

## **Multidimensional Social Exclusion among Dalits in Nepal**

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### **Abstract**

*Constitutional guarantees of equality and social justice have not eliminated caste-based discrimination against Dalits in Nepal. This study examines the level and nature of social exclusion among Dalits in Nepal. It integrates data from the National Population and Housing Census 2021: Dalit Statistical Report and the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022/23). Similarly, it employed the International Labour Organization (ILO) report on Dalits and Labour, and the Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025. The study uses descriptive analysis of national-level secondary data broadly and the research is guided by social exclusion and capability theories to explore comparative level of exclusion. Dalits continue to face significant social and economic disadvantages and exclusion in Nepal in compared with non-Dalit people and the national average. They have low literacy and less secure employment because of caste discrimination and social exclusion which is practicing for decades entire the society. They also face poorer housing conditions and lower property ownership in general and particularly among women and differently among them between Hill Dalits and Tarai Dalits. Their opportunities for education and employment-related migration are also more limited due to economic hardship and social exclusion, which is practiced historically has taken a normal behaviour. The findings suggest that Dalit exclusion in Nepal is shaped by broader structural inequality associated with social and political aspects rather than economic deprivation and poverty alone reflected in statistics. The analysis emphasizes the need for a coordinated policy between the federal and local governments. Meaningful social inclusion mainly for Nepal's Dalits can only be reflected through better access to education, employment, and housing without social distance. Making constitutional provisions practical and accessible mainly for underprivileged social groups the empowerment is a primary task with a focus to marginalized groups within the Dalit population, which is a matter of debate regarding inclusion in the present context.*

### **Keywords**

Dalit, Social exclusion, Caste inequality, Multidimensional deprivation, Nepal.

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## **Multidimensional Social Exclusion among Dalits in Nepal**

### **1. Introduction**

Nepal is a socially and culturally diverse country with many caste and ethnic groups and existing inequalities arising from its diversity. Social inequality remains a major challenge even after the restoration of democracy in 1990s, and different constitutional and legal provisions have been adopted by the government since the 1950s after dissolved the 104 years Rana's rule. Nepali society is fundamentally caste-based with social and cultural hierarchy and exclusion primarily reflected in caste and gender. Caste continues to shape people's access to education, employment, land, housing, political participation, and public services unequally in Nepal. This inequality has been practiced historically because it is deeply rooted and reflected in various forms of social institutions such as religion, family, kinship and community organization. Therefore, Dalits have continued to experience multiple forms of disadvantage and exclusion for decades. These inequalities affect their living conditions and self-esteem in the society and limit opportunities for social and economic mobility and ownership.

The present Constitution of Nepal (2015) guarantees equality for all people before the law and prohibits caste-based discrimination and untouchability. It is important to do need for each democratic state to reduce caste based inequality but the situation is different and showing exclusion at different levels. Several policies and programmes have also been introduced mainly after 2005 through interim constitution to improve the social and economic conditions of Dalit communities. However, evidences show that legal protection alone does not removed deeply rooted structural inequalities without social transformation and proper inclusion in social and cultural sphere. Many Dalits still face barriers to take education, involvement in employment, securing land ownership, and participation in public institutions including politics. It means society is not yet prepared to accept Dalit people as usual in social practices. These challenges show that formal equality does not always result in equal outcomes even when legal provisions are in place which is reflected in fact and figures (NGO Federation of Nepal, 2025). Therefore, social exclusion provides an important framework for understanding caste-based inequalities and discrimination historically rooted in society. It is the process of structural discrimination through which individuals or groups are not permitted to participate fully in economic, social, political, and cultural life.

Social exclusion is a broader and multidimensional social process rather than simply poverty and economically weak conditions because it includes unequal access to opportunities, institutions, and social relationships (Silver, 1994). Social exclusion and life chances or a better and safe life are interconnected each other. Limited access to education, health services, decent work, and political representation resulting from social exclusion often occur together and reinforce disadvantage across generations (Sen, 2000). Studies have shown that Dalits in Nepal continue to experience discrimination in the labour market, politics and social and cultural participation. It is reflected in their concentration in traditional and low-paid occupations and social distance in different forms. Many Dalits have limited access to productive resources such as land and credit due to caste discriminations. Employment opportunities are often restricted by social norms and caste-based discrimination rather than individual skills or education in a caste-based society (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2005). Recent evidence also suggests that inequality in Nepal is multidimensional and historically rooted. Educational disadvantage, poor housing, unequal access to public services, labour insecurity, migration, and weak political representation are closely connected with Dalits and their lives need to be explored to examine nature and magnitudes of social exclusion. These disadvantages often overlap and reinforce one another to create a pattern of exclusion for Dalits in Nepal (NGO Federation of Nepal, 2025).

Many studies on Dalit issues in Nepal have focused mainly on legal provisions or a single dimension of inequality, such as education or political participation. However, fewer studies have examined Dalit social exclusion from a multidimensional perspective (Adhikari & Gellner, 2023; Nepali, 2024). This study addresses that gap by integrating evidence from four authentic sources in the context of Nepal. The National Population and Housing Census 2021, mainly based on the Dalit Statistical Report, provides a primary source of empirical evidence about Dalit exclusion. Similarly, the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022/23) provides a national socio-economic context which make it possible to intersect data at national level. The ILO Report on Dalit and Labour in Nepal explains labour market discrimination and occupational exclusion which is persisted historically in Nepal. The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 similarly, provide a broader perspective on structural and multidimensional inequality, which is significant for examining the social dimension of Dalits. These sources in an integrative form provide a comprehensive understanding of Dalit exclusion in contemporary Nepal at national level.

The study has two main objectives in exploring Dalit exclusion. First, it examines the demographic, educational, economic, housing, health, migration, and political conditions of Dalits through current official national

data. Second, it analyses how different forms of disadvantage are associated and contribute to multidimensional social exclusion among Dalits. The findings of this analysis contribute to the literature in different ways for understanding Dalit exclusion and inequality. First, the study brings together multiple official sources and discussed facts beyond descriptive statistics. Secondly, it provides recent evidence that can support policy discussions on reducing caste-based inequality, which has been practiced for decades, and promoting inclusive development as per the current constitution of Nepal.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Social Exclusion: A Concept of Multidimensional Perspective**

Social exclusion refers to unequal access to opportunities and resources for some people or groups due to social, cultural and political injustice and discrimination. It limits their participation in major social, economic, and political institutions in the community, which ultimately make them exclude from main stream development. It is not only restricted to poverty or low income among them. It also includes and promotes unequal access to education, employment, political participation, and social recognition. Therefore, people may experience social exclusion even when they are not considered or classified as poor (Silver, 1994). Social exclusion is a dynamic process depending on multidimensional phenomenon. It develops through unequal social relationships and institutional barriers over a long period of time. The situation is associated with capability and development. People who cannot access education, healthcare, employment and political participation due to any causes and context have fewer capabilities to achieve for a decent standard of living. Therefore, social exclusion represents a loss of both opportunities, a self-dignified life and human freedom (Sen, 2000). Studies also emphasize that different forms of exclusion are closely connected with poverty and exclusion. Poor education often limits employment opportunities and chances of a secure social life. Similarly, limited employment reduces income and asset ownership is also reflected in poverty. Material deprivation then affects health, housing, and social participation. It reflects the interconnected nature of social exclusion. These disadvantages reinforce each other and continue across generations for promoting poverty and exclusion. Therefore, social exclusion should be analyzed as a multidimensional process with its diverse contexts (Levitas *et al.*, 2007).

This perspective is also reflected under different forms of data provided in the Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025. The report explains that inequality in Nepal is shaped by the interaction of caste, gender, ethnicity, geography, disability, age, and economic status in an integrated form. The report therefore recommends analyzing inequality through multiple dimensions and how they intersect with each other which is significant for

inclusion study. The multidimensional approach for an inclusion study is particularly useful for understanding the situation of Dalits in Nepal.

## **2.2 Dalits and Caste-Based Social Exclusion in Nepal**

The caste system has been shaped by the discriminatory social relations in Nepal for centuries. However, caste discrimination has been legally prohibited in Nepal after the implementation of legal code of 1993, which reshaped the Muluki Ain of 1910 BS (1854 AD) introduced by Jung Bahadur Rana. Historical exclusion is associated with Dalit and non-Dalit relations which has restricted their access to education, occupations, public institutions and decision-making processes. These disadvantages have accumulated and been reflected over generations and continue to affect social mobility (ILO, 2005). National data provided by mainly by the census report show that caste inequality exists in employment and other areas of social life and it making an important issue in sociological study. The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 indicates disparities in education, health, housing, wealth, migration, and political representation at a significant level among different social groups. These inequalities are closely associated with exclusion and caste remains an important factor influencing life opportunities for excluded social groups. This study explains census data with national living standards conditions and labour, and inequality evidence to provide a broader sociological understanding of Dalit exclusion.

Education is a key factor in shaping social conditions and social mobility and reducing inequality among people. It helps develop people's knowledge, skills, and opportunities which support to employment and empowerment. However, access to education is not equally distributed across social groups. Inadequate household income and associated caste discrimination have reduced educational opportunities for many Dalit children and continue into higher education (Bennett, 2005). Therefore, educational exclusion also leads to other forms of social exclusion (Silver, 1994). The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 identifies education as one of the major dimensions of inequality in Nepal. The report shows that access to education differs by caste, gender, geography, and economic status in Nepal. These differences can affect later access to employment, income, and public services among socially excluded groups. The National Population and Housing Census report 2021 provides recent data on literacy, educational attainment, and school participation among Dalit communities, which help to identify the nature of exclusion. These data provide a detailed examination of educational disparities across different Dalit groups.

## **2.3 Labour Market Exclusion among Dalits in Nepal**

Employment is an important source of income, freedom, social mobility, and economic security, which work in an integrated form for a decent life. However, labour markets do not always provide equal opportunities for all

social groups due to exclusion that has been historically rooted for decades. In Nepal, caste has historically influenced occupational opportunities and working conditions and is also reflection in exclusion (ILO, 2005). Many Dalit communities have traditionally depended on hereditary or artisan occupations with low respect and income. These occupations were often associated with low income, limited social status, and restricted opportunities for occupational mobility in the current market scenario. Dalits so called lower-caste often face unequal access to formal employment, lower wages, insecure jobs, and limited opportunities for a secure and dignified life. Occupational inequality and hierarchies with restrictions also affect other dimensions of human well-being. Limited access to secure employment reduces household income and savings may affect to their education health. Labour-market exclusion due to the capability deficiencies reinforces other forms of social exclusion and contributes to inter-generational disadvantage (Sen, 2000).

#### **2.4 Health, Disability and Capability Deprivation**

Health is an important dimension of human well-being which is associated to quality of life. Good health improves people's ability to study, work, and participate in society to make a secure life for generations. Poor health, disability and limited access to healthcare and social protection reduce individual capabilities and increase the risk of long-term social exclusion and inter-generational poverty (Sen, 2000). Health inequality is closely related to social and economic welfare. If people with limited education, poor housing, unstable employment, and low income often experience poorer health outcomes than others which is the main issues of exclusion. These disadvantages are interconnected and reinforce one another over time for exclusion (Marmot, 2005). The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 identifies health inequality as a major development challenge for development and prosperity. The report shows that access to healthcare and health outcomes differ across caste, gender, geography, disability, and economic status which is significant in sociological research. These inequalities reduce equal opportunities and contribute to wider social exclusion among the disadvantaged social groups. Similarly, Dalit statistics provided by the National Population and Housing Census 2021 are related to disability and selected health-related indicators among Dalit communities. These data provide a prospect to examine health disparities using recent national evidence among social groups.

#### **2.5 Political Representation and Institutional Exclusion**

Political participation is an important indicator of social inclusion based on equal citizenship, decision making and democratic participation. Equal representation in public institutions allows different social groups to influence policies and decision-making for their empowerment and development. However, facts show that political equality cannot be measured

only by voting rights and policy-level reform. It also depends on representation in government institutions, public administration, and leadership positions through access from the local to the central level (Young, 2000). Dalits have historically experienced limited representation in public institutions such as politics, bureaucracy and public institutions in Nepal. Constitutional reforms and inclusion policies have increased political participation since 2005. However, inequalities remain in public employment and decision-making bodies. These inequalities limit the ability of marginalized communities to influence policies and decisions that affect their lives (NGO Federation of Nepal, 2025). The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 also shows that institutional inequality continues to affect different social groups across several sectors. The report further expose disparities in political representation, civil service employment, and access to public institutions. These patterns indicate that legal reforms have not fully support for inclusion due to structural barriers which is persisted for centuries. Social groups with inadequate representation often have less influence over public investment, education, employment policies, and social protection programmes (Fraser, 2008). Political inclusion should therefore be understood together with education, employment, health, and economic opportunities based on diverse social and cultural characteristics of social groups.

Studies on this issues have made important contributions to understanding caste-based inequality and exclusion in Nepal. Researches have examined education, labour discrimination, poverty, housing, migration, health, and political participation based on caste and ethnic groups. These studies provide valuable evidence on specific dimensions of Dalit exclusion in Nepal (Bennett, 2005; ILO, 2005). However, many studies focus on a single dimension of inequality beyond the social and cultural aspects of society. This study addresses these gaps by integrating multiple official data sources within a multidimensional framework of social exclusion. The Dalit-related statistical report based on participation education, access, opportunities and ownership is provided by the National Population and Housing Census 2021 and the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022/23). Further supportive data were taken from the ILO report and the Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 to explore a broader understanding of structural inequality to measure the exclusion of Dalits. This integrated effort provides a more comprehensive understanding of Dalit exclusion in contemporary Nepal.

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

#### **3.1 National Population Structure of Dalits**

Table-1 presents the population aged 10 years and above by caste group and sex based on the 2021 census to explore the conditions and nature of Dalits. It shows the proportion of Dalits in comparison with the national population. Similarly, the gender distribution of Dalit and non-Dalit populations is also

examined. It provides the demographic context for comparing Dalit and non-Dalit populations to make the exclusion analysis comprehensive.

**Table-1: Population Aged 10 Years and Above by Caste Group and Sex**

| Caste Group | Population (10+ years) | Total (%) | Male (%) | Female (%) |
|-------------|------------------------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Nepal       | 23,958,868             | 100.0     | 48.1     | 51.9       |
| Total Dalit | 3,052,622              | 12.7      | 47.0     | 53.0       |
| Non-Dalit   | 20,906,246             | 87.3      | 48.2     | 51.8       |

**Source:** National Statistics Office (NSO), *Dalit Statistical Report, National Population and Housing Census 2021*.

Dalits represent 12.7% of Nepal's population aged ten years and above, which is a large national population group after the Chhetri remains with low development. The educational and economic conditions of the social groups therefore have direct importance for national development which is low in Dalit community. The data show that women form 53.0% and men form 47.0% of the Dalit population aged ten years and above at the national level. The female share was slightly higher among Dalits than in the national population (51.9%). This pattern may be reflected by male migration and absence in households, which were an increasing trend in Nepal among all social groups. However, the Census table does not provide the cause of migration among social group. The result by census data is projected only to examine a demographic pattern rather than a relationship. The size of the Dalit population also does not show that caste inequality is a major social issue directly as illustrated in the report which is incomplete and not relational analysis. However, disadvantage and marginalization affect more than one-tenth of Nepal's population which need to be measured with multidimensional indicators of development.

### 3.2 Literacy Inequality

Literacy is a key indicator of social inclusion an important factor in having access to opportunities. Table-2 compares literacy rates between Dalits and non-Dalits by sex. It explains the gender gap in literacy across the social groups, which helps to examine exclusion between non-Dalits and Dalits at the national level.

**Table-2: National Literacy Rates by Caste Group and Sex**

| Group       | Overall Literacy (%) | Male Literacy (%) | Female Literacy (%) | Gender Gap (%) |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Nepal       | 76.2                 | 83.6              | 69.4                | 14.2           |
| Total Dalit | 67.4                 | 74.1              | 61.2                | 12.9           |
| Non-Dalit   | 77.6                 | 84.9              | 70.6                | 14.3           |

**Note:** The literacy rate covers the population aged five years and above. The gender gap was calculated by subtracting female literacy from male literacy.

**Source:** National Statistics Office, *Dalit Statistical Report 2021*.

The national literacy rate in Nepal was 76.2% in the 2021 census which is in improving trend. The literacy rate among Dalits was 67.4%, which was lower than the national average and remains in improving trend compared to previous census report. However, Dalit literacy has increased compared with previous censuses. The data shows that Dalit literacy in Nepal was therefore 8.8 percentage points below the national average. The difference between Dalits and non-Dalits was wider even in the present context after applying inclusive educational policy since 2005. Non-Dalit literacy was 77.6% at the same time above, which was 10.2 percentage points above the Dalit national rate, it might be affected by caste relations and centuries social exclusion.

A gender gap was also present in the current data between Dalits and non-Dalits at the national level. Dalit male literacy was 74.1%, while Dalit female literacy was 61.2% at the same time. It shows that 12.9 percentage difference among Dalits. Dalit women faced a double disadvantage by being women and Dalit women, which supports exclusion among Dalit women. Their literacy rate was 8.2 percentage points below the national female literacy rate. It was also 9.4 percentage points below the literacy rate of non-Dalit women, which shows that the impact of social exclusion has persisted for decades in caste-based Nepalese society. These results show that the expansion of education has not produced equal outcomes between social groups. National data show that Dalits remain behind the national population which indicated structural problem for it. Similarly, Dalit women remain further behind Dalit men, which shows the gender gap persists in all groups. Literacy is a basic capability for comprehensive well-being and social inclusion for each people. It supports access to information, public services, employment, and political participation which can make minimized gender and caste gap. Lower literacy therefore limits opportunities in several areas of life due to the absence of capability (Sen, 2000). The finding also shows that social exclusion is not limited to income alone. It proves that unequal educational access can reduce participation in economic and institutional life (Silver, 1994). The data in Table 6 show that access to education affects economic activities and household assets.

### **3.3 Educational Attainment and Exclusion**

Educational attainment reflects access to higher levels of education and its future impact on access to opportunities for sustain better life. Table-3 compares the highest level of education completed by literate Dalit and non-Dalit populations on next page. Data contained in this table show that educational inequality increases at higher levels between Dalits and non-Dalits, which indicates unequal access to higher education. Among literate Dalits, 44.7% had completed only basic education, it shows excluded conditions by caste relations compel to drop out, whereas the national figure of dropout rate is 33.1%. Dalits were therefore more concentrated at the basic

level even after special provision for the targeted group through the initiations of national educational policy. The difference between the Dalit and national-level data was 11.6 percentage, which indicates that Dalit education is low as compared with the national trend. The proportion completing secondary education was 51.3% among Dalits, whereas the national rate was 57.6%. The data shows that the Dalits were 6.3 percentage below the national level. The largest difference appeared in higher education between Dalits and non-Dalits in the Dalit's ratio compared with national data. The data shows that only 1.6% of literate Dalits had completed a bachelor's degree, whereas the national proportion was 6.7%. The non-Dalit higher education rate was 7.4% at the same time which was more than four times the Dalit rate in higher education.

**Table-3: Educational Level Completed by the Literate Population Aged Five Years and Above**

| Group       | Below SEE (%) | SEE to Higher Secondary (%) | Bachelor's and Above (%) | Technical/ Other(%) |
|-------------|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Nepal       | 33.1          | 57.6                        | 6.7                      | 2.6                 |
| Total Dalit | 44.7          | 51.3                        | 1.6                      | 2.5                 |
| Non-Dalit   | 31.6          | 58.5                        | 7.4                      | 2.6                 |

**Source:** National Statistics Office, *Dalit Statistical Report 2021*.

This gap in education level and access has important social effects on the further comprehensive development of the marginalized social groups. Higher education mainly provides access to professional work, administration, teaching and public institutions, which has ultimately positive impact on livings. Similarly, a low higher level of access to higher education attainment therefore reduces access to occupations with higher income, security, power and authority. Dalit students may enter education and face greater difficulty in continuing to higher levels, mainly due to poverty and exclusion, which is not elaborated in the respective reports in detail. The census does not explain the causes of dropout in comparison between the social groups. Household income, social discrimination, distance, and family responsibilities require separate study while comparing educational data. capability theory explains lower levels of educational restrict the potential of lives and careers related to individuals (Sen, 2000). Data show that school exclusion remains higher among Dalits than the national average is significant. Among the population aged 5-25 years, 13.1% of Dalits had never attended school compared with 8.1% nationally and 7.1% among non-Dalits. These data need to be considered while examining data from an exclusion perspective. These findings indicate that Dalit children and young people continue to face greater barriers to accessing formal education, which are associated to social exclusion that has persisted historically in Nepal.

### 3.4 Employment and Economic Activity

Employment, the nature of work and payment and participation in work are key indicators of economic participation, social inclusion and livelihood sustainability. Table-4 compares economic activity and employment status between Dalit and non-Dalit populations aged 10 years and above, which is shaped by which is shaped by structural and historical detriments of caste based inequality.

**Table-4: Employment and Economic Activity among the Population Aged Ten Years and Above**

| Group       | Economically Active (%) | Usually Active (%) | Usually Employed (%) | Usually Unemployed (%) |
|-------------|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Nepal       | 34.3                    | 29.6               | 93.0                 | 7.0                    |
| Total Dalit | 33.5                    | 32.4               | 92.0                 | 8.0                    |
| Non-Dalit   | 34.4                    | 29.2               | 93.2                 | 6.8                    |

**Note:** Usually employed and usually unemployed are shares of the usually active population.

**Source:** National Statistics Office, *Dalit Statistical Report 2021*.

The above table shows that 92.0% of Dalits were employed compared with the national proportion of 93.0%. Dalit unemployment was 8.0% compared with the national unemployment rate of 7.0%, while the non-Dalit unemployment rate was 6.8% at the same time. The data show a modest gap between Dalits and non-Dalits in the respective indicator. However, employment status alone does not show employment quality and access to the nature of work and social support. The proportion classified as usually inactive was 32.4% among Dalits compared to the national figure of 29.6%, which is important for the impact of both categories on their social life. This was a difference of 2.8 percentage between them which was not significant size, but shows a nature of trend. Labour related research at different level and at different time has found that Dalits faced occupational segregation, limited mobility, and concentration in informal work (International Labour Organization, 2005). The present census data are not able to directly measure discrimination and exclusion between Dalits and non-Dalits. However, they show that Dalits remain disadvantaged in many sectors including social and economic, that lead to their condition of unemployment and exclusion

### 3.5 Household Assets and Digital Access

Household assets and digital access reflect the living standards of people, and it make possible to enhance access in further life chances and overall development. They provide access to information and technology, which support individual's livelihood and freedom. Table-5 compares the availability of selected household assets and facilities among Hill Dalits, Tarai Dalist, and non-Dalits.

**Table-5: Selected Household Assets and Facilities**

| <b>Household Asset/Facility</b> | <b>National (%)</b> | <b>Hill Dalit (%)</b> | <b>Tarai Dalit (%)</b> | <b>Other House-holds (%)</b> |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Television                      | 49.4                | 36.7                  | 29.8                   | 51.7                         |
| Ordinary mobile phone           | 73.2                | 73.5                  | 66.8                   | 73.5                         |
| Smartphone                      | 73.0                | 63.8                  | 52.4                   | 74.9                         |
| Computer or laptop              | 15.0                | 5.6                   | 2.5                    | 16.5                         |
| Internet access                 | 37.8                | 27.0                  | 12.4                   | 40.1                         |
| Refrigerator                    | 23.7                | 12.1                  | 3.5                    | 25.8                         |
| Electric fan                    | 53.1                | 34.2                  | 66.1                   | 54.4                         |

**Source:** National Statistics Office, *Dalit Statistical Report 2021*.

The data show that large differences appear in modern household assets between Dalits located in different areas at the national level. Only 5.6% of Hill Dalit households and 2.5% of Tarai Dalit households had a computer or laptop compared with the national rate of 15.0%. It further shows disparities between Dalits from the Hill and Tarai. Similarly, internet access was also unequal between intra and inter-groups, which is significant in sociological studies. It was available to 27.0% of Hill Dalit households and 12.4% of Tarai Dalit households. In comparison, the national rate was 37.8%, while the non-Dalit internet rate was 40.1%. This was more than three times the rate among Tarai Dalit households which shows caste based exclusion is in intensive level in Tarai. Similarly, smartphone ownership followed the same unequal pattern between them. The national rate was 73.0%, which was higher than the rates among Hill and Tarai Dalits. It was 63.8% among Hill Dalit households and 52.4% among Tarai Dalit households.

These differences show a clear digital divide, which is growing in the present context between social groups. Digital access is important in the present context because it is able to sharply affects education, access on employment, banking, communication, and government services. Therefore, it is an important indicator for understanding social exclusion and poverty. Limited access may therefore reproduce existing social inequality among different social group and increase the chances of continuing exclusion. Similarly, refrigerator ownership also showed a large material gap which indicate a kind of poverty. The national rate was 23.7% with compared with the rate of 12.1% among Hill Dalit and only 3.5% among Tarai Dalits, which shows that social disparities may be reflected in the economic sector. However, these assets are not perfect measures of intensive poverty. Sociologically, it shows major differences in purchasing power, infrastructure, and living standards, which are associated with the nature of poverty in society.

### 3-6 National Pattern of Exclusion

Table-6 documents key national indicators of social and economic exclusion among Dalits in Nepal. It compares Dalit and non-Dalit outcomes across education, employment, property ownership and migration. These indicators show the overall pattern of inequality between Dalits and non-Dalits.

**Table-6: Selected National Indicators of Dalit Exclusion**

| Indicator                           | Dalit (%) | Non-Dalit(%) | Gap (%) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| Literacy                            | 67.4      | 77.6         | – 10.2  |
| Bachelor's degree or above          | 1.6       | 7.4          | – 5.8   |
| Never attended school (age 5-25)    | 13.1      | 7.1          | +6.0    |
| Worked six months or more           | 38.6      | 41.3         | – 2.7   |
| Usually unemployed                  | 8.0       | 6.8          | +1.2    |
| Female property ownership           | 15.7      | 25.1         | – 9.4   |
| Migration for education or training | 4.2       | 8.3          | – 4.1   |

**Source:** National Statistics Office, *Dalit Statistical Report 2021*.

The combined data in above table show a consistent pattern of multi-dimensional disadvantage and exclusion between Dalits and non-Dalits. Dalits continue to lag behind non-Dalits across several key indicators which shows exclusion in Dalits. The largest gaps are seen in education, employment continuity, property ownership, migration opportunities and literacy at the national level. Higher education shows a major gap between Dalits and non-Dalits which contribute to enlarge their poverty status. The non-Dalit rate of completing a bachelor's degree or above was more than four times the Dalit rate. It shows a major example of social exclusion. The data show that Dalits aged 5-25 years were almost twice as likely as non-Dalits to have never attended school. This reflects unequal access to education at the national level or more widely. These educational inequalities influence employment and life-sustaining opportunities which are reflected in employment, income and other social indicators.

Migration patterns also expose unequal access to opportunities between social groups, which is associated with social mobility and personal development. Dalits were less likely to migrate for education, employment, or business compared with the pattern of non-Dalits. It may be associated with poverty and social exclusion. Their migration was more strongly connected with marriage rather than associated with opportunities and better livelihoods. Similarly, gender inequality operates across these dimensions between the two groups. The data show that Dalit women had

lower literacy than Dalit men. This reflects both caste and gender inequalities that affect Dalit women. This is also reflected in the lower rates of female ownership of houses and land among Dalit households. The consistency of the differences with facts at the national level across several indicators provides strong evidence of structural and multidimensional inequality between Dalits and non-Dalits in Nepal.

### 3.7 Institutional and Political Exclusion

Representation in public institutions enables social groups to influence national policy, resource allocation, and administrative decisions for their own communities which shows inclusion-exclusion variations. It is an important indicator of social inclusion that lead to equal participation. The Nepal Country Inequality Report shows that Dalits remain under-represented with compared to non-Dalits in many sectors including in the civil service and in the leadership bodies of major political parties.

**Table-7: Dalit Representation in the Civil Service and Major Political Parties**

| Institution/<br>Political Party                      | Total<br>Members | Dalit<br>Members | Dalit<br>Representation (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| National population                                  | —                | —                | 13.00                       |
| Nepal civil service                                  | —                | —                | 1.40                        |
| Nepali Congress Central<br>Committee                 | 148              | 11               | 7.43                        |
| CPN (UML) Central<br>Committee                       | 301              | 20               | 6.64                        |
| CPN (Maoist Centre)<br>Central Committee             | 236              | 23               | 9.74                        |
| CPN (Unified Socialist)<br>Central Committee         | 335              | 17               | 5.07                        |
| Rastriya Swatantra Party<br>Central Committee        | 40               | 3                | 7.50                        |
| Janata Samajwadi Party<br>Nepal Central<br>Committee | 446              | 19               | 4.26                        |
| Democratic Samajwadi<br>Party Central Committee      | 215              | 10               | 4.65                        |

**Note:** The national population share of 13% is the scale used in the Country Inequality Report. Party-related figures represent central committee membership. It is not represented as elected parliamentary representation.

**Source:** NGO Federation of Nepal, *Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025*.

Data contained in the above table show that Dalits remain severely underrepresented in public institutions and political leadership. Their share in the civil service and major party committees is far below their proportion of the national population which is a major example of exclusion made

structurally. Similarly, Dalit representation remains remarkably below their population size across state administration and political-party leadership. This raises questions about the commitment to social inclusion at the national political level. The data show that the civil-service gap is particularly large, which reflects the continued exclusion of Dalits from state institutions historically. Dalit constitutes about 13% of the population and were able to hold only 1.4% of positions which is reflect acute level of exclusion. Similarly, representation in party central committees ranged from 4.26% to 9.74% which was also negligible. It therefore remains below the population size in every party listed which means that political representation of Dalits continues to be limited by caste discrimination. Institutional exclusion has persisted for decades in Nepal. It may weaken the capacity of Dalit communities to influence policies on education, employment and social protection (Sen, 2000; Silver, 1994).

#### **4. Discussion**

The national-level data show that Dalit exclusion in Nepal is multidimensional, reflected in many forms, varies within groups, and it affects many aspects of life. The differences are significantly reflected in education, employment, ownership, migration and digital access. These disadvantages are associated with each other and make them more disadvantaged and excluded. The findings support the multidimensional concept of social exclusion which is persisted historically, based on data associated with Dalits. The facts show that social exclusion discussed as by Silver is broader than income poverty, compared with Dalits of Nepal. People may experience disadvantages in several areas at the same time of exclusion (Silver, 1994). The analysis show that educational disadvantage remains a major dimension of Dalit exclusion in Nepal. Lower literacy, limited higher educational attainment, and higher rates of school exclusion and dropout among Dalits indicate that inequalities impact entry and continued into the labour market and economic empowerment. This is significant because it limits employment opportunities and long-term social inclusion with social ownership. Educational disadvantage therefore is therefore reflected in employment and material conditions among Dalits. They were also less represented in female property ownership, access on digital facilities, and household enterprises, which is associated to the structural inequality. It indicates that exclusion is reproduced across institutions from social inequality and structural unjust. This finding is consistent with Silver's argument that exclusion weakens social participation and capability. The Dalit population is comparatively found to have less access to social and material resources.

Sen argues that development is about people's freedom to make meaningful life choices (Sen, 2000). Social capital such as literacy and higher education and knowledge expand people's ability to access information,

employment, and decision-making. The lower educational position of Dalits therefore represents a reduction in substantive freedom which is signifies debates in current development. Low educational attainment and digital access remain important dimensions of Dalit exclusion and poverty. These inequalities in different sectors make it difficult to access better employment, information, and social mobility. It reinforces existing structural disadvantages further.

Dalits continue to face disadvantages in labour market participation and associated low-level income in Nepal. Their employment mainly concentrated in informal sectors is generally less stable, increasing economic vulnerability and limiting long-term opportunities. The census is unable to directly measure job types and quality of work, contracts and conditions, wages and discrimination associated with Dalits and non-Dalits. Therefore, employment status given by the census does not fully represent labour market inequality between caste and gender categories. The data therefore suggest that the main problem is access to stable, formal and rewarded work. The findings show that caste-based exclusion also exists directly and indirectly in public institutions like politics and bureaucracy directly and indirectly in Nepal. It is proved by the data associated with limited representation in decision-making bodies. It reduces the ability of Dalits to influence policies affecting their communities.

The findings suggest that Dalit exclusion may be reproduced across generations, which is reflected in the present condition of education, income, decision making and resources. It is proved lower parental education can reduce household income and educational support for their children. Similarly, insecure employment limits savings and investment for them sustain life. It may have an impact on ownership and education. Likewise, limited education reduces access to secure employment and access to resources which is significantly translated to Dalit families. The data therefore demand a structural explanation of exclusion and a vicious circle of poverty among Dalit communities.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study shows that Dalit exclusion in Nepal remains multidimensional and reflected across different sectors despite constitutional provisions and policy commitments of inclusion initiated by the government since 1999s. The findings show significant inequalities in comparison with non-Dalits in education, employment, housing, digital access and migration opportunities. These inequalities exist both between Dalits and non-Dalits and within Dalit communities. However, these gaps remain substantial between Dalits and non-Dalits widely. Dalit women face even greater barriers across these areas in compared with Dalit male and the national average. It indicates that these inequalities are interconnected and intersect with each other and it reflected as a form of structural barriers for exclusion. The fact from this analysis supports

the argument that legal equality is not sufficient to achieve substantive social inclusion which is rooted under caste-based inequality in Nepal that has existed for centuries. It suggests that strengthening education, employment, digital inclusion, and access to public services should remain a policy priority for all excluded social groups. Now is an appropriate time, after two decades of implementation of inclusion policies, to assess whether they have improved social inclusion and supported equitable development.

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