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Access to Social Services for Dalits in Nepal: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

This paper analyses the access of Dalits to basic social services, education, health care, and livelihood opportunities in the Tarai region of Nepal. Caste-based hierarchy and the historic stigma of "untouchability" have continued to produce an eternal structural discrimination and exclusionary practice against Dalit groups, despite constitutional provisions and government initiatives since 1991. Adopting a qualitative methodology, such as semi-structured interviews of Dalits, leaders, and non-Dalits, this research reveals significant gaps in the efficiency of state provisions as well as a lack of knowledge of social security schemes among Dalits. While enrolment has increased, the findings show Dalits continue to suffer from social ostracism inside educational institutions and health centres. The paper finds that any positive advancement towards social inclusion and justice for the Dalit community in Nepal shall only be achieved when institutional and systemic socio-economic deep-seated barriers are addressed, complementing the enhancement of legal frameworks and community engagement.

Keywords: Access to Education, Dalits, Discrimination, Healthcare, Social Exclusion, Social Services, Tarai

1. Introduction

The constitution acknowledges 103 groups, and castes and ethnicity have had a profound impact on Nepal's society. Of these, the Dalits at the lowest rung of the Hindu caste ladder have had a history of ingrained social outcaste and discrimination. As "untouchables", this can lead these communities into significant isolation and exclusion from basic social services such as education, health care facilities, sanitation, and clean water, resulting in their confinement in separate spaces. Despite this, there is a large population of dalits, especially in the Terai, with nearly four million people (21%) living in those districts.

For the most part, the Dalits' misfortune was lost sight of in national-level laws from the Rana time frame constitution of 1948 to the Interim Constitution of 2007. However, since 1991, the government of Nepal has implemented several social security allowances and scholarship programs targeted at the Dalits and other disadvantaged groups to improve their socio-economic status. This suggests both a reduced effect of these interventions and a continuing incapacitating capacity of Dalits to access services, including social services. It thus presents an analytical overview of the availability of social services to the Dalits of Tarai, Nepal, their

history, social hierarchy, and systemic discrimination level, legal provisions ensuring access to social services to the Dalits, government initiatives towards this end, and effectiveness of these initiatives.

1.1. Significance

Castes and ethnicity have played significant roles in Nepali society over time. The Nepalese constitution identifies 103 groups, categorizing 59 as indigenous ethnic groups and six as Madhesi, with the rest considered general castes. Dalits in Nepal are distributed across the Terai and Hill regions. The Hill Dalit group comprises 11 castes, including Kami, Damai, Sarki, Gaine, Badi, and others; the Terai Dalit group includes 18 castes, such as Bantar, Dom, Lohar, Paswan, and Ramar. In the Tarai region, the number of Dalits is estimated at four million, representing approximately 21 percent of the population in the Tarai districts (Maharjan, 2018, pp. 1-19).

1.2. Research Questions

To examine the access of Dalits in the Tarai region of Nepal to public and community resources, the following research questions were formulated:



- Participation of Dalits in social and public services following the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990 and the promulgation of the interim constitution in 2007?
- Aware of various social and government provisions that have been put in place since 1990?

1.3. Research Gap

- II. Limited research on the impact of special state provisions for Dalits in Nepal: Despite sustained efforts towards Dalit emancipation through various programs since 1990, the impact of special state provisions remains sparsely researched, especially considering their theoretical and empirical significance.
- III. Lack of awareness among Dalits regarding social security schemes and the inadequacy of reported benefits: Existing surveys highlight a critical lack of awareness among Dalits concerning social security schemes, and even when aware, reported allowances are considered inadequate.

1.3. Research Method

The paper predominantly employed semi-structured, qualitative interviews. In addition to common Dalits, interviews were conducted with some local Dalit leaders and non-Dalits to seek explanations for the views expressed by Dalits and to gain a broader understanding of the situation. Respondents' demographic characteristics were recorded, with age-based analysis of their opinions. Participants were chosen between the ages of 25 and 60, guided by the assumption that those under 25 would be less politically interested and those over 60 might lack current political knowledge. This assumption was confirmed mainly, although some youth and elders demonstrated a nuanced grasp of social and political processes (Maharjan, 2018, pp. 1-19).

1.4. Conceptual Framework

This paper is guided by a conceptual model that examines 'multiple marginalisations' Dalits encounter when they seek access to social welfare in Tarai. Three emergent elements are described: social exclusion, institutional impediments, and socio-economic limitations.

"Social exclusion" forms the basis, and this is rooted in historic caste-based discrimination; untouchability stigma reinforces it. This reinforces a pervasive feeling of subjugation and discrimination that puts Dalits off accessing public services.

There are also second-order, "institutional" barriers ranging from poor enforcement of policies and public ignorance as to government entitlements to the stigmatizing practices of those who serve. These are the dynamics that hamper, no matter what interventions a government can mount.

Finally, there are "socioeconomic constraints" such as poverty and low levels of education, as well as a shortage of jobs. All three of these constraints are cause and effect, with the other two keeping Dalits caught in a cycle of disadvantage. It is proposed that this framework enables a detailed examination of the systemic nature

of Dalit deprivation and demonstrates that tackling access requires comprehensiveness in addressing all three components.

2. Findings and Discussions

2.1. Historical Context of Dalits in Nepal

Nepal's Dalits have historically experienced social exclusion and discrimination. They are considered the lowest in the Hindu caste hierarchy and are subjected to various forms of untouchability and social restrictions. Dalits have faced barriers to accessing services such as education, health, sanitation, and drinking water. They have been denied admission to or service in temples and have had to dwell in segregated colonies (Maharjan, 2018, pp. 1-19). The nation's constitutions from the Rana-era Constitution of 1948 to the Interim Constitution of 2007 have mainly ignored dalits or reinforced their state of subordination. Certain Dalit groups, such as the Badi in the far western hills and the scanning basse in the far western hills of Nepal, have been subjected to apathy and discrimination and have the lowest socio-economic indicators. Since 1991, the government of Nepal has provided several targeted social security allowances to Dalits and other disadvantaged groups, including allowances for Dalits and single women, allowances for disabled people and older adults, and scholarships for Dalit and disabled students. Dalit group and single women (widows, unmarried, and divorced) receive NRs 300 (\$4.12), and older adults over 75 receive NRs 500 (\$6.87) each month, while disabled people are given NRs 700 (\$9.63) each month.

2.2. Social Stratification in the Tarai Region

Occupying the southern strip of Nepal, the Tarai reaches outward from most of the rest of the country, linking Nepal with the wider Indian sub-continent. As portrayed in Figure 1, accepting the Tarai as bounded by the northern border of Bihar to the south, the West Bengal state border to the east, and the border of Uttar Pradesh to the west, the Tarai covers roughly one-third of the country's total land area. About half of the country's total population lives in the Tarai, of which the majority are Terai-Indigenous (Brahmin-Bahun, Chhetri, Tharu, and Madhesi) and Dalit (Dalit Hill, Madhesi, and Tarai-Indigenous).

2.3. Legal Framework Governing Social Services

The social service system covers a wide range of benefits and rebates, including relief and education allowances, shelter and rehabilitation grants, scholarships, youth and women services, child support grants, income support, and farming loans.

3. Current Access to Education Services

Education is not only a basic right; it is a fundamental necessity for all tangible and intangible aspects of development. The disparity in access to education services varies among Dalits both in the Tarai and hills regions (Devkota, 2018, pp. 115-133). Despite compulsory education policies, approximately 5 percent of Nepali children remain out of school, with higher disproportionate rates among specific castes, ethnic groups, regions, genders, and classes (Devkota & Bagale, 2015, pp. 1-4). Usually, children from high-caste and economically affluent families benefit from better access to quality education and secure employment opportunities. In

contrast, children from low-caste and underprivileged families continue to face scarce access and substandard educational facilities, which perpetuates social inequality. Although many Dalit children are now enrolled in schools, they frequently experience social exclusion and inequalities in educational settings due to their socio-historical marginalization and limited social, cultural, and economic capital. Most marginalized individuals remain outside educational or vocational training programs, with some even leaving school early. Uneven implementation of social inclusion policies results in persistent caste-, gender-, economic-, and region-based disparities, exacerbated by the prevalent English Language Teaching (ELT) and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) practices. Dalit pupils, who are commonly confined to under-resourced schools with minimal exposure to English, face significant obstacles in rapidly acquiring foreign-language proficiency. Discrimination and social bias linked to caste, gender, and economic position persist within EFL classroom environments. The continuation of caste discrimination, gender bias, and otherization throughout schools, classrooms, and communities suggests that enrolment and attendance alone are insufficient to foster social inclusion for Dalit learners.

3.1. Primary Education Access

The right to primary education represents the first stage of engagement for individuals from various social and economic groups who are not already attending school at an appropriate level and age. Children who do not currently attend school, but appear willing to enter in the future, should have opportunities to enter or re-enter the education system at all levels appropriate to their capabilities. While there have been improvements in the access of Dalits to primary education in recent years, the extent to which such provisions can contribute to the promotion of Dalit rights depends on how the primary education system functions, the nature of the curriculum, and the extent to which children from disadvantaged groups are integrated within schools and classrooms. Although school enrollment and literacy among Dalits have increased, they still face social exclusion and inequalities within school, classroom, and community spaces because of their particular socio-historical situation. Dalit children often feel humiliated, prejudiced against, and excluded despite efforts to promote the inclusion of all marginalized groups across the country. Inequalities associated with caste, gender, economic, and regional disparities connect to policies and pedagogies that frequently limit genuine social inclusion. English language teaching (ELT) and the growing promotion of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) pose further challenges for marginalized Dalit children. English functions as a form of cultural capital that symbolises a more developed economic and social status. The uneven provision of English-rich schools throughout the country, therefore, plays a significant role in reproducing existing social inequalities. Dalits attending inadequately managed schools are seldom exposed to English and are often discriminated against on the grounds of caste, gender, and economic status. Evident through popular discourse, Kathmandu University Department of English language students' attitudes and experiences, and fieldwork in rural schools, the government's

policy emphasis on enrolment and classroom attendance does not recognise the continuing manifestation of long-standing practices of caste discrimination, gender bias, and othering in schools, classrooms, and community spaces (Devkota, 2018, pp. 115-133).

3.2. Secondary Education Challenges

Most Dalit children at RDC are economically marginalized, supporting their families through household labour, engaging with a "living in the now" mindset that leaves little time or resources to attend classes or learn English, math, and science. While their study is inevitably political, and therefore limited to such, it attempts to acquire sufficient understanding of the school experience of Dalit learners in order to appreciate the interrelationship between structural inequalities, schooling modalities, and the identities they (re)produce. Many young Dalit learners also shoulder responsibilities of labouring either on construction sites or in agricultural fields to support their family's livelihood, and thus spend less time studying at home (Devkota, 2018, pp. 115-133).

RDC mainly enrolls low-income and Dalit children, with the influx of academically and economically stronger children, it becomes increasingly complex for low-income and Dalit children to perform well, as they lack the resources to attend extra tuition elsewhere or private coaching within the school. However, continuing schooling through RDC brings along "certain social connectedness" that constitutes a Dalit child's "schooled identity". Thus, those who do attend school experience, to a certain extent, tolerance – borne out in the refugee's confidence and comfort around his peers, which are seemingly absent in the rest of society. His remark, "I feel isolated", encapsulates the ambiguity of trying to be included in a context where exclusion remains ever present.

The caste-class hierarchy that shapes the structural conditions of schooling is, to all intents and purposes, identical to the caste-class hierarchy that creates the plurality of social identity. Dalits, relating both to the workers of the factory and the downtrodden in Indian society, are denied many social services and face discrimination or maltreatment in social welfare institutions. Schooling, therefore, becomes a vehicle of privilege, access to which is regulated mainly on the same criteria that generate social identity itself. Working-class and Dalit children attend poorly managed public schools and are granted schooling credentials carrying a correspondingly inferior valuation. Despite extensive research on the schooling modalities that produce exclusionary identities, the Bengali refugee camp provides a rare glimpse of schooling in which sustained engagement, rather than religious segregation and socio-economic isolation, serves as the primary obstacle to inclusion. In particular, the refugee's position concerning English language acquisition appears to be one of relative advantage. Most Dalit children attend public schools or madrassahs, where English instruction is limited or non-existent.

Policy-practice ambiguities in ELT/EMI (English Language Teaching / English Medium Instruction) tend to reinforce rather than challenge exclusion, even when implemented in a positive environment. Schooling remains overwhelmingly dependent on

economic capital, and much of the dissatisfaction of Dalit EFL learners appears to be based on a frustrated desire for a more successful educational and social trajectory. The perceptions of “one boundary to cross” tune into this aspiration. The refutations – “barriers for us” / “not equal” – mirror the constraints already imposed: DPS is closed to Dalit learners, and the broader social conditions remain difficult at best. EFL, taken together with the rest of the school experience, is therefore read as a continuation of the worker’s predicament, in which dominance through possession of English language (monocultural) capital substitutes for dominance through ownership of production. This position is hardly the problem anticipated by Elgarah, “imagination”, and the refugee’s politics of possibility.

4. Healthcare Access for Dalits

In Nepal, Dalit communities endure pervasive caste-based discrimination, which adversely affects their access to health services. Because of these obstacles, Dalits face an increased risk of diseases and suffer from poorer health outcomes compared to other groups. Despite the availability of regular health services, many Dalits hesitate to seek medical treatment for various ailments.

Health inequalities among Dalits not only arise from issues within the health sector but also stem from broader sociocultural, economic, and political factors that shape their overall status and health outcomes. Institutional discrimination further restricts their access to health services, thereby sustaining health disparities. To effectively address these inequalities, it is essential to attain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying sociocultural determinants of health and to develop strategies and programs that specifically target these factors within the health delivery system (Kabir et al., 2018, pp. 1-13).

4.1. Public Health Facilities

Primary healthcare services are delivered by medical officers, nurses, auxiliary nurse midwives, and paramedics via Primary Healthcare Centres, Urban Health Clinics, Health Posts, and Sub-Health Posts. Secondary care is provided by one district hospital and one zonal hospital. In addition to government services, a network of NGOs and private sector entities—including hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies is also available. Government facilities provide approximately 70% of routine and acute healthcare (Devkota et al., 2017, pp. 1-12).

4.2. Barriers to Healthcare

The provision of healthcare services alone is insufficient to improve the health status of Nepal’s Dalits. A better understanding of the sociocultural determinants of health inequalities is needed, along with strategies to address these determinants and develop more inclusive health service systems (Kabir et al., 2018, pp. 1-13). A comprehensive investigation of how social, cultural, economic, and political factors influence Khwame health and interconnect to reinforce health inequalities amongst the Dalits remains to be conducted.

5. Economic Opportunities and Employment

Dalits are mainly absent from significant employment opportunities offered by the government and the private sector. Having limited skills, they generally secure low-paying and insecure positions. Dalits with permanent employment typically receive minimum wage and endure unsafe working conditions. Overseas migration for work is common; however, many face difficulties due to insufficient skills, poor connections, and deficient capital (Maharjan, 2018, pp. 1-19).

5.1. Access to Employment

Dalits in the Tarai face significant challenges accessing social services. Discrimination against Dalits occurs directly or indirectly and can be institutionalised in formal and informal laws and rules. It is this discriminatory social framework that is the most significant barrier to social service access. Access to employment is restricted by caste prejudices and by social and political discrimination, especially in the Tarai and Central regions. Dalits also lack access to employment-generating and self-employment schemes run by the government and banks. Because many Dalits lack certificates and documents, they cannot obtain services or benefits from various government programmes. This section explores Dalit employment patterns and access to various types of government services and benefits (Banks et al., 2019, pp. 929–956).

5.2. Microfinance and Dalit Entrepreneurs

Dalit entrepreneurs struggle to obtain financing due to a lack of collateral and insufficient capacity to assure lenders of loan repayment. Transaction costs and perceived risk drive financial institutions to avoid providing financial services to micro businesses. To finance a new business, few entrepreneurs rely entirely on family or friends, and even established businesses require more funds than retained earnings readily provide. A survey of development agents found access to finance and credit as the most important asset constraint limiting business growth. Microfinance has the potential to strengthen and empower Dalit entrepreneurs to make productive investments and increase returns. The provision of entrepreneurial skills and microfinance also has a direct impact on local development, enabling business emergence and generating growth in areas where micro and small enterprises are the primary source of wealth creation and employment (Loca & Kola, 2013). Microfinance institutions operate under the assumption that a group of people, typically five to ten individuals, within a poor community can foster a strong environment of mutual support to overcome the lack of conventional collateral. Microfinance institutions, however, operate mainly on the supply-driven model and require a strong framework to ensure that elements such as group formation and repayment procedures are firmly in place to prove effective in poverty alleviation. Currently, most microfinance institutions have limited outreach to the poorest communities in Nepal, where Dalits are concentrated. The needs of entrepreneurs, particularly Dalits, in reaching higher levels of economic transformation remain almost entirely ignored by

microfinance lenders. In addition to credit, entrepreneurs require a range of services that include training, contemporary market information, locally based expert advice, and improved access to technology, among others (Kasat, 2010).

6. Social Welfare Programs and Their Impact

The inadequacy of welfare programs deserves mention. Social welfare programs form an integral component of the national agenda for the upliftment of the Dalit community in Nepal. These programs have been supplemented by the intervention of national and international welfare agencies tasked with providing assistance to address the acute needs of vulnerable groups.

Nepal's development program has been geared, in part, to enable the social and economic advancement of the country's diverse population—the interim constitution of 2007 guarantees the right to social welfare to every citizen. The government's efforts in this regard have evolved from a focus on the poverty reduction strategy and the reconstruction of conflict-affected areas into an agenda of inclusive development. Representative programs include the Child Grant, the Single Women's Allowance, the Senior Citizens' Allowance, and disability allowances. However, these schemes face an array of logistical and administrative difficulties that limit their impact on the physical needs and social status of their target recipients. In addition to an absence of budgetary provision, their coverage is restricted by arbitrary eligibility requirements, limitations on the duration and level of benefits, and the vulnerability of the process to corruption and political capture. These factors reduce the effectiveness of these instruments and often heighten the community's sense of marginalization.

6.1. Government Initiatives

The Government of Nepal initiated efforts to support Dalits' human security by providing social security allowances and introducing scholarships. Provisions were also made for Dalits and Madhesi, other backward classes, to secure reservation in all levels of government jobs; thus far, however, almost no Dalit has been employed at the official level in this region. Attempts were also made to develop Dalits as Model Village Communities to ensure their livelihood security through providing land for house construction and government employment opportunities. However, only a small number could be reached by this scheme. Furthermore, the Tarai Dalits and Madhesi population are interspersed; the Tarai Dalits do not live separately and stay in isolation, so it is challenging to implement such a livelihood security programme in this region. The landless Dalits who have migrated to Adarsh Nagar and Kathmandupur are scattered, but in Banka and Kanchrauli, they are not separated (Maharjan, 2018, pp. 1-19).

6.2. Cultural Barriers to Access

Cultural barriers represent another major hurdle for Dalit communities in accessing social services. Many Dalit households reported fear of using available programs or health facilities due to concerns about discrimination. A Dalit family head explained that

one reason many Dalits remain deprived is their reluctance to utilize government facilities, mainly because these services are dominated by caste groups such as Brahmins and Chhetris. Dalits fear facing prejudice if they visit. Numerous Dalits prefer to remain ignorant of available services rather than encounter discrimination. Conversely, several local administrators from Brahmin caste groups asserted that Dalits are unaware of their rights and privileges and stressed the role of NGOs and civil society organizations in fostering awareness and mobilizing Dalit communities to assert their entitlements to social services (Pandayid et al., 1970).

Discussions on caste-based discrimination with Dalit informants yielded consistent accounts of the pervasive disadvantages experienced by Dalits in daily life. Officials acknowledged that discrimination is deeply rooted in the Tarai society, further disadvantaging the Dalits. Contributing factors include the absence of strong political representation for Dalits and the limited integration of Dalits in government pan-Nepali social organizations. Societal norms persistently relegate Dalits to subordinate roles, aligning them with the elements of earth and darkness. Even within cooperative frameworks among the Tarai Madhes Political Forum, which includes major Dalit organizations, Dalits often find themselves excluded from meaningful participation.

Cultural factors constitute a significant barrier to social inclusion. Dalits commonly experience denial of access to drinking water and toilets due to prevailing superstitions and myths about pollution and contamination. They are frequently denied access to social and economic organizations and face exclusion from neighborhood gatherings and religious services.

6.3. Discrimination and Stigma

Dalits face deep-rooted stigma and discrimination due to the notion of untouchability, which tarnishes the label and deters many from self-identifying with the group, even though caste remains a crucial marker of social identity (Kharel, 2007, pp. 11-15). Considered impure because of the alleged pollution associated with their traditional occupations, Dalits suffer widespread caste-based exclusion that restricts their access to healthcare and other public services (Kabir et al., 2018, pp. 1-13). Public perceptions frequently depict Dalits as degraded and sub-human, confining them to the lowest positions in society. The long-term consequences include loss of self-worth and the development of mental health problems, such as depression and shame, fostering social isolation and limiting participation in health programmes.

6.4. Community Perceptions

A significant part of the research sought to explore perceptions of the equality of Dalits in Tarai society. Foremost in measuring the various dimensions of their social isolation was determining whether Dalits perceive themselves as equal to or respected equally by people from other ethnic groups. Dalits are held in very low regard and generally avoided by the other castes and ethnic groups, both in the Tarai and the hills. Prior research substantiates wide-ranging prejudice against Dalits, who are commonly referred to as

“untouchables.” Interaction with Dalits is therefore limited even among members of the same communities in residential areas, radicalizing and reinforcing social division (Maharjan, 2018, pp. 1-19). Responses to “Do you believe Dalits are equal to other ethnic groups?” reveal that most Dalits from all the areas strongly believe themselves to be equal, but note that other castes do not see them in the same way. Even Dalits themselves also reflected doubts on this issue. Several respondents cited urgency in making Dalits equal in Tarai society. Other ethnic groups likewise recognize that Dalits are not accepted as equals by mainstream society. Because Dalits are aware of being regarded as inadequate, they often display aggressive behaviour, which reinforces the negative perception.

7. Case Studies of Successful Interventions

This chapter presents two case studies—one from the Dalit population in Dhaka, Bangladesh (Kabir et al., 2018, pp. 1-13), and the other from disabled people in Nepal (Banks et al., 2019, pp. 929-956) to indicate the feasibility of broader adoption of similar interventions in Nepal’s Tarai. Both cases highlight how appropriate policy changes, in conjunction with grassroots-level awareness-raising and outreach, can significantly improve social service utilisation, especially for marginalised groups. The two cases are discussed in detail below, with each chapter followed by a discussion of the relevance of the findings to the context of Nepal’s Tarai.

7.1. Local Success Stories

The Dalit community holds the lowest rank in the traditional caste hierarchy of Nepalese society. State provisions mandate one-third representation of Dalits in government scholarships and one-fifth inclusion in all types of training. However, Dalits often remain unaware of these benefits or face bureaucratic hurdles preventing access. The right of Dalits to purchase property anywhere is not well-known, and prevailing societal discrimination persists, denying them family property inheritance. The provision allowing one-third of parliamentary seats to be filled through proportional representation by Dalits and Janajatis remains an untapped opportunity to lift Dalits from underprivilege.

Certain marginalised groups encounter difficulties in registering new births, although most households reported registering their children. Under the old age allowance scheme, all adults above the age of 60 receive a monthly benefit, with the eligibility age lowered to 55 specifically for Dalits. Nutrition allowances target malnourished children and severely sick maternity cases. In the Churiyamai Municipality of Dhading District, Dalits were universally aware of a planned budgetary allocation of approximately 60,000 Nepalese rupees, communicated via local meetings. Previous interventions included the distribution of traditional occupation equipment and minimal livestock support. Dalits continued to report many benefits as ineffective or inaccessible, with some having abandoned their traditional occupations due to a lack of support. The Dalit community expressed widespread dissatisfaction with budgetary allocations and significant skepticism regarding the local administration’s

responsiveness and HFL support mechanisms (Maharjan, 2018, pp. 1-19).

7.2. Lessons Learned

The analysis of multiple governance debates over the last two decades opens lines of story about politically connected Dalit elites’ use of new governing powers, the reordering of state services, and the persistence of neighbourhood-level caste oppression. These issues – the enclosure of external resources in rentier circuits, state-institutional transformations, and the continuation of discretionary power, peppered with caste-specific violence and HP disempowerment – situate the larger enquiry (Kurian & Singh, 2017, pp. 1-22). The challenge is how to consider conflict and variance across the state and societal dimensions of sociopolitical life, at once, when analysing the scope of contemporary liberal governing reforms. An effort is made to move from the conventional separation of polity and society, with the state the political agent and the caste structure its sociological alter, toward a more processual understanding based on the circulation of multiple forms of power. The turn towards analysis of circulation, already familiar in anthropological and post-political discourse, offers an alternative to conceptions in which the state and caste are presumed already formed and given, prior to their interaction or mediation. The approach is well-suited to settings with limited institutionalization and authority, above all, concerning law. The analysis considers governing power both as the catalyst of circulation and itself circulated, in the form of bureaucratic processes and practices. What unfolds through all this are the contours of a less unambiguously liberal democratic form of governing, one whose practices and consequences echo classical conceptions of domination.

8. Policy Recommendations for Improved Access

Such a scenario calls for further reform of existing institutional mechanisms to make them more effective and the introduction of a flexible mechanism to grant access as needed. Policies and programmes must address the Dalits’ inability to access social services caused by social exclusion and disparity through a planned approach to delivering such services, with the emphasis on the services themselves rather than on social characteristics such as gender, caste, and ethnicity (Maharjan, 2018, pp. 1-19).

8.1. Strengthening Legal Frameworks

The current social security provisions in Nepal are based on an expansive understanding of social protection, encompassing programmes such as old age, single woman, widows’ and helpless Dalit allowances, subsidies on education and medicine, tuition waivers, pensions, scholarships for Dalit and backward groups, drought and disaster relief interventions, among others (Maharjan, 2018, pp. 1-19). These services under the government’s social protection provisions conform to the universal coverage model; no criteria for the middle and the rich, who are considered economically sound, are included. The universal model based on income is one in which all the citizens of a country are covered by social protection. In contrast, the criterion-based social protection

is based on the income of the individuals, the need, and less than one (Banks et al., 2019, pp. 929–956).

The need for strengthening legal provisions in the field of social security is the key argument for strategic action to ensure social justice for Dalits. Five-point programmes have been recommended, including the promotion of a culture of legal awareness through the education system, Dalit-based representation in the formulation of laws and rules, the formation of legal cell or institution at the local level to strengthen legal provision and protection for Dalits, provisions for the dissemination of legal knowledge by the District Dalit Protection Committee, and provisions for cooperation between the legal cell and the concerned line agencies to control and inquire into incidents related to Dalits.

8.2. Enhancing Community Engagement

During the general debate of the National Development Forum 2013, participants also stressed the need to seek cooperation of national and international organizations that are involved in Dalit-related programmes for enhancing the efficacy of various programmes and policy activities carried out for Dalits. It is vital, they said, to give adequate priority to Dalits and provide targeted support to them. Such support may come in the form of encouragement to self-employment and co-operatives by enhancing access to credit and skill development, or bolstering awareness-raising programmes for Dalits so that they can fully understand the laws and their implications.

The government needs to enhance communication infrastructure, because the integration of the District Development Committee-promoted project called society support programme for Nepal (SSPN) with the community-facility-based social security scheme has failed to materialise due to the lack of access to communication.' This has hampered the effective implementation of programmes and projects for Dalits. Community health programmes should focus on increasing awareness of healthcare services among ethnic minority groups, involving family members and traditional health practitioners. Ethnic minority groups in Nepal often have worse maternal and child health outcomes and face more difficulty accessing healthcare (Pandayid et al., 1970).

9. Conclusion

Social security allowances are a key element of the government's efforts to ensure social inclusion and to make the country's development more balanced and broad-based. The Government of Nepal has been implementing social security allowances of various types under different names, and with different criteria, for more than a decade; the legal foundation of the social security allowance programme, however, was only laid in 2013. Despite its recent origins, the programme has become an important component of poverty alleviation and social inclusion schemes, receiving budgetary priority amongst many programmes in the social protection domain.

Dalits, many of whom faced persisting poverty and unequal social and economic disadvantages, had limited access to the primary social services that were available to other caste and ethnic groups.

The coding of social services as upper-caste practice, the cost of accessing services, and discrimination by officials and the general population are among the frequently cited reasons. Social security allowances provide important opportunities for such communities to improve livelihoods and increase access to public services and participation. (Maharjan, 2018)

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