

Social Changes in Musahar Community: A Case Study of Dhanusa District of Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Musahars are the Terai Dalit community living in plain areas; basically Southern part of Nepal. Majority are living in government land and worked as a wage labor to sustain their life. The study aims to identify the social changes of Musahar community living in the different location of Dhanusa district of Nepal. The district is located in the southern part of Nepal. The study was conducted among the 400 households of Musahar community. The respondent was selected by using the simple random sampling techniques. The researcher visited the study areas and pre-informed the selected respondent through the community leaders. The structured survey was done for data collection. The study found that educational status of Musahar community was very poor because still 93.8% people could not read and write. From the social perspective, there was no significant changes in sources of drinking water and energy used for cooking. The significant changes was measured in the use of energy source of light in comparison of 15 years back and now. There was improvement in use of toilet by 47.3% (before 15 years 85.8% had no toilet but now 38.5% had no toilet) though still 38.5% households are doing open defecation which should be strictly restricted because it is hazardous for the health and environment. So, local government should support the poor people to build the toilet to stop open defecation.

KEYWORDS

Changes, Community, Musahar, Social,

INTRODUCTION

Nepal is located in the lap of mountain Everest having with multi-culture, multilingual and multi-ethnicity. According to the Census Report 2011, there are 123 Caste and ethnic groups living in Nepal. There are hierarchy of caste system in Nepal like upper caste (Brahamin/Chhetri), Janjati (ethnic groups) and Dalit (disadvantage/untouchable caste). In comparison of these caste groups, Dalits have been economically deprived, socially discriminated against, politically underrepresented and excluded, and treated as untouchables for centuries. 42% Dalits (national average is 25%) are below the poverty line, the life expectancy

for Dalits is 50.8 years (national average is 59 years), the literacy rate of the Dalit community is 33.8% (national average is 54), their representation at the gazetted level in the civil service is less than one per cent (0.9%), in Constituent Assembly their representation was 8.1%. 23% of Hill Dalits and 44% of Terai Dalits are landless (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The word “caste” does not adequately comprehend the caste system and its complexities. The Sanskrit words varna and jati need to be spelled out to explain the caste system. These two words denoting two dimensions of caste are commonly translated as “caste” but this is misleading and obscures important differences between them. Caste, therefore, is best understood as having two different aspects – one oriented toward the systematic classifying and ranking of people (varna) and the other constituting everyday transactions and relations and the cultural and interactional system (jati or jat in Nepali). These two dimensions of caste are commonly conflated in the general use of the word (Cameron, 1998; Shah, 2004).

Etymological meaning of the word 'Musahar' was derived from their dietary inclination to mouse which is symbolically. Literally, 'Musahar' means one who eats rats (Jha, 1998; Kumar, 2006). Musahars are fully backward, Dalit, untouchable, highly marginalized, excluded group, very poor and landlessness (Chaudhry, 2008). But they were included untouchables category of caste system without specific ritual based caste occupation. Being socio-politically weakest and economically resource less group of the Tarai, Musahars deployed various strategies of livelihood (Giri, 2012). In the whole country Musahars are in the lowest priority from local to state level. They don't have sufficient food to eat whole year, no adequate clothes to wear, most of the family members use one clothe entire years, and their children have to spend the childhood without good cloth. They don't have big space in their shelter to live in, so more than 7 to 12 persons have to live in a small hut. Their literacy rate is also very low (Chaudhry, 2008). Musahars are the one caste groups basically living in the Terai region as categorized as Dalit group. The Musahars are the second largest Tarai Dalits caste group, with a total population of 1,72,434 (CBS 2001), who inhabit scattered settlements in the Siraha, Saptari, Dhanusha, Sunsari, Morang, Udayapur, Mahotari, Bara, Parsa, Sarlahi, Rautahat and Nawalparasi districts of eastern and central Tarai Nepal. The Musahars are in dire need of land. With shortage of food and clothes, children do not attend classes regularly. “Child marriage, illiteracy, superstitions and lack of basic amenities have made the settlement a hell (KHATIWADA, 2017). The Musahar caste group is predominately landless and employed through bonded labour. They are also deemed as ‘untouchable’ due to extreme caste discrimination – some people, for example, won't even drink tea or eat food served by a Musahar. These factors make the Musahars one of Nepal's most marginalized communities (Street Child of Nepal, 2018).

The various previous study had shown the poor socio-economic condition of Dalit community, among them Musahar community is also more deprived from the power and access of development. So, the study become interested to compare the social status of Musahar community between 15 years back and current condition. The researcher visited the Dhanusa district to study the Musahar community and collected the data through structured survey.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The study was conducted in the Dhanusa district among the 400 households of Mushar community. The study was based on the quantitative design. It was based on the descriptive as well as exploratory research design. The data was collected from the individual household by simple random sampling techniques. The study had developed the structured questionnaire to collect the data from field. The researcher had visited the field and consulted with community leader of Mushar community to pre-inform the people for data collection. The written consent was taken from each respondents. The respondents were asked about the changes of their social status in comparison of 15 years back. The comparison was done between the 15 years back and current status of Musahar community. The frequency distribution and Paired sample t-test was done to measure the change.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The demographic distribution of data shows that average family members was 4.8722 in one family of Musahar community. The study had explored the educational status of Musahar community which shows that there was 93.8% Musahar respondents were found illiterate because they could not even read and write. Almost same result was reported in the before 8 years ago also from the study of Dilli Ram Dahal. The result shown that the adult literacy rate (7.3%), female literacy rate (3.8%), life expectancy and position on human development indices were the lowest (Dahal, 2010).

1. Changes in sources of drinking water

Musahar community were had socio-political changes after 15 years regarding sources of drinking water after 15 years. In a particular, there was mean 1.7796 of respondents who used well as a source of water, on the other hand, there was mean 1.9651 respondents who used well source of water 15 years earlier and mean difference between these now and 15 years back was .18548. In the similar way, regarding used of main tap source of water by Musahar respondents were found no change till now, it is because there was mean 1.6074 who used main tap now and on the other hand, there was mean 1.6048 who even used main tap 15 years earlier and the mean difference between before and now was only .000265. Likewise, Musahar respondents even used river and pond water in these days which was proven from the given table where mean was 1.8602 who used river and pond water until today and on the other hand there was mean 1.7493 of Musahar respondents who even used river and pond water 15 years earlier too and mean difference between before and now was .11082. Similarly, the respondents who used open source of water even before 15 years to at the date of today where mean was 1.3797.

Table 1: Changes in sources of drinking water

		Mean	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower	Upper			
Innar/well	Now - 15 years back	1.7796-1.9651	-.18548	.49852	.02585	-.23631	.13466	7.176	371	.000
Main Tap	Now - 15 years back	1.6074-1.6048	.00265	.08928	.00460	-.00639	.01169	.577	376	.564
River/Pond	Now - 15 years back	1.8602-1.7493	.11082	1.67565	.08607	-.05842	.28006	1.287	378	.199
Open water source	Now - 15 years back	1.3797-1.3797	0.0000	.12340	.00621	-.01221	.01221	0.000	394	1.000

Source: Field Survey, 2018

The statistical analysis of Paired difference shows that there was significant association between Musahar community who used Well as a source of water 15 years ago and now because $P=.000$ which is less than .05 significant level. However, there was no significant association between before 15 years ago and now regarding used of main tap source of water by Musahar community because $P= .564$, on the other hand, there were insignificant respondents 15 years before and now regarding used of river and pond source of water because $P=. 199$ which is greater than .05 significant level and in the context of open water source used by Musahar community before 15 years ago and now were found no significant change because $P=1.000$ which is greater than .05 significant level.

2. Main source of energy used for cooking

Musahar people live in the eastern part of the Terai region of the Nepal. Terai is the source of food, as well as development in education, health facility, forest, easy access of transportation were found more easier than Hill and Mountain region of Nepal. However, there were majority of Musahar respondents who used wood source of energy for cooking even after the advanced technological development which was proven from the given table that 94.0% Musahar respondents who used wood energy even today on the other hand 98.8% Musahar respondents who used wood energy before 15 years. In the similar way, there were majority of Musahar respondents who even used Guitha energy for cooking even today and here in the table 93.5%

Musahar respondents were used Guitha before 15 years ago whereas 88.5% Musahar respondents even used Guitha for cooking today.

Table 2: Main source of energy used for cooking

		Now		Before 15 Years		Paired Sample t-test		
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Wood	Yes	376	94.0	395	98.8	-1.173	375	.242
Guitha	Yes	354	88.5	374	93.5			NA
Gobargas	Yes	29	7.3	11	2.8			NA
Electricity	Yes	35	8.8	4	1.0			NA
LP Gas	Yes	60	15.0	2	.5			NA

Source: Field Survey, 2018

However, nowadays there were only 7.3% Musahar respondents who used Gobargas; a modern source of energy for cooking, whereas, only 2.8% Musahar respondents who used Gobargas before 15 years ago. Similarly, nowadays there were only 8.8% Musahar respondents who used electricity energy for cooking the food, whereas, 15 years ago there were only 1.0% Musahar respondents who used electricity for cooking. Finally, nowadays there were even only 15.0% Musahar respondents who used LP Gas energy for cooking and on the other hand, 15 years ago there were only .5% Musahar respondents were seen used LP Gas energy for cooking the food in their home.

The statistical analysis of Paired Samples t-test showed that there was no significant difference in used of wood energy for cooking before 15 years and now by Musahar respondents because $P=.242$ which is greater than .05 significant level at 95% confidence interval.

3. Main energy source of light

In the Musahar community there were found electricity nowadays and have connected the electrical power at their home and here in the given table 90.3% Musahar respondents were taking advantages of electrical power at their home, but there were only 40.3% Musahar respondents who had access of electricity before 15 years ago, on the other hand there were very few respondents who used Gobargas and Kerosene for light even before 15 years and nowadays which was proven from the given table that only .8% Musahar respondents were used gobargas for light nowadays whereas only 4.5% Musahar respondents were used gobargas before 15 years ago and finally, before 15 years majority of respondents were used kerosene for light because 55.3% respondents were agreed than nowadays because only 9.0% Musahar respondents were used kerosene for light.

Table 3: Main energy source of light

	Now		Before 15 Years	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent

Electricity	361	90.3	161	40.3
Gobar gas	3	.8	18	4.5
Kerosean	36	9.0	221	55.3
Total	400	100.0	400	100.0

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pair 1 Now - _15years	-1.42500	1.47812	.07391	-1.57029	-1.27971	-19.281	399	.000	

Source: Field Survey, 2018

The statistical analysis of Paired Samples Test showed that there was significant difference in using source of energy of light before 15 years ago and after the advanced development because P=.000 which is less than .05 significant level.

4.Types of Toilet

There were in Musahar community majority of respondents had not have toilet at their home before 15 years, but nowadays only 38.5% Musahar respondents were had no toilet at their house. In the same way, nowadays only 23.4% respondents had pan toilet on the other hand only 1.5% Musahar respondents were had pan toilet at their house. Similarly, nowadays there were only 21.8% Musahar respondents were used borehole toilet, on the other hand, there were 6.0% Musahar respondents who used borehole toilet before 15 years ago. Likewise, nowadays there were 16.0% Musahar respondents were used public toilet and on the other hand before 15 years ago there were 6.8% Musahar respondents used public toilet.

Table 4: Types of Toilet

	Now		Before 15 Years	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Pan	95	23.8	6	1.5
Borehole toilet	87	21.8	24	6.0
Public toilet	64	16.0	27	6.8
No toilet	154	38.5	343	85.8
Total	400	100.0	400	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2018

CONCLUSION

Musahar are the deprived from the various development activities due to their weak socio-economic status. This community is categorized as Terai Dalit and they are behaved as ‘untouchable’ caste by other so-called upper castes. Musahars communities are not aware about the importance of education so data shows that still more than 90% people are illiterate. Nepal

government has been providing the free basic education to all and also providing the educational support to the very poor and backward communities. The study had compared the social status of Musahar community before 15 years and present condition. The result shows that there was slight improvement in the use of drinking water from well but there were no any significant changes in other types of source of water. Similarly, the study did not see the any changes in the use of source of energy for cooking because majority of household reported the same practice before 15 years and now. The improvement was seen in the practice of using the energy source of light. Drastic changes were seen in the use of electricity for cooking and significant decrease is seen in the use of Kerosene for light. The gradual expansion of electricity in rural areas has effect on the life of Musahar community. Similarly, the study found the improvement in use of toilet. Before 15 years, 85.8% household had no toilet but now only 38.5% reported about the not availability of toilet in their house. The result shows the problem of open defecation in Musahar community. Health and environment is directly affected by the open defecation so Local government should support to build the toilet for Musahar community.

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