

## Lifestyle and Struggle of the Nomadic Nat Community: A study of the Nat community in Sarlahi, Nepal

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### Abstract

*The Nat community, which involves the people of a Madheshi Dalit caste, comprises a nomadic lifestyle and history. The main objective of this study is to investigate the lifestyle, history, citizenship, ownership of property, profession, religion, education and usage of information technology of the nomadic community with permanent residence. In this research, descriptive and explanatory research framework has been adopted. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using qualitative and quantitative methods and household survey methods. Historical and frequency analysis were adopted to analyze data. Information and data were collected through in-depth interviews with 47 respondents using a semi-structured questionnaire. This study reveals that lifestyle and occupation of Nat community were closely related with their poor educational status. Out of 47 participants of this community, 45 had got Nepali citizenship. It was found that 43 of the 47 participants had their own house. It has been found that the main occupations of all 47 respondents were begging. Out of total, 58 percent of school age children were out of school and the school going children scarcely went to school. With their nomadic lifestyle and begging occupation, they appeared to be in the primitive hunter-gatherer stage of human social development. Due to the lifestyle of the Nat community, they were found to be illiterate, poor and marginalized.*

**Keywords:** Citizenship, education and technology, house, land lifestyle, Nat, occupation

### 1. Introduction

The Nat community refers to the Madheshi Dalit community living a nomadic life in Nepal and India. Comparatively in Nepal, the Nat communities stay in one place for a little longer and in a stable condition than in India. Although the habitat is somewhat stable, there is still a nomadic movement in earning in order to live their life. The Nat community is spread from the eastern district of Siraha to the Western Kanchanpur district of Nepal. According to the list of the National Dalit Commission of Nepal, the Madheshi Dalit community also includes the Nat community with 19 castes. They have been begging, showing amusing tasks and hunting for their livelihood. Along with the changes in the world society, it seems that their lifestyle has also changed to some extent (Pasi & Rasieli, 2076).

The spoken language of the Nat caste is similar to that of the Vanjara caste. Basically, the Nat caste is a wandering caste for their livelihood, but the researcher came to know that they have made permanent residence at Ishworpur of Sarlahi district. The information about their permanent settlement has prepared the fertile ground to study about this caste. The Nat community itself is a nomadic independent community. Looking at the historical background of this Community, it is assumed that they came to Nepal from the Western part of India.

Their dress, behavior and culture are similar to the Madheshi community of Nepal. Although they are a nomadic caste, they have been living permanently in different places in the Terai region of Nepal. Different research studies show that they have established harmonious social relationships with other community people. According to the legend, the main occupation of the Nat caste is begging, but along with this work, their participation in agriculture, trade, foreign employment, hunting, employment and other fields is also increasing. Nats, who generally like to lead a nomadic life, call their temporary residence as temporary house or "Dera". Although this community is generally seen to be below the poverty line, some families are prosperous. Especially due to illiteracy, they have a tendency to beg, expect help from others and make a living in a traditional way. Overall, the lifestyle of this community is changing with the modern wave that has also entered into the Nepalese territory. The lifestyle and culture of the Nat community is similar to the Vanjara community of India. Therefore, whether these Nat castes and Vanjara castes are the same or not has become a matter of research. Various characteristics are found in the Nat caste, commonly known as Vanjara, who lead their nomadic life by pitching tents from place to place. Hence, there is a need for more research studies on this matter.

### 1.1 Research Problem

The government of Nepal has not paid any attention to address those marginalized community people who are solely dependent on their nomadic life by dancing, begging and hunting in villages and cities as well. The state has not kept any account of these and other such castes. They have lost their identity in the diversity of Nepalese society. Regarding the Nat caste, very few people keep knowledge about their identity. They know them as nomadic people who dwell in Sarlahi district of Madhesh province of Nepal. Different social as well as political parties have raised the voice of economic, social, political and cultural rights including their ethnic identity and priority rights in the context of Nepal but the Nat community has been in double marginalization. On the one hand they are suffering due to being Dalits and on the other hand they are suffering being the poorest Dalits in the Dalit group. They are downtrodden people whose study has not been carried out yet.

This seems to be the case when hearing the voice raised by various political and social organizations regarding ethnic identity and priority rights in the context of the overall economic, social, political and cultural development of the ethnic groups living in the territory of Nepal. Madheshi Dalit caste has not been found yet. Since there is not much information that can be found about this caste on social media, this study has been done in order to find out information and facts about the lifestyle and permanent residence, economic, social, religious and cultural aspects of the Nat community. Nat people, generally have been living in 13 districts of Nepal (Pasi, 2076, p.191) Although there have been some studies about them in the Terai district of the western part of Nepal, but no study has been done on them in Sarlahi and eastern districts. The information of permanent residence about the Nat nomadic people has revived the psyche of researcher to fulfill the knowledge of thirst that why and how such nomadic people have settled their permanent livelihood. Hence, this research has tried to dig out their actual lifestyle.

### 1.2 Literature Review

#### 1.2.1 Social, Economic, Culture, Education and History of Nat People

The Nat community is known as Natu, Natuwa and Netuwa in Nepal and India. According to Pasi & Rasaili (2076), "Natuwa is a dance and art community living in the Terai region of Nepal. The name and identity of the Natuwa community seems to be established on the basis of their traditional occupations. In Nepal, Natuwa are also known as Nats themselves (Pasi & Rasaili, 2076, pp.1&5). The Nat castes are commonly known as Vanjaras in the villages. Traditionally they live in tents near different villages and towns and beg for

food. Generally, women and children go to the nearby villages and towns in order to beg whereas the men kill wild animals like foxes, rats, birds and bring them to their tents for food. The Nat community is largely a nomadic community in India, while in Nepal there is a lot of stability in their dwelling place (Pasi & Rasaile, 2076, pp1&5). Especially in Nepalese context, the Nat caste are living in 13 districts, namely Kapilvastu, Kanchanpur, Banke, Rupandehi, Nawalparasi, Parsa, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Rautahat, Sarlahi, Mahottari, Dhanusha and Okhaldhunga, and their total population remains 3062 (Pasi, 2076: p.191). The permanent residence of the Nat caste is widely found in various places of Sarlahi and surrounding districts also.

In this rapidly changing social environment, Nat people could not change themselves, that's why their position in the society remains at the bottom. The current situation of the Nat caste is very miserable. Nat community belongs to the Madheshi Dalit community which is at the bottom of the Hindu caste stratification of Nepalese society. Even among the Dalit community, the economic and social condition of the Nats is very weak. They have been supporting their families by showing their intelligence, catching animals and snakes and by making them dance, collect honey and sell it, and ask for alms (Pasi & Rasaili 2076: p.186). There are many similarities between the Nat caste of Nepal and the Vanjara caste of India in terms of lifestyle and economic and social conditions.

Regarding the evolution of Vanjara, some say that the origin of the Vanjara tribe is from Afganistan, while others say that it is from the Madwad region of India. The origin of the word 'Vanjara' seems to be from 'Vanaj'. In the literal sense Vanjara' is derived from 'Van Charak', which means to seek in the forest. It is assumed that the name originated from the tendency of this community to often go to the forest for their livelihood. The Vanjaras came from Rajasthan and Rajputana (Deogaonkar, 2022, p.11). Although there is no written history of the Nat community in Nepal, the history of India can be understood about their evolution. The statement also confirms that after the British entered India in 1608, the British could not rule over the Vanjara tribe even after subduing the other kings of India. The British fought a major war with the Vanjara tribe and lost many soldiers. After the Vanjara community killed many Britishers, the British imposed laws against them. The British created different books as the discourse of law and started preaching through books in order to subjugate the Banjaras, one of which is Confession of Thug. In that book, the British mentioned the Vanjara caste as thieves, robbers and terrorists. The British enforced laws and started punishing even minor offenses by hanging. Perhaps that is why even today the Vanjara's economic and social condition is very weak (Anil, 2020). In this regard, according to Dhanwath when the British listed the Vanjaras as terrorists in 1871, some of them fled into the forest, others adopted agriculture as the means of their livelihood (Dhanwath, 2022, p. 42). So this caste has been introduced as backward and poorest castes in present scenario. There are altogether 6300 Natuwas who have been living in Unnao of Utter Pradesh of India.

Nats are a semi-nomadic community tracing their lineage to the Marwar region of Rajasthan. Spread out across northern and western India, in the states of Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, the Nats had for long been the 'pride and prejudice of colonial anthropologists' (Datta, 2009). Simultaneously exoticized and criminalized in these writings, the Nats were nevertheless the subject of studies that feverishly attempted to draw connections with the gypsies of Europe. Recorded in history as jugglers, acrobats, gymnasts, dancers, magicians, tattooists etc., the Nats continue to hold on to these many practices. As performers, the community traditionally moved from one place to another, setting up camps, and exhibiting their arts and trades (Sundar & Datta, 2022).

Kothiyal (2022) claims Nats as nomadic people. According to him, this nomadic caste has been left behind in the blind race of development. The rules and laws made before and after independence are also against their interests. The Nat community could not live safely, and the huts built nearby river bank and villages were set on fire, forcing them to lead a careless life. These castes, who have lived a nomadic life for a long time, want to live in one place, but the society does not allow them to live there. Their settlement has been attacked. They are not allowed to live in any village. Why are such injustices happening? Why wouldn't anyone want to live around these nomadic tribes? Similar is the situation of the Nat community living near Bhojpuri village in Alwar district. At first, no one said anything to them, but when the villagers found out that they were Nats, they were asked to leave from there. They were also threatened with death if they did not leave the village.

Before the British Raj, the life of these nomadic tribes was very rich and dignified. The entire society was depended on these communities in transportation, entertainment, medicine to other information. Banjaras, Gadias, Lohars, Bawarias, Nats, Kalbolias, Bhopa, Sikaligars, Singhiwals, Kuchbands, Kaldars etc. were all integral parts of the society. Nats were used to perform dances but with the development of society, the traditional occupation of Nats has ended. In present scenario, the business of Nat community has also been moving from city to the village and has almost come to an end.

These nomadic tribes fiercely participated in the rebellion of 1857. In order to control them, the Criminal Tribes Act was enacted in 1871 and all nomadic tribes were declared terrorists. All nomadic castes were defined, in the eye of police as terrorists, thieves, robbers and murderous ones; and a king of negative wave of perception towards them spread in the society. Since then, society started to perceive them as terrorists. After the British government made this rule, the nomadic tribes did not move even if they wanted to. Earlier their business and life used to go around but today their traditional business has descended since the time of their forefathers has ended. Today, the scenario has been changed; this tribe wants to live in one place but the society does not let them reside in their locality. They have been turned as the object of hatred. Even if they camp nearby a river, stream or lake, the villagers threaten to drive them away. In some places, their huts have been set on fire. Until now, after their death, there is no place to bury them and they have to bury their bodies inside the house (Kothiyal, 2022).

There seems close nexus between the Nats of Nepal and Vanjara of India which opens up the reason to conduct this research. A study of social history helps to get closer to the reality of the Nat community. There are nomadic tribes like Nat, Vanjara, and Raute in Nepal, while there are nomadic tribes in different countries of the world. The Sami of Scandinavia in Europe, the Nenets of Russia, the Hadza, the Pygmies and the San tribe of Africa, Australian aborigines such as the Wari, Yatanka, Piltupi and the Inuit aborigines of Canada are other nomadic people from other countries. (Wikipedia, 2079)

The history of the Nat community living in Nepal is hundreds of years long, but no written evidence or source has been found yet about their residence and history in Nepal. Nats lead a less mobile life in Nepal than in India. They have become one of the natives of the district as they have settled in one place and made movement around surrounding places for livelihood strategies. They migrate to other places for seven to eight months of the year to earn a living and return to the main place after the onset of the rainy season (Pasi & Rasaili, 2076, p.189). Even though the Nats of Ishwarpur in Sarlahi have a permanent residence, and they move from place to place throughout the year, but they return home especially during festivals. According to the senior citizens of Nat village, their ancestors came to this place a century ago and settled near the forest.

Religious diversity is found in the Nat castes living in Nepal and India. Although the Nats living in Sarlahi district are Hindus, other Nats living in Nepal and India are divided into

Hindus and Muslims. In terms of religious freedom, there is no religious or social discrimination for Netuwas in Islam, while Hindus suffer from discrimination and untouchability. The Netuwa dance is popular among the people of the Netuwa caste who follow the Hindu religion and live in Sarlahi, Mahottari, Dhanusha, and Sirah districts of eastern Nepal. Chhat festival is celebrated especially in the Madheshi community who speak Maithili, Bhojpuri, Thethi and Bajjika languages. During the Chhath festival, there is a custom of vowing to conduct Netuwa dance to God (Passi, 2076, p.193). Religious beliefs and social norms have forced them to live in poverty and oppression.

The Nat community has been trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty for centuries. They are the poorest of the poor. They are deprived of resources and education due to the discriminatory policies of the state. The current state structure that restricts the resources of the state to them and granted only to those people who have access on state. On the one hand, their nomadic life and temporary residence means they have no access to education, and on the other hand, the local and central governments do not seem to be interested in hearing and managing the voice of the voiceless. The level of public awareness of the Nat community is at the lowest level of the current state structure; they only know about the rights and facilities provided by the state, but they could not able to enjoy it. They are suffering from illiteracy and poverty, and have remained themselves outside the present social structure and relations. Furthermore they are victimized and boycotted. As per a head teacher of local school, even though the Nat community is far away from educational institutions, as an exception, Badi Mistri from the Nat community of Ishwarpur has passed the National Examination Board 2078 exam with 3.70 GPA. According to Pasi:

The caste system intertwined with the social structure that forces the leading community to live in poverty is equally responsible. The nomadic lifestyle has also alienated them from education. Society and the state seem to play a neutral role. Their poverty and the caste system are what they suffer. (2076, p.204)

Looking at the economic, cultural and political aspects of the Netuwa community living in the Madheshi society, Pasi emphasized that it is very backward and weak compared to other castes and communities. The caste differences and conservative traditions existing in the Nepali society have forced the Netuwa community to live in the margin. Their integration in society is less. Since other local communities do not want to inter-mingle with the Nat caste, they have not been able to feel themselves as an integral part of the Nepali society. Conscious and educated people including the initiation of state's active role may bring the positive change on the field of social respect and inclusion of the Nat community (Pasi, 2076, p.207).

Human basic rights such as food, house, clothing, education, health and employment guarantee guaranteed have been granted by the Constitution of Nepal 2072, but Nat communities have been completely neglected. They have been trapped in the vicious circle of poverty and hunger. On the brink of human development, they are socially and culturally oppressed, neglected, excluded and far away from modern lifestyle. It seems that the Nat community has arrived in the present modern society bearing all these hindrances for a long time. It is necessary to inquire from all levels and stages of the Nat community, which is in the early stages of human development. It is necessary for the state to recognize the true identity of this community and bring it into the mainstream of development by providing special facilities and programs. An equitable and inclusive society can be developed if all races, languages and cultures of the country develop equally.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this research is to study the lifestyle and their struggle for livelihood whereas the specific objectives are as follows:

- To identify the life style of the Nat caste.
- To identify the profession of the Nat caste.
- To identify the educational level of the Nat caste.

#### **1.4 Importance**

Since there is no information regarding the lifestyle, occupation, education, religion and culture of the Nat people, the information obtained from this study will provide information to anyone who wants to study about them. Data and information will be helpful to those researchers and planners who want to study the Nat community. This type of study is very important as it helps to gain comprehensive knowledge about the Nat caste in Nepal, a country with ethnic and cultural diversity. In addition to this, it helps the local government to make a plan for the growth and development and inclusion of the communities that are at the bottom economically and socially. It is expected that this study will play an important role in informing all the Nepalese people about the Nat caste. Real information about the life history of the nomadic community helps to change the perception of the people and develop positive thinking towards them. This study keeps significant importance as it provides holistic knowledge about the culture of nomadic Nat caste in Nepal where different castes and ethnic groups live. This study is equally important for the local government to make policies of development and inclusion in order to uplift the socially and economically marginalized community. This study will be beneficial to the people to be familiar with Nat community. Real information about the life history of the Nomadic Nat community helps to change the perception of the people and develop positive attitudes towards them.

#### **1.5 Limitation of the study**

As this study was conducted to fulfill the knowledge of thurst, the scope of the study is limited. The scope of the study has been limited within the Nat community people who follow the Hindu religion in Ishworpur Municipality-3 of Sarlahi district. As this study was conducted in a small area using limited resources and means, this research may not represent the economic, social and cultural life of the nomadic Nat community living in other places of Nepal.

### **2. Materials and Methods**

#### **2.1 Research Design**

This research has been carried out by using mixed methods by adopting a descriptive and interpretive research framework. Historical and frequency analysis have been adopted to analyze data. During the study, a household survey was conducted to collect quantitative data, while qualitative information about the historical background and lifestyle of the Nat community was obtained from convenient key informant interviews. A household survey was prepared by incorporating interview questionnaire in order to obtain overall information about the Nat communities' household, population, type of household, major occupation and educational status of children.

#### **2.2 Study Area**

This study was conducted in Ishwarpur municipality-3, Nat community, Bhaktipur of Sarlahi district of Madhesh province. Nat Toll is a model community of Nepal where Nat tribes have a permanent residence. This place has been permanently inhabited by this caste for ancient times which is interesting in itself. In order to protect and upliftment of this community, local government has deployed itself.

### **3. Materials and Method Used**

#### **3.1 Census Survey**

Since the Nat community lives in a small village near Bhaktipur market, census survey method was used in this study. While using this study method, data were collected and analyzed covering the entire population, so the degree of accuracy is claimed to be high

(Acharya, 2076, p.127). For more information, reliable and accurate data have been collected by conducting the key informant interview. Detailed historical, fact and factual information have been obtained for this study.

### **3.2 Data collection Tools and data collection**

#### **3.2.1 Interview**

An interview is a formally and informally repeated structured conversation between the respondent and the interviewer to elicit answers to specific research questions. While collecting data, the researcher meets the respondents directly and takes the necessary information at a personal level. In this research as well, a semi-structured questionnaire related to the subject of the study was prepared and the researcher himself went to the Nat Toll of Bhaktipur and conducted a household survey and primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants. The interpretation of the study topic has been analyzed with the help of secondary data from books, articles and online sources.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

In order to present the data and information obtained from this study in a simple and clear manner, the information obtained from key informant and the household surveys of Nat Toll have been presented separately in nine points. The first point incorporates the life history and lifestyle of the Nat community. The second point explains the number of households and population. In the third point, the habitat (condition of the house) has been analyzed. In the fourth point, their citizenship and the use of mobile phones have analyzed. In the fifth point, the land situation of the Nat caste has been explained. In the sixth point, profession and business has been explained. Education has been explained in the seventh point. In the eighth point, the overall content has been summarized. In the ninth point, the study results have been discussed and finally the conclusion has been presented.

#### **3.1 History and lifestyle of the Nat community**

Although there is no strong evidence that Vanjara caste in Ishwarpur Municipality, Ward No. 3, Bhaktipur of Sarlahi District is the place of origin. They came from Rajasthan in India many years ago (about 100 years) and have been permanently living in that place by clearing forests. Even though the Nat caste is called a nomadic caste, they have settled permanently in Bhaktipur and this has raised questions about the people's faith. Although the origin of Nat caste was India, they have been living in different 13 districts of Nepal. These castes live in Kishanpur, Pokharitol, Gair, Bhaktipur etc. areas of Sarlahi. The Nat community is one of the castes that adopted the Hindu culture based on Eastern philosophy. Nat caste generally celebrates festivals according to Hindu traditions. Chhat and Holi are special festivals celebrated by them. During these festivals, the family members who have gone abroad or outside the home to earn money return home and celebrate with the family. There is a tendency for people of this caste to go far away cities and villages to beg and return home after a certain period of time with whatever goods and money they can get.

The Nat community adopts Hindu rituals and culture. They wander in different areas throughout the year, hunt and beg in villages for their daily living. That is why people know them as nomads, wanderers, Vanjaras. Nats prefer to walk in groups and stay in groups. Vanjara and Nat communities are one and the same. Varahi, Kapri and Mistri are the types of the Nat community. Previously they were not aware of the health, but now they have started to pay more attention to neatness and cleanliness. They have started to work mixing with other caste people in labor and farming. They utter that they have been harassed by other community people. They are living actually poor lives.

The nomadic Nat community adopted the social life style of the Hindu religion and followed the religious, cultural behaviors and social values that have been aimed by it. They introduce themselves as Hindus and also celebrate feast and festivals according to Hinduism. Mainly, they believe and worship to Lord Vishwakarma. They celebrate Chhath, Holi,

Jutshital and Dussehra with much fanfare. The Nats are wandering and beggars; they do not have any kind of clothes that reflect their originality, so they usually wear Hindu clothes. Nats prefer to live in tents on the ground under the open sky. Since time immemorial, they have been living their lives proudly saying that begging for Nats and eating them is their religion. Even in today's changing modern times, the same begging work is being adopted as a tradition. It is customary for them to marry within their close relations. They usually adopt arranged marriage and polygamy is generally considered normal in their community. According to their tradition, when getting married, the groom's side has to bear all the wedding expenses of the bride's side. If they marry inter-caste, they have to pay a fine to the community. Among them, there is a practice of exchange of boys and girls from one family to another for marriage. According to one of respondent, the marriage relationship of Nat caste is between Guhar and Koiri, two clans in their community. Their relations are in Kisanpur, Gair, Pokhari Toll of Sarlahi, Badiyarpur of Rautahat, Chandranigahpur, Sisuwa of Bara etc.

Nat people prefer to live in groups and consider childbearing as a blessing from God. Due to which they give birth too many children. According to the information and statistics obtained from this study, some families have up to 85 members. Wrestling is considered to be more popular sport among the young generation than any other sport. Nats people generally prefer common food but they are very fond of carnivorous food. So, they hunt rats, cats, rabbits, foxes, pigs etc. and eat meat collectively. Wrestling is played as a professional sport by youth and they have entertainment during festivals.

According to one of the key informant, a total of 98 families reside in Nat Toll. A total of 195 people from 98 households had registered their names in the electoral sheet. A total of 8 people from this community had got a motorcycle driving license. Most informants had mobile phones. One of them had the experience of foreign employment, while some young people had made passports and were in the mood to go abroad. A person from the Nat community was defeated as a ward member in the local elections held in Baisakh 2079. The people of this community usually did not work; they stayed in the village and roaming here and there. The richest person of this community owned 13 acres of land and a RCC (concrete) house. Even though they are rich, they still live a nomadic life and beg for food. According to a member of the community "leaders come before the elections, get their footholds, win the elections, bring budgets, eat and drink but do not share with us anything". Nat community has their own judicial system. They have managed internal judicial system in order to manage the conflicts and tensions within the community for many decades. Disputes and different opinions emerged among and between the community people, they settle on the auspicious Holi festival. Hence, Holi festival is the festival of harmony, good familial relationship and peace keeping. Nat people do not file any cases to the courts rather they settle within their community by charging fines to the guilty and confer justice to the innocent.

### 3.2 Household and population

There were altogether 98 households in the study area. There were 47 households were residing there out of 47 households, there were altogether 441 people. Although the population of all communities was not ascertained, community members informed that there were about 1000 people.

**Table 1:** Number of Nat caste households, informants and population details

No. of Household	Female informant	Male informant	Population	Female	Male	Remarks
47	11	36	441	220	221	
Percent			100	49.9	50.1	

**Source:** Household survey, 2079.



In the Nat Toll of Ishwarpur-3, Bhaktipur, Sarlahi district there were altogether 220 females and 221 males within 441 households. The researcher selected 47 respondents including 11 female and 36 male members. While making judgment from the perspective of gender ratio, the statistics show that the population of women and men were almost equal.

**3.3 Types of house**

The types of households show degree of lifestyle and their struggle for survival. In the study area, there were some concrete houses, some wooden huts and mud huts in the permanent residence of the Nat community. Some people lived in tent houses. Generally, this community is considered to be a low-income nomadic community, but there were also some people in this community who had a lot of land and well-built houses.

**Table 2:** Description of housing conditions of 47 households in the community

Type of House	Household	Female	Male	Percent	Remarks
Paki (Concrete House)	9	2	7	19.1	Normal cemented house
Kachhi (Crude House)	22	4	18	46.8	A house with thatch and zinc roof
Hut	13	5	8	27.6	A messy house
Tent	3		3	6.3	A house made of tent

**Source:** Household survey, 2079.

There were altogether 47 households of Nat community in Ishworpur-3, Bhaktipur of Sarlahi district. Majority of them i.e. 22 households were Kachhi followed by 13 huts, 9 Pakki and 3 tent respectively. While making gender base classification, there were 11 female respondents, of them 2 were concrete house, 4 were crude house and 5 were residing in hut. In the same way, there were 36 male respondents, of them 7 were concrete house, 18 were residing in crude house, 8 were residing in hut and 3 were dwelling in tent. Out of total household types, there were 19.1 percent households were concrete house, 46.8 percent were crude house, 27.6 percent were hut and 6.3 percent were tent. During the time of field study it was found that whose houses were made of concrete, their family members were in big size. In this case, old age people and children were residing in concrete houses young and adult members were residing in rented rooms.

**3.4 Having Nepali Citizenship**

Although the Nat castes have been living in Bhaktipur of Ishwarpur municipality for generations, their grandfather's do not have citizenship on the basis of descent. Some of them had citizenship on the basis of birth. Even within the same family, those who had succeeded in obtaining citizenship provided by citizenship providing team that was mobilized by his majesty's of government. But in general, there was a problem in obtaining citizenship due to the inability to complete the necessary documents that are inevitable to obtain citizenship. During the field survey, it was found that most of the informants had citizenship, but it seems that there had a legal problem to regulate citizenship for the people who did not get citizenship provided by the citizenship team.

**Table 3:** Citizenship details of Informant

Availability of citizenship	Household	Female	Male	Total	Percent
Yes	45	11	34	45	95.7
No	47	-	2	2	4.3

**Source:** Household survey, 2079.

The above table reveals that out of 47 informants, 45 respondents had taken their citizenships and 2 informants had not taken citizenship. All female informants had taken citizenship whereas 2 male informants had not taken citizenship during the time of interview. Table shows that majority of the respondents i.e. 95.7 percent had taken citizenship and only 4.3 had not taken citizenship. While analyzing this data, most of the respondents had taken citizenship.

**3.5 Use of mobile phone**

Majority of the Nomadic Nat people are also use of mobile phones. They are also moving with the wave of modern means of technology. This is the age of science and technology, which has directly and indirectly impact upon them also. Hence, they are using mobile phones.

**Table 4:** *Details of Informant's Mobile Phone Usage*

Availability of mobile phone	Household	Female	Male	Total	Percent
Yes	47	6	30	36	76.6
No	47	5	6	11	23.4

**Source:** *Household survey, 2079.*

Table 4 reveals the details of informant's mobile phone usage. Out of total respondents 36 including 6 females and 30 males had their private phones whereas 11 including 5 females and 6 males did not have their private phones .This information exhibits that still there were some people within Nat nomadic community that did not have any private mobile phones for their personal use. But during the time of field study, it was revealed that they used mobile phone in order to conduct communication with family members.

**3.6 Land Ownership**

Landownership in Nepalese context shows the basic ground for livelihood strategy. The Nat caste has been living in Bhaktipur for many decades by clearing forests, most of the families do not have land for farming. During the household survey, it was found that some families had 2 to 13 Bighas of land. It was found that some families had a very large number of houses and lots of land too. Due to the large number of family members within a single, some married family members lived in rented house. Some of the family members were lining at home in order to provide rearing and caring of the land and house. It was found that no matter how rich they were, they had a culture of not showing off their wealth and looking for different sources of support and not missing opportunities for support. It was found that the family with 13 Bighas of land and a well-equipped concrete house in the community went to the village to beg for alms and some of the elders and children of the family took care of the farm.

**Table 5:** *Details of Informant's Landownership*

Availability of land	Household	Percent	Female	Male	Remarks
Yes	43	91.5	8	35	
No	4	8.5	3	1	The landless household are dwelling in public land and rented rooms as well
Total	47	100	11	36	
Percent	100	100	23.4	76.6	

**Source:** *Household survey, 2079.*

There were altogether 47 respondents including 36 males and 11 females. Out of total respondents 43 informed that they had land, of them 8 were females and 35 were males. In the study area 91.5 percent had their own land where as 8.5 percent did not have their own land. The respondents who were not having their own land, they were living in public open lands by putting tents or dwelling in rented rooms.

**3.7 Profession and Business**

Generally, the Nat community people's main business is to begging and hunting, but in present scenario this trend has been somehow changed. They have adopted to collect old and rejected clothes from villages and sell in motor garage. Some people and families are also partially engaged in agriculture, trade and wage labour too. Although the place is a permanent residence of the Nat caste, the active members of the house, i.e. people who can work, stay outside or go out to earn, and the children and the elderly people stay at home. This community is also known as a hunter caste because they have been earning their living by hunting since time immemorial. While hunting, they hunt animals and birds such as cats, wild boars, rats, foxes, rabbits and birds. People of that caste go to far away cities and villages to beg and take whatever goods and money they can get and returned within certain time period.

**Table 6:** Occupational status of the respondents

Occupational status	Informants	Female	Male	Remarks
Agriculture	34	6	28	
Begging for alms	47	11	36	
Hunting wild animals	28	9	19	
Wage labor	28	6	22	
Business	3	0	3	Selling old and rejected clothes brought by begging from the village are sold in community and motor garage
Others	5	4	1	Elderly people

**Source:** Household survey, 2079.

Above table reveals that 34 respondents including 6 females and 28 males out of 47 household were partially engaged in agriculture. All the respondents i.e. 47 including 11 females and 36 males were engaged in their own forefathers occupation i.e. begging as their main occupation. Similarly, 28 respondents including 9 female and 19 male were in hunting wild animals and the same number of respondents including 6 females and 22 males were engaged themselves in wage labor. Only 3 male members of that community found to be engaged in business such as begging and collecting old and rejected clothes from the society and sell it to their community and motor garage. In the same way, 5 informants including 4 females and 1 male were elderly people.

**3.8 Education**

According to Koirala (2074), the Nepal government that set the goal of education for all was implemented in the year 2000. 42 out of 47 informants were found to be illiterate and 5 literate (can read and write normally) in 47 household surveys in Nat community of Sarlahi district of Ishwarpur-3, Bhaktipur. The statistics clearly show that the state's policy was limited to slogans. Even though they led a nomadic life, their level of consciousness was increasing, so it seems that the Nat community was paying more attention to education now than before. The Nuts had started teaching their sons and daughters in government and private schools. Although they were deprived of state facilities, the level of awareness was

increasing. The awareness that children should be educated has developed in a well manner. Being aware of the importance of education, they had not been able to send them to school to study because of their nomadic lifestyle. They took the children with them in begging job and sent them to beg as well. Therefore, their begging profession was the main hindering factors in order to obtain education. Although there were more children in this society, but only 10 students record found to be registered their names in Saraswoti Secondary School which is situated nearby Nat society. These 10 students enrolled in this school were not regular in their classrooms. Despite being such negligence towards their study, one student has passed the S.E.E. of 2078 securing 3.72 GPA in the exam. Other two students, namely Badi Mistri and Pathal Kapri from Sarlahi district of Nat caste passed S.E.E. examination in 2078 and were doing their best in class 11 with good subject. Badi Mistri was studying Biology at Kathmandu's Model College and Pathal Kapari was also in the mood to study Science. The facts have shown that in the Nat caste had also started to perceive new and modern thinking. Slowly and gradually they had started to let traditional norms and values and habituated themselves with new thinking's and insights. They had started to send their children towards schools in order to educate them. The following table shows the educational attainment. Their educational attainment seemed quite feeble while comparing and contrasting with national level education, but it could not undermine their debuted in the field of modern science and new way of lifestyle.

**Table 7:** *Distribution of school going, non-going and never going Nat children*

Age group	Total	School going	Dropped out	Never went to school	Remarks
06-10	80	39	6	35	
11-15	37	19	9	9	
16-20	22	5	3	14	
Total	139	63	18	58	
Percent	100	45	13	42	Comparatively in Nat community, Daughters are given less priority send to school

**Source:** *Household Survey, 2079*

Table 7 deals with the information of school going, non-going and never going behavior of the students of Nat community. According to the information given by the respondents, there were altogether 139 school going age people below 20 years of their age. Of them 45 percent were schools going, 13 percent dropped out and 42 percent never went to school. There were 80 students of 6 to 10 years of their age, of them 39 were going to school, 6 had dropped out and 35 never went to school. Similarly, 37 students of 11-15 age groups seemed the vivid picture of their school going behavior. Of them equally i.e. 9 dropped out and never went to school where as 19 were going to school. 14 students out of 22 of 16-20 age groups never went to school whereas 3 dropped and 5 were going to school.

While analyzing above table, it can be said that school going behavior and their changing sentiment towards school was increasing because more proportion of the students of their small age was higher than that of their 16-20 years of age group students. Hence, the trend of school going behavior and their attitude was slowly and gradually increasing positively.

### 3.9 Discussion

The Nat caste is a Madheshi Hindu Dalit caste. Basically, they adopt nomadic lifestyle and begging alms for their livelihood. They have settled in 13 districts of Terai region of Nepal. The hill communities known them as Banjara. It was found that 47

households had been living in Ishwarpur Municipality Ward No. 3 of Sarlahi district for centuries. Although it is not clear from where the ancestors of the Nat caste came to this place, the Nat community has claimed that they have been living in this land for many decades. There were altogether 441 people in 47 households in Nat Toll. Although there were few families in the Nat Toll, most of the families outside the village. They primarily returned home only during the time of feast and festivals. As they adopted nomadic lifestyle, there was problematic situation of educational attainment of their children. Despite being such reality, there was a growing awareness that children should be educated even if they adopted a traditional nomadic lifestyle. It has been found that 55 percent of the children were still out of school and even though they were sent to school, they did not go to school regularly. They helped their parents in begging alms and collecting foods moving with them whenever they went. In the Nat community, they did not consider it necessary to send daughters to school compared to sons.

For many centuries, Nat people had been living their nomadic lifestyle in Kapilvastu district of western Nepal. Among them 8.95 percent had their own land sufficient only for buildings where as 90 percent of them were landless. As they didn't have their own land, they were living in public land. Some of them were living in landlords land as a bonded labour, male as wage labour and female as Kamlari. 79.5 percent Nat people's main occupation was begging alms. Pasi (2076) reveals that 50.3 percent school age Nat children were out of school.

The life-history and livelihood style as well as strategies of Nat community of Sarhali district was comparatively similar to the Nat people residing in Kapilvastu district of Nepal. They were living their nomadic lifestyle. Statistics show that the social, economic, cultural and educational condition of Nat community lay at the last point of Madhesi Dalit castes. They were very far from the mainstream of state power and development. The statistics reveals the bitter reality of their lifestyle and their struggle for existence. Despite having long history of being inhabitants of Bhaktipur of Ishorpur, they were compelled to be marginalized from that society. The society did not accept them and they were treated as a different entity of that society. The main reason of such biasness was due to their nomadic lifestyle. Most of the time, they remained out of their village in order to beg alms. As the feast and festivals came closer, they returned to their village. Due to their long migration from their village, villagers did not pay their especial attention to them as their integral part of the society. Consequently, they did not include them in social work and common social phenomena.

Generally, they married in early age, and start living independently in rented rooms which had created a lose social as well as familial bondage. Social marginalization was due to their nomadic lifestyle and irresponsible social activities. Gender based discrimination could be traced in this community. Female and children were assigned to beg alms and males were assigned to hunt. From gender perspective, it can be said that women were used in terms of male members beneficial activities. They had taken the responsibility of feeding rearing and caring their children. It means, they were in double marginalization. Sex ratio was more progressive in Nat community than that of other Hindu community. It means, sex preference was also another entity of this community.

Majority of the Nat people were residing in crude and huts. Small numbers of people are residing in concrete and tent houses. More than 90 percent families had little land and more than 75 percent participants used mobile phones. The major occupation of all participants was begging alms and partially they were involved themselves in agriculture, hunting ad wage labour. On the surface reading, they seemed average level of economic attainment as some of them own RCC houses, mobile phone, some land and so on but in reality, they were compelled to celebrate their miserable lifestyle and struggle for sustainability. Majority of them were living in rented rooms. Due to their own sufficient

space on house, only old age people children were viable to residing in their own houses. They didn't care for agriculture due to their nomadic lifestyle and hypnotized to begging alms. Except some exception, most of the Nat people were rendering on the bottom level of down troddenness.

According to the data obtained from household survey, 90 percent respondents were illiterate which was quite exclaiming fact in Nepalese society. Only 10 percent Nat people could simply read and write. Fifty five percent of their children were out of school and 45 percent who had taken admission in school, they were not attending school in daily manner because they joined their parents in begging alms. Due to their illiteracy, they were not aware of the facilities provided by the Government of Nepal and they were compelled to live their innocent life. In order to provide education to Nat community, constitutionally provisioned, declared and granted facility "Education for all" should be implemented as basic and fundamental law of the people.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

While observing social, cultural, economic and educational status of the Nat people residing in Ishworpur Municipality-3, Bhaktipur of Sarlahi district, the present world has been running in modern global social structure, but the Nat community seems to be in the primitive predatory stage of human development as they have adopted nomadic lifestyle and begging alms as their main profession which indicates that they are economically, socially and educationally backward and are very far away from the mainstream of modern social development. They are suffering from extreme poverty. They are deprived of basic human needs like food, shelter, clothes, education, health and employment. The Nat people are trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty and hunger. They are at the lowest level of human development indicator. They have been neglected, excluded and forgotten by the state for a long time and they are forced to double marginalization being Dalits of Dalit and poorer of the poor. Hence, there is an urgent need for their recognition and upliftment. The state should identify them and create political and practical opportunities for them to live with dignity like other Nepalese citizens and the state should confer them justice and opportunities in diverse fields.

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