

Democratization and Development in Nepal

✉ Ram Prasad Aryal, PhD

Abstract

Democratization and development are intrinsically related to each other. There is very little literature on the relationship between democratization and development, especially after major political movements in Nepal. Therefore, this paper focuses on impacts of democratization on development activities. This is based on descriptive analysis of the Nepalese censuses after 1950s, periodical demographic surveys and a review of official documents. Democratization in Nepal has resulted in changes in Nepalese society, especially in the areas of education, health, transportation, practices in elimination of caste differentials, and migration and remittance inflow into the country. This paper is expected to have importance for policy implications from holistic perspectives.

Keywords: Democratization; Development; Socio-cultural Transformation

Introduction

Nepal has been proceeding from an autocracy socio-political structure to democratization and a republic with a multi-party system. Although the political system has changed time and again, development activities have been moving ahead with time, more or less in pace with the country's contextual background. The country's political situation, autocracy, democratization and development are instinctively interrelated with each other (Bista, 1991). With the commencement of development plans and policies after the introduction of democracy in 1951 in Nepal, development activities such as formal and informal educational programmes, resettlement programme, expansion of transportation, agricultural development, expansion of modern communication, elimination of the practice of caste hierarchy, priority on inter-caste marriage and

reproductive health with integrative approach are moving ahead gradually (Ministry of Health and Population, 2011; Lawoti, 2008; KC, 2003; Bista, 1991). Therefore, an attempt has been made to explain in a brief a process of democratization and development activities since the 1950s onwards.

Nepal has been moving from the autocratic regime of the Rana family to democratization since 1951. Before 1951, the Rana family ruled the country in the autocratic manner without giving human rights to the general population, even including reading and writing (Fisher, 1997; Borgstrom, 1980). At that time, education opportunities were limited to the Rana family members and their close elite social members. Although there was a king of the state, the king was also within the boundary of the Rana regime and had no opportunity to interact with the general population living in the different parts of the country. The Rana families and elite classes were living very sophisticated lives having many servants in their palace, indicating a vast difference in the life styles between the rich and the poor people (Liechty, 2003). The monarchy did not figure prominently in the beginning as the Ranas were the symbol of Nepal's feudalism, whereas the Shah kings were just nominal heads of the state (Borgstrom, 1980). Realising the tyranny of this despotic regime, the then king Tribhuvan and the Nepalese people overthrew the Rana regime of more than 100 years and declared democracy in the country in 1951. With the dawn of democracy in Nepal, the then government introduced a five year development programme (1956-61) in 1956 and addressed major development plans and policies in every periodic plan, basically education, health, agriculture, resettlement programmes, transportation facilities and such other necessary development programmes (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1987). So far the 10th development plan (2002-2007) was completed and interim development plans are in place after constituent assembly election of 2008 in the country (Ministry of Health and Population, 2011).

After democracy was introduced in 1951, it took a long time to stabilise the government and there were contentions among different parties. Realizing the political scenario the then king introduced Panchayat (a partyless political system) system.

The development activities and subsequent development plans gradually moved country ahead. The king promulgated the 1962 Constitution under which the country was divided into zones, districts and villages Panchayat with a view to launch development activities proportionately in all areas of the country (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1987). The king also promulgated the National Code Act in 1964 making all castes and tribes equal and dictating that there must not be discrimination in the name of any caste or tribe. In favour of the poor people, the Land Reformation Act was declared by the king in which the one who has been cultivating others' land for a long period of time, be able to claim one-fourth portion of the total land. Later, the proportion of cultivated land reached fifty per cent for people who have been cultivating land for a long period of time after the introduction of the multiparty system in the country (Community Self-Reliance Centre, 2009). Nevertheless, democratic process seems to favour the poor people, to some extent.

Although there were electoral members in the parliament (Rashtriya Panchayat) from throughout the country in the Panchayat system, a handful of people had more opportunities than the general population; and the Panchayat system could not abolish the feudal system and eliminate caste discrimination. These improvements were on paper only and could not come into practice. The Nepalese king was above the constitution. Underground political parties commenced movement against the king and the government in 1990 to throw out the Panchayat system for multi-party democracy. Finally, king Birendra declared multi-party system with the king under the constitution of Nepal in 1990. After the introduction of the multi-party system in the country, development activities were more active at village levels in comparison to the previous period. However, the old feudal traditional system, especially the gap between poor and rich and caste discrimination, could not be totally abolished. That is why the Maoist movement paved the way to raise marginalized people's voices and strengthen the social movement for change during the period 1996-2006 (United Nations, 2012). The Maoist movement started from western regions of Nepal where many marginalised people live. A significant proportion of the excluded and marginalized population participated in the Maoist

led insurgency with high hope to change the hierarchical society and end social discrimination. Eventually, many parties came to the same conclusion as the Maoist party to overthrow the king and the Maoist party also agreed with the multiparty democracy and republic although the earlier purpose of the Maoist party was to bring socialism into the country. Almost all parties in Nepal commenced the second movement in 2006 (the first movement was in 1990) to overthrow the king, whose lineage had ruled the country for the last 240 years, and succeeded in their purpose of overthrowing the king from the palace and established a multiparty democracy and a republic state in Nepal. This gave the political opportunity and space for dalits (Scheduled caste) to engage in political activities. The Constituent Assembly (CA) elections in 2008 brought many dalit representatives in the Constituent Assembly and the Interim government has passed Acts in favour of females and scheduled castes. Before 2006, the proportion of females in the parliament was only about 6 per cent. After the peace process agreement of 2006, the interim government provided more rights in favour of females and lower caste people with reservation and priority seats in various sectors of development, especially in scholarship quota for education and in scheduled caste and female priority for employment.

Data Source and Method

This paper is concerned with processes of democratization together with development activities in Nepal. In the context of an absolute dearth of literature dealing with democratization and development, this is expected to provide some general links between these two processes in Nepal from 1950s onwards from the data issued by the Central Bureau of Statistics and other related institutions including e-resources. This paper is based on the descriptive analysis from a lens of democratization processes of Nepal together with development activities including reproductive health in the country as per the purpose of this paper.

Development in Nepal

As stated above the process of democratization since 1950s,

the process of development is moving ahead, more or less, with development plans and programmes in accordance with the country's geographical and political situation. An attempt has been made to provide a glimpse of development activities that are associated with democratic processes of Nepal in the following section.

Resettlement programme

The government of Nepal placed an emphasis on the resettlement programme to the lowland plain areas of Terai (Plain lowland of Nepal), from the hills and the mountains, in 1950s onwards after a successful endemic malaria eradication programme as well as clearing a dense forest in the Terai and inner Terai valleys, a region containing around one-fifth of the total land (Subedi, 1988; Gurung, 1989). The government's resettlement programme assisted the people of the hills and the mountains, who had suffered from landslides especially in the rainy season, with their new homes being much safer than their places of origin. Now Terai has fifty per cent of the total population of Nepal, according to the census 2011 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The fertile land of the Terai and lower population due to outmigration from the hills and the mountains not only increased their agricultural production per head but also provided the opportunity to think about their reproductive health and rights and to use the family planning services made available by government efforts.

Expansion of transportation

Although Nepal has the highest mountains and hills in the world together with a very steep land that has made it difficult to construct roads everywhere in the country, the government has realized the overall development of the country is not possible without connecting roads into remote areas of the country and facilitating agricultural products being sent to urban areas. That is why the Nepalese government has given priority to construction of roads up to remote rural areas. The efforts in constructing the roads are in progress and rural people are able to send their agricultural products into the cities in better ways than ever before. The process of constructing roads has also made it easier to promote health

services in the rural areas. In comparison to earlier times, rural people are able to receive information on family planning and HIV/AIDS. Of course, the expansion of the road construction in the remote rural areas has not only increased income of the rural people but also has made it much easier for them to receive information about development activities. In the lowlands of the Terai areas of Nepal, there are better transportation facilities in comparison to the hills and the mountains. After the 1990s political movement, political parties dedicated to construct and to expand roads into remote areas using slogans like 'let us make our village ourselves' and budgets are being provided directly to both village development committees and municipalities. This has given the villagers a very good impression towards development. With the expansion of roads in village areas, rural people are able to connect with their family, relatives and friends relations in urban areas and their periphery and they are getting more information about reproductive health than the previous period, although not all rural Nepalese people are receiving adequate information delivered from the central levels.

Expansion of formal and informal education

The common Nepalese people did not have the opportunity to study until 1950 while the despotic and autocratic Rana families were in power (Lawoti, 2008; Borgstrom, 1980). The overall literacy rate of the country was only around 5 per cent of the total population during the Rana regime until 1951 (Ministry of Health and Population, 2011). After the democracy in the country, Nepalese government focused on the expansion of education for all Nepali people throughout the country. Population census 2011 provides information that overall literacy rate has increased unprecedentedly and reached 66 per cent of the total population whereas the literacy percentage for males and females are 75.1 per cent and 57.4 per cent respectively (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The recent development plans have focused on informal education to eradicate illiteracy for those people who have not benefited from the opportunity of formal education in both rural and urban areas of the country. At the same time, they can have the opportunity to receive information about family planning and HIV/

AIDS as NGOs and INGOs have multiple purposes in launching informal education programmes for both young and old people and knowledge of reproductive health with Information Education and Communication (IEC) is provided to the people who join the informal education where they have opportunity to learn HIV and AIDS and the prevention measures.

Shifts in occupation

People's income and the seeking of information on family planning and reproductive health are closely interrelated as hungry people want to eat first without considering other things such as contraception and overall reproductive health. In Nepal people are more motivated towards non-agricultural occupations, which are generally far better in their income than the traditional ways of cultivating farmland. Even working in the Agricultural sectors, people use modern fertilizers and grow more products than the previous years, which has given a stunning result in their income. The increasing level of income has given people not only time but also money for transportation costs and receiving information about contraception (i.e. condoms) which helps in avoiding HIV and AIDS. In comparison to the previous period, Nepalese people are paying more attention towards reproductive health, family planning and HIV/AIDS. As a result the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) is going up, fifty per cent among currently married females of reproductive ages 15-49 years in Nepal (60 per cent in urban areas and 48 per cent in rural areas) and the average fertility rate of a couple is not far away from the replacement level, and this is much lower (1.6 children per woman) in urban areas (Ministry of Health and Population, 2012).

Expansion of modern communication

Modern means of communication provide the backbone for conveying information about reproductive health and HIV/AIDS from central to village levels. The modern technological development, especially in the field of communication and internet access, expanded not only in the urban areas but also in the rural areas at an accepted level in the recent years after the people's

movement of 1990. The 2011 census shows that around two-thirds of households have mobile phones including rural and urban areas of Nepal (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The internet access, basically in urban areas, and the increased access to the telephone and mobile phones even in rural areas, have made it easy for people to find information on prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS. They are able to find new information in such a country as Nepal where collectivism works well in updating and sharing information to other people living with HIV at least within their own circle if someone knows the latest information about HIV and AIDS. Wireless internet services in rural Nepal have been set up and interlinked with the rest of the world, for example, very remote rural areas of hill districts have now internet available with efforts of a Nepalese scholar who has studied abroad (Sein & Thapa, 2014).

Elimination of caste based hierarchy

In Nepalese traditional practice, there are four main caste groups, namely, (i) Braman (ii) Chhetry; (iii) Vaishya, from whom water is not acceptable and with whom touching on body does not require purification; and (iv) Shudra from whom water is not acceptable and with whom body touching requires purification of the one who touches the person by sprinkling water on his/her own body, including Sarki, Damai, Kami, Gaine, Sunar, Badi, Chunara, Pode etc. (Subedi, 2010; Hofer, 2004; Dahal, 2003). These distinctions categorized the communities according to the hierarchy that led to the practice of caste-based untouchability and discrimination against the scheduled caste.

After the introduction of the Panchayat system in Nepal in the early 1960s, the then king declared “all people irrespective of caste and gender are equal” amending the National Code in 1964. With an increase in the level of education in the country, educated Nepalese people realised that all people are equal and there must not be caste based discrimination in society and the country. The Maoist Movement from 1996 to 2006 helped reduced caste-based untouchability in most areas as they taught villagers about their rights and that the traditional customs are all in favour of upper caste and rich people and encouraged them to become involved in

the Maoist war for equal rights as other upper caste groups. With the peace agreement between the Maoist Party and the government of Nepal, the main focus of the development has been on lower caste people and female, bringing them into the mainstream development. The Interim constitution provided reservation in jobs for lower and scheduled caste and females in Nepal. These activities of the government have made lower caste people and females easy to involve in development activities, such as education and health, and that has made receiving information on reproductive health, and HIV AIDS easier.

Priority on inter-caste marriage

To narrow down the distinction between various castes and ethnic groups, Nepal government has recently emphasized the inter-caste marriage, providing a fund of Nepalese Rupees 100,000 as an incentive through the state fund to a couple who are married to untouchable caste's boy/girls (Sharma & Rauniyar, 2010). There is an increasing trend of inter-caste marriage in Nepal that is going to narrow down the gap between lower caste and upper caste people in every aspect of life. This effort of the government has increased an opportunity to the lower caste people to interact with upper caste people. These days love marriage is also one of the processes of getting married, especially in young generations irrespective of caste and clan. Aspirations of young generations and the government efforts are really matched to make all castes and class equal and to provide development opportunities to all people equally. The recent government efforts are really making even lower caste people to convey information on family planning and reproductive health in a better way as one can guide another easily if married between lower caste and upper caste persons.

Downward trend of feudal patronage system

In Nepal, there were various developments of the feudal patronage systems, though the purpose of the various movements in Nepal was to eliminate those forms of feudal system. With the dawn of democracy in Nepal in 1951, the foundation of the feudal patronage system became weak. The increasing number of schools

and colleges and the increasing awareness level in the general population has meant the feudal patronage system is now on a downward trend in Nepal. The Maoist war during the period 1996-2006 was directed against the feudal system and kingship system. All parties came to the same foot and the king was ousted from the palace. Accordingly, the feudal system is now being overthrown gradually, replaced by the rights of the poor and deprived caste and tribes. Consequently, many marginalized people are benefiting in terms of their livelihood and have paid attention towards development activities.

Inflow of remittances

Looking at reduction of poverty from the Nepalese context, there has been stunning progress, far better than the neighbouring countries, Bangladesh and India. There has been a paradoxical relation with conflict during the Maoist war (1996-2006) and remarkable progress in reduction of poverty immediately after the peace process in the country. Nepal's latest figure of people living below the poverty line is now 23.8 per cent, which is a great result in front of a critical political situation (National Planning Commission, 2013). This is attributed partly to remittances sent by Nepalese emigrants living in various parts of the world (Ministry of Health and Population, 2012). The outcome of internal and international migration is not only the accumulation of money to be sent home but it is also beneficial for gaining knowledge on development activities from the point of eye witnesses. After multi-party democracy (1990) in the country, the Nepalese government focused on emigration of unemployed youths wishing to go to other countries through various manpower agencies. The government facilitated in establishing the manpower companies and many unemployed youths have emigrated to other countries and sent money and goods back home. On return, they bring not only money but also skills and ideas that they learn during their stay in foreign countries, including knowledge of reproductive health and contraception. There are examples working in the field of public services like schools, colleges, hospitals and cinemas. The world famous army people (Gurkha people) are in Nepal. They have

earned not only fame but also money for their family and donation for schools, health institutions and other social services in their villages and the community.

Discussion

The Nepalese socio-economic and political system are based on the Hindu philosophy that assigns work division based on gender, caste and class differently, and it also affects the level of education and working jobs differently in Nepalese society though the country is recently declared as a secular country. *Braman* people are assigned the work of instructor as priest (*Pandit* in Nepali), *Chhetri* people as warrior and administrator, *Baishya* people as traders and agricultural workers, *Shudra* people as the workers or servants serving the upper caste people. It is therefore that people's work is assigned and understood differently on the basis of their caste and ethnic origin. The same types of labour division are assigned by gender, with males working hard work outside the home, working either in the farm or elsewhere to earn for living the family, and females are supposed working in kitchen and caring for children. Over time, there developed rich and poor people under the labour division. The work of the rich people seemed to be in higher class jobs and of the poor people to be knowingly and unknowingly in lower class jobs. Similarly, there are also labour differentials between literate/educated and illiterate people. The literate and educated people hesitate to do the jobs undertaken by lower class people (carrying of loads, sweeping/cleaning as well as labour jobs). The class and educational attainment etc. and their social interactions follow on the same way (intra-caste marriage, social custom and so forth). The norms and values of gender, caste and class have created visible power relations based on social hierarchical orders, such as, gender based roles, caste based roles (including touchable and untouchable castes), and rich and poor people's working roles. There is also a clear picture that the social customs that prevailed in Nepalese society enabled upper class and upper castes to grab their power in their hands. Therefore, there have been a number of historical socio-political events in Nepalese society that have enabled lower caste and class people to benefit to

some extent, democracy in 1951, multi-party democracy in 1990, and republic with multi-party system in 2006.

The caste, class, and gender roles assigned in the Hindu philosophy, which was interdependent in each other, is now diminishing following the demand of society. The living standards of people are increasing and people are taking more facilities as before, for which, everyone seems to be involved in some regular paid work for better remuneration irrespective of the job category. In this situation, with the increased income, most people can cope with all modern demands of home and society. On the other hand, people are not fully convinced with the traditionally society assigned jobs. Therefore, people are now moving from collectivism and interdependence to self-dependence. This applies not only for caste and class but also for gender as family structure is now drastically changing from extended and joint family system to nuclear family. Even in the nuclear family with only husband, wife and their children, if the husband and wife are not in the same place because of their job or study or something else, their role cannot be assigned differently. At present, people are trying to do everything independently within the home and outside. The changed pattern of diminishing collectivism and interdependence are working well enough in Nepalese societies irrespective of caste, class and gender; that seems visible with an increasing trend of modernization and urbanization.

Conclusion

This paper illustrates how people are assimilating in the main streams of development activities irrespective of caste, class and gender. The caste, class, and gender roles assigned in the Nepalese society, which were interdependent of each other, are now diminishing gradually. With increasing levels of modernization and urbanization, self-dependence among various socio-economic backgrounds of people is also being developed and perceived accordingly.

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