



## **Metaphysics of Nepali Society: Analysis from Power and Class Dimension**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Nepalese society is characterized by a complex interplay of caste, class, ethnicity, and power dynamics, which have historically shaped social hierarchies and access to resources. The metaphysical foundations of power have perpetuated divisions between dominant and marginalized groups, leading to systemic inequalities. This paper examines the historical and contemporary manifestations of power and class in Nepal, focusing on how societal structures have evolved through political, economic, and social reforms. **Objectives:** The primary objective of this study is to analyze the transformation of power relations in Nepali society from a historical perspective to the present, with a focus on marginalized communities. It seeks to evaluate how affirmative policies and constitutional provisions have addressed caste and class disparities, promoting social inclusion and equity. **Methods:** This research employs a qualitative and interpretive methodology, drawing on critical theory and thematic content analysis. Secondary sources, including peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and historical texts, were reviewed to assess the metaphysical underpinnings of power and class in Nepal. Marxist and post-structuralist frameworks were used to contextualize the findings. **Findings:**



The study reveals that while historical power structures—such as the Rana regime and feudal systems—reinforced caste and class hierarchies, recent policy interventions have initiated transformative changes. Decentralization, constitutional reforms, and affirmative action policies have gradually empowered marginalized groups. However, residual inequalities persist due to deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and uneven policy implementation. **Conclusion:** Nepali society is undergoing a significant shift toward inclusivity, driven by legal reforms and social movements. While progress has been made in reducing caste and class disparities, sustained efforts are needed to eliminate systemic discrimination fully. Future policies must prioritize equitable resource distribution, participatory governance, and cultural sensitization to achieve lasting social harmony. **Novelty:** This paper contributes to the discourse on Nepali social stratification by integrating historical analysis with contemporary policy assessments. It highlights the dialectical relationship between power, class, and social change, offering a nuanced understanding of how metaphysical constructs influence societal transformation.

**Keywords:** Class, marginalized community, transformative policy, metaphysics, power relations, Nepal

## **Introduction**

Nepal is a nation in the process of consolidating its multiethnic and multilingual identity, with its society reflecting a complex interplay of diverse ethno-cultural and linguistic traditions (Dhungel, 2010). Society, as a fundamental construct, exists across all living organisms, regardless of their nature or habitat. While colloquially understood as an organized aggregation of a particular population, a rigorous sociological examination reveals that society not only elucidates the structural and functional dynamics of a given population but also unveils the multifaceted—both tangible and intangible—factors that shape its evolution.

Globally, power and leadership are recognized as pivotal drivers of social change and local development (Sapkota, 2020; Saaida, 2023). Societal stratification often manifests in dichotomies such as wealth and poverty, resource abundance and scarcity, and power and powerlessness, shaped by economic disparities, social hierarchies, cultural constraints, and systemic inequalities in gender and caste. Such stratification engenders domination, wherein powerful groups subordinate marginalized communities, central authorities exert control over peripheral regions, affluent elites marginalize impoverished populations, and resource-endowed factions restrict access to those without. These power asymmetries have historically precipitated revolutions, conflicts, and socio-political transformations, while also fostering instances of social cohesion.

The dialectics of societal development are marked by the emergence of distinct classes and their ensuing struggles for socio-economic and political transformation (Mohiuddin, 2024). Karl Marx posits that these struggles arise from conflicting material interests and ideological divergences rooted in economic forces rather than political leadership (Slattery, 2003). According to Marx (1859), society is structured along two foundational axes: an



economic *substructure*, governing the production and distribution of goods and services, and a *superstructure*, encompassing social, political, and ideological institutions such as the state, legal systems, and familial structures. The economic substructure is determinative, shaping not only material production but also the broader institutional framework and societal governance. Central to Marx's theory of historical materialism is the concept of the dialectic, which asserts that progressive societal change emerges not through gradual evolution but through revolutionary conflict. Within Marxist theory, dialectical materialism identifies two principal mechanisms driving class-based social transformation (Slattery, 2003).

In the canvass of the political economy and class debate in Nepal with regard to the contemporary nature of Nepali society and state, there appears a momentum in seeing Nepal as being capitalist. For the last nearly three decades or so, Prof. Mishra has been arguing that Nepal's political-economic formation has historically and increasingly been predominantly capitalist and that its feudal attributes have weakened long before since 1950s (Mishra, 1987).

The state and society in Nepal are undergoing rapid and epochal transformations on many fronts since the 1990s and their speed is all the more geared up especially after 2006. This has both local and global contexts. Nepal had entered a capitalist phase, are some of the manifestations of these epochal transformations. Class, caste, gender, diversity, poverty, regionalism, sexuality and many other dimensions of societal (in)equality have recently received renewed prominence in the public sphere.

Class is a group of people with same characteristics but due to the metaphysics of the society power is always exercised with in the society to access the resources because society is bunch of diversity group. Economy is the prime factor for leading to inequality in the society. Inequality creates different classes in the society poor so there are always conflicts between two groups of people to access the economic prosperity and social dignity and always fight for equality, human right, social justice and prestigious life in the society.

### **Objective**

The primary objective of this paper is to critically review the transformation of societal power relations in Nepal, with particular focus on the marginalized sections of the community. This study traces the historical trajectory of class and caste-based inequalities and explores how these structures have evolved in response to political, legal, and social reforms. In recent years, Nepal has witnessed a shift toward a more inclusive and transformative social order, as reflected in affirmative policy measures and constitutional guarantees outlined in the prevailing constitution of Nepal. The researchers posit that the metaphysical foundations of Nepali society; once rooted in rigid hierarchies and exclusionary practices that are undergoing significant change. Discriminatory policies are being restructured to address systemic inequalities across class, caste, gender, and ethnicity. Within this evolving landscape, the study seeks to explore how these reforms are fostering greater social diversity, equity, harmony, and cohesion in contemporary Nepal.



## **Review of the literature**

The underlying contradictions within the economic substructure resulting in a growing conflict and mismatch between the forces and relations of production as new economic methods start to outgrow their social and legal structures as, for example, when industry and commerce began to outgrow feudalism. The growth of class conflict as the owners of the means of production begin to increase their exploitation to the workplace in order to maintain their privilege and profits. Social classes for Marxists arise simply from the ownership and nonownership of the means of production, a relationship which at heart is antagonistic due to its exploitative nature and unequal distribution of wealth, between feudal lords and serfs or capitalists and workers (Slattery, 2003, p- 45).

In the society there are two types of class land lord or capitalistic who have fully control and access over resources of production, equipment where as farmers or peasants are fully dependent to land lords because they are resourceless, powerless and minority in voices. Due to the differences in class peasants are labored hard in daily but always facing crisis for hand to mouth. If we look at the historical point of view there was no class discrimination system in primitive communal stage where as class struggle was flourished from the serfdom stage.

Social life of human being is full of class struggle. There is always struggle upper class and lower class, feudal and peasants. Struggle leads to revolutionary changes in the society (Marx, 1859).

In the context of marginalized community caste is another factor of backwardness in Nepalese context. Hereditary membership, traditional occupation, commensality rules and purity are some of the major features of the caste system (Berreman, 1972). It is culturally constructed and is the product of Hinduism. Castes are closed social groups: one may only marry within one' caste and the children of the marriage belong to the caste of their parents. Castes are hierarchically ranked on a purity pollution scale according to their traditional occupations. Castes are groups with a well-developed life of their own, the membership where off, unlike that of voluntary associations and of classes, is determined not by selection but by birth. The status of a person depends not on his wealth but on the traditional importance of the caste in which he has the luck of being born (Ghurye, 1969). According to Berreman (1972) castes are ranked endogamous division of society in which membership is hereditary and permanent (quoted by Sharma 2004: 129).

In general, social structure is an arrangement of persons in institutionally controlled or defined relationships (Radcliffe-Brown,1952). Hierarchy is a ladder of command in which the lower rungs are encompassed in the higher ones in regular succession. Hierarchy in the caste system is the opposition of the pure and the impure: superiority and superior purity are identical that leads to disparity in the society. It is in this sense that, ideologically, distinction of purity is the foundation of status. (Dumont,1980). Nepal is a stratified society consisting of its hierarchically arranged caste-rankings. Caste has been recognized as unique socio-cultural phenomena. Nepalese caste rules normally prescribe isogamies for its members (Sharma, 2004).



In the Nepali context, caste has become an institution rooted in the Hinduized way of life promoted by the state by nurturing customized laws (Hofer, 2004). The religion and rituals prohibit the inclusion of those considered impure, lowly and untouchable into the social sphere. Caste, therefore, has in itself become an exclusionary social institution forcing those considered lower caste or outcaste People to live a life on the margins and struggle to survive on the crumbs. Ultimately, caste system has become a process of social exclusion through which participation is restricted and claims to social opportunity denied (Kumar,1995:48).

### **Historical class overview during Rana regime**

In 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Nepal was divided into different states during the Prithivi Narayan Shaha dynasty and economy was utilized in the process of state building and unification of different states. Basically, class was flourished during the time of Rana rules. There was huge discrimination in the name of class, caste and economic status especially marginalized community were suppressed by high class people. They were deprived from basic education, health and shelters. In the name of religion marginalized community were faced brutal behavior from the high-class people. In this era due to the pursuit of economic and social development people were largely migrated from periphery to center, Kathmandu. Most of the facilities and opportunities were concentrated in center this scenario was the key factor of class division among capitalistic, farmers, poor, rich, rural, urban, peasants, businessman, middle class. Due to the different interest of different classes struggle for resource accumulation, basic needs, social justice, representation in decision making bodies, economic, social and political development.

Most of the people of hilly region were basically dependent on animal husbandry and spent nomadic life but in the case of Terai valley was known as productive land, rich in plants of Soorya Robusta and upper-class people controlled over the Terai productive land for the purpose of more revenue collection. State adopted policy of sending youth to join army from different Hilly region for the collection of more revenue in this scenario also different class were emerged due to the economic transition in the society.

In the Kathmandu valley capital city of three state was also mainly dominated by Hindu Newar, they captured the trade roots and productive land of Terai land. If we analyze the class perspective of Hindu Newar were more sophisticated, rich, access to state mechanism, power exercise with state mechanism whereas lower class of Newar like Poda, Chyame was facing starvation, deprived in every social activity, deprived in participation in social functions, rituals, they also faced caste-based discrimination, brutality and resource deprivation from the upper caste Newar community.

Near about initial phase of 17<sup>th</sup> century Shaha ruler of Lamjung colonized the Gorkha Magar state for the intention of establishing the Hindu kingdom. Class and power conflicts were happened during the time of 1760 Gorkha rulers fought with East India company but they defeated with Gorkha rulers. Similarly, class conflicts in the name of state expansions were happen in 1767 A.D Kritipur defeated with Gorkha rulers, 1769 concurred to Bhadgau and Patan state.



Class over view of semi colonial time: when Sugauli treaty was happen with India Nepal was become semi colonial and economy was totally dependent with India for the trade, export and import of goods.

### **Methodology**

This article employs a qualitative and interpretive methodological approach grounded in critical theory. The analysis is based on an extensive review of secondary sources, including textbooks, peer-reviewed articles, and relevant sociological and philosophical literature. Critical discourses and thematic content analysis were applied to interpret the underlying metaphysical assumptions embedded in narratives surrounding power and class in Nepali society. This methodological lens allows for a detailed understanding of how socio-cultural hierarchies are constructed, maintained, and contested. The article draws on theoretical perspectives from Marxist thought, post-structuralism, and indigenous South Asian epistemologies to contextualize the dynamics of power and class within Nepal's unique historical and cultural framework.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Political economy of history in class division**

Marx argues that key pillar of Marxism are philosophy, political economy and scientific socialism these elements are intercalated and dialectical in nature. David Sadden also describes the Nepal's political economy and its historical development in different time frame. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century economy was during the Rana regime high revenue was collected from poor, peasants, lower class people. High class people were in the state mechanism and in the decision-making level and their major focus was to collect revenue from the lower-class people but did not pave attention on policy formulation to agriculture and did not concern over the human rights and social justice issues of marginalized community. But if we look at the history some positive initiatives were also practiced by King Chandra Samsher by eliminating the Das and Sati rituals and worked to eradicate caste-based discriminations as well.

#### **Caste hierarchy and transforming through key policy**

Social inequality occurs when resources in a given society are distributed unfairly, typically through norms of allocation, that create specific patterns along lines of socially defined groups of persons (Amish et al., 2021). It is the condition where people have unequal access to valued resources, services, and positions in the society. Social inequality is related to the concept of social stratification, in which society is hierarchically divided into sub-groups, based on class, race, gender, religion and/or political power. Social stratification refers to a society's categorization of its people into groups based on socioeconomic factors like wealth, income, race, education, ethnicity, gender, occupation, social status, or derived power (social and political). In the case of Nepal, Hofer (1979) argues that the national civil code, 1854 (Muluki Ain, 1854) legalized the caste system and established it as the basis of social mobility, created social disparity and hierarchical social structures and formed as a rigid value system. According to Hofer (1979) five major caste group were prevailed in Nepal Tagadhari- those who wearing the sacred holy thread calle Janai. Masine Matawali- enslavable liquor drinkers.



Namasine Matwali- impure but touchable including foreigners, Muslims. Pani nachalne-impure but touchable. Pani nachalne- impure but untouchable, upon touching who are needed to purify themselves by sprinkling gold dipped water. In current context, the Civil code (2017) has secured the civil rights specially to avoid the discriminatory class and class system by contextualizing to marginalized community. Discrimination not to be made: (1) No discrimination shall be made in the application of general law on grounds of origin, religion, color, caste, race, sex, physical condition, disability, condition of health, marital status, pregnancy, economic condition, language, region, ideological conviction or on similar other ground (the Civil Code, 2017).

### **Metaphysics of class in Terai and transforming gradually**

Blakie et al., 2014 argues that Nepal is stagnation rather than growth, power relation is playing greater role how center plays great power to periphery and how resources are manipulated by center and sophisticated people in the name of center. In Nepal Political the Tarai as a whole was considered sensitive politically by the ruling elites of Kathmandu throughout history. Because of their close affinity with India and the Indian people, the Tarai people, particularly the Indian origin people were mistrusted and wherever possible they were excluded in the national politics of Nepal. For the first time, King Mahendra realized this political sensitivity of the Tarai people and gradually incorporated the Tarai indigenous groups as well as other caste groups into the mainstream of the National politics of Nepal. King Mahendra encouraged directly or indirectly to settle down the hill people into the Nepal Tarai to harmonize the process of "Nepalization" and national integration so that no hatred feelings could be develop. Marxist ideas: center and periphery, focus on inequality, center is always core, resourceful. talks about class structures, aristocracy, peasants, rural proletariats, this great initiatives by King Mahendra helped to minimize the regional class disparity, regional class and caste-based discrimination.

### **Decentralization minimizing class and caste discrimination and power devolution**

Decentralization means to distribute the power of the country in all the regions equally. It craves the highway for the smooth development of the infrastructures as well the works can be accomplished within their local level. This not only erases the burdens of the various factors involving with the seeking the permission from authority from the proper administration, planning and implementation, but also increases the democratic involvement of people and the public participation on the developmental activities. With the introduction of 7 states, 77 districts, and 753 local level administrations, our government has started to decentralize its power. The major goal of decentralization is to deliver public services effectively to the citizens equally under the democratically constituted local bodies. In the context of our country the term 'Local Government' and 'Decentralization' are taken synonymously, but in the deeper sense, they have vast differences as the local level is just the branch of the central government and decentralization plays the mode of transferring the power, resources, authorities, and responsibilities from the central government to the local government. Today we have decentralized the power of our country, so to upgrade the present status of society, we,



ourselves, must initiate the developments of our society from the very local level to the central level, so the trees planted by us today may be able to provide delicious fruits to our future generations, earning us dignity from them. Due to the decentralization process metaphysics of class is also transforming center of power is practicing in local level and voices of marginalized communities are also heard and mainstreaming by the state mechanism.

### **Democratic Involvement and marginalized participatory involvement**

Democracy as prescribed by US President Abraham Lincoln is a practice involved, run and maintained by the people. It is formed by the real involvement of the people with the state assuming all the responsibilities for the betterment of its citizen. Nepal has a long history of practicing democracy since 2007 B.S., which halted for some time after the advent of Panchayat System, and was restored again, after the people's movement of 2046 B.S. So, through these sands of time, we have seen all of its pros and cons. Due to lack of stability of government and disputes arose among the political leader for their selfish motives and the nature of political parties only focusing for the power of the country, the meaning of democracy has been deviated from the principle provided by Lincoln, but has even make our country contra democratic. In the historical context to present situation people's movement of 2046, ten years insurgency in Nepal and establishment of federal system in the history of Nepal. Democratic involvement of different classes of people especially marginalized people are practicing some sort of their rights and authorities.

### **Constitutional provision for social inclusion to reduce unequal class and caste disparity**

Social inclusion is very important in Nepal, as elsewhere, to advance social citizenship, equity, justice, and progress. But meaningful inclusion can be achieved only if „social“ is conceptualized as constituted not only by ossified cultural categories of the past, but increasingly more so by larger socio-economic processes such as globalization, modernization, urbanization, entrepreneurship, migration, education, profession, politics and the really practiced cultures of the present. These interactive processes promote or hinder social inclusion/exclusion, the nature of, and corrective for, which being determined by the specificity of the context. The surname-centric and ethnicism/racist discourse not only denies justice to the really marginalized people who may have involuntarily inherited „dominant“ sounding surnames, but also privileges the existing elites from the so-called marginalized ethnic groups at the expense of the really marginalized sections among them. The Constitution of Nepal (2072) has provision promoting unity in diversity, social and cultural solidarity and harmony by reorganizing the multi-ethnic, multi lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural and geographically diverse characteristics in order to ensure economic equality, prosperity and social justice by eliminating discrimination based on class, caste, religion, langue, reason and gender and all forms of caste-based untouchability. Based on the constitutional provision various constitutional commissions for ensuring the right of different community are also formed to end the unequal class and caste-based inequality in the society and from the nation at glance.





## **Conclusion**

Society is a mosaic diversity of different caste, ethnicity, race and class. There is power struggle, power relation, inter connection with different group during the social interaction, community works and ritual activities. Obviously, there are a lot of misunderstanding, struggle and within one community and outside of the society in the name of power, societal prestige, domination, hegemony and pursuit of governance in the state mechanism. Nepali society has been also facing different class struggle and caste struggle in the different timeframe from Shaha regime, Rana regimes, after the restoration of democracy and even the current scenario of federal state. On the other hand, some key affirmative prominent policies are also formulated and implemented in the due course of time to avoid the discriminatory class system and caste disparity in the society and the nation. Religion, culture and value based social norms were also key booming factors to promote the class and caste system in the society and vicious disparity were seen the past and some footprints are seen in the present situation but these traditional value and harmful social norms have been reforming process due to the reason of education, strong policy formulation, growth of economy in the society and in the household level, policy implementation and strong monitoring from state and from the civil society. Due to such affirmative policies people of bottom of the society, economically poor and socially marginalized community have been increased in state mechanism, reducing disparity and increasing representation in the decision-making level of the nation. Thus, power of Nepali society is transforming due to the empowerment level of people but needs to still initiate further actions, improvements and policy formulation to build a full of equal society.



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