

The Himalayan

ON S A T U R D A Y



(Re)Builder of homes, and dreams

Damages of Gorkha Earthquake 2015 in Khumbu Region

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He was still jet-lagged when he got news of the Gorkha Earthquake 2015 from Nepal. It had just been 10 days since Pemba Tenzing Sherpa's return to Colorado, USA from his birthplace in Chaurikharka VDC, Solukhumbu after the inauguration of the 'Stupa of Enlightenment' that he had built in memory of his parents.

He was told that everything was fine including his house and the stupa, but that there was a lot of damage otherwise. He felt sad, while regret set in. He had spent over a crore of rupees to build the stupa and he felt: "How nice would it be if I'd given the money to these people (earthquake victims) instead".

Today this 38-year-old painting contractor (Sherpa Painting since 2003) who lives in Vail, Colorado has established the Sherpa Foundation, raised funds and helped to either build or rebuild over 150 houses in Chaurikharka VDC of Khumbu Region. His work is important because building houses here is "expensive because of the airfare".

Out of 150 houses that he has helped build, 23 homes were newly built with cost anywhere from \$3,000 to \$7,000, while 140-plus homes were repaired that cost anywhere from \$500 to \$1,700. Right after the earthquake, they also distributed Rs 40,000 each to 87 families of Chaurikharka Ward-3.

The Foundation has reached out to people living as far as in the villages in Thame (3,750m) and Pangboche (4,252m). The volunteer-based Foundation aims to raise funds and help more people who cannot afford to build their own houses.

Born into a poor family in which his father was deaf and mother always sick, Pemba worked as potter when he was as young as 12 and he says he knows how in times of need and sorrow the poor are "suppressed. No one will look after them. The money they need in such times are used



Renovated Pema Cholling Ghomba

by people in power".

He felt the need to help the poor families who had no one.

So, in order "to take the donated money to the right place", Sherpa established the Foundation in May 2015. Raising funds for this endeavour, receiving good response and trust from donors and being motivated by it while getting support from his friends, Sherpa has become a saviour of sorts in this region.

Lending a helping hand

From Tenzing-Hillary Airport in Lukla till Namche Bazaar, there are many beautiful homes made of stone and wood. Looking at these houses, visitors might think everyone here is rich, but it is not so. There are the poor just some 20 yards from the main road, or across the Dudh Koshi River. And

these families were the focus of the Foundation for whom "the possibility of building a house was nil after the earthquake".

Fifty-one-year old Ang Pashi Sherpa in Benker is a widow and sells vegetables and homemade alcohol for livelihood. After her two-storeyed house was damaged in the earthquake, "I couldn't have built a house on my own. They (Sherpa Foundation) did it for me."

The Foundation has built a house — 38 feet by 24 feet — of two rooms for her. It is made of stone and wood wrapped by grey tin.

The Foundation also helped people like 38-year old Dawa Tenjin Sherpa in Monjo, on request. Dawa was living in rented quarters before the earthquake. Now, he owns a house. He is grateful as "it is a relief to have one's own home".

When Lakpa Sherpa, 29, and



Pemba Tenzing Sherpa

her family were building their new home, they did not have enough for the roof. The Foundation stepped in for which she feels obliged.

It was the same with the family of 64-year-old Dhamala Singh Tamang in Benker — they were provided with the roof as well as the labour cost to build the house which is made of stone supported by wood. A grateful Tamang shares, "We were just starting to build the house last year in Kartik (October/November 2016) when they offered to help us."

Another family that received help was Pasang Noru Sherpa, 35. "We are financially weak — I am uneducated and solely dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry. We have to meet our basic needs and send children to school, the money is not enough," he expresses adding, "The Sherpa Foundation was a big help. Without their help, we would have to invest more money to build the house which would be tough for us. Moreover, they came from time to time to check on us, the work and what problems we have."

Others who were helped are the families of 29-year-old Dawa Sherpa and 22-year-old Monika Tamang who used to live in a *chitra* (bamboo) dwelling. Now they each own a house that has stone walls and wood in Thado Koshi.

On the other hand, Tika Ram Nepali, 54 and his family were given a sum of Rs 90,000 to fix his house, while elderly people like Nima Phutar Sherpa were given Rs 5 lakhs. People were given money according to their financial status.

Give and take

Materials like sheets for the roof and cement were delivered till Lukla airport from where people whose houses were being built took them to their villages. Using local resources like stone and wood as well as reusing materials like beams and window frames as much as possible from the fallen houses, they managed to build earthquake-resistant houses.

"We asked them to put in what they have and can, and assured them that we will do the rest of the work," Pemba expresses. Otherwise, he says, it wouldn't have been possible to construct a house at the cost of \$7,000.

Pemba's elder brother Nawang Lakpa Sherpa, who is five-time Mt Everest summitter, coordinated the project.

Help for gumba

Pemba and the Foundation came to the rescue of not only the poor families, but also the Buddhist priests and their gumbas.

They raised around \$53,000 from Sherpas living in New York and Colorado to help rebuild the historic 500-year old Pema Cholling Ghomba in Phakding. This money was used to put a copper roof on the Gumba. And Treasurer of Ghomba's Byabasthapan Samiti Nawang Nurbu Lama says, "His help was instrumental."

In addition, Pemba and his wife Yanji gave an additional \$23,000 to build the giant statues of Guru Padmasambhava and its required set of statues inside the Pema Cholling Ghomba that is almost complete.

Lama adds, "We didn't have much support but when we got his help, it was like finding god. It motivated us to start the construction of the gumba."

The Sherpa Foundation was also able to raise \$30,000 from among Sherpa businessmen and Pemba's friends for Daktrul Ghomba (for lamas). Moreover, he was also able to get \$200,000 from South Korean climber Um Hong Gil for it.

The work on the monastery that's near Pema Cholling Ghomba started in May for which President of Nirman Samiti of Daktrul Ghomba Pasang Sonam Sherpa is thankful to Pemba. "I am personally happy for the help. It added fuel to find funds. If not, we wouldn't have been able to build it. It wouldn't have been so grand otherwise," he quips.

Good work continues

When Pemba came back in November 2016, he shares that people showed him immense respect in the villages that he visited that he was embarrassed. As the impact of his work has been positive, he feels it is all good and satisfying.

"The respect that they showed me, it was more than needed," he says. "They welcomed me with traditional dances and songs in each village — that was how we had welcomed Sir Edmund Hillary to our village when I was young. That was the welcome I received there. I was embarrassed as I was born into a poor family and I had never experienced such luxury."

But as people praised his good work, he felt it has been effective. "I am very happy about it," he says. What adds to his happiness is the "priceless" expression on people's faces that he has helped when they meet him.

And "not only the people I have helped are happy but people who heard about my project are also extremely happy".

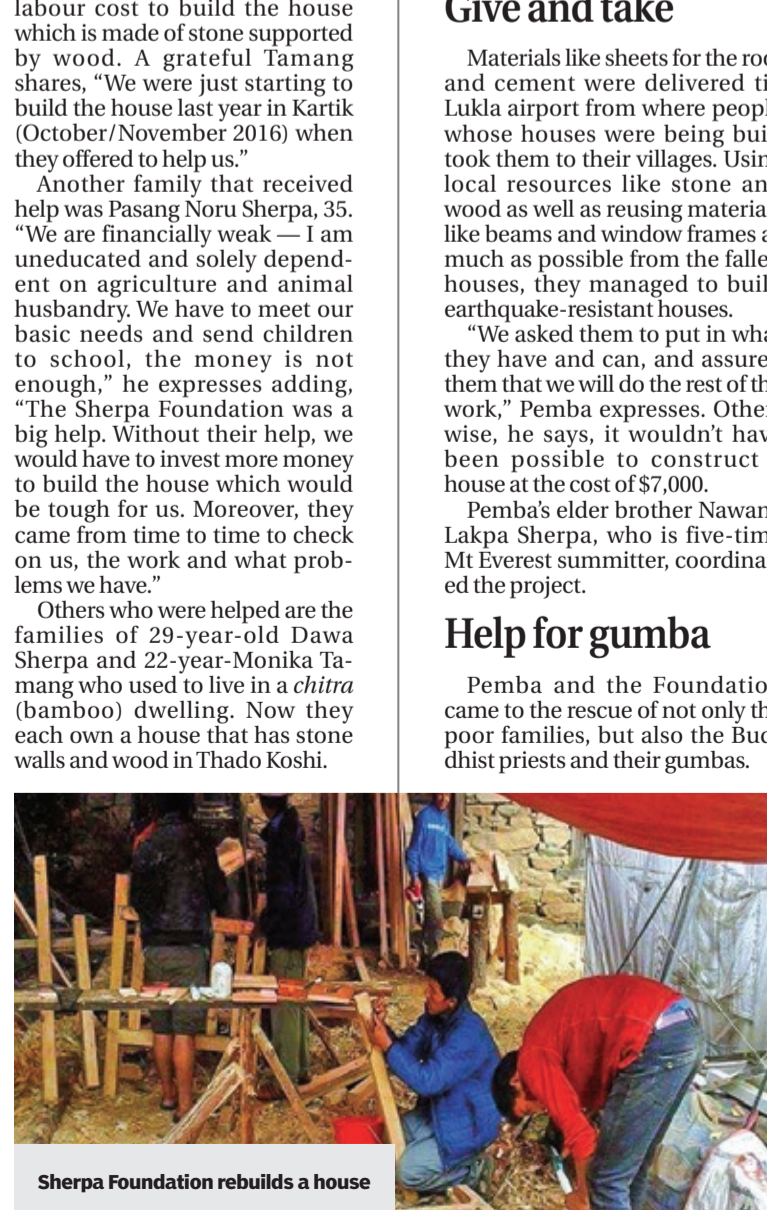
There are many more houses to be built or rebuilt in the region and Pemba, who wouldn't have been able to do without the helping hands from his supporters says, "There are still more poor families ... So many requests are coming in!"

Three years ago, he says he didn't have grey hair. "I have been thinking a lot in the last two years," he cites as the reason behind his grey hair.

"How can I continue this?" wonders Pemba, who received the 'Jana Sewa Shree' medal from President Bidhya Devi Bhandari in May for his social work.



Dawa Tenjin Sherpa's house in Monjo



Sherpa Foundation rebuilds a house

Photos: THT

Photos: Courtesy Sherpa Foundation