

ISSN 2505-0974

The Debate about How the Caste System Controls the Power Structures and Forcefully Shoves the Dalit Community into Landlessness: A Sociological Study of Changunarayan Municipality of Kathmandu Valley

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Abstract

For decades, the issue of Dalit landlessness has been made an important subject of debate in academic and political arena in Nepal where the specific problem of Dalit landless is perceived that the result of a conspiracy by the Hindu state based on the doctrines of pollution and purity. Land is taken as a dominant productive resource in agricultural society, and it determines the power, prestige, and property status of every individual and family which is considered a means of empowerment, economic strengthening, employment, and dignity in Nepalese society. In Nepal, fundamentally, the problem of acute landlessness is especially attached to the Dalit community, where millions of Dalits have been excluded from access of land rights due to the state's unscientific land distribution policy and practices. Based on a survey of Dalit household respondents, this study explores how the caste system influences the status of land ownership and how it accesses and controls the socioeconomic power structures in Nepalese society. This study also examines how the root cause of landlessness has forced millions of Dalits to tackle several issues, such as food insecurity, extreme poverty, illiteracy, and social isolation at own their society. The state brought many policies and programs and formed many land-related commissions and committees for the purpose of justifiable land distribution to the landless Dalit and non-Dalit family and scientific land reform program in the democratic period, the Panchayat (party-less regime), and after the restoration of democracy, from 1990 to onwards. Unfortunately, neither the state nor the political parties seem honest and responsible for the implementation of those constitutional and legal policies and programs yet. As second-class citizens, around half of the Dalit population have been living in Nepal as squatters, Haruwa, Charuwa, Haliya, Khaliya, etc., in a purely landless and nearly landless condition. Ultimately, they have an emerging distrust of both political parties and the state, which is a possible cause for increasing tension between the state and the Dalit community.

KeyWords: Dalit, landlessness, ownership, socioeconomic, exploitation, oppression, exclusion, discrimination, governmental policy

Introduction

The majority of individuals in emerging economies rely heavily on land for their livelihood. Land is central to the livelihood of many people in developing countries (Adhikari, 2010), where it seems to have more significance in agrarian societies. Unal (2007) argues that when there is inequality in land ownership, dysfunctional rural markets lead to inefficient resource allocation, enlarge income disparity and increase land concentration. Nepal's land distribution has remained unequal due to historical circumstances and the state's giving elite preference over others. Such as Adhikari's and Unal's arguments, the unequal distribution of land has consistently been increasing poverty, social discrimination, and economic inequality in Nepalese society for a long time. The caste system has been the primary cause of the Dalit's decades-long lack of access to land in Nepal, where the subject of their landlessness has been consistently raising in both political and academic spheres.

Land is considered the most important physical and immovable property in both traditional and modern societies. Not only a productive asset, it is also a measure of social power, pride, dignity, and a symbol of prosperity (Müller Böker, 1981; Regmi, 1998 & 1999; CBS, 2006). In Sharma's perception, land is considered a means of empowerment, poverty alleviation, and the basis of good governance (Sharma, 2004), which is, as a principle, a means for the overall socioeconomic empowerment of an individual and household (Nepali, 2019). Therefore, in many agricultural societies like Nepal, the issue of guaranteeing land rights and addressing the landlessness problem faced by deprived people who depend on agriculture has been prominently raised at political and academic levels.

The Hindu Varna-based caste system, which has existed in South Asia, particularly in India and Nepal, from around 1500 BC, is especially directly influenced to the Dalit landlessness. Traditionally in Nepal, as in other Hindu societies, significant differences in land holdings between higher and lower castes have been quite common, with the upper caste almost always being in a better position (Regmi, 1976; Sharma, Dahal, & Gurung, 1991; Adhikari, 2008). Cause of Hindu rulers' exploitation in the name of caste system, landlessness has become a terrible issue, particularly in untouchable Dalit communities. Millions of so-called untouchables have been denied the rights to land, particularly in the South Asian Hindu majority countries of India and Nepal, both in traditional and modern societies.

The land rights agenda is not only the subject matter of the landless Dalit community; it is closely associated to the prosperity of country. The Dalit community is referred to as the left behind in social, economic, educational, political, and religious spheres and deprived of human dignity and social justice due to caste-based discrimination and untouchability (Bhattachan et al., 2009). I am agree with the perception of Bhattachan, due to fundamentally, the issue of landlessness in Nepal is regarding the caste system, which has strongly created the barriers to the nation moving forward in a progressive way. However, the state has not concentrated its efforts on advancing the agenda for landlessness as a significant concern.

Similarly, there is found a strong association between landlessness and socioeconomic status in Nepalese society. In Nepal, every individual's or a household's social respect, economic progress, educational achievement, and political success is measured based on their land ownership. There are constructed various perceptions regarding the issue of landownership and landlessness in social research field. Among of them perspectives, "the monopoly paradigm", among the three main paradigms used by Silver (1994) to explain social exclusion, seems more relevant in explaining lack of access to land or social exclusion due to landlessness. The dominant groups in this paradigm draw boundaries and deny other groups access to resources. Using their political, economic, and social power, they change laws and practices to their benefit and exclude others, usually members of the poor and marginalized groups/communities. Especially in the Dalit community, landlessness has pushed the individuals and households into poverty, squatting, and non-citizen and deprived them of all kinds of opportunities provided by the state in societies. Koirala (1996) has analyzed the caste-dominant Nepalese society from functional, organic structural, and Marxist perspectives. Among of them, the functionalist approach looks at society as a complex system whose components co-operate to maintain stability and solidarity. The caste system is also analyzed from a functional perspective in society; nevertheless, Dalits, the untouchable community, considered the lowest caste in Hindu religion, have been excluded and discriminated from their own societies. Due to a lack of viable livelihood alternatives and low-wage work, landless Dalits in Nepal have detached in socio-political, economic and other many privileges from state agencies. The problem of landlessness and near-landlessness often become a livelihood challenging for people who fully depend on land as farmers, especially like the majority Dalit and other marginalized community.

In the Marxist perspective, caste is the result of the bourgeoisie's ongoing dominance over the

proletariat (worker/poor) through the establishment of intervention categories based on power dynamics between caste groups and attribution categories like landowner and landless. The caste is taken as a system of social rank and power distribution, especially in Hindu Varna-based societies. In the class system, ritual norms have no importance at all, but power and wealth alone determine one's status (Dumont, 1958), whereas Hindu religious and socio-cultural practices are the indispensable factors of the caste system. Lastly, and most importantly, for many centuries, the caste system has been a key instrument of social stratification, hierarchy, and inequality in Nepali society. This research investigates how the Varna-based caste system controls the power structures and how millions of Dalits are forcefully pushed into a deep crisis of landlessness.

Research Methodology and Materials

Field of the Study

In April and May of 2023, this study was carried out in the Changuarayan municipality in the Bhaktapur district of Kanth Chhetra, which is located inside the Kathmandu Valley. Even though the research area is regarded as a semi-urban area of the Kathmandu Valley, where residents have been living in a condition of flux between tradition and modernity because they neither fully adhere to modern customs nor avoid old socio-religious and cultural practices. The majority of people there have continued to pursue their traditional occupations in agriculture and husbandry. Their priorities are not public administration, politics, or the judiciary services, even though very few people are attracted in small scale of businesses.

To search out employment chances, some individuals have moved into the core area of Kathmandu Valley, while several youths have temporarily migrated abroad for higher study and attractive employment. However, there is gradually increasing the facilities of quality education, health services, drinking water, and road networks etc. The study area is geographically divided into 9 wards; among them, the survey was conducted only in five wards, which were wards number 2, 4, 5, 7, and 9. Those are recognized as having a higher density of Dalit communities compared to other wards. Especially the Hill Dalit, Kami, Sarki, and Damai castes are available in research site.

Sampling

A non-probability sampling design was applied to select the settlements having a higher concentration of all castes of the Dalit population. Only 50 numbers of Dalit households (HH size) were taken as research participants due to limited time and resources. Under this household survey employees were used to gather factual and quantitative information. The use of computer software like Microsoft Excel was used for this research. Specifically, the units of analysis were individual by gender (male and female), household (as the primary unit of land ownership, production, and economic activity), and settlement (for instances of exclusion and inclusion at the community level). Quantitative methods for its acceptance have been guaranteed for validity and reliability.

Methods and Study Design

Positivism theory (Haig, 2018) relies on the scientific method is employed in this research, including quantitative research design in descriptive nature data collection through survey interviews. Surveys produce information that is inherently statistical in nature which are quantitative beats (Groves, 1996), to find causal relationships with how caste system controls the power structures and shoves the Dalit community into purely landless and nearly landless

condition where the positivism paradigm is relevant in this study. The general stages outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1999) and Creswell (2007) are merged and adjusted in the study. I conducted a wide analysis of the data gathered from the desk review and research field using the research questions as a social researcher.

The purposive sampling method was used to collect quantitative information. In total, 50 respondents were selected purposively on the basis of being landless or having few landless Dalits, who were available at the time of the survey period in their households. Only Dalit household were taken as respondents of this study, however, all these interviewees are not reflected here. This study draws on concerns from national, international, governmental, and non-governmental publications, like magazines, journals, reports, and newspapers that deal with land ownership and possession.

Similarly, all survey interviews were transcribed by the researcher. This research investigates the causes of caste system of Dalit landlessness and its social ramifications in the context of past and present situation. On the other hand, study explores the previous and existential constitutional provisions, laws, policies, and programs of the state regarding the landless Dalit in Nepal through in-depth policy review. Researcher had attempted to ensure the representation of different ages, castes and genders of respondents in research fields. Reliability and validity are ensured by cross-checking, verification, and quantitative triangulation of data from various sources and methods for its acceptability and generalization. The ethical responsibility of the researcher is ensured in this study.

Review of Literatures

The acute Dalit landlessness in Nepal is not just the cause of the deeply ingrained issue of Hinduism; it was also brought by the long-standing monopolized controlling of so-called upper-caste Hindu rulers on state mechanisms. The feudal character of state led to socio-cultural discrimination and economic disparities, resulting in skewed land ownership patterns and excluding women, ethnic minorities, and Dalits (Deuja, 2023). According to the NDC (2023), the term “Dalits” refers to “those untouchable communities whose water is unacceptable based on traditional religious superstition, caste-based discrimination, and untouchability; are the most backward in social, economic, educational, political, and religious fields; and contributed to state building through their labor, skill, and arts”. In total, twenty-seven castes are listed under the Dalits, and it occupies 13.04 percent of the total population of Nepal (CBS, 2021).

The Dalit is perceived a common identity of untouchable caste groups; they have been subjected to caste-based discrimination by the Hindu religion-based caste system and the entire state mechanism. So-called upper caste people's unscientific Hindu religious mindset and structural discrimination in Nepalese society have made the foundation of the caste system stronger. Due to the caste system, Dalits have been economically and politically oppressed, denied access to productive resources, prohibited in education, and socio-culturally excluded from all societies and state mechanisms. Seddon (1987) states that almost all Dalits do not fall under these sorts of privileged groups, like Brahmins and Chhetris; hence, they are excluded from land resources. When it comes to the issue of access on land, the Dalits are categorized under the list of most disadvantaged group. Not only have the land rights of Dalit, or untouchable, people been an issue of national and international debate for many decades in Nepal, but the state's impositions of numerous atrocities and injustices have also turned them into severe issues.

Similarly, on the basis of status, property, and power, Dalits and other oppressed groups have also been suffering in their societies at the hands of upper-caste elites. Upreti (2004) argues

that powerful elites are exploiting marginalized people. So-called higher castes (Brahmins and Chhetris) have a lot more land than necessary; their land is cultivated by other landless people. The ILO (2005) states that Dalits have the least ownership or no land ownership due to reduced access to economic resources as per the caste hierarchy and caste system. Actually, it is a very serious matter for both the state and landless Dalits due to real farmers having been excluded from their land holdings and continuously having been working on the land of landlords for many decades to produce the agricultural crops.

The caste system, with its purity and pollution, has been utilized as a means of exploitation by the Nepali state based on Hindu religious ideology, which pushed so-called lower castes into a condition of heavy pauperization. Landlessness has strongly increased poverty in Nepal because land is recognized as the major asset in Nepalese agricultural societies. Land has an economic base, and its hierarchical feature bears similarities to those of pre-capitalist class society everywhere, and it is used by the dominant classes to divide the oppressed and laboring classes of the villages (Nepali, 2019). Omvedt (1978) has stated that there is a debate on caste and class relation in the Indian context. In this regard, following the Marxist division of society into two elements via economic structure, or 'base structure,' determines the superstructure (Singer, 1980). The caste system in Nepal is stronger than class ideology since it has provided the Hindu rulers with a formidable instrument to exploit the people without constraint, whereas in this context, class ideology seems unable to overthrow the people's traditional caste-based mindset.

In a nation that relies heavily on agriculture, such as Nepal, poverty and landlessness are inter-linked, yet they are not exclusive to the Dalit community. Since poverty always has a high impact on the path to prosperity, eradicating it is essential to creating a thriving nation. UNDP Human Development Report (2009) also states that power relation among various categories seems one of the causes of disparity among various social groups, though there is increasing trend of human development index from 0.471 in 2001 to 0.509 in 2006. This report helps to understanding how the upper-caste rulers and the traditional Hindu state created disparity in society cause of power relation.

Actually, land is the main asset for determining an individual's social status and living standard in Nepali society, unfortunately, Dalits have an extremely high rate of landlessness. About 24.5 percent landlessness and 8 percent semi-landless (having less than 2 ropani or 0.1 ha. land are called agriculturally landless) are under poverty (CBS, 2006). According to the UNDP (2004), landlessness in Nepal also relates traditionally to low status in the caste system; a reality reflected in the fact that 15% of Hill and 44% of Tarai Dalits are totally landless, and depend on landlords for their daily subsistence.

In the context of Nepal, Dalit are recognized as poor, landless, uneducated and back-warded community where as national and international documents also justified this common understanding. Dalits are synonymous to landlessness and this problem is concentrated and also acute in case of Madhesi Dalit, such as *Chamar*, *Batar*, *Mushar*, *Dushadh*, and *Dom* (Bhattachan et al., 2003 & ILO, 2005). This data has shown the clear picture of Dalit landlessness.

Due to their lack of land, Dalits are now economically powerless and dependent on so-called upper castes' landlords. Landlords frequently take advantage of this dependence, which permits numerous atrocities against Dalits. Small land holdings and landlessness problems are the main causes of the *Haliya*, *Balighare/Khaliya*, *Haruwa*, *Charuwa*, and other systems (Sunar et al., 2015). The majority of Dalits have connected to agricultural and occupational work and have been victims of the violent forms of caste-based discrimination.

The landlessness issue is more acute in the Dalit community; however, a million numbers of indigenous and a small number of higher castes/communities have also been suffering and

deprived of their land rights. A study of six Terai districts (NDC, 2005) shows that 53 percent of the Dalit landlessness is more acute in Terai (70-80%) than Hills (10%) area. It is a fact that a large portion of the population has been deprived access to the resources of mobilization and consumption by the Nepalese state, where high classes, so-called upper castes, and powerful social groupings control the majority of the means of production in Nepal. Like, as mentioned in the above reports, landlessness invites the poverty, food insecurity and exclusion, and all these factors are strongly associated within each other.

The productive resource determine the access and deprivation from the opportunity of every individual and family. Sen (1981) states that resource entitlement avoids deprivation through command over alternative bundles of commodities and the use of economic, social, and political opportunities. Having no land in Nepal means people are excluded and deprived from their societies and all kinds of opportunities. Adhikari (2010) also expresses that the government's land distribution policies have not played an influential role in narrowing the disparity. Based on the above-mentioned views, it can be clearly be said that the Dalit landlessness is the product of the Varna-based caste system, feudal characteristics of the Hindu state and fragile legal provisions.

In South Asian Hindu societies, the Varna system is an extreme form of discrimination from the history of Vedic civilization, which was forcefully imposed on powerless people who were isolated from their society and property ownership. Upreti (2004) clearly illustrated how the landlords and the local elites maintain their hegemony and supremacy by use of local authority and power, as in the case of Guthi. The Varna system was applied by the Hindu rulers, which is based on the theory of conspiracy. Dalits could not associated in the Guthi system due to the cause of the so-called lower caste.

The Guthi system illustrates the exclusion of the Dalit community from land access in traditional societies and how it indirectly assists the Hindu state in the development of the Varna-based caste system. The Guthi system seems like a strong means of exploitation for lower castes and a means for the encroachment of power holders from the perspective of the caste system. Robertson and Mishra (1997) noted down that the Dalit's land in Bajhang district was registered by non-Dalits during land management. That is a minor example of how non-Dalits abuse power in the name of so-called high caste.

During the Rana and monarchy administrations, the Hindu rulers of Nepal lawfully employed a number of land distribution practices; regrettably, these procedures were carried out according to their wishes. According to Regmi (1963), Prithivi Narayan Shah, who unified this until-then fragmented country, was keen to control the negotiating access to land in Nepal productive lands of Kathmandu Valley and the Tarai. He distributed Birta and Jagir land to his followers, especially his soldiers, who helped him in the expansion of territory (Regmi, 1963). Among those land distribution systems, Guthi was the property controlled by religious organizations, and Birta was the land given to those who were obedient to the authorities.

The Raikar, a significant land distribution system, was provided on a regular basis. Jagir was land awarded to government employees in exchange for their work. Sera was the name of the territory that belonged to the palace. Cultivators without access to Raikar land worked as Halis or Gothals (herdsmen), in many cases as bonded laborers (Regmi, 1976). With the exception of the Raikar system, the caste system completely denied the untouchable Dalit community access to other kinds of land opportunities.

In the Kathmandu Valley, Hindu rulers started to monopolize land distribution with the support of legal policies based on the Varna system, both in the Malla period and the Rana regimes. Millions of so-called lower-caste people had been deprived of the natural land rights, and the same number of so-called upper-caste people were able to gain a lot of land through the injustice and intentional land distribution process of Hindu rulers. Charmakar (2017) states that

the history of land ownership and tenure in Nepal has undergone major changes time and again since 1769. Sharma (2004) argues that all ideas of agrarian reforms by securing tenancy rights to the tillers, an equitable distribution of land, and adoption of scientific methods in farming have been attempted only since the dawn of democracy after 1951. It is clear that land was started to be distributed by rulers to their interested people and own relatives within the Malla regime and during the Rana ruling period.

The process of justifiable land distribution to landless Dalits have continuously been problematized in shadow because of the fake commitment of all political parties and the influence of landowners in the state till now. Only 1.5 percent of agricultural land was redistributed in spite of such numerous efforts due to invasion of land ceiling, and the hiding of land holdings during the period examined (CBS, 2002). Landlords who controlled over land have also been intervening in the political parties and major organs of state (executive, legislative, and judiciary). The conflict of interest of landlords have been creating the obstacle to making landless-friendly policy by parliament due to their dual role and intervention in the state. Landlords as parliament members want to make the protection of their land more important than the limitation of land rights. Considering all the aforesaid contexts, the issue of land distribution for landless Dalits and squatters and the agenda of scientific land reform are becoming very complex and rigorous after the restoration of democracy, 2046 B.S.

Similarly, the Dalit community has faced food insecurity in Nepal for centuries more than non-Dalits, a situation that is directly related to their landlessness. Dahal et al. (2002) mentioned that landlessness, marginal and small landholding, and food inefficiency are typically features of Dalits. In addition to bringing with them feudalistic values and norms based on the Varna system and religion-based rigorous cultures, the Hindu rulers and other Hindu religious priests had been in Nepal for centuries (Aahuti, 2004). From the first century to the seventeenth century, the Hindu religious rulers and followers had continuously entered Nepal from India. Regmi (1999) states that the Birta system was one of the worst manifestations of socioeconomic inequality. Frequently in all societies, the origination of landlessness is the problem of usually moving economically and socially process but main cause of Dalit landlessness associates with the caste based Hindu Varna system (Deuja, 2019). In this context, Aahuti (2004) further states that without ownership of economic base or land, without promotion of skills and management of the alternative employment, and without construction of the cultural environment two the occupation change, it is clear that there won't be fundamental change in the life of Dalit community.

Finally, the issue of Dalit landlessness is directly associated to the change of semi-feudal mode of production of country where Dalit communities were neglected in relation of feudal and semi-feudal mode of production. The various arbitrary land distribution system are recognized as state's feudal character, which was begun by Rana rulers in Nepal. Millions of people have been compelled not only to exploit and discriminate, but also they are extremely deprived of the multi-dimensional sectors because of these unscientific and so-called social and cultural rituals based on the Hindu religion in Nepal existence till now. A thorough analysis of this situation reveals that most Dalits have been living in a vicious cycle of poverty and landlessness, but the state has not yet made resolving the Dalit landlessness issue a main priority.

Policy Review

After centuries, the federal democratic republican state finally enacted a Dalit-friendly land policy, although the state is only limited to establishing and reforming to the land distribution commissions. Surprisingly, when it comes to land ownership, the state has always taken on dual standards for the landless Dalit community. The Malla and Rana regimes frequently

denied to the Dalits access to land, and almost all governments have not implemented laws, policies, programs, and constitutions pertaining to the allocation of land for squatters and the landless after the establishment of democracy, 1950. The state formed two commissions in the democratic period (1950-1959) regarding land reform; these were (1) the Land Investigation Commission, 1950, and (2) the Land Reform Commission, 1952. At that period, the state brought the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 1951; the Tenancy Right Acquisition Act, 1952; the Land Reform Act, 1957; and the Birta Abolition Act, 1959.

Likewise, the King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah also provided a special royal proclamation regarding the farmers and land tenants, but all these commissions, acts, constitutions, and royal proclamations did not prioritize the addressing of the problem of Dalit landlessness. In the Panchayati regime (1960-1989), the Agricultural Reorganization Act, 1963 and the Land Act, 1964 were also brought by the state. And, the Panchayati regime formed the Royal Land Commission in 1962, but these acts and commissions did not support the management of land for landless Dalits. However, it is assumed that the Panchayati reign successfully reformed the land program to some extent.

On the other hand, following the people's movement in 1990, the state enacted the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal; however, this constitution did not include any special provisions addressing Dalit landlessness. In the restoration of the democratic period (1990-2005), the High Level Land Reform Commission was formed in 1951 under the chairmanship of Keshab Badal. But none of the Dalits had gotten the benefit from that period. On the other hand, none of the governments implemented any of these suggestions and recommendations regarding land reform and distribution to the landless and squatters.

After the establishment of federal democratic republican, almost all political parties have been raising the issue of scientific land reform and commitment to landless Dalit communities, but an equitable distribution of land remains only a popular election slogan of Nepal. Political parties' popular land slogans have been strategically used only to attract the Dalit vote bank. The Comprehensive Peace Accord (2006), the Interim Constitution (2007), and Nepal's two Three-Year Interim Plans (2007–2010 and 2010–2013) all made reference to this widespread consensus about the necessity of land reform. The majority of Nepal's major political parties said that one of their main goals for the nation's negotiating access to land in Nepal was to conduct a "scientific" and "revolutionary" land reform.

Among of major three political parties, one of the main objectives of the Nepali Congress, the country's largest political party, is focused to land reform program in political manifestoes. According to the Nepali Congress (2008), the party wants to "build a national consensus to draft a scientific land policy that will help increase the productivity and ensure the effective use of land." Similar to this, the party states in its 2013 manifesto that it is committed to successfully enforcing a land-use policy that forbids the commercial exploitation of agricultural lands (Nepali Congress, 2013). In its 2008 election manifesto, the CPN (UML) asserted that it will industrialize agriculture and implement revolutionary land reform in order to create a powerful and affluent Nepal. A program for land use management, distribution, and productivity growth would be implemented, party said. A unique initiative will be started to improve the lot of peasants who are below the poverty line, such as *Kamaiyas*, landless people, and slum dwellers (CPN (UML), 2008). The UML promised in its 2013 election manifesto to use scientific land reform to provide land access for those without land (CPN (UML), 2013). The UCPN (Maoist) party raised as more significant land rights issue than other political parties. In summary, the party's primary objective would be an agricultural revolution, as mentioned under the subject of agriculture and land reforms. Party would create a national capitalistic system of production that would give land to impoverished and landless farmers, ending feudal, semi-feudal, and bureaucratic means of production.

The party further emphasized that, to maximize labor usage and support economic growth, land taken from feudal and capitalist bureaucrats would be allocated to local farmers without discrimination, and co-operatives would be encouraged to boost output (UCPN (Maoist), 2008). In the UCPN (Maoist), 2013) manifesto, the party reaffirmed its commitment to enacting an idea that the tillers should own their land (UCPN (Maoist), 2013). All these three major political parties were included similar land rights agendas in the 2018 and 2023 parliamentary election manifestos.

The state totally formed 16 commissions after the establishment of democracy in 1950 to until now. The state established four land commissions during the Federal Democratic Republican Period (2006 to onward): the High-Level Commission for Scientific Land Reform in 2009, the Land-Related Problem-Solving Commission in 2020, the National Land Commission in 2021, and the Land Issues Resolving Commission in 2024. However, for Dalits who are still without land, none of these committees were able to provide fruitful results. In Nepal, 2007 Interim Constitution and the 2015 Constitution were both adopted; however, the former failed to address Dalit landlessness through any constitutional measures.

On the other hand, political parties and the state are not yet prepared to provide land to landless Dalits. The land-related policy study mentioned above shows that there are adequate laws and program in place to address the Dalit community's landlessness issues in Nepal. The main issue, however, is the state's and political parties' commitment, willingness, and resolution, which highlights the main obstacles to resolving landlessness in Nepal. All major political parties are agreed to land reform; however, their manifestos are limited to public consumption and party politics. It is said that the 2015 Nepalese Constitution is the unique constitution for resolving the Dalit landlessness; however, the state is unable to distribute land to landless Dalits in accordance with the constitution, as stated in Clause 40, Sub-clause 5 of Part 3, under the Rights of Dalits.

After being legally released from the landowners' coercive control, the state rehabilitated tillers (bonded workers), but they were unable to obtain complete land rights. In addition to living in exploitative relationships, thousands of *Haliya*, or tillers, are living in a condition of complete landlessness. The majority of *Haliyas*, or tillers, have been forced to work as laborers for landlords. Among the total numbers, ninety-seven percent are from the Dalit community (Biswakarma, 2019). Landless Dalits could not get any kinds of government grants, loans, or services due to their landlessness because financial institutions don't provide huge amounts of loans to their clients without collateral. Because of landlessness, they are compelled to do hard labor all day, but not only do they need to stay hungry. Ultimately, they have to work as slaves, and they have been living like slaves as second-class citizens in their own country. Unfortunately, the state is indifferent to putting constitutional and legal provisions into effect and resolving the Dalit landlessness issue.

Findings of the Study

Caste system and social hierarchy are taken as the major root causes of the Dalit landlessness, where, due to the Dalit community's minimum land holdings, the majority of Dalits have been compelled to menial work in a minimal wage. According to the results of this household survey, the primary source of poverty among the Dalits is near landlessness or pure landlessness which is the result of how caste system displaces to the untouchable Dalits community from the land ownership. The study also shows how the Hindu religion Varna based caste system has been made a major factor of the Dalit community's poverty, illiteracy, starvation, discrimination, low health facilities etc in the research field.

The Dalits women possess far-less land than men do, and their literacy rate is more -less than male, with the majority of Dalits living in illiterate condition.

Caste-based discrimination, exclusion, and oppression are so pervasive in the Dalit community that somehow there is a significant role of landlessness among them. Actually, landlessness is not limited only a constraint on prosperity for them; it has created a huge barriers for the development of the whole nation. Policies and programs have managed after the promulgation of the federal democratic republican regime for the Dalit landless and squatters, bonded laborers, etc.; however, in the context of these constitutional and legal provisions of implementation are in very poor condition. The majority of political leaders have been represented from the landlords, feudal families, and elites in both federal and provincial governments and parliaments. The Brahmin-dominant major political parties, on the other hand, have not been ready to adequately execute the constitutional clause pertaining to Dalit landlessness, ultimately, all these Dalits have been compelled to stay in the pure landless condition.

The research site, in Changunarayan municipality, approximately all landless Dalits have been compelled to facing the illiteracy, food insecurity, lack of quality health services and education, unsecure accommodation, impure drinking water, and other numerous problems. Not only the federal government, provincial and local governments are not also serious about their landlessness and other basic needs. According to the respondents, landlessness is the foundational cause of numerous other problems in the Dalit community where landless Dalits of Changunarayan have been consistently claiming the land rights as per constitutional and legal provisions. This research justifies how caste system controls the power structure and how displaces the powerless and untouchable Dalit community into landlessness and nearly landless condition in Nepal.

Discussion and Analysis: Landlessness among Dalit Community

The Dalit landlessness is the more significant and debatable issue in political and academic sectors, where multidimensional factors are responsible for inviting this severe problem in the Dalit community. According to the research findings, majority of Dalits in Nepal have been living in either completely landless conditions or on minimal land, where it appears that local feudal lords and other powerful individuals from the upper caste have hijacked their land. Several factors are contributed to the complexity of Nepal's Dalit landlessness, which poses a serious problem for both the Dalit community and the state. This research also shows the Dalit community's actual land access, and the data discloses that the maximum number of Dalits are living under landlessness in Changunarayan municipality of Bhaktapur district in the Kathmandu Valley.

In accordance with survey data, 56 percent of Dalits have minimal volume of land; however, 44 percent of Dalits have been living in an absolutely landless condition. In this context, Dahal et al. (2002) state that landlessness, marginal small landholding, and food insufficiency are typical features of Dalits where the UNDP (2004) data also shows that the Dalit occupy only 1 percent of total agricultural land. According to the ILO (2005), Dalits possess the least amount of land or none at all since they have less access to financial resources because of caste and social inequality. In comparison, the Dalit community in Changunarayan has less land, and studies have delved into the reasons for this landlessness. Survey results show that landlessness is an extreme problem for them because landlessness or very small land size has consistently negatively affected their livelihoods.

The Dalit community is forced to forfeit their land rights due to the exploitation by so-called upper-caste elites, as evidenced by survey data showing that 64 percent of Dalits lost their land through forceful hijacking, mortgage, and fraudulent documents created by Brahmins and Chhetries. Robertson and Mishra (1997) noted down that Dalit's land in Bajhang district was registered by non-Dalits during land management.

Their land was dramatically hijacked because local feudal provided a minimum volume of loans, but they were compelled to fall for fake legal documents. Landless Dalits in Changunarayan are equal to the average percentage of landless Dalits in Nepal, whereas various (non-governmental and governmental) research show that an average of 44 percent of Dalits have been living in a purely landless condition in the country. This research data also proved that landlessness is an acute problem for the majority of Nepalese Dalits, whether the Hill or Madhesh/Terai, and neither Kanth area of Kathmandu Valley.

Indeed, the main factor causing the Dalit community to fall into a vulnerable socioeconomic status is landlessness. According to research data, 95 percent of Dalits felt that they had lost their social prestige and dignity, and 14 percent of Dalits had faced familial relation breaks cause of landlessness. In a field survey, 98 percent of Dalits were not able to get any kinds of loans or financial support from the governmental and non-governmental institutions. Not only a productive asset, it is also a measure of social power, pride, dignity, and a symbol of prosperity (Regmi, 1998 & 1999). I am fully agree with the above mentioned Regmi's logic whereas landlessness has been made a major cause of defamation, distrust, and grievances in the Dalit community. The Hindu caste system may be defined as a hierarchy of endogamous divisions in which membership is hereditary and permanent, where the hierarchy includes inequality both in status and in access to goods and services (Subedi, 2010). Such as Subedi's argument, Dalits have been deprived of the status and access to goods and services of the state. In reality, the Hindu Varna based caste system has forcefully pushed the Dalits into the bottom of Nepali society at every dimensions. The majority of the Dalits are landless, and they are facing socio-economic deprivations (Nepali, 2019). According to the poll, just 6% of Dalits can obtain enough food from their land for fewer than three months. Due to food insecurity, the remaining 94% of Dalits have been living in extremely precarious situations. Similarly, 76 percent of respondents said that the caste system and Dalit landlessness are strongly association with each other. According to the field survey, 98 percent of participants stated that their lack of land prohibit them from receiving any loans or other financial assistance from the state agencies. These data justify that the Dalit landlessness problem is the root cause of their barrier for neither the federal republican democratic era nor democracy were able to resolve the issue of landlessness. The main recent goal is not to formulate other policies to reduce landlessness; the state assignment is rather to implement such land laws and policies.

In the case of Dalit landlessness, the state and political parties are conspiratorial, unaccountable, and irresponsible in their dedication to their tasks. Due to the negligence of political parties and the state apparatus, the issue of Dalit landlessness is steadily becoming a severe condition. The landless Dalits have grown concerned as a result of the failed attempts to address the issues of landlessness, even in spite of the numerous progressive policies, the formation and reformation of land commissions, and the implementation of new and failed programs by administrations under the pretense of resolving squatter and landless issues.

In conclusion, before the establishment of the federal democratic era, the causes of injustice in land distribution laws and policies were favor of upper castes; actually, those policies supported the increasing of landlessness, poverty, political domination, social deprivation, and economic exploitation of the Dalit community. Based on the Varna system, caste discrimination and the domination of the Hindu state/ideology are the main sources of Dalit landlessness. Especially, Terai-Madheshi Dalits have been living in the condition of high vulnerability to poverty due to landlessness compared to other regions, even though landless Dalits have been scattered all over Nepal. Finally, this research has depicted as evident not just the status of landless Dalit of Changunarayan Municipality of Bhaktapur; it also discloses the landlessness facing the Dalit community in Nepal as a whole.

Conclusion

The Dalit community in the study area's actual land ownership and possession status is clearly reflected through this research. These figures demonstrate that the Dalit community have relatively limited access to land, where the majority of respondents have claimed that they had lost their land as a result of it being hijacked by the Chhetries and Brahmins, who are considered to be higher castes. Local feudal rulers dramatically seized those lands in order to provide a minimal amount of loans. Unfortunately, the state has consistently acted as though it is genuinely enforcing land distribution laws to provide landless citizens with access.

The land distribution status, land access, and the ways in which the caste system governs societal power structures based on the aforementioned facts. The socioeconomic situation and the way upper-caste feudal lords are seizing their land are also examined in this study. The state established a number of land-related commissions and committees, as well as brought a number of policies and programs, for the purpose of scientific land reform and land distribution to the landless during the democratic period, the Panchayat (party-less regime), and after the democratic era. However, the state did not apply such constitutional laws and Dalit-friendly land policies to solve the problem of Dalit landlessness.

Finally, due to structural and systematic caste discrimination in Nepal, Dalit community have been facing a number of issues, including caste hierarchy, unequal distribution of productive resources, socioeconomic hardship, political exclusion, and other types of repression of cultural and religious exclusion. Due to decades of persecution by political parties led by majority members of the upper caste and their distorted ideologies, which have their roots in both casteism and class, Dalit communities in Nepal are being exploited. Given this, the state must take notice of and honestly initiate the scientific distribution of land to landless Dalit families in accordance with appropriate laws and the elimination of structural discrimination based on caste system.

Declarations: For contributing to the development of this research article, I am especially grateful to the respondents as well as Associate Professor Dr. Tika Ram Gautam of Tribhuvan University's Department of Sociology in Kirtipur.

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