

Socio-economic and Political Deprivation of Hill Dalits

(A Study of Gaikhur and Taple Villages of Gorkha District)

Dr. Shiva Prasad Khanal *

Received: April 18, 2022

Accepted: May 15, 2022

Published: December 24, 2022

Abstract

This paper applies the mix-method approach (both quantitative and qualitative methods) through survey data from Gaikhur and Taple villages of Gorkha district (408 Hill Dalit households and 210 non-Dalit households). The caste hierarchy and varna system created the caste-based discrimination and untouchability practice in Nepal. This paper also explores that because of caste-based discrimination including untouchability prevailed in the villages studies non-Dalits discriminates Dalits in education and participation in religious and cultural functions in the villages. Further, Dalits are deprived of household income generation as compared to that of non-Dalits. Data also reveals that Dalits are deprived of political participation as compared to that of non-Dalits. Within Hill Dalits, the so-called low caste Dalits (Damai and Gaine) have also deprived in education, household income and political as well as cultural participation as compared to that of high caste Dalits (Sarki and Kami).

Keywords: discrimination, untouchability, deprivation and participation

Introduction

Hill Dalits are those communities who fell the caste-based discrimination and untouchability and deprived in educational, economic, political and religious grounds by which they are depressed to the human dignity and social justice (National Dalit Commission, 2017). According to Koirala (1996) Dalit a group of people who are religiously, culturally, socially and economically oppressed caste group living with vulnerable state in Nepal. Dalits is not a homogenous group, whose heterogeneity extends to language and culture. Dalits are categorized in three broad regional groups a) Hill

Dalits, b) Newar Dalits, and iii) Dalits in the Tarai community, among which this paper is assessed the socioeconomic deprivation of Hill Dalits (Sarki, Kami, Damai and Gaine) who are residing in Gaikhur and Taple villages of Gorkha district. The discriminatory practice is based on the fourfold *varna* system of Hinduism. From this notion, the society mostly practices caste-based discrimination that creates unequal caste hierarchical relations among the social groups in Nepal. Thus, Hill Dalits are undergoing deprivation in socio-economic and political dimensions if we compared to that of non-Dalits (Bhattachan, Hemchuri, Gurung, Chemjong & Bishwokarma, 2003).

Objectives

The specific objective of this paper is to explore the deprivation of Hill Dalits in educational, cultural (participation in religious/ cultural functions), economic and political dimensions in comparison to the non-Dalits.

Methods and Materials

This paper is based on the data collected from the survey of Ph. D. research conducted in 2014. The survey was conducted in two villages of Gorkha district (Gaikhur and Taple) where Hill Dalit households were concentrated. In total, 408 Hill Dalit households were taken as census method (215 households from Gaikhur and 193 households from Taple). The researcher took enumeration from all Sarki, Kami, Damai and Gaine households (102, 102, 179 and 25 households respectively) found in the villages. For non-Dalits, 210 households (Brahmin, Chhetris, Magars, Gurung and Newars) were selected by applying the stratified sampling procedure with proportion to population size. This study also based on mix-method approach on which qualitative data through i) focus group discussions, ii) key informant interviews and iii) cases developed are applied. This study applied Chi-square test and F- test. Chi-square test declares the association between dependent (caste groups) and independent variables at 5 % level of significant. F-ratio measures the population means are equal or not.

Results and Discussions

Educational Deprivation

Social deprivation covers the educational and cultural exclusion among Hill Dalits in comparison to non-Dalits (Brahmin, Chhetri, Newar, Magar and

Gurung). For centuries, Dalits have been deprived in access to education and cultural functions organized by non-Dalits. They are generally deprived of acquiring education in schools especially because of century old practice of untouchability and their economical backwardness. Koirala (1996) explored that the Hindu Gurukul education was based on Hindu *varnasram* system, and thereby the education was selective and discriminatory according to *Varna*. Three *varnas*- Brahman, Kshatiya and Vaisya - had access to education, but the *Sudras* (now Dalits) were excluded. Thus, the so-called untouchables had not only religious and cultural disabilities but they were not allowed to gain education and cultural functions since *Shudra* could not touch a Brahmin. The social segregation against Dalits brings educational discrimination between non-Dalits and Dalits.

Hill Dalits undergo the educational deprivation while we compared the literacy rates across the caste groups. The literacy rate of non-Dalit caste groups as a whole is remarkably higher (71.4 %) of which notably higher literacy rate for males (76.3%) than for females (66.4%) are observed. The corresponding figure for the Dalit population is somewhat lower (60.3%), in which the literacy rate for males (61.2%) outnumbers females (59.3%) but still lower than that of non-Dalits, indicating that Hill Dalits of the villages studied have deprived in educational dimension. Further, educational deprivation among the so-called low caste Dalits (Damai and Gaine) also persists within Hill Dalits. Literacy for Kami population is fairly higher (57.9), followed by Sarki (43.2%) while literacy rates of Damai and Gaine have found relatively lower (39.3% and 35.1% respectively) compared to that of Kamis (57.9%) and Sarkis (43.2%)(Table 1). On the other extent, the literacy rate for Gaine population is found to be prominently lower (35.1%) compared to that of the former four caste groups. In addition, literacy rates of female Dalits for all caste groups (Sarki, Kami, Damai and Gaine) are found to be markedly lower (66.4%, 53.7%, 38.8% and 35.4%, respectively) compared to male counterparts (76.3%, 62.3%, 48.1% and 46.15, respectively) (Table 1). It is concluded that the Damai and Gaine are more deprived caste groups in educational ground compared to Kamis and Sarkis.

Table 1 Distribution of Household Population Aged Six Years and above by Literacy by Sex, Gaikhur and Taple Villages, 2014

Caste group	Literacy			
	Total	Male	Female	Odds ratio
Non-Dalits	71.4 (572)	76.3 (293)	66.4 (279)	1.0
Dalits	60.3 (870)	61.2 (462)	59.3 (408)	0.71*
Sarkis	43.2 (211)	48.1 (112)	38.8 (99)	0.45*
Kamis	57.9 (291)	62.3 (152)	53.7 (139)	0.25*
Damais	39.3 (320)	46.1 (177)	35.4 (143)	0.82*
Gaine	35.1 (48)	39.1 (27)	36.2 (24)	0.91*
Total	53.3 (1442)	58.2 (755)	48.8 (687)	
ANOVA test (F-ratio)	6.9 ^o			

Source: Field Survey, 2014. Note: a) Figures inside the parentheses for literacy (overall literacy) in column indicates the population aged 6 years and above

b) Odd ratio is calculated between the categories (between caste groups).

*Significantly different from the reference values at less than or equal to 5 %, reference group= non-Dalit (Brahmin, Chhetris, Newars and Magars)

The ANVO test also confirms that the difference in literacy rate across the caste groups is significance at less than 5% level. The likelihood of Hill Dalits being literate is 0.71 lower than that of a non-Dalit people, which is statistically significant. The probability of being literate among Damais is 0.81 times lower than that of Sarkis. Qualitative data from the focus group discussions showed that educational deprivation is more pronounced among Hill Dalits compared to that of non-Dalits.

Cultural Deprivation

The common practices of association, sharing and getting entertainment from local functions such as *Teej*, *Mage sakranti*, *Vailo* and *Holi* organized in their community are considered inclusive social intercourse between non-Dalits and Hill Dalits. Thus, low participation in the different religious functions is labeled to be deprived of communal integration, meaning that such practice is linked with exclusionary social behaviours against Hill Dalits. In the villages studied, century-old social hierarchy is created through which Brahmin, Chhetris, Newars and Magars are positioned at high social ladder than the Hill Dalits because of the notion of untouchability

dichotomous, implying that Hill Dalits have felt deprivation in access to cultural participation.

Out of 618 households surveyed, more than fifty-one percent of households have participated religious or cultural ceremonies organized in the villages studied (51.3%). It is found that larger proportion of non-Dalit households attended religious or cultural ceremonies (72.0%) while lower proportion of Hill Dalit households are attaining such religious functions (43.6%) (Table 2). It is found that lower proportion of Hill Dalit households has feel comfortable to attain religious or cultural functions organized in the villages, implying that the non-Dalit people discriminated against the Hill Dalits in attaining religious functions. For intra-Dalits comparing, about fifty-six percent of Sarkis have attended the religious or cultural ceremonies (56.9%) followed by Kamis (53.9%) and Gains (44.0%). Thus, it is explored that there is caste segregation in participation of cultural functions that larger proportion of non-Dalits are likely to attain the religious functions compared to Dalits, suggesting that they have traditionally low caste status in caste hierarchy of overall caste structures and they are also placed at bottom caste hierarchy within the Dalit caste groups.

Table 2 Percentage Distribution of Household Members Participating in Religious and Cultural Functions in their Villages, Gaikhur and Taple Villages, 2014

Caste groups	Participation in Religious/cultural function (s)		Total
	Yes	No	
Non-Dalits	151 (72.0)	59 (28.0)	408 (73.1)
Dalits	177 (43.6)	231 (56.4)	102 (100.0)
Sarki	58 (56.9)	44 (43.1)	102 (100.0)
Kami	55 (53.9)	47 (46.1)	179 (100.0)
Damai	54 (30.2)	125 (69.8)	25 (100.0)
Gaine	11 (44.0)	14 (56.0)	618 (100.0)
Total	317 (51.3)	301 (48.7)	210 (26.9)
ANOVA F test	53.28*		

Source: Field Survey, 2014. Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages and figures outside of parenthesis are cases.

Qualitative data from focus group discussions showed that in cultural ceremonies substantial numbers of non-Dalits households were sharing these cultural functions compared to Dalits.

Economic Deprivation

Kumar (2009) assessed that Dalit households who have fallen in the ladder of landlessness imply denial of social and economic rights – the rights to have a shelter, adequate food, education and health, implying that those household populations are deprived or discriminated compared to the landowners. In order to assess to economic deprivation of Hill Dalits the economic strata derived by an amount of yearly income from different income sources. According to Subedi (2007), the economic strata are primarily based on the amount of yearly income (it is calculated by adding all income coming from each and every source like farm work, wage labour, service and so on). The high economic stratum refers to the households with earnings of more than Rs. 90000 in a year that maintain the family sufficiently, middle economic stratum indicates to the households with earnings of Rs. 61000- Rs. 90000 who maintain the family adequately, low economic strata means the households with earnings of Rs. 20000-Rs. 60000 who maintain the family for 8-11 months, and very low economic stratum refers to the households with earnings of less than 19000 in a year who manage the family only less than 8 months in a year.

Land distribution is skewed in favour for non-Dalits, indicating that Hill Dalits felt deprivation in maintaining household consumption. Despite the disparity in landownership size, farm production, alternative income sources and gainful employment are also major sources for the household population. These factors determine inequality in income distribution that brings deprivation among Dalits.

More than 88 percent of the Hill Dalits falls below the minimum subsistence income (low economic strata) while 11 percent of non-Dalits. Among the caste groups, the Gaine incomparably represent the very low-income category, accounting 40 percent of their surveyed households and there are more than four-fifth of Gaine households falling below the minimum subsistence income (Table 3).

Table 3 Percentage Distributions of Households by Economic Strata, according to Caste Groups, Gaikhur and Taple Villages, 2014

Caste groups	Economic strata				Total
	% out of total households within economic strata				
	High	Middle	Low	Very low	
Non-Dalits	45.3 (61.3)	13.3 (32.8)	26.0 (21.3)	15.3 (11.3)	210 (34.0)
Dalits	10.5 (38.7)	40.2 (67.2)	38.2 (78.7)	44.1 (88.7)	408 (66.0)
Sakis	11.8 (10.8)	14.7 (24.6)	43.1 (24.0)	30.4 (15.3)	102 (16.5)
Kamis	26.5 (24.3)	11.8 (19.7)	26.5 (14.8)	35.3 (17.7)	102 (16.5)
Damais	2.2 (3.6)	5.6 (16.4)	34.6 (33.9)	57.5 (50.7)	179 (29.0)
Gaine	0	16.0 (6.6)	44.0 (6.0)	40.0 (4.9)	25 (4.0)
Total no. of households	124 19.9 (100.0)	67 10.9 (100.0)	202 32.8 (100.0)	225 36.4 (100.0)	618 100.0 (100.0)
χ^2 value					104.56*

Source: Field Survey, 2014. Note: χ^2 value: *significant at less than or equal to 5% level. Parentheses refer to column Percentages.

Out of 408 Dalit households, the majority of them have fallen into 'very low' economic stratum (44.1%) while much lower proportion of non-Dalits have fallen in the strata (15.3%). Only about eleven percent of Dalit households are in high economic stratum (10.5%) while more than forty-five percent of non-Dalit households are in the category (Table 3). On the other hand, non-Dalits are essentially large size income holders, although they are spread across all economic strata because of majority of non-Dalit' households have fallen in the category of high economic strata (45.3%). There are few Kami' households (high caste Dalits) who have high income (24.3%) while majority of them have fallen in low and very low economic strata (26.5% and 35.3%, respectively). More than seventy-three percent of Sarki' households fall under subsistence income level because of majority of them fall in low

and very low strata (43.3% and 30.4%, respectively) (Table 3). There is clear association between economic strata and caste groups, indicating that caste is a core determining factor of one's economic class as also suggested by the value of χ^2 , which is significant at 5% level. The qualitative survey also confirms that more Hill Dalit households have felt economic deprivation compared to that of non-Dalits.

Political Deprivation

Access to politics of any political background is low among Hill Dalits, implying that Dalits have felt deprivation in participation in political parties compared to non-Dalits. The poor participation of Hill Dalits (involvement in various political parties) in party politics has indicated that the non-Dalits always try to segregate Hill Dalits in politics, indicating that they are bond in trap of illiteracy, poverty and low social mobility because of the legacy of century-old caste-based discrimination and untouchability. Further, political participation is also found discrimination within Hill Dalits, indicating that the larger segment of Damai and Gaine felt exclusion from the party politics.

Out of 210 non-Dalit households higher proportion of them have access to take the membership of any political party (42.7%) during the second CA election held in 2008 compared to that of Hill Dalit household members (27.6%), showing that the Hill Dalits have felt deprivation in access to participation in politics because of discrimination and untouchability practice (Table 4). Moreover, Firstly, Hill Dalits fall in poor section of the society, secondly, they placed in lower ladder in local class-caste hierarchy in comparison with dominant class non-Dalits and thirdly, they are seemed to be reluctant to politics and decision-making authority. For intra-Dalit comparison, larger proportion of Kami household members have taken party membership (38.2%) followed by Sarkis (36.3%). The participation of Damai and Gaine household members is found to be lower (36.3% and 15.6% respectively) compared to the former two Dalit caste groups, implying that there is found caste-based discrimination against the so-called low caste Dalits (Damai and Gaine). Sarki and Kami also create the demarcation to Damia and Gaine in access to local to national politics.

Table 4 Percent Distribution of Household Members involving in Politics (Party members), Gaikhur and Taple Villages, 2014

Caste groups	Membership of political party		Total
	Yes	No	
Non-Dalits	88 (42.0)	122 (58.0)	210
Dalits	113 (27.6)	295 (72.5)	408
Sarkis	37 (36.3)	65 (63.7)	102
Kamis	39 (38.2)	63 (61.8)	102
Damai	28 (15.6)	151 (84.6)	179
Gaine	9 (36.1)	16 (64.0)	25
Total	196 (31.7)	422 (68.3)	618

Source: Field Survey, 2014. Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages and figures outside parenthesis are cases.

Qualitative data showed the similar line that the non-Dalits have shown discrimination against Hill Dalits in taking part in politics from local to national level politics. Moreover, Dalit people have to bear in mind that they have obligation to cast their votes in the line of non-Dalit' candidates favouring regardless of political party. Similarly, the so-called high caste Dalits (Sarki and Kami) discriminated to Damia and Gaine in participation in local and national level politics.

Discussion and Conclusion

Hill Dalits experienced the educational deprivation compared to that of non-Dalits. Educational deprivation is considerably higher among the so-called low caste Dalits (Damai and Gaine) compared to so-called high caste Dalits (Sarki and Kami). Access to cultural participation is found significantly higher among non-Dalits compared to that of Hill Dalits, suggesting that the Hill Dalits have felt deprivation in access to participation in cultural ceremonies because of untouchability and caste-based discrimination. Dalits are markedly deprived of household income as compared to that of non-Dalits. Access to politics (membership of any political party) is found significantly higher among non-Dalits compared to that of Hill Dalit, indicating that Hill Dalits are deprived in participation of party politics. The so-called low caste Dalits (Damai and Gaine) has experienced deprivation

in education, household income and cultural and political participation among Dalits.

Untouchability practice is primarily based on the caste hierarchy with pure and impure notion that allowed the restrictions to the touch of Dalits to an object or human body because the touch can pollute the non-Dalits. It creates social distance between non-Dalits and Hill Dalits that brings the discrimination/exclusion over Dalits in social, economic, political and cultural grounds. Despite the various social and economic measures to uplift the conditions of Dalits from the constitution of 1990 to the constitution of Federal State of Nepal 2015, the vulnerability in socioeconomic positioning of the Hill Dalits remains the same.

Implications

This paper has three-dimensional implications. Firstly, the research explored the cultural and educational deprivation of Hill Dalits in comparison to non-Dalits. Unless the state addresses literacy and educational attainment of Dalits that empowers Dalits the integration of Dalits into development may not be achieved. Secondly, economic positioning of Dalits is found far behind. Until the provisions of household income generation among Dalits are initiated, the economic condition of Dalits is not improved. Thirdly, participation of Dalits in politics is seen poor. Unless the state addresses inclusive participation of Dalits in politics and state mechanisms, the inclusive development of the nation will not be visible.

References

- Bhattachan, K., Hemchuri K., Gurung Y., Chemjong K., D., & Bishwokarma, P. (2003). *Existing practices of caste-based untouchability in Nepal and strategy for a campaign for its elimination*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Action-Aid Nepal.
- Koirala, B. (1996). *Schooling and Dalits of Nepal: A case study of Bungkot Dalit community* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Alberta, Canada.
- Kumar, D. (2009). Encountering marginality: Social exclusion of Hill Dalits in Surkhet District. *Contributions to Nepalese Studies: Social Exclusion and Group Mobilisation*, 33(2), pp. 65-79.
- National Dalit Commission (NDC). (2017). *Nepalma Dalit samudayako sthiti* (Situation of Dalit community in Nepal). Kathmandu, Nepal: Author.
- Subedi, G. (2007). *Institution, gender relations and poverty: A sociological study of two villages in Nepal* (Doctoral dissertation). Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.