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The New Facets of Exclusion of Dalits in Nepal

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Abstract

This paper has assessed the exclusion of Dalits through new dimensions which creates new discourses in the reconstructing of the state of Nepal. Dalits are highly excluded groups ever than ethnic groups and Madhesis. The total population of Dalits is not less than other groups which covers about twenty percentage of the total population of Nepal. However, Dalits are excluded socially, politically and economically by the states and elites of the society since 25 hundred years. Social exclusion is a dynamic process of progressive multi-dimensional rupturing of the 'social bond' at the individual level and collective levels (Silver, 2007). For study Dalits exclusion, the secondary data are used and reviewed some articles based on the subjects. It is found that Dalits are the poorest groups of Nepal. The multidimensional exclusion of Dalits makes them absolute poor and it is difficult for them to come out of poverty. The demand of identity of Dalits is different than the ethnic groups and Madhesis as they are Hindus like other higher caste elites and their culture and language are similar. The emancipation of Dalits is not clear till now even after the Second People's Movement of Nepal in April 2006. Dalits had very low representation in the House of Representatives. Major political parties do not have clear cut proposal about the issues of Dalits' connection.

Keywords

Dalits, Untouchable, Exclusion, Multi-dimensional, Marginalized, Emancipation.

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1. Introduction

Dalit means oppressed, downtrodden, and exploited who are regarded as untouchable. The members of the Dalit community are routinely denied social, political, religious, and economic rights. The word 'Dalit' is derived from Sanskrit and means 'ground', 'suppressed', 'crushed' or 'broken to pieces'. It was first used by Jyotirao Phule in the nineteenth century, in the context of the oppression faced by 'untouchable' castes of the twice-born Hindus. Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar made it popular initiating the Dalit Movement in India (Ahuti, 2010). Before that period, '*Achhut*' is used to denote 'untouchable' castes in Nepal. Due to caste based discrimination and untouchability, Dalits are left behind in social, economic, educational, political and religious spheres. They are deprived from human dignity and social justice. In the context of traditional Hindu society, Dalit status has often been historically associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure, such as any involving leatherwork, butchering, or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses, and waste. Dalits worked as manual labourers cleaning streets, latrines, and sewers. Engaging in these activities was considered to be polluting to the individual, and this pollution was considered contagious.

In Nepal, National Dalit Commission of the Government of Nepal has scheduled 7 hill and 26 Terai Dalits. They cover about 20 percent of total population of Nepal. 80 percent of the Dalit population lives below the poverty line. Only 23 percent of Dalits are literate in comparison to the national average literacy rate 65.9 percent (NSO, 2021). The average life expectancy of Dalits is 50.8 years as compared to a national average of 58 years. The per capita income of Dalits is half of the national average. Dalits have little representation in the Nepali bureaucracy, legislature and within mainstream political parties. All these meager social and economic conditions of Dalits are the outcomes of exclusion created by the society and state through history in long run. Dalits could not acquire sufficient and necessary

capability due to extreme exclusion. This article has discussed the multidimensional exclusion of Dalits in Nepal.

2. Methodology

The research methodology involves a dual approach utilizing secondary data and article review. The study begins with a well-defined research objective. Secondary data is collected from reputable sources such as existing datasets and databases relevant to the research topic. Concurrently, a comprehensive literature review is conducted, identifying and reviewing pertinent articles. The gathered secondary data is analyzed for insights, while the article review involves extracting key findings and methodologies. The synthesis of both sources of information allows for a holistic understanding of the research topic. The limitations and validity of the study are discussed, and the findings are interpreted in the context of the research objective, contributing to the existing body of knowledge.

3. Theoretical Perspectives of Exclusion and Dalits

The term 'Social Exclusion' is used in 1974 by Rene Lenoir of France to address not only the poor, but also handicapped, suicidal people, aged, abused children, substance abusers etc. about 10 percent of the French people (Haan, 1999). Then, it became worldwide and popular in social science. For Hilary Silver (2007), social exclusion is a dynamic process of progressive multi-dimensional rupturing of the 'social bond' at the individual level and collective levels. Social exclusion prevents full participation normal activities of a given society and denies access to information, resources, sociability, recognition, and identity, eroding self-respect and reducing capabilities to achieve personal goal. As the definition of the social exclusion by the Hilary Silver, we can say Dalits are excluded in our society by the higher Hindu elites and the state. Hilary Silver has argued social exclusion as the multidimensional and context-dependent (Silver, 2007). Social exclusion is polysomic terms that it has more than one meaning. Social and cultural cleavages vary across the countries. In the western countries, social exclusion is associated with economic exclusion. The context of Africa and Asia is different. Different context of social, economic and politics create different level of exclusion. Social exclusion and chronic poverty has some commonalities. Both can appear simultaneously. Social exclusion can create poverty and poverty can create social exclusion.

Though the social exclusion and chronic poverty has some commonalities, social exclusion is concerned with horizontal ties among groups while poverty has vertical mobility. In the case of Dalits, first, they are excluded from social relations and public services and then they indulge in extreme poverty.

In contrast to the Hilary Silver, Amartya Sen has argued exclusion as the deprivation of capability (Sen, 2000). In exclusion, the social relations of individuals or groups are ruptured and the exclusion plays constitutive as well as instrumental role for further impoverishment of individuals and groups. Amartya Sen has argued two types of social exclusion: active and passive exclusion. The exclusion that may be the result from the set of circumstances without free will is passive exclusion such like sudden unemployment. The exclusion aimed directly through the policies and clearly seen its implementation is active exclusion. The exclusion of Dalits that prevalent in Asia is active exclusion that has direct intention of the state and high-class elites. The distinction between constitutive relevance and instrumental importance is only one of the distinctions that can be fruitfully used to understand and analyze the nature and reach of social exclusion (Sen, 2000). Constitutive relevance is the deprivation that directly impoverishes the human life; such like not taking community activities generates capability deprivation. Sometimes exclusion becomes instrumental for the deprivation indirectly to achieve some things that is not necessary for human daily life. Instrumental importance may not be impoverishing in them, but they can lead to impoverishment of human life through their causal consequences. Landlessness is an instrumental deprivation. Dalits are facing both constitutive and instrumental exclusion.

Dalits are far from the resources as they are land less. Their self-respect has been eroding since twenty five hundred years (Ahuti, 2010). The social bond of Dalits is ruptured and Dalits are in social isolation. Hilary Silver has defined social exclusion as the dynamic process. Internationally, it is suitable to use as the economic fluctuation is changing over time of period. In the south asia, the exclusion of Dalits is persisting before a long period and still is deep rooted in our society. The exclusion of Dalits is not only economic, rather it is caste and group based exclusion. Chaitanya Mishra has argued that there might have some economic and structural conditions which make the possibility of exclusion of Dalits still in capitalism and globalization (Mishra, 2010). The social exclusion in

South Asia is not dynamic rather it is static and persistent. So, different aspect of analysis is needed in the case of Dalits of Nepal and South Asia.

In social exclusion, peoples are excluded to participate in normal activities of society in four ways: first consumption and savings, second production, third political engagement, and four social interactions. In case of Dalits they are deprived of these four forms of participation. According to Mary Cameron, Dalits are still depends upon *riti maagne* system. *Riti Maagene* is the dependence of Dalits on higher caste for their subsistence (Cameron, 2010). Dalits has low income and unequal labour sharing that they could not save any things. Dalits can produce their artisan products, but they are compelled to exchange it with minimum food stuff. Untouchability deprives Dalit of equal economic and other opportunities. Many jobs, professions and business opportunities (such as opening tea stalls and selling milk) available for enterprising poor rural people are not viable options for Dalits because many members of the society do not buy edible goods from them. With the penetration of the market and the availability of cheaper ready-made clothes, shoes and metal framing implements, traditional sources of income of the Dalits have been undermined (Lawati, 2010). Social practice of untouchability contributes Dalits to exclude the Dalits directly as well as indirectly by marginalizing them and making them uncompetitive.

The political engagement of Dalits is very low. Leaders of the high caste groups have not treated Dalits as political equals. The non-nomination of Dalits for public offices and the absence of progressive programs by major political parties to end untouchability and promote inclusive demonstrate this ambivalent attitude. Not a single Dalit was made a minister during the 1990-02 democratic period. Likewise, only one Dalit was elected in the three parliamentary elections out of a total of 615 possible seats (Lawati, 2010).

In the November 2022 House of Representatives elections, only one Dalit secured a parliamentary seat through the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. This marks the lowest Dalit representation in Parliament since 2008. However, parties have chosen additional Dalit members through the proportional representation (PR) system, resulting in a total of 16 Dalit representatives (5.8 percent) out of 275 seats. At the local level, there is minimal allocation of ward positions for Dalit women. It is very pathetic condition that only just about 6

percent seats of Dalits in the House of Representatives despite they have about 20 percent share in the total population of Nepal. Social exclusion is a trap for groups or individuals. Social exclusion refers to a situation where people suffer from the cumulative disadvantages of labour market marginalization, poverty, and social isolation that we can see in the Dalits' cases. Not from macro level, we should analyze in the micro level. Steven Folmer (2010) has studied the social exclusion of Dalits in micro level. The social boundaries become small for the peoples who are excluded.

Social exclusion creates social insecurity and persistent unemployment that leads loss of skill and long-run damages. It creates loss of freedom, psychological harm and misery. Some outcomes of exclusion are: ill-health and mortality, loss of human relations, motivational loss and future work, gender and racial inequalities, and weakening of social values. Social exclusion can cause inequality and poverty with capability deprivation. During the financial and economic crisis, both social exclusion and absolute poverty may become much sharper inequalities increase along with recession. The economic crisis creates labour market exclusions, credit market exclusions, gender related exclusions and inequalities.

People could be excluded individually and in groups. Dalits of Nepal are excluded in groups not in individual. Charles Tilly (2006) has presented the various apparatus of social exclusion stating it is social process and interaction origins. The argument raised by the Arjan de Haan is different than Hilary Silver and Amartya Sen since he has tried to define social exclusion as the holistic meaning of deprivation. Poverty and social exclusion are two different things though they are relevant to each other. Hilary Silver has given stress on the exclusion within the Western Europe which does not match up with the exclusion of Dalits in Nepal. Dalits are not excluded and discrimination through economical fluctuation rather they are excluded socially and politically. Their exclusion is based on caste which is absent on the Western Society.

4. History of Exclusion

The exclusion of Dalits is based on caste. There was no sign of casteism in the ancient period of Nepal. Later, in the period of Lichhavi era (200-979 AD), primitive type of castes was introduced. Various castes were divided by the Jayasthiti Malla totally based on *Manushmriti* inviting five Brahmins from India. Untouchables were

segregated from mainstream society and introduced severe punishment for those breaking caste hierarchy and barriers. Particular occupation was given to certain groups of people and made punishable if they changed the occupation. Ram Shah (1606-1633 AD) copied the similar system that of Jayasthiti Malla and fixed severe punishment for untouchable for the similar crime. Prithvi Narayan Shah (1779-1831 BS) introduced caste upgrading and degrading system. Janga Bahadur Rana introduced first Muluki Ain (civil code) in 1853 AD and defined Dalits again as 'untouchables'. In the Panchayat era, King Mahendra abolished the untouchability promulgating the new civil code. However, untouchability was not removed from the society and the state (Ahuti, 2010). Dalits were not included in the political and social level and the economic enhancement policies were not formulated in the government level.

After the end of Panchayat era, caste based discrimination and untouchable was made punishable by law through 1990 constitution. Dalits people started organized movement for social justice and for economic, political and social rights. Dalit development Committee and Dalit Development Commission were established by the government to uplift the Dalits though the condition of Dalits remained same. Dalits involved significantly in Maoist insurgency seeking the right and inclusion in the state apparatus. After the Second People's Movement of 2006, some progress has been made. The Dalits has got some provisions for non-discrimination, equality and protection in Nepal's constitution. In the international arena, the government has expressed support for the UN principles and guidelines to end the caste discrimination. Yet, Dalits continue to be the under-represented at the political level, having secured just eight percent of the seat in the house of representative of Nepal despite they have about 20 percent share in the total population of Nepal. The social and economic condition of Dalits is not improved yet for that it needs further efforts and movement.

5. Multi-dimensional Exclusion of Dalits

Dalits are facing multilayer type of exclusion. Firstly, they are excluded in the society and taken as untouchable and water polluted caste. They are not involved to perform any kind of social activities by other castes whether they are high caste Hindus or so called indigenous groups. They could neither get chance to enter temples freely nor to enter the home of other groups' people. They are landless

and much more than the dominant caste population. They could not compete with the modern markets and compel to change their traditional occupation. This is social as well as economic exclusion. Dalit women are excluded socially, culturally, economically as well as biologically. Similarly, Terai Dalits are excluded regionally as well as socially and economically. Terai Dalits are more marginalized, oppressed and poor than other Dalits (Ahuti, 2010). Dalits are physically assaulted, killed and forced to leave their residence in the society by so-called higher caste and they are compelled to hide their caste and their traditional occupation. The extent of exclusion is very deep in Dalits which created absolute poverty within them. They are not entertaining the alternative resources and the sharing on the state property is the lowest to the Dalits.

Next, state is indifferent to the condition of the Dalits. Dalits are excluded from the state privileges and get very few opportunities of government services. Opportunity hoarding is created for the Dalits. Actually, state itself is an excluder for Dalits. The literacy rate and health condition of Dalits is very low. The human development index shows the pathetic condition of the Dalits which is below the national average and the lowest in comparison to the other caste groups. In politics, only few numbers of Dalits are taking part and they are politically excluded. State is not serious about Dalits, however it has made the situation to exclude the Dalits. The untouchable is made punishable in Law, but it is not implemented seriously. National Dalit Commission is established, but its function is not effective and could not access to the grass level Dalits. In Pachayat system, few Dalits were selected in the government level in Rastriya Panchayat, but it could not uplift the condition of Dalits and could not remove the discrimination faced by Dalits in the society. Some national and international non-government organizations are trying to aware and to uplift the economic conditions of Dalits, but it did not give positive results till now.

6. Indigenous, Madhesi and Dalits

The exclusion faced by Dalits and other groups is different. Ethnic groups and Madhesis have their own territories. Dalits do not have own particular territories of residing. They are scattered all over the country and in minorities in all regions where they are residing. Ethnic groups and Madhesis have their own culture and language, but Dalits do not have their own culture and language. So, Dalits are

excluded separately than other groups. The state should treat them separately.

Dalits could not mingle with other groups for identity politics and they could not demand separate province for them. Indigenous people and Madhesis are more united to demand their rights, but Dalits could not organize easily as they are scattered all over the country. Socially, economically and politically, Dalits are more marginalized and oppressed than other groups. Indigenous and Madhesis are excluded by the state only whereas Dalits are excluded by other groups of society as well as the state. So, Dalits are excluded doubly than other groups. The exclusion of Dalits is more severe.

Dalits have lowest indicators of the mobilization and performance among three groups (Lawati, 2013). Madhesi has the highest movement capability (strikes, length and frequency) after 1990 and 2006. The formation of political party and representation in governance is also lowest in Dalit community. Limbu has the highest representation in governance. Lots of factors facilitate the mobilization such as political opportunities, state attitude, cohesiveness of community and community characters, degrees of groups' discrimination, cultural differentials and identity formation, education, activists and supporters and international factors. Dalits have fewer cultural differences with dominant groups and they have difficulties in identity formation. We can see lots of factors which facilitates lower mobilization and performance of Dalits than other groups. Therefore, they have low voices against their exclusion and deprivation.

7. Politics of Anonymity and Identity of Dalits

The identity politics of Dalits is different than other groups. Dalits do not interest to identify themselves as Dalits and they are trying to copy the higher castes to become like them. Steven Folmer has termed the exclusion of Dalits as politics of anonymity in the sense that deprivation of Dalits is still unknown to the most of people. Scholars have done little research on this important issue. Donor agencies are trying to uplift Dalits through income generation, but it is not only economic problem. The exclusion of Dalits has social, cultural and political dimensions. It has long history of deprivations (Ahuti, 2010). How was it created and why does it exist till present? The two questions raised by Chaitanya Mishra are also important for the emancipation of Dalits (Mishra, 2010).

A major controversy that Steven Folmer has analyzed is whether Dalits have internalized their low status so much that they reinforce it through their behaviour. He has raised three still open salient issues: first the degree to which Dalits are still subject to social and political oppression, second the degree to which Dalits participate willingly in their degradation, and third the social and political strategies Dalits employ to deal with degradation (Folmer, 2010). He has followed the micro level research on the issues and found the different findings than other. Dalits are still in oppression and they are not willing to their degradation. They are trying to resist in the grassroots levels. Dalits are not researching their identity, but trying to mask it and they do not like the word Dalits. They are taking it as insult and feel humiliated (Cameron, 2010).

The identity politics of Dalits is different than the other groups and identity politics is different than the demand of inclusion. Identity politics is demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied. For Dalits, identity politics is complex. Dalits is the word that is used to denote the oppressed groups and it is not the caste. There are various levels of identity inside Dalits as a specific caste such as Sarki, Kami or Damai or as the shared identity of Dalit. Dalit is an ambiguous identity to which not all low caste people aspire. Caste hierarchies are prevalent within the Dalit castes. So, whose identity is demanded, the confusion is existed within Dalits.

Politics of anonymity is related to the masking of the identity. Through masking identity, Dalits are free to act against the current of the system, but only in spaces where their Dalit or untouchable identity is unknown. Many Dalits are following this kind of masking their identity. Steven Folmer has found lots of cases in the ground level of Dalit communities. Actually, Dalits do not have surname, but government officials write surname according to Dalits traditional occupation such as those who sew clothes become Damai. They are attempting to change their caste Nepali or Pariyar or Das for Damai, Achhami or Bogati for Sarki and Sunar or Bishwokarma for Kami. The discrimination of Dalits is deep rooted in the cultural geography of Nepalese society for that it should be analyzed in the micro level to solve the problem. The efforts of Steven Folmer is commendable as he has researched Dalits identity in three cultural geography tea shops, water tap and temples where we can observe the changing inter-caste relations in Nepal.

India. The political force for meaningful change and goals for social mobility is lack in Nepal (Folmer, 2010). In Europe and USA also has applied the reservation for deprived black people and indigenous minorities. Dalits activists has demanded reservation in state, government jobs, education, land and shelter, community trade and production for marginalized Dalits (Padmalal, 2002). We should not follow the mode of reservation blindly from India (Ahuti, 2010). Reservation is not generosity of the state, but it is the right of the Dalits. In the new constitution, the rights of Dalits should be stated separately with justice. Ahuti has proposed for the non-territorial province for the Dalits (Ahuti, 2010).

Steven Folmer has argued the inclusion of Dalits might be possible through the political initiation in national and local political process opening economic and educational opportunities and equalizing the social status. It is positive sign that new generations of Dalits have entered the process of advocating greater freedom, access and respect in public discourse. They should be well-organized and effective (Folmer, 2010). Folmer has attracted the attention of academics to study the micro-level politics of identity and anonymity of Dalits which seems more logical. Not in the macro level, micro level activities should be conducted in the Dalits community.

In the theoretical level, Amartya Sen has discussed about the democracy and political participation to end the social exclusion in the policy level (Sen, 2000). Economic incentives only could not play positive role for the inclusion of deprived groups. Political freedom and participation is needed with economic incentives. Transparency and protective security should be ensured. Democratic rights and shared opportunities of political participation can be important to raise voice against social exclusion. These concepts of Amartya Sen might be applicable in the emancipation of Dalits of Nepal. He has given the example of Southeast Asian countries which reduces the social education by giving emphasis on the education, generating opportunities of participating in market economy and increasing political participation which are very applicable in the context of Dalits in Nepal.

9. Conclusion

The social exclusion of Dalits is complex and multidimensional and it is rooted deeply in the Nepalese society. The bond between the society and Dalits is ruptured severely and it is very difficult for them

to come out of the long historical deprivation. The identity movement of Dalits is moving in the slow pace as they are scattered all over the Nepal and difficult to be united. The political involvement of Dalits is very low than other groups of Nepal. The poverty generated by the exclusion is very intense within Dalit community. The exclusion of Dalits does not match up with western exclusion and exclusion of ethnic groups and Madhesi of Nepal. The exclusion of Dalits is exclusively different. The exclusion of Dalits is based on caste which is created by Hindu religion by the society. It is social rather than economic and the exclusion of Dalits plays both constitutive and instrumental role to drive them into chronic poverty as well as capability deprivation. They are facing difficulties to raise demand about their inclusion in the state restructuration process of Nepal. Many intellectual persons as well as the major political parties and state are confused on the issue of Dalits which still makes the condition of Dalits more pathetic. Dalits could again get frog like in the game 'macha, macha, machaaaaaaaaa-byaguta !' (Fish, fish, fish, fishhhhhh- frog !), similar as discussed by Steven Folmer.

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