny of widow), and *Newar Castes (Various- Shrestha & equivalent)*.
  - (b) Non-Enslaveable Alcohol Drinkers or *Namasinya Matwali*: *Magar (Gorkha Army)*, *Gurung (Gorkha Army)*, *Sunuar (Hinduist)*, and *Newar Castes (Jyapu, equivalent)*.
  - (c) Enslavable Alcohol Drinker or *Masinya Matwali*: *Bhote (Bhudhist)*, *Chepang (Animist)*, *Kumal (Animist-poters)*, *Hayu (Animist)*, *Tharu (Animist)*, and *Gharti (Progeny of freed slaves)*.
  - (d) Impure but Touchable or *Pani Nachalnya Choi Chito Halnu Napanne*: *Kasain (Newar butcher)*, *Kusle (Newar Tailor/musician)*, *Dhobi (Newar Washerman)*, *Kulu (Newar drum-maker/tanner)*, *Musalman (Indian)*, and *Mleccha (European)*. and
  - (e) Untouchable or *Pani Nachalnya Choi Chito Halnu Parne*: *Kami (Parbate blacksmith)*, *Sarki (Tanner/shoe-maker)*, *Kadara (Cross of Kami and Sarki)*, *Damai (Parbate tailors/musician)*, *Gaine (Parbate bard/minstrels)*, *Badi (Parbate entertainer/musician)*, *Pode/Pore (Newar scavenger/skinner/fisherman)*, and *Chyame (Newar scavengers)* (cf Andras Hofer 1978 in Sharma, 2004 ; and Gurung, 2007).
- (iv) *Jagir-Land-Assignment* is the policy of the government to pay the salaries of civil and military employees, which is documented from 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards in India and 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards in Nepal, as share accruing to the state (see Regmi 1978).
- (v) According to Regmi (1978) *Jagirdar* means Government employees.
- (vi) *Birta* is an oldest existing form of land arrangement, under which the land was granted to individuals to enable them to make living. The term probably is derived from the Sanskrit word 'vritti' meaning livelihood (see Regmi 1978).

- (vii) The term *Guthi* is probably derived from the *Sanskrit* word '*Gosthi*' meaning council, which was established in the time of Gorkhali conquest in 1769 in Katmandu valley. It was land endowment made to meet and operate the expenses arising from religious services and celebrations. This land grant was done for the charitable organizations, religious purposes or philanthropic institutions, held under the trust for specific objectives (see Regmi 1978).
- (viii) *Kipat* was a form of communal land tenure system, prominent for the people in eastern Nepal among the ethnic groups namely, *Limbu*, *Rai*, and other indigenous groups, until 1960s.
- (ix) *Raikar* was a law through which the state retains the land under its ownership and taxes the private individuals who operate it. It was by ending the privileged status into the orbit of normal taxation with the declared policy of the government since 1951 (see Regmi 1978).

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