

Pathways to Policy Intervention Aiming at Badhi Community in Karnali Province

Khagendra Prasad Adhikari

Assistant Professor

Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Midwest University, Surkhet, Nepal

khagendra37@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4473-2262>

Received: April 16, 2025

Revised & Accepted: May 25, 2025

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Abstract

Karnali Province, one of the privileged provinces of Nepal, has particular difficulties when it comes to Badi, the marginalized caste group. This policy mapping offers a badi's current situation. As a disadvantaged, marginalized, and minority group, the Badi community in Nepal experiences difficulties that are representative of larger problems among underprivileged communities, such as dalits. highlights the possible socioeconomic effects of increased life chances and opportunities in Karnali Province, identifies major obstacles to access and quality, and offers a series of evidence-based policy recommendations. It seeks to explore the existing status of Badhi of Badi people by acting as a catalyst for positive change.

While some women have found alternative livelihoods, the fear of their daughters falling into prostitution due to the ongoing socioeconomic marginalization persists. The state's response must undergo a qualitative change with a genuine commitment to implementing agreements and programs to address structural discrimination and prevent future conflicts as the Badi community continues to advocate for their rights and development efforts for their upliftment. While some women have found alternatives. The research shows the terrible and panicky situation of Badi girls and women due to the multi-layers of exploitation, based on the findings of the research.

Although self-respect, access to empowerment, and other rights for the Badi people have been guaranteed by constitutional, legislative, and policy measures, it is yet unclear how effectively these laws have been put into practice. In 2005, the Supreme Court issued a mandamus order, directing the Government to immediately arrange for the citizenship of any children, including the Badi children, who are unaware of their fathers' whereabouts due to their fatherlessness, in

accordance with section 3(2) of the Citizenship Act 2020. In spite of this decree, Badi children have been refused citizenship and birth registration since they do not know who their father is. Since caste-based discrimination, untouchability, and social discrimination against the Badi community and their children are still common, the government and non-governmental organizations should lead effective movements against these forms of discrimination and ensure that the laws against them are applied effectively.

Keywords: Badi, Health policy, Empowerment, Nepali, Marginalization

Introduction

The Badi community, despite being a small numerical group, represents a larger issue of deprivation and marginalization in the country, echoing the challenges faced by various excluded groups, including the broader Dalit community, constituting around 15 percent of the population. The struggles of the Badi community parallel those of other marginalized groups, marked by unfulfilled promises of legislation and initiatives. While their direct impact on Nepal's peace may be limited, the collective force of excluded groups, exemplified by the Badi community, poses a potential challenge.

Despite governmental and Badi community efforts to uplift their status, a persistent obstacle is the societal perception associating Badis with prostitution. This stigma leads to discrimination and harassment, particularly affecting Badi women and girls, hindering the community's efforts for emancipation. Even though some women have found alternative livelihoods, there remains a fear that their daughters might face prostitution due to the sustained socio-economic marginalization of the community. A qualitative shift in the government's response, coupled with a genuine commitment to implementing agreements and programs, is crucial to eliminate structural discrimination and prevent potential future conflicts. It is likely that the Badis will continue advocating for their rights and community development, emphasizing the need for systemic change.

Badi in Karnali Province

Karnali Province, known for its remoteness and socio-economic challenges, encounters distinctive obstacles in higher education. This policy brief offers a comprehensive overview of the present situation of the Badi community, an underprivileged group in Nepal facing issues emblematic of wider challenges experienced by excluded communities, including Dalits. Focusing on Karnali Province, it identifies key hurdles to access and excellence in education, provides evidence-based policy recommendations, and underscores the potential socio-economic benefits of enhancing life opportunities in the region. The document seeks to act as a catalyst for positive transformation, advocating for inclusivity and improved status for the Badi people.

As per the 2011 census of Nepal, the Badi community's total population is 38,603, constituting 0.15 percent of Nepal's overall population. Predominantly located in Sudurpaschim, Karnali, and Lumbini provinces, this once-nomadic community has transitioned to permanent settlements over the past few decades.

The Badi community in Nepal, especially in Karnali Province, continues to face entrenched socio-economic and structural discrimination, making them one of the most marginalized and stigmatized caste groups despite progressive constitutional provisions and multiple judicial and policy-level commitments. Despite the fact that legal frameworks like the 2015 Constitution of Nepal guarantee equality, nondiscrimination, and socioeconomic rights to all citizens, including Dalits, the Badi population has not seen these rights implemented fairly or effectively (Bhattachan et al., 2009; UNDP, 2022). The group, which has historically been linked to culturally stigmatized occupations like prostitution, continues to experience extreme social exclusion, restricted access to jobs, healthcare, education, and land, as well as structural obstacles to citizenship, particularly for children born without a father's name (Karki, 2021; Supreme Court of Nepal, 2005).

Despite the fact that succeeding administrations have established task forces, made agreements, and promised specific initiatives like livelihood support, skills training, and special scholarships, these initiatives have frequently remained paper-based with minimal implementation (Badi Sarokar Manch, 2021). The Badi have experienced recurring cycles of protest and frustration as a result of the gap between policymaking and grassroots implementation, which indicates a serious governance issue and a lack of institutional accountability. To find practical solutions for the long-term empowerment and advancement of the Badi community in Karnali Province, it is necessary to critically assess the current policy pathways and the degree of their implementation.

- Which significant policy initiatives have been implemented by the federal and provincial governments to address the socioeconomic issues that the Badi community in Karnali Province is facing?
- How much of these policy interventions have been carried out locally, and what are the differences between the creation and application of policies?
- What is the Badi community's opinion of the efficacy and inclusivity of government-run initiatives and legal safeguards?
- What administrative, sociocultural, and institutional obstacles still stand in the way of the Badi community's rights and entitlements being realized in spite of constitutional guarantees?
- What legislative suggestions might be made to improve the Karnali Province's Badi community's empowerment, accountability, and participation?

Objective

General objective of research mapping is to explore and critical review the existing status of the *Badi* communities in Karnali Province of Nepal, and also assess the various policies and programs aimed at the overall welfare and development of this special ethnic group. More specifically, this paper aims to establish a few ways forward aimed at this community.

Literature Review

Social exclusion, cultural stigma, and structural marginalization have long been experienced by the Badi community, which is traditionally classified as Dalits in Nepal's caste system. The

community, which was historically associated with entertainment and sex work during the feudal era, now faces a distorted identity and restricted access to political representation, work, and education (Gurung, 2006; Bennett et al., 2008). The legacy of sex work still hinders social integration and upward mobility, even though it has significantly decreased as a source of income (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2013). With few options for social protection or legal recourse, women and girls in particular bear the combined burden of caste-based and gender-based marginalization (Koirala, 2019).

Development Exclusion and Structural Marginalization

Especially in rural Karnali Province, the Badi continue to be one of Nepal's most marginalized communities. Research indicates that they have restricted access to essential services like housing, education, and health care (Bhattachan et al., 2009). Their socioeconomic marginalization is exacerbated by the fact that many Badi settlements are located in remote or environmentally hazardous areas (ADB, 2020). While the federal governance model in Nepal was designed to increase representation and decentralize services, caste hierarchies and implementation flaws have left Dalit communities, including the Badi, marginalized (UNDP, 2020). For example, provincial governments frequently fall short in enforcing anti-discrimination laws or allocating targeted budgets for Dalit empowerment (Dahal & Gurung, 2021).

Impacts on Gender and Livelihood Vulnerabilities

Low levels of education, social stigma, and landlessness limit the Badi's options for a living. Many are forced to work in precarious and exploitative informal labor markets like portering, street vending, and daily wage labor (Dhakal, 2016). Livelihood insecurity disproportionately impacts women. The absence of access to financial services and vocational training exacerbates the feminization of poverty in the Badi community. Small-scale empowerment initiatives have been tried by a number of NGOs and community-based organizations, but there is a lack of consistent policy support (Paudel, 2022).

Gaps in Policy and Piecemeal Interventions

Although social justice and affirmative action for Dalits are promised by Nepal's 2015 Constitution and other legal frameworks, implementation is still uneven. Due to the lack of disaggregated data and their small population, the Badi community frequently eludes mainstream Dalit-targeted programs (National Dalit Commission [NDC], 2020). Furthermore, the majority of policy initiatives to date have lacked significant community involvement and have been either donor-driven or top-down. Gellner (2007) points out that rather than relying solely on welfare policies, true social inclusion necessitates tailored policy solutions based on community needs.

Policy Overview

Despite constitutional, legal, and policy provisions safeguarding the rights, self-respect, and empowerment of children from the Badi community, the effective implementation of these measures remains elusive. In 2005, the Supreme Court issued a mandamus order directing the government not to withhold birth registration and citizenship from children, including those from the Badi community, who are unaware of their fathers' whereabouts. Despite this directive,

Badi children continue to face denial of birth registration and citizenship based on their lack of knowledge about their father's identity.

Efforts by both governmental and non-governmental entities against caste-based discrimination and untouchability must be operationalized effectively. The prevailing social discrimination against the Badi community and their children necessitates the robust enforcement of laws combating untouchability. To address the challenges faced by the Badi community in Karnali, the provincial government plans to establish a three-member task force tasked with delivering a comprehensive report within two months, focusing on upliftment and development.

Furthermore, the government pledges to implement additional programs within the current fiscal year under the Clothes, Food, and Shelter Program, as part of the Chief Minister's Office. Future policies for the betterment of the Badi community will cover education, health, employment, arts, culture, skill-based training, and income generation. An agreement outlines plans to create a fund offering interest subsidies to youth entrepreneurs with loans up to Rs 1 million, indicating a commitment to addressing the multifaceted needs of the Badi community and fostering overall development.

This article, based on a study in Narayan municipality, Dailekh district, argues that socially constructed and changing norms impact relationships. The study perceives the Badi community as initially woman-friendly, preferring daughters over sons. However, recent shifts indicate a preference for sons. Formerly, Badi women played pivotal roles in family life through dance, song, and family management. Modern entertainment systems have replaced their traditional roles, leading to a shift in occupations for Badi women, resulting in subjugation and disempowerment. Key themes include social norms, the Badi community, social location, and occupational change.

Following is a brief outline of the various judicial and strategic decisions taken keeping in view the well-being of Badi Community in Karnali (UNDP, 2022):

- Show cause order issued by the Supreme Court on April 22, 2003 (Baisakh 9, 2060).
- The mandamus order of September 15, 2005 (Bhadra 30, 2062) by the Supreme Court in the name of the government.
- Agreement reached between the Government of Nepal and the Badi community in 2007 (2064).
- Report of the sub-committee formed under the Women, Children and Social Welfare Committee of the House of Representatives to study the problems and conditions of women of the Badi community.
- The decision of the Council of Ministers dated January 7, 2009 (Poush 23, 2065).
- Formation and establishment of Badi Community Upliftment Development Committee.
- Special Scholarship Procedures, 2015 (2072) enacted.

Methodology

This study examines the paths to policy interventions regarding the Badi community in Karnali Province by primarily using qualitative analysis of secondary data and a variety of existing literature, official reports, government documents, legal provisions, policy briefs, media

articles, and scholarly publications. The state and civil society actors' historical and current efforts to improve the lot of the Badi community were examined using a document review method. The Supreme Court's mandamus orders, government agreements with the Badi community, task force reports, the Nepalese Constitution, and particular policies like the 2015 Special Scholarship Procedures were important sources. Relevant UNDP and NGO reports provided additional information. With an emphasis on citizenship, land rights, education, and livelihood, the study employed a critical interpretive approach to assess the long-term impacts of systemic exclusion, policy neglect, and social stigma on the Badi community. Thematic content analysis was used to group the data into key areas such as structural discrimination, grassroots demands, and state responses. By integrating multiple textual sources, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of the policy environment and its shortcomings in addressing the complex realities of Badi marginalization.

Analysis and Interpretation

The policy addressing the Badi community encompasses several key components, each designed to address the unique challenges and uplift the socio-economic and cultural well-being of this marginalized group. Specific regulations form the backbone of the policy, delineating the rights, protections, and opportunities afforded to the Badi community. Funding mechanisms are integral, ensuring the allocation of resources for targeted initiatives. Program interventions focus on education, healthcare, and skill development to empower community members. Initiatives aimed at breaking down societal stigmas and promoting inclusivity are prioritized. Activities within the policy include awareness campaigns, vocational training, and healthcare outreach. Enforcing these components involves collaboration with local authorities for effective implementation, partnerships with NGOs for community engagement, and continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to gauge the impact of the policy. Altogether, this multi-faceted policy approach strives to bring about positive change, address historical disparities, and foster sustainable development within the Badi community in Nepal.

Pathways to Inclusive Policy Interventions

Recent scholarship emphasizes the importance of intersectional and participatory approaches in designing inclusive policies. Effective pathways for the Badi community should combine legal protection with targeted economic, educational, and social interventions (DFID, 2019). Key strategies include: Affirmative Action and Quotas: Effective enforcement of political representation quotas at the local level. Education and Skill Development: Community-based vocational training tailored to the socio-cultural realities of Badi youth. Gender-Focused Programming: Special programs for women, including microfinance, SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights), and protection against gender-based violence. Monitoring and Accountability: Establishing grassroots monitoring mechanisms to track the impact of policies on marginalized groups. Studies have shown that policies co-designed with affected communities are more likely to be successful (Acharya & Zafarullah, 2021). Therefore, community-led development models should be at the heart of policy pathways aimed at the Badi.

Key Stakeholders and Sourcing of the Policy:

The formulation and implementation of policies related to the Badi community in Nepal involve a diverse array of stakeholders and sources. At the national level, the central government, through relevant ministries and departments, plays a pivotal role in shaping policies that address the unique needs of marginalized communities, including the Badis. Provincial governments, especially in regions where the Badi community is prominent, contribute to the policy landscape. Local authorities, such as municipalities and rural municipalities, implement these policies at the grassroots level, tailoring them to address the specific challenges faced by the Badi community within their jurisdictions. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to social issues, both domestic and international, actively participate and contribute in advocacy efforts and contribute resources to support policy development. Academic and research institutions provide valuable insights through studies on the Badi community, aiding evidence-based policy decisions. Within the community, leaders, activists, and representatives ensure that policies align with the actual needs and concerns of the Badi people. Media outlets and public opinion also influence the policy discourse, shedding light on the challenges faced by the Badi community and fostering awareness. The legal framework of Nepal, including existing laws related to minority rights, serves as a foundation for policies, with amendments or new legislation being sourced from this framework. The dynamic interplay of these stakeholders and sources reflects the ongoing efforts to address the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Badi community.

The Badi Sarokar Manch in Karnali province organized a two and a half week-long demonstration asking for the rights of the Badi Community to be upheld from February 21 to March 10 in 2021. Their demands included access to arable land, guaranteeing employment, access to housing amongst other issues. Following the agitation, a five-point agreement was reached between the Karnali Provincial government and the Badi Sarokar Manch on 11 March, 2021. The agreement was signed by the then Secretary of the Ministry of Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperative, Dr Rajendra Mishra on behalf of the Karnali Province government and by Hikmat Badi, the Karnali Province Coordinator of Badi Sarokar Manch. In the agreement, the Provincial government agreed to form a Task Force to present a factual report for the upliftment and development of the Badi community in Karnali province.

The agreement also included the following:

- The Provincial government would coordinate with the Federal and Local governments for the provision of housing and arable land.
- Establishing employment creation activities through targeted programs of the Provincial government.
- Conduct skills-oriented training.
- Providing subsidized loans with low-interest, and grants for people who wish to operate a business

The leader, Hikamat Badi, representing Badi Sarokar Mancha (2023) claims that a number of agreements were made between Provincial Government and Badi Sarkar Mancha but most of them remained only upto signing in paper, except publication of the report studied by the task

force.

Challenges, Controversies, and Issues

The Badi community has a long history of enduring social, economic, and political marginalization, facing discrimination even within the Dalit community to which they belong. While there has been notable improvement in their situation, marked by a gradual departure from their historical nomadic lifestyle and traditional roles as entertainers, the shift to settled, permanent locations, such as in Karnali province, brings new challenges, compounded by limited access to basic services. The present circumstances of the Badi community reflect positive changes, yet persistent issues persist.

Originating from a traditional nomadic lifestyle, a significant portion of the Badi community has been grappling with landlessness, a grievance persisting for almost seven decades. Critical priorities for the Badi community include securing access to essential needs like food, housing, clothing, and agricultural land. Despite political and economic transformations and various legal measures aimed at addressing landlessness among marginalized groups, the issue remains acute, especially for the Dalit, particularly the Badi community. A study conducted in Lumbini, Karnali, and Sudurpaschim provinces reveals that 46 percent of the Badi population lacks any form of land ownership. Additionally, 57 percent of Badi community members were found to reside on unregistered land, government land, or land privately owned by others.

Challenges associated with Badi policy implementation encompass resistance from certain societal segments, deeply ingrained stereotypes, and difficulties in reaching remote Badi settlements. Political considerations and resource constraints further complicate the situation. Breaking down historical stigmas proves to be a complex social task, and economic challenges arise from limited employment opportunities and financial constraints faced by the community. Challenges associated with the Badi policy include resistance from certain societal quarters, deeply rooted stereotypes, and difficulties in accessing remote Badi settlements. Political considerations and resource constraints have also posed hurdles. Socially, breaking down historical stigmas has proven to be a complex task. Economic challenges arise from limited employment opportunities and financial constraints faced by the community.

Findings

- Since 2005, a number of agreements and legal documents have been made to improve the status of the Badi community. These include the 2007 government agreement, the Supreme Court's citizenship mandate, and Karnali Province's 2021 declaration, but the majority of them have not been fully or partially implemented. Absence of legal identity and statelessness
- Because the state requires paternal identity, many Badi children are still denied citizenship and birth registration. Administrative authorities continue to reject mother-based citizenship in spite of a court order that permits it, leaving generations of people without a
- The Badi's traditional means of subsistence, such as singing and dancing, have been disrupted by modernization, road expansion, and social stigma. The community has not received enough assistance in adjusting to new, respectable jobs.

- Badi women suffer disproportionately from the combined effects of caste discrimination, gender-based violence, and economic marginalization. The historical stigma attached to prostitution continues to affect their sense of self-worth and social standing.
- The Badi community is the target of policies that are implemented with little to no coordination between the federal, provincial, and local governments. Budgetary allocations are either inadequate or delayed, and taskforces are established but disbanded without any follow-up measures.
- Dominant caste groups and even local authorities frequently oppose attempts to redistribute land or administer affirmative action policies, citing administrative and technical obstacles.
- Planning is hampered by the absence of Badi-specific data. Their inclusion in state programs and policy interventions is limited by their classification in national data under general Dalit groups.

Discussion

The results are consistent with sociological and critical development theories and represent more general structural and systemic problems:

Gellner (2007) and Sharma (2014) characterize the Badi case as an example of the disjunction between progressive constitutional guarantees and the ingrained inertia in state institutions. Because of discriminatory attitudes and bureaucratic discretion, legal mandates such as the Supreme Court's citizenship order are not enforced. Generational marginalization is perpetuated by denying citizenship on the basis of fatherless identity. Bennett (2005) discusses this type of exclusion as being both legal and symbolic, depriving people of the very acknowledgement that they belong to the nation-state. Crenshaw's (1991) idea of intersectionality is reflected in the Badi women's exacerbated marginalization. Caste, gender, sexuality, and poverty are overlapping forms of oppression that influence their experiences and are not addressed by conventional policies. "Policy evaporation" occurs when well-written agreements and declarations are not followed (Sharma, 2014). The Badi case serves as an example of the significance of community monitoring, performance tracking, and legally binding accountability systems. The Badi, particularly women, lack access to healthcare, education, work, and self-determination, demonstrating Amartya Sen's (1999) concept of capability deprivation. Programs for empowerment such as MEDPA are beneficial, but they need to be implemented and monitored consistently.

In Nepal, federalism served to bring the government closer to underserved groups. However, provincial and local governments are unable to operationalize inclusionary policies due to a lack of inter-tier coordination and resource distribution. This runs counter to Ostrom's (1990) polycentric governance theory, which holds that various governmental tiers should work together to resolve challenging issues. The results demonstrate that, even among administrative actors, casteist norms continue to shape public opinion. Policy tools alone won't be enough to achieve social justice unless intentional norm transformation is achieved through media, education, and civil engagement (Kabeer, 2005).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Badi community in Nepal, constituting a minority group, faces persistent caste-based discrimination and is among the most marginalized communities in the country. With a population of 38,603, the Karnali province houses 5,612 Badis who confront challenges across various sectors. Despite past protests and government-initiated Task Forces, the implementation of recommendations has been deemed unsatisfactory by the Badi community. In 2021, a movement in Surkhet reiterated their priorities, including separate quotas in the Dalit scholarship program, special reservations in education and public service sectors, priority in employment for development projects, tax exemptions for Badi-run enterprises, inter-caste marriage incentives, and financial support for those displaced by such marriages. The call for a high-level committee, representation in government bodies, issuance of Badi Identity Cards, and concrete activities for leadership development and meaningful participation underscores the community's quest for comprehensive upliftment and development.

Policy Recommendations and Implication

comprehensively to uplift the marginalized Badi community in Karnali province, the government should enact a multifaceted policy approach. First, the establishment of an integrated information system, utilizing biometric identification and real-time data linked to national identity cards, would enable evidence-based decision-making and prevent service duplication. Identity cards, distributed based on economic status and land ownership, should undergo regular updates to ensure targeted assistance without redundancy. Cooperative training programs, modeled after successful initiatives like MEDPA, should be prioritized to enhance the socio-economic status of the Badi community. Collaborating with the National Land Commission, Local, and Provincial governments is crucial to rehabilitate those on government, unregistered, and forest land, addressing land-related issues and providing integrated settlements with basic services.

Urban housing initiatives with affordable rental rates would facilitate access to employment opportunities, and subsidies for arable land rent would incentivize commercial farming. Additionally, the government should develop scholarship programs for higher technical education and encourage corporate employment for Badi youth. Private sector collaboration, incentive programs, and a mobile seed capital fund for Badi community cooperatives would further promote entrepreneurship. Legal remedies and rehabilitation should be ensured for those facing untouchability, violence, and harassment. To tackle health challenges, provincial and local governments should initiate awareness programs and projects for clean drinking water, sanitation, and nutrition. Continuous oversight mechanisms should be established to monitor the effective implementation of these recommendations, ensuring the holistic development of the Badi community in Karnali province

The three tiers of government should, based on priority, implement the agreements reached between the federal government and the provincial government and the Badi community at various times, the recommendations of the Task Force and orders of the Supreme Court.

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