

# It's not about the Stove “Chulo”

## A short account on a mission to Gatlang

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It was an unforgettable 3 days of my winter vacation as I got to become a member of the “ujyalo” team of STARIC/N. It wasn't just a trip for fun; we had a mission, a goal to complete: the ujyeli **chulo**. But I have decided not to talk about the **chulo**; I will rather talk about the whole experience.

It was total darkness when we reached Dhunche; I had no idea where I was. I was hemmed in by darkness, giving no hint which part of the world I was. The next morning as I wiped the fog off the window, I was literally dumbfounded! I couldn't believe my eyes: I was on the edge of steep hill, with the red light of the morning sun enlightening the mountains in the dawn. We hoped that this trip would be the dawning of a couple of new lives. Looking at such a beautiful sight a voice inside me whispered “this is life.” It wasn't long before we were back in our scarlet Pajero and off to the mission again.

Before reaching Gatlang, we made a small pit stop, the highest point we reached (2500 metres). Any vehicle passing this small settlement will certainly stop as this place gave a fabulous panoramic view of both sides of the hill. At this point we came to decide that we would install one of our **chulos** at this house. The people at first were quite perplexed that few strangers barge in to their house and do all kind of things without properly explaining what is going on. It was a pain stacking three hours trying to fit the **chulos**. But as always hard work always pays off: it was a success! We had installed the first one in the whole of Nepal.

I cannot exactly describe the glow of joy along with perplexity in the faces of the Tamangs when they saw that this special type of **chulo** lighted up their house which has been set in darkness ever since one can imagine. But I will tell you that this sign of perplexity can be a big drawback later. Even when the guys were preparing the stuff, keen eyes came and looked at the work. They exchanged remarks in Tamang, unfortunately, I did not understand what they said, but one could clearly see that they were quite interested. And I have a fear that others had a slight feeling of envy as they were throwing remarks with smirks on their face. However, the extraordinary sign of interest is, in a way, very good as, if people show more interest this is a sign that they are willing to give up their traditional methods and implement this technology which will benefit them in every way. Previous works have shows that these people find it hard implement a certain technology to their houses.



*Chulo\** = Wood burning stove

I have a strong respect on the masterminds behind this technology as this **chulo** will not only help the people themselves but also try to decrease the use of fire wood as it boosts up efficiency rate. This **chulo** does not change the traditional value of the people; it just modifies it which is the best part of the whole theory. There are a lot of controversies going on about modernization and traditional culture. I believe this is a slap on the face to such controversies. This is a perfect example of how one can preserve the tradition by amending the bad parts. We moved on.

Our next stop and final destination Gatlang, was a small village which gently camouflaged with the hill. At first sight the houses look pretty well, not until you realize that even the roof is made of tiles of wood and even two houses shared a wall that is just put up by stones. From far away this village does seem well structured, but as you walk through it you see the lack of sanitation, cleanliness. Clean water was flowing freely down the hill, but at the same time there was a canal of drainage. Though I got to see only a few part of the whole population of that village, the men and women there seemed very old, later on I figured out that this is the effect of harmful gases people breathe when they burn wood without having proper ventilation. Imagine having the kitchen, the living room, the bed room, the study area in one miniature dark room with one tiny window: that's how life is in there. Sitting inside that house wasn't an easy job either; the slow smothering smokes from the fire wood brought my eyes into tears that I had to go out. I won't go into details of how this can be reduced, but imagine how those little kids could live in such a place and what effect it will bring into their lives. We should be ashamed of living in such luxury while the status of millions of people is still so regretful.

Living in such luxury, no one of us will be able to apprehend the importance of the **chulos** to them: first of all this was the only way which heated up their house in the freezing winter, next of course this was the only way to cook their food and at last it was their only source of light. It is no doubt people find it so difficult to change into modern stuff. It was quite ironic that one of the hydro electric power plants was so close by, but still the houses weren't lighted up. This is because of poverty: the people there already found it difficult to earn their breads, how are they going to pay for electricity? I had read about this before, but after seeing this whole scenario with my own eyes, I have a great respect for all the people behind this masterpiece.

On the way back, we dropped by to the place where we had installed our first **chulo**. But the sight was a little disheartening. Everything was going well: the **chulo** was working, along with the ventilation and the lights were glowing. However, they were still using the old **chulo** bringing back the same problem; this was the dangerous result of the sign of perplexity in the people. Well this is a problem due to illiteracy as well as the communication gap. Even as we tried to explain them the harmful effect they just nodded their head, they tried to look as if they understood everything, but I doubt they did. Another problem I fear that these kinds of project will have to face is due to illiteracy. No matter how much you tell them they might not understand the new technology, and this might lead to its degradation. As seen in many past projects in Nepal, the newer technology put in by foreign donors do not always work. The locals do not have that feeling of ownership or responsibility, as a result they do not show special attention to it and it's not long before it degrades. I think that in the future while implementing this type of project, the locals should be involved so as to raise their responsibility.

This trip has been an eye opener to me. Being a part of this team has enlightened me with knowledge and at the same time I got to see the rural villages. I keep thinking back on the children who sang Bheda ko Oon Jasto to me, which makes me feel that we have the responsibility to do something towards them. No matter how rural this place is, I saw life in it and I believe we can still shimmer this life with more light.