



## **Dalit Caste Discrimination in Urban Areas of Nepal: A Case Study of Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines Dalit caste discrimination in the urban setting of Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal, through a quantitative-dominant mixed approach. The researcher conducted a questionnaire survey of 134 respondents, 85 of whom were temporary students residing in Kirtipur for study purposes and 49 local students who were permanent residents. The findings of the quantitative study were further triangulated with qualitative assessment by employing purposively selected four Key informant interviews. The study's findings indicate that caste discrimination among Dalits is a structural issue, but attitudes are changing due to increased awareness and education. Nepali society, mainly urban areas, has massive mobility of people from different castes/ethnicities, and those regions are undergoing rapid sociocultural changes. Caste issues among the students have been diluted from extreme worldviews, but they are facing to penetrate the mainstream social order of society. While discrimination is rare among educated people, such as students, problems persist in rural and underdeveloped areas. Although policy reforms are in place, social behavioural changes remain crucial for achieving equality. The study's findings have significant implications for policy and further research, highlighting the need for continued social behavioural changes and further studies in this regard.

**Keywords:** Dalit, caste discrimination, student life, Nepali society, Nepal

### **Introduction**

Dalits are often described as the most discriminated section of most South Asian societies, who have experienced severe marginalization and poor resilience. Belonging to the conventional Hindu varna system, they endure persistent discrimination in Nepal (Kharel, 2010; Rajan,



2024). Since ancient times, Hindu scriptures have excluded them as the lowest possible caste and untouchable social strata. This discrimination has been deeply ingrained in the Hindu social order. For many years, Dalits have experienced marginalization through multiple forms of exclusion, yet they have persevered. They have found themselves with few educational or professional possibilities while lacking economic stability. Among the sub-groups included under the term 'Dalit' are the Kami, Damai, Sarki, and Badi people. Throughout history, they have received society's lowest positions in occupations, which society views as degrading. The Nepalese constitution, together with legal protections for their rights, exists, yet caste discrimination still leaves its impact on multiple socioeconomic aspects and cultural elements that shape their daily lives. With the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015 and the adoption of a federal governance system, debates on participatory development and proportional representation have intensified. However, the political perspective, inclusion mechanisms, and leadership development of the Dalit community remain underexplored and inadequately prioritized, both theoretically and empirically (Dahal, 2025; Gellner et al., 2020; Sapkota, 2024).

The ethnic and caste system of Nepal is a testament to its extensive diversity, formed through mixtures of historical rule with religious and socio-political elements. As a multi-ethnic society, Nepal hosts 142 caste/ ethnic groups, each with its distinct lingual practices and socio-cultural history. The Hindu caste system, which began hundreds of years ago, today shapes daily social encounters, wedding arrangements, and monetary standing. The various ethnic groups of India have produced many cultural traditions, contributing to the rich tapestry of Nepalese culture. However, such caste/ethnic diversity also upholds rigid social rankings, establishing Dalits as the lowest element in the social strata (Bishwakarma, 2017; Sunam, 2014). Nepal established itself as a democratic republic supported by anti-discriminatory laws, yet permanent social discrimination patterns persist for vulnerable groups.

The caste discrimination in Nepal, unfortunately, continues to manifest through different expressions, primarily through community rejection, treatment of untouchable persons, and limited access to vital resources. The combination of increased education levels with economic advancements along with statutory changes has reduced overt caste prejudices throughout Kathmandu. However, caste-based biases continue to exist in modern Nepalese society through concealed practices which impact both social interactions and access to available resources. Residential areas that are both rural and remote demonstrate higher levels of discrimination because cultural values and social practices tend to stay unchanged. The research investigates Dalit student caste discrimination within Kirtipur to determine if urbanization, educational progress, and new policies made a difference in social exclusion practices.

### **Methodology**

The researcher adopted a post-positivist framework, which emphasizes the importance of both objective and subjective elements in research, using predominantly quantitative and qualitative methods as supplementary to assess the level and types of caste discrimination in urban societies. This framework was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of



social discrimination patterns, which are best studied using the positivist paradigm. The research employed a questionnaire survey method in 23-29 January, 2025 for systematic data collection from 134 participants to create findings that were dependable and applicable across various situations. The research divides participants into two groups: 85 non-local students residing in Kirtipur for education and 49 local students living there permanently. The structured questionnaire collected information from respondents, which focused on their perception, experiential knowledge, and awareness of caste discrimination practices. The survey consisted of limited response questions as well as Likert-scale questions to achieve precise measurement of participant opinions. The researchers used statistical data analysis and a thematic review of their gathered information to identify important patterns. The research upholds methodological standards by using random sampling procedures, which help minimize biases and improve the accuracy of the sample's representation.

On the other hand, the study embraced a comprehensive approach, endorsing the constructivist approach and conducting key informant interviews with four purposively selected research participants. This approach allowed for the triangulation of survey results, aiming for a deeper extraction of subjective interpretations of responses about the Dalits' issues in navigating their experiences and perceptions of caste discrimination. A set of open-ended questionnaires was employed, and the responses collected during the interviews were analyzed using narrative analysis.

The research design was meticulously crafted, enabling the researcher to compare the discrimination experiences of Nepalese migrants from various regions and those who have experienced Kirtipur urbanization. Throughout the research process, the study rigorously followed ethical guidelines that protected participant informed consent and privacy information, thereby safeguarding the validity of the collected data and instilling confidence in the study's findings.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Insights**

Sociological studies define caste as an inherited system with strict hierarchical positions that combines marriage within group boundaries with specific professional choices. Traditional Hindu society inherited caste from the varna system which has maintained itself by making religious and cultural statements about how birth determines hierarchical positions. The theoretical research of Louis Dumont presented in *Homo Hierarchicus* (1970) examines caste through purity-pollution symbolism whereas Marxist views caste as a hierarchical economic system that sustains social class control. Gender, together with class status and ethnic background, multiply instances of discrimination against people with specific caste backgrounds according to intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989). Modern sociological research examines caste systems through changes in adaptive dynamics, which result from state politics and socio-economic conditions and identity-based political behaviour in former colonies.



Nepali society exists with the caste system through both religious institutions combined with state-approved laws, especially the ‘Muluki Ain’ from 1854, which officially confirmed the caste rankings and their exclusion practices. Previous regimes politically endorsed and institutionalized the caste hierarchy; however, early Vedic society was not originally rooted in such rigid structures. Instead, it emphasized a karma-based system, wherein social roles were more fluid and aligned with individual actions and duties (karma) rather than birth. Over time, the development of *karmakāṇḍa*—ritualistic practices—introduced layers of superstition and formalism, which contributed to the emergence of discriminatory practices that deviated from the humanistic and holistic principles of the early Vedic worldview.

The continuation of caste discrimination against Dalits remains widespread even after Nepal's democratic transformation along with its constitutional amendments, across educational settings and employment opportunities and judicial practices and social integrative domains. Execution of the 2011 Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability Act faces difficulties since it achieves minimal implementation success in areas where traditional social hierarchies and beliefs remain widespread. The caste system of Nepal becomes more intricate because of both ethnic diversity and differences between regions across the nation. Dalits receive better political representation after the reform of the federal democratic system, yet substantive changes in their social status advance at a minimal pace. The present-day obstacles in equality feature modern legal progress against strong traditional biases, which demonstrate a difference between official equality rights and discriminatory practices in reality.

### **Structural Nature of Caste Discrimination**

Table 1 shows that most survey participants view caste discrimination as a fundamental societal issue instead of an isolated event. Non-local students expressed this view, with 45% expressing strong agreement and 30% agreeing after experiencing different Nepalese regions. Local students from Kirtipur assigned a high significance to caste discrimination as a widespread social issue through their agreement responses, which reached 38% and 42%. The structuralist perspective on caste discrimination presented by Dumont (1980) and Gellner (2001) receives support from students' responses, as these scholars explain that caste represents an established historical system that society maintains through economic and institutional mechanisms. The urbanization process, as well as the modern era, have reduced visible examples of untouchability practices, yet caste-based hierarchies continue to function through social barriers and restricted access to influential networks (Cameron, 2007). This highlights the complexity and persistence of the issue. Perceptions show that education and urbanization influence how people view caste discrimination, even though most agree that the system operates at a structural level. Fewer than three percent of non-local students and two percent of local students reject that caste discrimination follows systemic patterns.

**Table 1: Responses Regarding the Perception of Caste Discrimination as a Structural Issue**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Non-Local Students</b>		<b>Local Students</b>	
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly Agree	38	45	19	38



Agree	26	30	21	42
Neutral	13	15	5	10
Disagree	6	7	4	8
Strongly Disagree	2	3	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

The findings are in line with sociological studies from Kovacs & Lama (2020), which show that recent legal changes, educational access expansion, and affirmative action policies in Nepal have significantly reshaped societal beliefs. This is particularly true among the younger population, who are playing a key role in this transformation. Many students, while attending university, adopted a neutral stance towards caste discrimination, with non-local and local students exhibiting these attitudes at 15% and 10%, respectively. As Jodhka (2012) points out, 'urban caste invisibility' is a concept that explains how discrimination becomes concealed within institutional and cultural practices, even when it is not immediately visible. The reduced explicit discrimination in Kirtipur, and its counterparts, are indicative of the social structures of stratification that persist in Nepalese society.

### **Changing Attitudes and Awareness**

The results presented in Table 2 reveal a positive change in community views about caste discrimination since 75% of non-local students joined 68% of local students, noting its diminishing trend. Kovacs and Lama (2020) support these findings because urban growth, educational advancement, and new policy implementation lead to changes in human attitudes. Students who live in Kirtipur's urban environment interact daily with different social groups, which seems to explain their belief that discrimination against castes is decreasing. Research has confirmed through Gellner (2001) that higher education establishments create social mobility pathways which shape progressive thinking that breaks down caste-based social barriers. The Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offense and Punishment) Act (2011) and Nepal's Constitution (2015) have helped decrease more obvious discriminatory practices in Nepalese society. Although important progress has been made, there remain subtle caste-based disparities which continue to affect local and non-local students, and this persistence underscores the need for continued vigilance.

**Table 2: Changes in Attitudes towards Caste Discrimination**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Non-Local Students</b>		<b>Local Students</b>	
	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Caste discrimination is decreasing	64	75	33	68
No significant change	17	20	12	25
Discrimination is increasing	4	5	4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*



Results show a positive trend in attitudes about discrimination, but non-local students (20%) and local students (25%) lack belief in change, and 5% and 7% indicate that discrimination is growing. Little evidence supports the argument made by Rai (2023) that urban settings and legal frameworks reduce caste barriers because social prejudices and economic disparities continue to permeate beneath the surface. Local students who enrolled in higher education show higher percentages than non-local students for maintaining unchanged discrimination levels or observing its rise, which indicates that urbanization does not naturally eliminate structural social inequalities. The prevalence of caste biases in employment decisions, marriage choices, and casual social encounters is reported in Nepalese urban zones. However, they do not lead to overt cases of untouchability (Bhatta, 2021). Further progress exists, yet the ongoing appearance of caste-based attitudes throughout specific contexts underscores the urgent need to implement educational initiatives with firm policies and public awareness programs.

### **Rare Cases of Dalit Discrimination among Students**

According to the survey results, most Dalit students (non-local at 80% and local at 85%) have not faced direct discrimination in Kirtipur. Table 3 shows that non-local students rarely experienced discrimination at a rate of 15%, and local students encountered it at a similar level of 12%. Only a fraction of 5% (non-local) and 3% (local) reported facing occasional discrimination. The survey revealed that discrimination was completely absent among all participants. According to these study findings, academic institutions and urban areas have become strategic settings that actively reduce caste-based discrimination. Dahal (2025) substantiates modernization efforts, legal and policy reforms, and enhanced social group interactions as the primary causes for declining open caste-based discrimination throughout Nepali politics and affairs of inclusion and leadership from this marginalized community. Students in Kirtipur meet regularly from different backgrounds at educational institutions, which facilitates egalitarian attitudes that decrease discriminating castes and construct social unity.

Table 3: Frequency of Direct Discrimination Experienced by Dalit Students

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Non-Local Students</b>		<b>Local Students</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Never	68	80	42	85
Rarely	13	15	6	12
Occasionally	4	5	1	3
Frequently	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

While direct discrimination may seem limited today, it does not signify the complete eradication of caste-based prejudices. Watanabe et al. (2014) suggest that caste influences social relations indirectly. Dalits may not face direct exclusion, but they could experience biased treatment through various unspoken forms, such as social networking disadvantages and perceptual or actual prejudice when pursuing studies or employment, or being discriminated





against by non-Dalits outside the academic environment. The results from this study differ from those of research conducted in rural Nepal, where caste discrimination is more intense in daily life interactions (Budhathoki, 2022). The limited cases of discrimination in Kirtipur underscore the role of urban development, education practices, and legal protection in suppressing discrimination. However, they also highlight the need to address hidden prejudices to achieve genuine equality among communities.

### **Urban vs. Rural Disparities**

Caste-based discrimination continues to affect Nepali society as a vital social issue because of its Hindu religious roots in the 1854 Muluki Ain legal framework yet its expressions adapt across temporal and geographical regions. The traditional discrimination against Dalits in rural Nepal appears through concrete practices which deny their access to water sources and temples while banning their participation in caste-segregated eating rituals. Rural societies maintain social rankings through traditional cultural standards together with limited educational access and limited knowledge about constitutional rights. The studies performed by Cameron (2007) and UNDP (2020) demonstrate that rural Dalits encounter persistent discriminatory exclusion from economic benefits and political group participation and fair judicial process because of enduring social precedence systems. The legal framework that abolished untouchability through acts like the Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2011 fails to enforce these mandates effectively since local power structures along with minimal state representatives prevent implementation in rural areas.

Caste-based discrimination exists in reduced forms within urban setting throughout Nepal. The process of urbanization together with migration and educational advancement and growing media accessibility has resulted in reduced public awareness of caste categories and has made caste systems more flexible in urban areas. Caste identities in urban environments become less prominent than economic status and occupational positions and personal achievements which create spaces that are more equal. The societal bias continues through concealed discrimination practices which affected housing and employment and marriage functionality as shown by Gellner (2020) and Bennett et al. (2013) in their research. Rural migrants living in cities deal with two forms of marginalized status because they are both working class newcomers and members of socially stigmatized caste groups. The challenge of caste-based discrimination continues to exist as it metamorphoses thus requiring dual structural reform support along with ongoing socio-cultural transformation throughout Nepal's rural-urban zones.

Table 4 underscores a stark contrast in how caste discrimination is perceived in urban and rural areas. In urban settings like Kathmandu, a mere 10% of respondents view discrimination as prevalent, while a significant 65% believe it to be low. On the other hand, in rural and remote areas, a substantial 55% of respondents report high levels of discrimination, with only 15% considering it low. These findings are in line with sociological literature (Béteille, 2020; Jodhka, 2017; Jogdand & Kamble, 2013), which suggests that urbanization, increased literacy, and economic diversification contribute to a decline in caste-based discrimination in cities. Urban environments offer greater anonymity, diverse social interactions, and institutional

mechanisms that deter explicit caste biases. Moreover, affirmative action policies, such as reserved quotas for Dalits in education and employment, have paved the way for upward mobility, further reducing caste-based barriers in urban areas.

**Table 4: Comparison of the Perceptions of Caste Discrimination in Urban and Rural Areas.**

Location	High Discrimination		Moderate Discrimination		Low Discrimination	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Urban (Kathmandu) (n=85)	9	10	21	25	55	65
Rural/Remote Areas (n=49)	27	55	15	30	7	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>-</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

However, the persistence of caste discrimination in rural Nepal remains a pressing issue. The high percentage (55%) of respondents perceiving significant discrimination in rural areas reflects deep-rooted social hierarchies, where caste still determines social interactions, economic opportunities, and access to resources. Scholars argue that rural communities maintain traditional norms more rigidly due to their smaller, tightly-knit social structures, making it difficult for marginalized groups to challenge discriminatory practices (Gellner, 2001). Furthermore, studies by Kovacs and Lama (2020) emphasize that Dalits in rural regions often face exclusion from communal activities, restrictions in temple access, and limitations in employment opportunities due to caste biases. These disparities indicate that while urban areas like Kirtipur have witnessed significant progress, rural Nepal still requires targeted policy interventions, awareness campaigns, and grassroots activism to dismantle entrenched caste hierarchies and promote social equity. This is a crucial step to ensure that rural areas can also witness the progress seen in urban areas.

### **Analysis of Causes and Consequences**

Table 5 demonstrates that caste-based discrimination exists as a multidimensional problem because people hold traditional sentiments and face economic discrepancies and inadequate policy enforcement, which produces diverse social effects alongside economic and psychological consequences. The ongoing practice of traditional caste beliefs creates the leading source of social exclusion, which affects 40% of individuals, while economic difficulties affect 30%, and psychological watchfulness impacts another 25%. According to Dumont's (1980) theory, the South Asian caste-based hierarchical structure represents more than a social separation (Deshpande, 2015). A lack of education is a key driver of psychological distress, along with other factors, to the degree of 40%, which demonstrates how incorrect information from culture maintains discrimination within contemporary societies. The role of policy enforcement in perpetuating discrimination is a cause for concern and should motivate us to advocate for change (Banerjee-Dube, 2014).





**Table 5: Cross-tabulation of Causes and Consequences of Caste-Based Discrimination (%)**

<b>Causes of Discrimination</b>	<b>Social Exclusion</b>	<b>Economic Hardship</b>	<b>Psychological Impact</b>	<b>Limited Educational or Job Opportunities</b>	<b>Political Marginalization</b>
Traditional Caste Beliefs	40	30	25	20	18
Lack of Awareness & Education	35	25	40	30	22
Economic Inequality	20	50	20	40	30
Weak Policy Implementation	15	20	25	45	50
Rural-Urban Divide	25	30	35	20	15

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

The survey revealed that economic inequality exists as a vital element since half of the participants connected it to financial problems, while forty percent correlated it to restricted educational opportunities and limited occupational pathways. The findings by Kovacs and Lama (2020) and Soundararajan et al. (2024) show economic disparities which enable caste discrimination because Dalits face limited access to land, capital and stable employment opportunities. The inadequate execution of anti-discrimination laws constitutes half of all political marginalization causes since policy enforcement is weak (50%). The legal order of Nepal prohibits caste discrimination, yet its enforcement weaknesses prevent this prohibition from producing meaningful results, particularly in rural parts of Nepal. Our survey found that psychological effects from discrimination occur more strongly in rural areas than in urban areas, where 35% of respondents made this observation. Strengthening awareness campaigns, forcing policies, and developing economic empowerment plans have become essential to address caste biases, which still persist strongly in rural Nepalese communities even though Kirtipur shows progress as an urban area.

### **Policy Reforms and Behavioral Change**

Social behaviour surpasses legal provisions that ban caste-based discrimination because it shapes how Dalits live their reality in Nepal. According to the study results, 74% of participants support policy changes, yet they stress that implementing laws by themselves will not achieve change without fundamental social evolution. The legislative efforts Nepal created through laws such as the Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offense and Punishment) Act of 2011 failed to translate into practical changes because of cultural norms and weak



enforcement regulations (Gellner, 2001; Gellner et al., 2021). In this context, Giri (2023), in the context of Indian societies, notes how caste prejudices remain active within social and professional scenarios even when the law legally prohibits them, particularly rural Dalit women. Real inclusion requires both a transformation of social beliefs and legal protections to establish effective, genuine inclusion.

**Table 6: Policy Reforms and Behavioural Change**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
Belief in the necessity of policy reforms	74%
Policy reforms alone are insufficient without social transformation	74%
Educated and urban youth practice non-discrimination	Higher than other groups
Older generations exhibit persistent caste biases	Higher than younger groups
Rural populations exhibit more caste biases	Higher than urban population

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

The research shows that educated residents of urban areas and young people better understand discriminatory practices based on caste, so they maintain non-discriminatory practices. However, older residents, alongside rural inhabitants, keep traditional caste biases. The findings indicate that educated and socially exposed younger age groups from urban areas have fewer caste-based prejudices through their enhanced education. Kirtipur's urban student environment enables regular interactions between diverse backgrounds, thus diminishing the social effects of caste identity because tradition remains deeply rooted in rural areas. The research conducted by Rathod (2022) demonstrates how academic and professional meetings between people of diverse castes lead to diminished discriminatory behaviour. The occurrence of meaningful behavioural shifts within society regarding inclusivity demands ongoing awareness initiatives together with community participation and inclusive policy enforcement.

### **Triangulation with Qualitative Inquiry**

As outlined in the methodological section, the researcher conducted four Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with purposively selected participants representing both local residents and non-residents. These interviews are significant as they provide first-hand accounts of caste discrimination experiences and perceptions, offering a nuanced understanding of the issue. The interviews were guided by an open-ended questionnaire, allowing respondents to share their perspectives on Dalit issues. Participants discussed their personal experiences and perceptions of caste discrimination and proposed solutions to address and eliminate caste-based discrimination in society.

#### **KII-1: Non-local student (Male, 23 year old).**

**Statement:** I am studying in Kirtipur for two years. I came from Doti, a far-western region and I belong to the Dalit community. The prevalence rate of caste-based prejudice diminishes substantially in Kirtipur compared to my rural origin. This area features discrimination jokes against Dalits, but I still feel disturbed upon hearing them. Poor education levels combined with minimal knowledge lead to discriminatory behaviour, in my opinion. Despite the open-



mindful atmosphere of the city, urban exposure has not eliminated caste prejudices, which manifest through discreet discriminatory behaviours. During my schooling, I have not encountered serious issues obtaining living accommodations for my academic purposes. My landlord initially made no questions about my caste status before learning I am Dalit, and their family maintains no discriminatory practices toward me. The members of my college show no indication of engaging in caste-based discrimination practices toward others. My sense of inferiority occurs during birthday celebrations, festival participation, and eating at restaurants, which demonstrates how societal rankings continue to influence social interactions (*Based on personal conversation, 28 January 2025*).

**Analysis:** Urban Kirtipur witnesses diminished but present caste discrimination through secretive methods compared to the open discrimination in rural areas. The study participants' observations about the negative impact of cultural diversity and social contact on discrimination match the findings in Cameron's (2007) paper on prejudice reduction through intergroup encounters. To recall this issue again, Allport's (1954) Contact Theory agrees that better social interactions between diverse groups create stronger understanding between people while diminishing prejudices. The respondent indicates their experiences show that simple social contact does not eliminate deeply ingrained prejudices. Even though caste hierarchies show no direct discrimination activities in educational institutions or housing arrangements, they still influence interpersonal relationships through continued feelings of inferiority during social contact. The process of social change needs more than connections and social interactions because it requires deliberate measures to root out internalized prejudice and develop authentic equality.

**KII 2: Local Student (Female, 40, Resident of Nagaun, Kirtipur)**

**Statement:** As a member of the majority group, I have never encountered discrimination, yet I have seen Dalit students receive different treatment, mainly from older people. Generations throughout society have upheld these beliefs since the past while modern young people exhibit more tolerance yet the previous generation remains staunch in their beliefs. Recent developments and modernization efforts in our society have changed our mental structure and the educational wave created by Tribhuvan University is the backbone for such change in Kirtipur (*Based on personal conversation, 29 January 2025*).

**Analysis:** The divide in caste-related perspectives between different generations is demonstrated through this statement. The differences between generations in caste attitude expressions match the principles of intergenerational transmission theories of caste (Hutton, 1963; Lee, 2021), which explain how prejudices become embedded between generations through social learning processes. This finding supports the socialization theory because people learn their caste attitudes from the environments provided by their families along with their communities and broader society. Educational progress does not diminish older generations' caste beliefs; therefore, societal value transformation must proceed beyond legislative advancement. Young people prove that education combined with awareness activities reduces discriminatory views.



**KII 3: Non-local Student (Male, 31, from Butwal; Studying in Kirtipur for 13 years)**

**Statement:** In the past, I heard that people in Kirtipur openly exhibited caste prejudice, both within their rural communities and toward external migrants, including students. The local Newar community has a deeply ingrained caste structure, which is often less inclusive toward lower-caste groups such as Pode and butchers. Additionally, in some social spaces, complete segregation of Dalits and Madhesis persists, as certain communities avoid interaction with them altogether. In my observation, Madhesi people and students seem to face greater discrimination than Dalits, which creates a troubling social dynamic. Educational institutions in Kirtipur have contributed to improving the situation, but caste-based biases remain particularly strong among rural residents. Although discrimination has significantly declined over time, and I have not witnessed any visible cases in the last five years, further awareness and educational programs are necessary to eliminate lingering prejudices (*Based on personal conversation, 29 January 2025*).

**Analysis:** The respondent's insights highlight that caste-based discrimination is more pronounced in rural settings than in urban areas, aligning with spatial theories of caste stratification (Srinivas, 1966; Yengde, 2022). This observation supports the idea that rural environments tend to uphold stricter caste hierarchies, whereas urban areas experience relatively weakened caste structures due to increased social mobility and educational exposure. Furthermore, the respondent's emphasis on the role of education in mitigating discrimination aligns with Bourdieu's (1986a) theory of cultural capital, which suggests that knowledge and formal education provide individuals with the means to challenge and reject hierarchical social systems. However, while urban institutions contribute to fostering inclusivity, persistent caste biases among certain local rural residents in Kirtipur suggest the need for targeted educational programs, particularly in rural settings, to further dismantle deep-rooted discriminatory practices.

**KII 4: Local Student (Female, 31, Resident of Panga, Kirtipur)**

**Statement:** Students in my college and other colleges in Kirtipur do not consider caste differences because everyone works toward receiving education and life improvement. I maintain relationships with Dalit students who do not seem different to me. I understand there are people who maintain caste ideals in their minds at places outside Kirtipur since they don't openly demonstrate these preferences (*Based on personal conversation, 28 January 2025*).

**Analysis:** The new urban environment produces changes in how individuals view caste because educated young people develop different perspectives. Social integration theory explains how diverse populations who share common educational and professional goals in urban environments will usually diminish their focus on caste distinctions (Bhatt, 2022; Simmel, 1950). Contact Theory shows that educational contact between castes reduces the awareness of caste differences between people. The respondents' admission of "old ideas" in certain individuals reveals that structural discrimination remains even though visible discrimination seems to diminish, especially among those without experiences with diverse social contacts (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Goghari, V. M., & Kusi, M. (2023).



The KIIs reveal that caste discrimination exists in structural ways and also demonstrate major attitudinal changes among urban residents and educated youths. Raising social contact and educational programs represent essential methods for fighting caste prejudices. The Contact Theory demonstrates that mixtures of social groups in urban areas like Kirtipur can reduce observable discrimination through better interpersonal relations. The ongoing deep biases serving old and rural people stand as a major obstacle that prevents the complete attainment of social equality. However, the experiences of the interviewees also highlight the potential of education to challenge and change these deep-seated biases.

### **Analysis of Findings from the Perspective of Bourdieu's Cultural Capital**

The expression of discrimination based on caste in Nepalese society has evolved differently in urban and rural areas during the recent period. The fundamental status of caste in social arrangement functions distinctly in different geographic and social contexts. The institutionalized way that caste functions in rural Nepal retains influence over social relationships as well as occupation selection and resource ownership access primarily due to enduring traditional customs combined with limited contact with anti-hierarchical discourse. The mix of cultural factors in cities leads to shifting forms of caste interactions because individuals encounter each other less recognizably and better understand their legal rights and achieve economic crossover. According to Bourdieu the changing role of cultural capital distribution between groups who possess knowledge and other cultural traits and behavioral norms shapes this transformation. Those from historically oppressed castes who attain both academic education and urban contact develop the ability to convert their personal cultural skills into social advancements that break tradition-based social barriers (Bourdieu, 1986b). The subtle manifestation of caste-based symbolic violence continues to exist in urban areas through elite cultural standards as well as closed networks and coded discriminatory communication patterns.

The acquisition of education alongside modernization serves as institutionalized cultural capital tools which have transformed how people perceive caste relationships and access social mobility in Nepal. Modern education together with affirmative action policies provide formerly restricted knowledge systems to Dalits and marginalized groups through public educational institutions. Education leads students to develop new orientations (or habitus) which make them capable of participating in public debates and political settings and urban employment opportunities. Bourdieu indicates that the simple ownership of cultural capital does not ensure social success because it lacks either recognition or value within dominant cultural spaces. Many cultural assets of Dalits get downgraded to worthless status by dominant groups leading to social inequality while their formal accomplishments prove insufficient. The disruption of traditional caste boundaries by modernization and education becomes most apparent in urban areas yet both factors have not destroyed the symbolic and structural bases that maintain caste-based discrimination. The transformation of cultural capital into social equity continues to experience irregular and battle-filled procedures.





## **Conclusion**

The study reveals that while caste discrimination persists in urban Kathmandu, particularly in Kirtipur, it is less prevalent compared to rural areas. This indicates a shift in social dynamics, with urban environments offering more exposure to diverse populations and progressive attitudes. The study suggests that changing attitudes, particularly among educated youth, are contributing to its gradual reduction, empowering them to make a difference. The findings align with existing literature that underscores the role of education and awareness in mitigating caste-based biases (Cameron, 2007). In urban areas like Kirtipur, where diverse student populations coexist, the impact of caste discrimination is diminished, signalling a positive change in social interactions and perceptions. However, the persistence of caste-based attitudes among older generations and rural populations highlights the enduring nature of this issue.

This research underscores the insufficiency of policy changes alone in eliminating caste discrimination. It emphasizes the need for society-wide reforms to achieve progress. The study shows that legally defined discrimination-specific policies do not reach or resolve the deep-lying implicit prejudices that continue to exist throughout many communities. It urges the development of transformative social practices, especially educational programs and mixed community experiences, to achieve sustainable caste peace. Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, along with social integration theory, provide essential knowledge about how education, social awareness and integration create solutions for reducing caste-based divisions in modern cities. Despite some positive trends, the study emphasizes that legal and policy reforms, while important, are insufficient on their own to eliminate caste-based inequalities. It stresses the importance of social transformation to complement legal reforms. While legal frameworks such as the Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability Act of 2011 are in place, enforcement remains weak, and the social transformation required to combat deeply ingrained caste biases is still lacking. The study finds that social change, including increased awareness and behavioural shifts across communities, is essential to complement legal reforms. Educational institutions, youth activism, and community-level awareness programs play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and reducing caste-based discrimination. Therefore, a multi-faceted approach, integrating both legal reforms and social transformation, is necessary to effectively address caste discrimination and ensure greater social equity for Dalits in Nepal. In this context, the study provides the following empirical recommendations which are essential for continued social reform to achieve equity and justice for Dalits in Nepal.

- (1) **Strengthen Awareness Campaigns:** Promote anti-discrimination programs targeting both urban and rural populations.
- (2) **Educational Reforms:** Integrate caste discrimination issues in the curriculum to instill awareness from an early age.
- (3) **Policy Implementation:** Enforce existing anti-discrimination laws with stronger monitoring and community engagement.
- (4) **Community Participation:** Encourage local initiatives to foster inclusive social practices.



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