

***Koshish School, Mushahar Tola, Village Malwabar, Bhagochghat,  
Block Pathardeva, Deoria District, Uttar Pradesh, INDIA***

***About the Village:***

*The village has more than 150 families of Mushahars (a particular caste) are made to live outside the village bounds about a kilometer and a half of away. They are landless, economically backward and socially outcaste, surviving on the verge of starvation. All of them are landless living in thatched huts*



*with very little land to till. With no school, electricity, health centres, this community was living totally cut away from the modern world. Flood threats are annual, as river Khanua flows by and changes its embankment every year threatening to submerge the village.*

***About the Mushahar Community:***

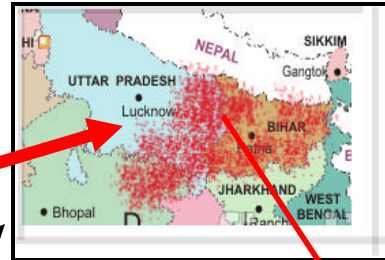
Though there are no specific figures of the numbers of Mushahars in Uttar Pradesh State, yet social activists estimate their population at around five lakhs. The major concentration of Mushahars is in Maharajganj, Deoria, Kushinagar, Mau, Jaunpur, Chandauli, Ghazipur, Siddharthnagar and Varanasi. The main profession of Mushahars have been collecting forest leaves and make *Pattals* (plates made of leaves-use and throw), piggery and catching rats. Even among the Dalits their number do not attract political leaders to come to their *bustees* (habitation) and seek vote. Over 90% of the community remains illiterate and landless. The community remain thoroughly apolitical and therefore victim of social and political marginalisation and also humiliated and exploited.

In the thick of unemployment and landlessness, many of them have APL (Above Poverty Line) cards. The quality of food grain provided to them is pathetic.

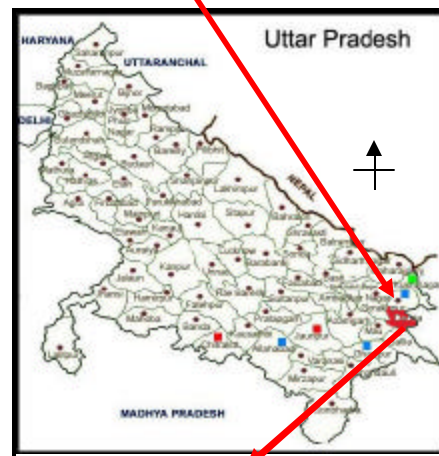
## Location



Map of India



The area in red is where there is high concentration of Mushahars. (Eastern UP, Bihar and Parts of



Dist. DEORIA

### *Why this initiative?*

In June 2007, SDF along with Uttar Pradesh Land Alliance organised a foot march on Land, Dignity and Freedom from Gughali (Maharajganj) to Chaurichaura (Gorakhpur). The aim was to aware the marginalised landless people about their right over land, resources and dignity. In one such day, the padyatra (foot march) entered Malwabar, Nautan, Udaipura villages in Deoria district, where Mushahars were living in abysmal conditions. As part of the program, a Fact Finding Team with local people was constituted and later the result showed there was lack of facilities which the



School in 2007

Government was supposed to provide.

So there was a need to work strongly in the area, to make the community aware of their rights, and realise the lack of basic education that the potential target of exploitation would soon be young children. SDF came up with the idea of "KOSHISH". (*Koshish* means to 'try'). This was a small school for the children for the community.

### ***Present Situation:***

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With a consistent work of over two years, there is visible change in the lives of the community in the entire area. SDF with support from Humanist friends has arrived at a position which is enumerated below. Malwabar Village community engaged themselves in numerous activities. All these initiatives were applauded and covered in Media both electronic and print media. The activities were then followed by Van Mahotsav (planting trees) and health check-up camp. With newer employment opportunities for the women and the Self Help group formations, the community is enjoying the Prerna Kendra (Centre of Inspiration) and activities undertaken by SDF in a proactive way.



After 60 years of Independence of India, the community could gain access to Electricity through SDF's support. Even though the electricity stays for not more than eight hours a day but still the community is not deprived of this basic right. A used donated computer has been installed; the children are really excited to see films in the computer. SDF is trying to mobilize funds to buy invertors for power-backup, so that the youth could gain computer education in the centre.

### ***Community Development:***

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Formation of Women's collective and initiating women economic empowerment programme along with "Koshish School" for Mushahar children in Village Malwabar is some of the achievements of SDF. Enrollment of the children in the school has increased.



This means the community has gained the knowledge of the importance of studies in their child's life. The revolving fund has got 100% return from women in Malwabar and Sunderpura Village women are in the process of returning the loan (with no interest rates). Women brought piglets or lambs to rear them and then sell it

to slaughter houses. Women with their small economic empowerment schemes have found new ways to increase their economic base.

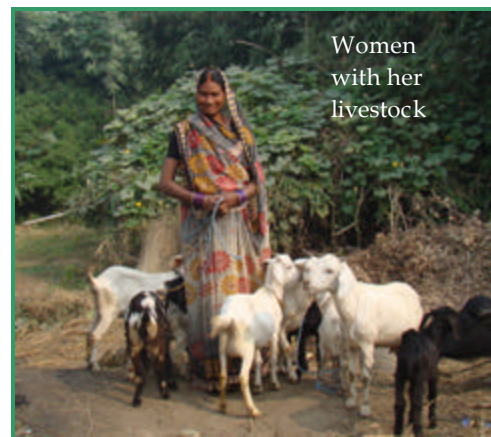
The women of the village meet every week and discuss the situation of their families and other issues. Earlier it was hard to bring women out of their preoccupation to talk about their lives, but now the change is that women meet every week and urges the need to initiate vocational skill development programme for them and the adolescents. They have desired to learn other skills like candle making, incense making, sewing and quilting from rags, making of artifacts, etc. With initial meeting and exploring various alternative economic programmes and raising funds, the staff of SDF would make way to get the infrastructure and equipment to skill women to make candles, incense and other skills, which will then be marketed through Media or through networking sites. The idea is also afloat to get a space in Bhaghoch Market for regular retail sales.

Under the Economic Empowerment for Women, out of the ten women who were given benefits seven women have returned the money so far and the rest will sell their livestock soon and return the money. Now women are seeing the benefits to rear cattle too, apart from piggery. Some of the women have desired to open a shop or take a Cycle rickshaw for their husband's income. The funds have been extended to four other women. Out of them, two women Yashoda and Ghiliya brought a rickshaw each for Rs 7,500 in their name and their husbands are plying the Rickshaw. According to Yashoda, as she says her family has got a meaning to their lives, they know how much hard, they have to work to earn what amount of money. Both the families have become very close to SDF activities and volunteer to do work for Prerna Kendra. Both the families vouched to return money in a year's time.



Yashoda  
with her  
Rickshaw

These benefits have relieved some women and her family to work as bondage labour in Brick kilns. The women have organized a number of meetings every week to discuss about the children studying in the school. Enrollment of the children in the school has increased. They have also discussed the problems of some families which as a community they need to help. Most probably the women will form a food security bank in their hamlet, so that they can collectively assist other families in distress.



Women  
with her  
livestock

Meanwhile, Sunderpur Village women are in the process of returning the loan as now their livestock is ready to be fetching them money. Before initiating this programme in the village, none of the children went to the school which was not more than 100 m away from their hamlets. The families continue to live in degraded conditions even if they have amenities to optimize. But SDF's initiative has formed women's group and trying to revive the already dead SHG group in the area. Now 50 children have taken admission in the school and are happy to be regular in the school. Next year the younger kids will have an Anganwadi Kendra in the area as we have already lobbied to get one in the Sunderpura Village.



### ***Koshish School***

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In the beginning, the children as old as 12 years had no clue about school and education. Koshish was the only school; SDF established it just to mainstream the children to the government school. Today the school has taken a vibrant shape, the children are slowly learning to read and write. Five senior students have also joined mainstream government school this year.

### **Independence Day Celebration (2009) at Koshish School, Malwabar**



The idea behind having such school is to allow children to get used to school and to train them to a level in reading and writing that they can qualify into the mainstream education system. In the beginning, it was really difficult for the teachers to cope up with the children, to train them to even sit in a class like situation. The children from the age group of 6-10 years were given special sessions and were taught keeping in mind the syllabus pattern of the government schools. This would help them an easy entry into these schools.



Kids on Swings

During this process of time, various kinds of infrastructure



Usha loves to pose

for the children were developed in the School. Small huts were created with help of the community so that children get used to sitting in a classrooms. Books



Sarpanch distributing sweaters

and Blackboards were introduced. Teachers were given training to work in the community and encourage them to send their children to the school daily and with neat and hygiene.



Students happy to get winter uniform

With help of help with some friends the children were given text books, stationery, bags, mats to sit, school uniforms and winter uniforms.

This winter the children were given winter wear to bear the chills of winter. The women of the community said that if SDF will give the children winter wear, the community will give the children footwear. The program to distribute the sweaters was done by the local village head (*sarpanch*). Apart from this, swings have been installed in the school, this has made the children owning up school and taking up responsibilities to assist the day to day functioning of the school.

Weekly Bal Sabha (Talent Club) is organized on every Saturday, where children perform in their respective forms. They sing and dance. A regular sport event like racing and matches are organized. Children draw and colour beautiful pictures. Children always look forward to this day. There has been a



Students showing their talent

wonderful change in the children's drawing. SDF is planning to bring a collection of these drawing of the children soon.

### *Teachers training Workshop*

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Four-day teachers training workshop was organized in Malwabar Village for the teachers of Koshish School. The teacher's training had all components of deliverables for the children. Special



focus was to Koshish School wherein the children be taught



simple scientific experiments so that they become analytic from the childhood. The teachers were informed about scientific rationalism and how the teachers have a bigger role to play and make the children understand these terms through simple

examples. Teaching aids tools were developed to enable the teachers to involve children's interest into teaching and speed-up the learning process.

### *Bal Sabha with the Media team*

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The Koshish School was visited by many journalists both from print and electronic media; they organized a sport competition and creative workshop. The students enjoyed and participated in all the games which is followed by the interviews of students and parents. They recorded the entire Bal Sabha which was telecast in Mahua TV Channel of



Uttar Pradesh. Many daily newspapers like Dainik Jagran, etc covered the articles quoting the students' aspirations and interests.

One of the famous quotes when Gopal was asked by the media, "What do you want to become

after you grow-up?” Gopal replied “A Police Officer”. Children were initially shy and running away from the camera but soon all started singing. They organized swimming competition across the River. Though it was a tough competition between children, the Media Community was in a fix before pronouncing the final results. All the winners were given prizes brought by the Journalists. They extended their support in getting electricity so that the children can learn computers and watch television through media campaign.

### *Health Camp and Treatments*

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Two Full-fledged health camps were organised in Malwabar village, this was done with help of MBBS doctor once from Deoria and another from the Government Hospital, Mau who not only treated the patients but also assisted them with medicines (which they brought along).

Dr. Anurag Rai observed that almost all



Dr Rai investigating children

children have protein, vitamin and iron deficiency. He recommended that if the children can get an egg twice a week and a banana twice a week than their nutritional value will increase.



Doctor giving prescription

During that time, chickenpox was rampants in the area. More than 15 children got afflicted with the epidemic. Poor Hygiene coupled with low – protein intake, children were facing a lot

of problems. Dr Rai prescribed a tonic with Vitamin B-12, which SDF purchased and distributed among the children.

At the time of the second health camp, the doctors of Government Hospital Mau (adjacent district) also joined. They brought along with them all



Children queue at the health camp

necessary medicines and gave them as per the prescription. The parents of the children also got their check-up and enquired about any prolonged ailment. One person was diagnosed with Tuberculosis and has been given a long course of treatment. The chance of his living is bleak. There is a need to seriously look into the problem of economic sustenance of the family.

Two grievously ill patients were shifted to the local government hospital with the help of SDF staff working in the village. The families of these two families are in pathetic situation following the ill-health of the earning member of the family.



It may be desired to actively initiate the community food security bank in this area.

Another child-“Mithun”, who is regular in the school, but is blind in both eyes, he is just 5 years old. When he was one year old, he got chickenpox which blinded both his eyes. Since then he is living with his maternal grandmother, his parents quiet likely disowned him (though it is not so clear).

SDF Staff with help of any organization in Delhi brought the child to Delhi and showed him to Venu Eye Hospital. After preliminary investigation, the doctors of the hospital recommended cornea transplant and lens replacement for the child. This can only be possible if a donor pledges his/her eyes. So SDF has got the child’s name registered in one of the best government hospital in the State capital in Lucknow.

### ***Midday Meal and Health Monitoring***

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Every day children are getting 200 grams of pulses, vegetables and cereals. Hot meals are cooked in the School premises with the help of a cook who belongs to the same community and her grand children are studying in the same school. So the quality of food preparation is maintained.



Apart from the Health Camp, a monthly



monitoring of the weight and height of the children is been done. The teachers and some senior students have been trained to record the measurement of each child. A pediatrician has been engaged to get a full report of the health and nutrition of the children by providing him the data collected over five months. Dr. Anurag Rai observed that almost all children have protein, vitamin and iron deficiency. He recommended that if the children can get an egg twice a week and a banana twice a week than their nutritional value will increase. Due to lack of resource, this has not been achieved so far.

But the space of the school has been utilized to grow some organic vegetables which are added to the pulses and lentils to make it more nutritious.

### ***Monitoring of the work***

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A constant monitoring with daily dairy and reports of the community is been prepared and for next two months the same will be followed.

The teachers underwent an evaluation test in November with help of the trainers. The formats are in the process of preparation, which will also include practical as to the usage of teaching aids and joyful method of education. The teachers who could not qualify the test, the same were replaced by new teachers who were again given intensive training.

A women coordinator has been put for work, the reason behind this was to encourage women interacting with other women so that the women within this rigid caste barriers come out in open and gain confidence of the community.



## AIM

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- SDF set out to work towards a productive environment for these children which is as good as any other child in the world. And then mainstreaming them with the government-run schools.
- Scholarships will be raised for girls and boys in case they pursue higher education or vocational skills at the training centre which is named as Prerna Kendra (inspiration).
- Besides this, workshops will be conducted include training on leadership development, Humanism, human rights education, eradication of superstition, etc. with the community.
- To create information centres, libraries in the area, Audio-video, which can then be managed by the children of this village.
- Not only to bring change but empowering them to become a true Human Being.

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