

Dalits and their Participation in National and Local Governance

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1.0 Introduction

The Dalits have been discriminated on the basis of caste and untouchability mostly in matter related to food and drink on the one hand and prohibition of entry into houses, temples and other public places on the other. Such caste-based discrimination against the Dalits is continuing for generations together. By tradition, those who are treated as impure and whose food and water are not accepted are called *pani na chalne jaat* or the Dalits. Food and water offered by the *pani na chalne jaat* is regarded as impure by the *pani chalne jaat*. All possible efforts are made that the *pani na chalne jaat* do not come in physical touch with the so-called *pani-chalne-jaat*. One has to take bath and sprinkle water if one belonging to *pani chalne jaat* is touched with the body of someone from *pani na chalne jaat*. In actual practice, however, there is no such rigorous rule to sprinkle water to become pure during the physical touch with the Dalits, except in the case of Doom or Halkhor caste of people.

The central theme of the traditional caste system is based on the concepts of 'purity' and 'impurity' reflecting the rank of a caste in local hierarchy and other walks of life. By tradition, the women are more particular about purity-impurity than the men and it is on this ground that they are called the 'custodians of tradition'. The kitchen serves as the heart of this system. Food, in fact, occupies a pivotal stand in the domestic ritual, which varies from caste to caste. It is solely within the domain of the women to decide who eats what, where and when.

It will be wrong to think that the question of 'purity-impurity' is confined to merely food and water. Sex is equally governed by this consideration. Man or woman is not expected to indulge in sexual activities with other caste. Indulgence in such activities is treated to be a violation of social rule. The *Panchayat* or council functioning as quasi-judicial institution punishes such offenders of social law. In this respect, the *Panchas* govern both the internal and external relations of a caste and determine the nature and magnitude of punishment for offenders of social law. Usually, the offences dealt with by the *Panchas* include issues like eating, drinking and sexual activity with caste groups forbidden by the society, refusing to accept wife, refusal to meet the promise during the marriage, etc.

In order to avoid sexual activity outside one's own caste, the marriage used to be arranged between the baby bride and baby groom. Usually such marriage used to be arranged before the puberty of the baby bride. It was after several years of the marriage and puberty that the bride used to go to her husband's house during the second marriage called '*gauna*.' Many of the bride or groom did not even know whom she or he married. Though over the years the marriageable age between the girl and boy has increased in all the castes, the traditional practice of marriage between 'baby bride' and 'baby groom' is not very uncommon, particularly among the Dalit caste groups in the Terai.

The modern education has brought certain change in the attitude of the common mass of the population towards the Dalits. Yet the impact of such change is least

visualised mainly in the rural areas where the majority of the population (90 per cent) live. Many of the Dalits are also discriminated in the urban areas. It is estimated that as much as 90 per cent of the Dalits are victims of untouchability. The Dalit women are doubly exploited. Since most of the males from the Dalit community spend substantial portions of their income on alcohol, smoking and gambling, this is a burden on the women folk.

The Dalits are also victims of discrimination as they are treated as descendents of the *Sudras* i.e. the lowermost layer of the Hindu *varna* system based on *Brahmin*, *Kshetri*, *Vaishya* and *Sudras* categories. But in reality there is hardly any historical fact to support the proposition that the Dalits are descendents of the *Sudras*.

In the initial Vedic period, there was hardly any concept of 'untouchability' between one *varna* with the other. In regard to untouchability, the noted enlightened master Swami Vivekanand used to say quite frequently that the so called *don't touchism* is a form of mental disease and the more he grew older the more he was convinced about this truth. Therefore, to get rid of this problem he often suggested that the Hindu ethos should be guided by *Atmavat Sarvabhuteshu* i.e. looking upon all beings as our own self.

During the evolution of the Hindu society, however, the *four* *varnas* were divided into castes (large-scale endogamous descent groups) based mainly on the division of labor. Certain castes were formed because of marriage/sexual relations called *anulom*, *bilom* and *pratilom*. If the upper caste man married the lower caste woman, this was the case of *anulom*. In *bilom*, the upper caste woman married lower caste man. And in *pratilom*, one of these two groups married each other. Because of some of these developments in the society, a large number of castes were formed both among the Dalit and non-Dalit castes people.

However, it is a matter of shame that when an effort is being made at certain level to remove caste-based discrimination and untouchability, there exist all such inhuman relations among the Dalit castes themselves. For example, in the Terai region of Nepal a *Chamar* thinks himself superior to *Musahar* or *Dusadh* and *vice versa*. Even a *Dom/Halkhor* lying at the bottom in Hindu caste hierarchy treats himself superior to *Tatama*, *Khatwe* and *Chamar*. People of one caste hardly share food with the other. Similarly, the people of one caste do not marry with the other. Thus, both in the matter of food and sex, each caste of Dalit people think themselves superior to the others.

In Nepal, it was unfortunate that the *Muluki Ain* (Civil Code) of 1853 demarcated the castes into two groups - 'touchables' and 'untouchables'. Derogatory words were used for the Dalits like '*bada*' and '*chhota*' even in the *Naya Muluki Ain* (New Civil Code) of 1963. But it stated that legally every citizen is equal irrespective of caste, creed and sex. Often the Hindus get beaten with due to this

caste factor. Most of the Westerners are shocked at this formal system of untouchability, which is more caste-based rather than racial in character.

However, the European society at some point of time was not much different from the caste-based society that Nepal inherits. Until today the European society is not free from the landed elite and also royalty, apart from such class system as merchants, artisans and peasants. The guild legacy of artisans in the West is reflected through surnames like Smith, the metal worker. Industrialization and public education changed this class system in the West but the residue is not altogether removed. In Nepalese society too, the caste-based discrimination is changing with the fast growth in communication and also due to education and urbanization.

Many of the Nepalese, including Dalits, are unaware of the magnitude of discrimination in the West. In USA, the Mecca of modern world, hundreds of thousands of people are forced to live destitute and homeless on city streets, perhaps more degraded life than even the so-called untouchables in Nepal. Black Americans are destined to receive harsher sentences than the white Americans for the same crime! A large number of Native American Indians live at the bottom of society, destitute or even alcoholic on barren Indian reservations (Hinduism Today, April/May/June 2004). But this does not mean that the state and the stakeholders should not do something to end caste discrimination, though no country in the world is free from racial and some kind of caste-based discrimination. Solution of the caste-related discrimination has to be sought within the given social milieu.

2.0 Sanskritization Gaining Ground

Interestingly, certain Dalit castes people have tried to emulate the customs and traditions of the upper caste people under the process of 'Sanskritization.' They have started wearing sacred thread as used by the upper cast *Brahmins* or *Kshatriyas*. There are signs where the upward mobility among the Dalits is not discarded. It has been found that the untouchable castes people like *Sudi*, *Teli* and *Kalwar* in the Terai are not so much taken as untouchables as they have demonstrated their strength through better education and improving their economic and political conditions. The *Chamar* castes of people are also trying to imitate the upper caste Hindus in their bid to improve their social and economic condition (Box 1). Many Dalits have launched movement to enter into temples, including that of Pashupatinath temple, in their bid to raise the status of their caste.

Box 1

Upward Mobility among Terai Dalits

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There is certain upward mobility in caste system. For example, the *Sudi*, *Teli* and *Kalwar* – three main business classes people - in the Terai used to be treated as untouchables. Over the years, they have fared well economically, received better education and demonstrated their unity during the elections. As a result, they are least regarded as untouchables. This creates an impression that the upward mobility of a caste is possible provided the people fare well in education, economic and political arena.

Encouragingly, certain Dalits have been able to improve their socio-economic conditions by engaging in agricultural activities, though on a marginal scale. In the project area of CARE Nepal in Bharatpur VDC of Mahottari district, the Chamar caste of people, who by tradition work as scavenger and engage themselves in skin tanning, grew vegetables for marketing purpose. Similarly, these people gave up eating the meat – whether of fresh or of dead animals. By tradition, these people were used to taking meat from the dead animals.

The *Chamar* caste of people in Mirchaiya VDC of Siraha district also gave up eating meat. In order to follow vegetarianism strictly, these people use '*kanthi*' made of up sacred *Tulsi* plant. A baby is given '*kanthi*' around his/her neck on the sixth day of his/her birth so that he/she does not take meat throughout his/her life.

3.0 Major Dalit Castes

A number of the Dalit castes exist in Nepal. In the hills, the major Dalit castes are Kami, Damai, Sarki, Badi and Gaine. On the other hand, the major Terai Dalit castes include Dom, Halkhor, Dusadh, Halkhor, Chamar, Tatma, Khatwe, Musahar and Bantar. The National Dalit Commission has identified the following 22 major castes in the Dalit category of which 5 castes exist in the hills and the remaining 17 in the Terai.

Dalit Castes of Hill Origin

1. Gandharb (Gaine)
2. Pariyar (Damai, Darji, Suchikar, Nagarchi, Dholi, Huduke)
3. Badi
4. Vishwokarma (Kami, Lohar, Sunar, Oda, Chunara, Parki, Tamata)
5. Sarki (Mijar, Charmkar, Bhool)

Dalit Castes of Terai Origin

6. Kalar
7. Kakihaya
8. Kori
9. Khatik
10. Khatwe (Mandal, Khang)
11. Chamar (Ram, Mochi, Harijan, Rabidas)
12. Chidimar
13. Dom (Marik)
14. Tatma (Tanti, Das)
15. Dusadh (Paswan, Hajra)
16. Dhobi (Rajak)
17. Pattharkatta
18. Pasi
19. Bantar
20. Musahar
21. Mestar (Halkhor)
22. Sarbhang (Sarbariya)

4.0 Dalit Population

As per the Census Report 2001, Nepal's total population is found to be 23,151,423 of which the Dalit population as a whole is 3,030,067 i.e. 13.08 per cent (table 1). Of the total population of the Dalits, the share of Terai Dalits is 36.17 per cent against the hill Dalits of 58.11 per cent. However, Dalit activists in Nepal believe that their number both in the hills and in the Terai is under enumerated. They claim that their share in Nepal's total population is 20 per cent and not 13.08 per cent as the government statistics reveal.

It is evident from the table 1 that among the Terai Dalits the number of female Dalits (532,984) is less as compared to the male Dalits (563,017). On the contrary, among the hill Dalits the number of female Dalits (908,378) is more than the male Dalits (852,287). Stopping giving births to the girl child after the requirement of the boy child is met, growing mortality of the girls/women due to carelessness, etc. are some of the major factors responsible for the decline of female population among the Terai Dalits,

It also needs to be mentioned that the *Lohar* caste of people constituting 2.73 per cent of Dalit's total population (as given in table 1) do not come in Dalit category as they belong to *pani chalne jat* in Terai, though they are equivalent of Kami caste people in the hills. *Lohar* in the Terai has the same function as Kami in the hills but his/her status in the society and social recognition is entirely different. It is also important to mention here that the Khadgi (Kasai), Kapali (Kusule), Kuche, Dhobi caste people from among the Newar Dalits made petition to the

National Dalit Commission for excluding their names in the Dalit category (National Dalit Commission, 2060). Originally, the Ministry of Local Development (MoLD) had included the names of Newar caste people like Chyame, Kasai, Kuche, Kusule and Pode in the Dalit category. The population of the Newar Dalits is not reflected in the table as their names have now been excluded from the Dalit category by the National Dalit Commission.

Table No. 1: Dalit Population in Nepal

Caste	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
A. Hill Dalit	852,287	908,378	1,760,665	58.11
1. Kami	432,937	463,017	895,954	29.57
2. Damai	188,329	201,976	390,305	12.88
3. Sarki	153,681	165,308	318,989	10.53
4. Badi	2,152	2,290	4,442	0.15
5. Gaine	2,857	3,030	5,887	0.19
6. Sunar	72,331	72,757	145,088	4.79
7. Chunar	NA	NA	NA	NA
B. Terai Dalit	563,017	532,984	1,096,001	36.17
8. Bantar	18,139	17,700	35,839	1.18
9. Chamar	138,878	130,783	269,661	8.90
10. Chidimar	6,516	5,780	12,296	0.41
11. Santhal/Sattar	21,515	21,183	42,698	1.41
12. Doom	4,631	4,300	8,931	0.29
13. Dusadh/Paswan	82,173	76,352	158,525	5.23
14. Dhobi	38,350	35,063	73,413	2.42
15. Halkhor	1,848	1,773	3,621	0.12
16. Jhangar	20,892	20,872	41,764	1.38
17. Khatwe	38,643	36,329	74,972	2.47
18. Lohar	42,270	40,367	82,637	2.73
19. Musahar	88,041	84,393	172,434	5.69
20. Sattar	21,515	21,183	42,698	1.41
21. Tatma	39,606	38,906	78,512	2.53
C. Newar Dalit	NA	NA	NA	NA
22. Chyame				
23. Kasai				
24. Kuche				
25. Kusule				
26. Pode				
D. Unidentified Dalit	85,063	88,338	173,401	5.72
Total	1,500,367	1,529,700	3,030,067	100

Source: Based on Census Report 2001 & http://www.hurights.or.jp/asia-pacific/no_30/04.htm

5.0 Basic Indicators of Social Life

Studies show that the Dalits are the most disadvantaged and poorest community in Nepal. Most of the Dalits in the Terai are landless and their share in agricultural land is only 1 per cent (Jha, 1998). Only the lucky ones among the Dalits in the Terai have land, though the situation is comparatively better in the hills.

Literacy rate among the Dalits is as low as 10.7% whereas at the national level literacy rate is over 50%. In certain Dalit communities such as among Musahars the literacy rate is 4% till today. Literacy rate among the Dalit women is as low as 3.2% (Nepali, 2000). The Dalit children find it difficult to receive education in the schools partly due to the social discrimination and partly for their inability to pay for tuition fee and textbooks.

Life expectancy of the Dalits is 42 years against 58 years at the national level (Nepali, 2000). About 50 per cent of the Dalit children are the victims of malnutrition. Trafficking among the Dalit women is a matter of concern. The status of the Badi community is most deplorable because they are regarded as prostitute. Gynecological disease such as prolapsed uterus is most common among the Dalit women. Birth control and spacing is still unknown to them. Many of them become pregnant each year.

In most of the villages, the Dalit castes of people are made to live in separate tole (counte) and thus a barrier is created in communication between the so-called Dalit and non-Dalit caste people. They have been marginalized in the administrative and political structure of the country, including in the Royal Nepal Army and the police. They do not have any place in judiciary and in decision making process. There is hardly any representation of the Dalits in the lower house of the parliament called House of Representatives. In the Upper House called National Assembly various political parties and the king nominated only 3 Dalits. Representation of the Dalit women in the political parties and administrative structure is almost non-existent.

6.0 Poverty among Dalits

The Dalits are the victims of the feudal political structure where they prove 'voiceless' and 'choiceless'. Unequal distribution of resources and exploitative relations of production have compelled most of the Dalits to live as paupers, landless and homeless. The problem of untouchability does not allow them to improve their economic conditions as many of them are not allowed to sell milk or engage themselves in tea stalls, hotels, restaurants, etc. It is also due to the inequality in caste system that the Dalits are left to engage in polluting occupations. This is so because the Chamar or Sarki is entrusted with the function of tanning of hides, removal of dead animals, scavenging and shoe-making. Similarly, the Dhobi is made to wash the clothes and the Dom/Halkhor caste of people sweeps the streets and removes the filths.

Interestingly, a woman in almost all the Dalit castes works either alone or jointly with her husband even outside their house. The wife of the Chamar called *Chamain* performs the work of mid-wife, removes the filths during the birth of the child and engages herself in oil-massage of the mothers. The wife of the Dhobi also washes clothes along with her husband. A woman from Dom/Halkhor sweeps like her husband. Basket-weaving by the Dom caste of people is a joint activity of man and woman.

In the existing agrarian structure of the nation, what the Dalit caste people receive in kind annually from their patrons against their services is hardly enough to fill the belly. The 'Hindu equilibrium' is maintained by perpetuating 'patron-client' relationship in which each group has a set of rights and obligations to fulfill. The service providers have a right to demand for the work from the patron. At the same time, they have certain duties to perform during rituals like marriage ceremony or funerals at the house of the patron. But there is a decline in this system as well.

A study conducted by Foundation for Economic and Social Change (FESC) in Saptari district of Nepal shows that 78 per cent of the Dalits are in extremely difficult situation for the lack of adequate land for housing, food, education, employment, ability and capacity to spend on treatment. The study result shows that the Dalits do not even hold 1 per cent of the agricultural land. In order to supplement the family income, the Dalit women have to work in agricultural and in various other sectors. In the rural areas, the food grain that a *Chamain* earns ranges between 10 kg. and 20 kg. per household per year which is too little to scratch a living. Of the total population below the poverty line, the majority belongs to the Dalit castes.

Nearly 80 per cent of the Dalits has to live below the poverty line. Per capita income of the Dalits is US \$ 39.6 against the per capita income of the nation of US \$ 210 (Nepali, 2003).

The market forces were promoted in the name of liberalization and privatization haphazardly, which adversely affected the interest of the Dalits. In the name of liberalization, imports of goods from outside were promoted which displaced the traditional occupation of the Dalits. For example, the import of shoes from different countries in the recent years weakened the traditional shoe-making jobs of the Chamars/Sarkis. Privatization of Bansbari Leather and Shoe Factory gave a death-blow to many of the Sarkis who were working in the factory. Similarly, the proliferation of plastic industries and the import of such items from outside have given stiff competition of the Dom caste of people in the Terai who are skilled in making artistic basketry items from bamboo. These people find it difficult to compete with attractive and cheaper plastic items. As liberalization and privatization are part of the global regime, it is not possible to live under the protectionist regime and that too when Nepal has become full-fledged member of

World Trade Organization (WTO). It would, however, be wrong to say that the market forces operating in the national economy had all negative impact. With the development of markets in both urban and rural areas, the caste-based discrimination has declined, particularly in hotels, restaurants, teashops, factories etc. In one recent study conducted by Action Aid Nepal, it is found that in all the eight study areas many Dalit respondents opined that the forced labor system was non-existent among them (Bhattachan and et al, 2003). An improvement in the life of the Dalits on account of the growth in market forces is presented in Box 2:

Box 2

Market Forces Reducing Untouchability

Extreme forms of atrocities against Dalits such as murder, burning houses, abduction, etc. are not found in any study area...Market has, in general, helped to reduce caste-based untouchability as most of the hotels and restaurants do not make caste-based discrimination against Dalits in eating foods and drinking beverages, including tea...Overall literacy rate is 72.5% of the total respondents interviewee.

Source: Excerpts from Existing Practices of Caste-Based Untouchability in Nepal and Strategy for a Campaign for its Elimination

7.0 Fourth World of the Fourth World

The Dalits of the Terai like the Dusadh, Tatma, Khatwe, Musahar, Dhobi, Chamar, Dom and Halkhor are most backward as compared to the hill-based Dalits such as the Kami, Damai and Sarki. All the Dalit organisations at the national level are the exclusive monopoly of the hill Dalits. Even among the hill Dalits, the Kamis have more control over these organizations than the other castes like Damai, Sarki, or Gaine. The Terai-based Dalits are either non-existent or their representation is only nominal in most of the Dalit organisations like *Dalit Mukti Samaj*, Dalit Welfare Association, Faminist Dalit Organisation, *Rastriya Dalit Kalyan Samaj Sangh* and Nepal Dalit Sangh. They are also not properly represented in such government and autonomous bodies as *Upedshit Utpidit Dalitbarg Utthan Bikas Samiti* and National Dalit Commission. Even if one goes to the Dalit Hostel at Swambhu in Kathmandu, it is difficult to get any Dalit student from the Terai origin. Scholarships given to the Dalits in the name of the Dalits hardly reach the Terai Dalits. The Terai Dalits are so backward that they do not even know how they might come in par with the rest of the Dalits and as such they are called the 'fourth world' even among the 'fourth world' or 'Dalits' of the 'Dalits.'

8.0 Violence against Dalit Women

As in many other countries, the violence against women is rampant in Nepal too. It is assumed that 95% of the women of the country are victims of one or the other

form of social, economic, political or domestic violence. However, it is accepted that the violence against Dalit women is more serious in Terai than in other parts of the country. The Dalit women of the Terai are triply oppressed by the patriarchal social system, Dalit males and high caste people. Cases of mental and physical torture of these women are common. As the Dalit women of the Terai are weak socially, economically, politically or even educationally, they are not in a position to safeguard their interest. Until today, education among these Dalit women is too low. Drop-out rates among the school-going Dalit girls is highest. Literacy rate among the Musahar, Chamar or Dom women is even negligible. Untouchability is practiced in several government or NGO-supported schools, which inhibit children from receiving education. Also almost nil is the representation of these women in administrative and political bodies of the country. By and large, these women are voiceless and choiceless but there is hardly any serious effort from the governmental or non-governmental sector to address their problems.

9.0 Local and National Governance

In Nepal, there are altogether 3,915 Village Development Committees (VDCs), 58 municipalities and 75 District Development Committees (DDCs). Representation of women is required in each ward committees of the VDCs/municipalities as per the provision of granting minimum 5% tickets to the women candidates for these bodies. Accordingly, certain Dalit women both in the hills and in the Terai have been elected in the ward committees of VDCs/municipalities. Yet none of the Dalit women could be elected Chairperson or Deputy-Chairperson in any of the VDCs/municipalities in the country. In the DDCs, only a handful of Dalit males and that too from the hill origin were able to win the elections. Prakash A. Raj finds that in 1994 elections of VDCs/municipality/DDC 963 women were able to win elections; of which the share of Dalit women was as low as 6%! In Kathmandu district, the share of Dalit women was even less i.e. 2% only among the 1,388 women elected at local levels (Raj, 2003). Though no exact figure is available of the Terai Dalit women winning elections at the local level, it could safely be concluded that their representation in the local bodies could be even worse.

Following the restoration of democracy in 1990, there have been three general elections of the Lower House of Parliament called House of Representatives at the national level. But none of the Dalits had an opportunity to win the elections in this 205-member lower house of parliament. It was only in the 60-member Upper House called National Assembly that altogether 14 persons from among hill Dalits were nominated at different periods of time (Raj, 2003). As per the constitutional provision, 35 persons are elected to the National Assembly by the House of Representatives on the basis of proportional representation. Of the five national political parties, only Nepal Sadbhavana Party provided ticket to a Dalit in the parliamentary elections in 1994 but the candidate could not win the elections. The male Dalits had, thus, representation in the National Assembly but

not in the House of Representatives. Representation, however, of the Terai Dalits in the National Assembly was rare. It was an exception that Ram Prit Paswan was peaked up as Vice-Chairman of National Assembly by CPN-UML from among the Terai Dalits.

There is a provision in the Nepalese constitution 1990 that the political parties should allocate minimum 5% tickets to the women candidates in the elections of House of Representatives. But the political parties in general allocated such tickets to the women candidates of so-called higher castes and not to the Dalit caste women. Interestingly, even most of the so-called higher caste women were given tickets in such constituencies where the prospect of the parties to win the elections was very thin. The constitutional provision was important in the sense that the number of women winning elections of the House of Representatives from different political parties nearly doubled from 7 in 1994 to 12 in 1999 (Raj, 2003). But none from among the Dalit women had any representation in either House of Parliament.

Table 2 presents that of Nepal's 265 positions in parliament the share of the Dalit is only 4 against 159 of Bahun/Chhetri, 46 of Madheshi, 36 of Indigenous Groups, and 20 of Newar. Similarly, of the 97 positions in the field of educational leadership the share of the Dalits is only 1 against 75 of Bahun/Chhetri, 11 of Newar, 7 of Madheshi, 2 of Indigenous Groups and the remaining 1 of others. In most of the areas including in courts, constitutional bodies, cabinet, public administration and political parties leadership, the representation of the Dalits is nil. However, it appears that there are certain flaws in the collection of facts in the table. For example, the population of the Dalits is given as 8.70% in Nepal's total population, which is gross under enumeration of the Dalit population. Similarly, the table treats Dalits as different from Madheshi and thus it overlooks the facts that among the Madheshi there is substantial population of the Dalits. But the table at least tries to present that the share of the Dalits in the governance is not only less but it is deplorable.

Table 2 Integrated National Index of Governance, 1999

Institutions	Bahun- Chhetri (Khas)	Indigenous (Mongol/ Kirat)	Madhishi*	Dalit	Newar *	Others	Total
Courts	181	4	18	0	32	0	235
Constitutional Bodies	14	2	3	0	6	0	25
Cabinet	20	4	5	0	3	0	32
Parliament	159	36	46	4	20	0	265
Public Administration	190	3	9	0	43	0	245
Political parties leadership	97	25	26	0	18	0	166
DDC chair/vice chair, mayor/deputy mayor of municipality	106	23	31	0	30	0	190
Industry/Commerce leadership	7	0	15	0	20	0	42
Educational leadership	75	2	7	1	11	1	97
Culture: academic & professional leadership	85	6	0	0	22	0	113
Science & technology	36	2	6	0	18	0	62
Civil society leadership	41	1	4	0	8	0	54
Total	1,011	108	170	5	231	1	1,526
Percentage	66.25	7.08	11.14	0.33	15.14	0.07	100
Population %	31.60	22.20	30.90	8.70	5.60	.10	100
Difference %	+34.65	-15.1	-19.76	-8.37	+9.64	-0.03	-

Source: Nepalko Jatiya Prashna & also Human Rights in Nepal: A Status Report 2003

10.0 Efforts to Raise Dalit's Share in Governance

It is only around the last quarter of the 20th century that the world started changing its course in favour of the weak, old, women, poor, and downtrodden sections of the society.

This wind of change also made its impact in Nepal and accordingly on January 30, 1970, the country endorsed UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and implemented it on March 1, 1971. Besides, Nepal also signed United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1999), Convention on Political Rights of Women (1966), etc. To correct some of the mistakes committed in the past, the Nepalese Constitution (1990) not only treated the Dalits as equals but it also held discrimination on the basis of caste as punishable by law. The welfare of the Dalits turned to be a priority issue, which attracted the attention of the planners, policy makers, government, NGOs, INGOs and the donor agencies.

It was for the first time in the Nepalese history that the democratically elected government in the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) accepted that the downtrodden sections of the society are subject to neglect by the higher caste groups despite their occupational ability, knowledge and skill to raise the country's GDP.

Therefore, a number of programmes were initiated in the Ninth Plan to implement the policies aimed at the upliftment of Dalits related to education, health, sanitation, training and capability enhancement, employment, etc. This, *inter alia*, included the provision of the formation of "Independent Downtrodden and Oppressed Community Council" with the objective of co-ordinating policies and supervising programmes targeted to the Dalits. Of the total members of this organisation, 75 per cent were expected to be elected from district level with tenure of minimum 3 years. It was also envisaged that the district-level committee for the Dalits would be formed in 75 districts. However, this Councils is not yet formed.

The establishment of *Upekshit Utpidit Dalitbarg Utthan Bikas Samiti* (Committee) 2054 Vikram Sambat (1996-97) under the chairmanship of the Minister of Local Development under the Vikas Ain 2013 was the major step for developing plans and programmes for the upliftment of the Dalit communities by launching activities related to income generation, employment promotion and skill development. for the overall improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the Dalits. Later on, the National Dalit Commission was formed by the Sher Bahadur Deuba government in 2002 as an autonomous body to make policies and monitor activities launched by various organizations for the upliftment of Dalits in Nepal.

In the Tenth Plan, provision was made for initiating more of programmes in education, health and economic sectors for the empowerment of Dalit community (HMG/N, 2059). Focus is given in this Plan for the empowerment of the Dalits by adopting measures related to an increase in Dalit's access to agriculture technologies and products, launching of food for work programme, conducting training for women's groups from ultra-poor Dalits, developing small rural industries for Dalits, reservation of minimum 25% of the total participants' seats for Dalits in rural trainings, provision of scholarships for poor and bright Dalit children, loan assistance to Dalits in seeking jobs abroad, awareness creation for the Dalits in health, sanitation and hygiene sectors, and financial support to Dalits through NGOs for poverty alleviation. Additionally, it is also envisaged that the school curriculum should be redesigned to create awareness in the society to give respectful place to the Dalits in the national and social life (Human Rights in Nepal, 2003).

Recently, a high level government body called Committee to Resolve the Problem of Reservation (CRPR) was formed under the chairmanship of Finance Minister a few months back to provide reservation to 20% of the women, 15% of the *Janjatis* and 10% Dalits. Sometimes back in his budget speech of 2003-4, the Finance Minister had also promised that income-generating and employment opportunities would be provided to women, Dalits and the oppressed and the people of backward community (HMG/N, 2003).

In order to encourage economically deprived and Dalit communities in foreign employment, the HMG/N under the Government-to-Government Agreement had made an arrangement to give priority in employment opportunities to Dalits in which a provision is made to deduct a fixed portion from the salary of the workers to pay back the employment agency.

To increase the participation of the Dalit students, including the girls, from Dalit and ethnic communities, a policy is adopted to make additional grant to the community schools run on government grant in pursuance of affirmative action. Scholarships are provided to the all the children from Dalit families admitted in primary schools for which an amount of Rs. 81.7 is earmarked. All the colleges and universities depending on the government grant are expected to provide compulsory admission to minimum 20% girls, 10% Dalits and 15% from ethnic communities in each admission session. Even in the matter of scholarship, the government is required to make similar arrangement.

During the third round of talks with the Maoist in August 2003, the government had proposed that reservation for the Dalits could be made in education, health, administration and employment opportunities, apart from the political bodies. It was also proposed that reservation to the extent of 25% could be given to the women in all representative institutions and also in education, health, and administrative structure.

11.0 Conclusion

The problem of the Dalits should be treated as a national problem and not the problem of any specific community. Such problem could be resolved in an integrated manner by focussing on their education, health, income, political participation and other core issues. Massive awareness and advocacy programmes should be launched to sensitize their problems. Pressure groups need to be formed to see that affirmative action is taken and the anti-discriminatory laws are effectively enforced. The leadership development training should be provided to the different groups of the Dalits, particularly to the girls and women. Considering the miserable conditions of the Dalit community, urgent attention needs to be paid by all the stakeholders, including the Government, NGOs, INGOs, donor and multilateral institutions to contribute significantly for the upliftment of this community. The following recommendations have been made to reduce the socio-economic miseries of the Dalits:

Special Programme for the Terai Dalits

Categorization should be made among the Dalits considering their socio-economic status i.e. 'Dalits' and 'Backward Terai Dalits.'. All possible efforts need to be made by the planners, policy makers, government, NGOs, INGOs and donor agencies to see that special programmes are launched to develop leadership among the Terai Dalits.

Reservation

The government should implement its reservation policy effectively and give due share to the Dalits as per its commitment in education, employment and other sectors. `Dalits' even among the Dalits should get priority in the reservation.

Skill Development Programmes

The traditional skills of the Dalits in all such fields as making *khukuris*, utensils, ornaments, agricultural tools, woodcarvings, shoes, basketry items, etc. need to be improved and utilized in the larger interest of the nation for which Technical Training Institute could be established in various parts of the country.

Marketing of Products

Since the Dalits are skilled enough in making *khukuris*, utensils, ornaments, agricultural tools, woodcarvings, shoes, basketry items, etc. and certain Dalits are even experts in livestock farming, all possible efforts should be made by the concerned agencies to provide them market in some of these products, including the supply of milk.

Integrated Approach for Development

Since the backwardness of the Dalit communities is the outcome of exploitative socio-economic and political structure of the country, it is the primary duty of the State to pump adequate resources for their development in education, health, economic and employment sectors. Legal literacy programmes could be launched in various parts of the country to create awareness among them about their rights and duties. All possible efforts should be directed to bring the Dalits in the national mainstream by giving them due representation in the administrative, political and diplomatic assignments. Care should be taken to see that they get due place in the decision-making process in all these sectors.

Removal of Derogatory Words

The Government should take immediate action for the enactment of laws and bi-laws as per the letter and spirit of the Constitution of 1990 with a view to eliminating the caste system and to punish those who indulge in caste discrimination in public places and in the utilization of public services. Derogatory words used for the Dalits in the Muluki Ain need to be removed without any further delay.

Involvement of Political Parties

The discrimination against the Dalits might also be reduced if the political parties make it a pre-condition that only those people will be entitled to become their members who oppose discrimination on the basis of caste.

Land to the Landless Dalits

Access to the means of production is importantly associated with both status and empowerment. In the Nepali context, land is the most important means of production. The State should determine the magnitude of landless among the Dalit people and it should also determine the amount of land under its control. The surplus land should be distributed to the landless Dalits.

Governance

The stakeholders should take special measures to correct the imbalance and raise the Dalit participation in the governance both at the national and local levels.

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