

Livelihoods Strategies of Satar/Santhal: A Resilience Perspective

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Abstract- This paper tries to explore the livelihoods strategies of Santhal; a minority and socially isolated group, in the context of Nepalese community through the resilience perspective with narrative inquiry paradigm. It moreover, argues the long terms social issues of livelihood where they have been facing in the society. Again, this paper advances a resiliency perspective towards enriching livelihoods analysis, and taking livelihoods inquiry toward in the context of current dynamics. Even though they have maintained their livelihood adversities whether economical or physical or social or psychological throughout their indigenous skills and knowledge. In this research I have looked Santhal livelihood strategies and opportunities in local community of Gaurigunj Rural Municipality who are linguistically and culturally different with others. The issues of sustainability particularly of marginal group like Santhals are deeply practicing in the developing countries like Nepal. Sustainable livelihood practice has become multifaceted problem in our country. Even though highly marginalized community like Santhals have been attempted to cope their indigenous knowledge, skills, expertise in order to maintain the daily livelihood practices.

Index Terms- Santhal, livelihood, community, resilience, adversity

I. SATAR/SANTHAL COMMUNITY

“*It is not that just change is fast; it is getting faster and faster*” Chambers and Conway, 1992

Though written two decades ago, the quoted statement by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway from their seminal paper on livelihoods (*Sustainable rural livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21st century*) appears prophetic and more valid in today's world than it was at that time. Between then and now, the changes and related risks and uncertainties in as far as livelihoods are concerned have assumed an even more rapid pace. This paper advances a resiliency perspective towards enriching livelihoods analysis, and taking livelihoods inquiry toward in the context of current dynamics. In operationalising this perspective, the paper utilized the case of a marginal rural community of Sathal situated in the Gaurigunj Municipality area of Jhapa; the easternmost district of Nepal and lies in the fertile terai plains.

However Santhal community is far away from sustainable livelihood and never been to achieve that position. The situation of ethnical groups including Santhal deprived from their identity and they have been facing serious problem. Again they have been facing the various challenges in the daily livelihood affairs. Most

importantly the Santhal community what I found that the word 'satar' really humiliate to them and feel inferior calling them 'satar' and their complexion from others. The poverty is the reason which is curse to them and suppose to be away from healthy life style which have the interrelation with livelihood insecurity (Upreti., 2010). The Santhal community in Gaurijung is suffered highly with socially, economically, culturally, and politically. And it is supposed to be broad threat to include in development process for poor and disadvantage community like them (Upreti & Boker 2010). However they have tried to cope these problems with their indigenous knowledge and skills for the sake of independent livelihood strategies.

I recalled an event which occurred a couple of decades before while I started going school for the achievement of knowledge and skills, at the same time my colleagues who were same age as like as myself; bound to go for the fields own by us and relative. They were engaged whole day and in the evening too working hard in the field by all means to solve their hand to mouth problems. Even though they had utmost desired and wishing to send their children to the schools unfortunately, they could not act because of saving and fund rather compelled them to be accompanied with them in the field thinking to make more money and foods from the landlords. During that moment I started thinking why they were not sending their children with me to school rather forced them to work and ploughing into the fields always which is owned by us and our relative, again why I were told to maintain distance with them neither going to their huts nor having foods and play with their children whereas they were investing their labor, time, sweating for the sake of us. This sort of circumstance I frequently saw during my school tenure and decided to make some inquiries as well as research when I would be eligible for the same.

As soon as early I migrated and having acquired new urbanizing livelihood atmosphere when I joined my MPhil degree at Kathmandu University. I started to adopt new horizon of attitude and societal daily behavior. Then I blended my past with rural perspective particularly of Santhal livelihood. Eventually I tried to compare in different livelihood strategies adopted by the rural and urban communities specifically Santhal family. Handful of Santhals have limited excess of land and home to some extent but largely depend upon others' land and commodity.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the livelihood of Santhal community. Specifically, my research intends to explore the adaptation livelihood strategies of Santhals' against adversities they are facing in their context of living. Since my paper is based on livelihood of Santhals so, need to bring these issues under their

livelihood strategies, resources/assets, capability and capitals. I also tried to investigate the ways they have adjusted to cope their current livelihood practice. How do Santhal experience adversities in their livelihood?

II. SOCIAL STATUS OF SANTHAL

I was born on the early eighties in Jhapa; the easternmost district of Nepal and lies in the fertile Terai plains. I along with my sibling were born, up brought and got the education in the same area and also had a in dept opportunities to engage with various Terai ethnical communities such as tharus, rajbanshis ,doms, including satar (santhal) during my childhood to adulthood even today. Thus I was, am fortunate to understand their daily living style, socio-economic apparatus and cultural affairs broadly.

According to (NEFIN,1999), the far-easternmost foothills and inner Terai of Nepal from Jhapa to Sunsari are inhabited by the highly marginalized group of Santhal. Satars (Santhals) are one of the highly marginalized ethnic groups of Nepal. Their ancestral are strong hold of the dark-skinned, curly-haired and stoutly built. Proto Australoid Satars or Santhals are the Nepalese Plain and the Santhal Pargana of West Bengal in India. Santhals also call themselves Hor. They have their own unique religion and culture. They are animist. Their ancestral deity is Thakurju and their paternal guardian deity is Maranburu. Bow and arrows are their traditional weapons. Their favorite meat is pork. Most Satars are engaged in farming, fishing, collecting herbs and labour respectively.

The said ethnic community used to be living nearby forest for many years and practicing foraging and fishing as a livelihood, however as soon as almost forests have been drastically under deforestation then they were compelled to reside mostly around river side and the distance from urban location at all. Since most of the settlements are near rivers, fishing is one of the main livelihood activities of the community. Furthermore, freshwater shrimps, crabs and smaller fishes are eaten up throughout the year for sustainable practice.

Santhal, until recently, have been considered as tribal people living nomadic lifestyles. Santhal are found in India and Bangladesh as well where as in India they are living densely in Southern part of the country. Traditionally this community was relying on hunting and fishing as their livelihood as mentioned above however the modernization of the society and geo-political changes forced them to shift into other occupation mainly working as daily wage laborer in agriculture and other areas.

In Nepal, they are considered as one of the first settlers in eastern plain area. As per the census data of 2001, the total populations of this community was 42,689 and were found scattered in almost 30 districts; however the number is very negligible in other districts except Jhapa and Morang. Jhapa is the district where large numbers of Santhals are living and their population was recorded as 23,172. They are scattered throughout the district but are highly concentrated in 15 southern Village Development Communities bordering or near to India. Santhal people, who were considered to be 'sons of the soil', are now almost landlessness. Very few households now have their own land and most live on public land or rented land. The public land they live on tends to be nearby rivers/streams so are more prone to disaster.

Various native ethnic groups inhabit scattered in many places of Nepal. They do have their own customs, traditions and culture. There was not a system of keeping records of these ethnic groups in the past. The censuses from 1911 to 1981 AD did not keep any records of population and habitats of these ethnic groups. Largest ethnic groups are the Brahmans and Chhetris. Some of the ethnic groups are very small. Many languages spoken by these groups in Nepal are in danger of disappearing. The total number of people inhabiting in a specific area is the size of human population. Major ethnicities in Gaurigunj are Bahmin, Chhetri, Satar, Kami, Damai, Newar, Tamang, Rajbanshi, Dhimal, Sarki, Magar, Rai, Limbu and among others. Out of all the ethnicities, Satar and Rajbanshi are underprivileged in Gaurigunj Rural Municipality.

III. RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD APPROACH

In this research I try to bring resilience as theoretical base putting other relevant input for the sustainable livelihood approach. The definition of the concept of resilience may be traced to the Latin word *resilio* which means 'to jump back' (Manyena, 2006: 433). The fundamental issue of assets also adapted which is an unalienable issue of the livelihood particularly cultural aspect of livelihood that is probable interlinked with the resilience thinking in my research. Basically resilience notion concerns on the magnitude of change that the system can cope with while still being able to function, and to the ways in which social system are capable to taking this sort of changes. Further I focus towards the spontaneous movement in between the ecological and social systems which for grants to assess the environment impacts on livelihood. Under this observation that I enforce that vulnerability would be regarded flip side of resilience because it explains the limitations in the face of challenges.

Resilience perspective assures the main point around the difference between livelihood resilience and ecological resilience is the emphasis on different aspects of stability – where stability is characterized as persistence of a system near or close to an equilibrium state, thus drawing attention to the distinction between efficiency and persistence, constancy and change, and predictability and unpredictability (Gunderson, 2000).

Again it could be taken other perspective from sustainable livelihood approach to enhance the theoretical framework since these details as too for assessing resilience. This approaches aptly deals the character of assets, activities and capabilities which makes people to cope their livelihoods in the way whereby sustainable appears in the face of changes and outside stress. All in all the fundamental notion behind this strategy only follows resemblance ways as the resilience theory, as a livelihood that is sustainable can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, and maintain or enhance its capabilities both now and in the future, without harming the natural resource base (DFID, 2001). Because as in the perspective of sustainable livelihood, the local tribe or people are taken to be both objects and subjects of change, under broad knowledge, skills, expertise over their individual circumstance and the challenges and possibilities that they are facing with. In order to address the Santhal current adversities against sustainable livelihood. The unemployment situation could be addressed properly to pave the way for better life and prosperity throughout the various strategies like skill training,

social inclusion approach, humanistic perspective, transformacy and good governance and else. The targeted community will have taught and made skilled training towards modern equipments, also put their indigenous knowledge and skills with this latest technology so that they can produce the product more than before with minimum time frame. Moreover, they will be made awareness towards the equitable participation in the mainstream of the society and raise their minimum human rights affairs such as education, health and so on.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVE INQUIRY

So far the methodology was concerned I tied to relay my stories with narrative inquiry to reveal the understanding the livelihood of Santhal in Gaurijung Rural Municipality through "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Further the explanation of narration, I talked with my participants and tell their stories asking questions and listening their life stories whether personal or groups and reflect it accordingly. Further Lather clarifies that Subjective reality and constructed by individual (Lather 2006).

V. OVERVIEW OF SITA HEMRAN & MUNSA HUSDA STORIES

Pragmatic Indigenous Knowledge and Skill of Santhal

Throughout the story of participant, I took some assumption that this sort of efforts assures them for good income, food security and importantly, the quality of life so far. "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base." (DFID, 2000). As they catch and clean the fishes and else on time so that they can sale it in the market and get their necessarily commodities in return. They supplied their livelihood supporting goods which were not locally produced from the market very far from the native place and moved seasonally. It explores to me that they" were mobile, that was limited to the bringing of salt and cloths from the markets (Adhikari & Bohle, 2008. p.45). They have maintained their livelihood uder give and take strategies however this could not be for sustainable efforts.

Similarly indigenous people posses in-depth knowledge of traditional skill, knowledge, food and medicine for the business purpose (Griffiths and Anselmo, 2010). As Santhal do need more things for sustainable livelihood whether education, health security and the like. To address the mention commodities fund is an unalienable issues. Thus, to make fund resource they have to act as businessmen selling the the product whatever they produce like fishes, crabs and so on. This is transforming Santhal's life into to prosperity and security from probable risks. However, I observed some challenges also appear in front of them because of the lack of appropriate market, limited mobility and its recommendable values as well. Since they work hard for whole days collecting as well as catching the fishes and else yet, they are not assured whether they get able to sale it or not in the market.

As I snapshot of my past when one of my neighborhoods daily went to the forest in order to collect NIGUROS (this is a kind

of vegetable mostly available in rainy season in the forest), he spent whole day collecting and trimming it for sale in the market but when this was not sale appropriately in the market then he had dumping it badly. I just wanted to correlate this event to one and other since both of the activities require hard and careful skills if they did not get selling security of their products then they obliged to waste their labor and time both.

In nutshell, Resilience notion concerns on the magnitude of change that the system can cope with while still being able to function, and to the ways in which social system are capable to taking this sort of changes. Further I focus towards the spontaneous movement in between the ecological and social systems which for grants to assess the environment impacts on livelihood. Under this observation that I enforce that vulnerability would be regarded flip side of resilience because it explains the limitations in the face of challenges.

VI. APPROACH TOWARDS QUALITY OF LIFE

Throughout the interaction with the Santhal people, I appalled! And revised my perspective as I had misassumption towards them previously when I recalled the past that they were like uneducated, barbaric, and uncivilized tribes as they were out of the societal mainstream. Since they were found of livelihood supporting goods like fishes, wild foods, traditional farming rather than going schools, learning skills. But it was their one the strategies of livelihood that catching up these stuffs mean to sell it in the market and buy the daily and periodical household necessities. This technique of economical adversity is carried out from their predecessor to current time i.e. one of these skills they have been continuing for survival till today.

Moreover I examined that they have saved adequate fund for the sake of well fare not only for themselves but also for their children's education, fooding, health and happiness. These attempts definitely assure their secure as well as prosperous future. Thus they are striving for excellent quality of life, as a livelihood that is sustainable can cope with and recover from stress and socks, and maintain or enhance its capabilities both now and in the future, without harming the natural resource base (DFID, 2001). The act of catching up and clean fishes, shrimps, crabs and else on time so that they can sale it in the market and get their necessarily commodities in return. Further they supplied their livelihood supporting goods which do not locally produce from the market very far from the native place and moved seasonally. Because as in the perspective of sustainable livelihood, the local tribe or people are taken to be both objects and subjects of change, under broad knowledge, skills, expertise over their individual circumstance and the challenges and possibilities that they are facing with.

Further, I reexamined that their indigenous knowledge linked with their traditional skills whether catching fishes or cropping the rice, maize, millet or searching herbs from forest were appeared as a medium of cash and fund so that they could continue their existence and up coming generation ahead in the society. I would like to term this process as, "Survival of the fittest", in the life span. However, Sathals have been using empirical-analytic knowledge, historical-hermeneutic knowledge, and critical emancipator knowledge in typical fish catching, herbs collecting, farming as asset vehicle to achieve resilient livelihood.

But, the sustainable livelihood is questionable due to shocks and stresses. Furthermore, they have adopted multiple livelihood adversities of business, public service, typical agriculture, folk dancing and cardamom farming practices in combination to transform more distinct asset types into income.

VII. CULTURAL HERITAGE: MEANS OF INCOME

I concluded that they utmost fond of and love dancing and dancing is one activity which is in their blood and mind, it is a significant part of their fair and festival. They have strived not only for this generation but also preserving their next generation for quality of life. These attempts of livelihood strategy through cultural adversity also make them self-dependant and awareness of the counterparts in the society and it makes low resilience of their present and future as well ahead. They have learnt and implement culture as a sustainable tool for income, security and the prosperity.

As Ungar (2004) writes “a constructionist interpretation of resilience reflects a postmodern understanding of the construct that better accounts for cultural and contextual differences in how resilience is expressed by individuals, families, and communities” (p. 341). Through the folk dancing they have benefited multiple aspects, initially they collect fund which is fundamental part of sustainability and next they are preserving their culture and custom and lastly the others (society) understand them and their root of reality via this activity at all.

Resilience perspective assures the main point around the difference between livelihood resilience and ecological resilience is the emphasis on different aspects of stability – where stability is characterized as persistence of a system near or close to an equilibrium state, thus drawing attention to the distinction between efficiency and persistence, constancy and change, and predictability and unpredictability (Gunderson, 2000).

VIII. CRUX OF THE RESEARCH

The Santhals who were originally from Jharkhanda-India since inception and settle Gaurigunj along with other parts of Nepal particularly Jhapa, Morong and Sunsari respectively. In the beginning they had broadly lived by foraging, hunting and later they have adopted farming, fishing and dancing as their source of livelihood practices. As soon as forests wiped out and alternatively they were bound to look for different living strategies as a result, they implemented fishing, cultivation, dancing as a tool

of survival. But they were marginalized farmers since their lands were controlled by elites. As Camey states that if people have better access to assets, they will have more ability to influence structures and processes (Carney, 2000). However the unequal property i.e., land distribution in between elites and poor, Santhal make them economically deteriorate, poor, socially backward, educationally illiterate and politically unidentified.

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