



Nepal's Unfolding Egalitarian Quest:

From Democratic Transformation to the Politics of Inclusion

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Abstract: Nepal serves as a buffer between China's Tibetan region and India's economic and demographic core. In the 1940s-50s, when there was a wave of democratisation in South Asia, Nepal also experienced its democracy. Although Nepal's democratic journey is unlike other South Asian states like India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, which emerged as independent states from the colonial British rule, Nepal experienced its democracy by gaining freedom from the Oligarchic Rana rulers. Nepal experienced democracy in many phases, but we can see from the very first, when Nepal was formed, there was a lack of egalitarianism. Prithvi Narayan Shah, who significantly shaped the modern state of Nepal by conquering and annexing numerous small kingdoms, gave the high-caste Hindus from the hill region a significant upper hand in the political sphere, which created discontent among the various ethnic groups in Nepal. Political representation, social, economic inclusion in the Nepali state, citizenship, and languages are critical concerns that fuel significant dissatisfaction among the marginalised communities of Nepal. This article examines the struggle of marginalised communities for equality and justice in the democratic transition phases of Nepal. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part examines the various phases of democratic transformation in Nepal. The second chapter discusses the challenges faced by marginalised communities that hinder their inclusion in the nation-state of Nepal. The third part highlights the demands and the reality of inclusion in Nepal's democratic transformation.

Keywords: democracy, inclusion, Nepal, marginalised communities.

INTRODUCTION

Nepal is a landlocked country approximately 100 miles wide and primarily made of mountains. It serves as a buffer state between China's Tibetan area and India's economic and demographic core, which includes the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal.

The modern state of Nepal was established in the late eighteenth century, primarily due to Prithvi Narayan Shah (1723-1775), who began as the king of Gorkha. His twenty-six-year quest to conquer the Kathmandu Valley led to significant territorial expansion, reaching from Sikkim in the east to Kangra in the west. The current boundaries were set by the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816, following a war with the British East India Company. While the kingdom lost some territory, the British allowed the Gorkhalis to keep a significant area known as the Terai. Their loyalty during the 1857 Indian Mutiny was rewarded with the return of some Western Terai land (Gellner et al, 1997, pp.3-4)

Following the Second World War, democracy emerged in several South Asian countries, including India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. In Nepal, democracy also emerged, but its journey was unique compared to the others. Unlike India and other South Asian nations, Nepal was never a British colony. Instead, Nepal's struggle for democracy was primarily against the monarchy, rather than against British colonial rule. As

an independent democratic nation-state, Nepal faced the challenges of creating a legal system that would meet the expectations of its citizens. A large portion ethnic population of Nepal claims that Nepal primarily benefits high-caste Pahadis. When Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered and annexed the numerous small kingdoms, the high caste Hindus from the hill region gained the upper hand in the political arena (Hagen,2007,p.7). Nepal has undergone innumerable transitions from monarchy to democracy, yet the special privileges of high-caste Hindus remain largely unchanged, while the indigenous communities, Dalits, and Madhesi have been politically, socially, and economically excluded from their own country. In a nation, it is essential for every citizen to feel equal. However, in a multilingual and multi-ethnic country like Nepal, the dominance of high-caste Hindus in political, social, and economic spheres has led to dissatisfaction among marginalised groups in society. In response to this discrimination, these groups have begun to voice their demands for equal rights. This study shows how Nepal, following its political shift to become an independent nation-state, highlights the injustices faced by marginalised communities and their demands for inclusion. It also analyses whether constitutional and legal changes to promote equality have succeeded in fulfilling the needs of marginalised communities to create an inclusive state.

Objectives of this study:

- Examining democratic transformation in Nepal.
- To explore the marginalised communities of Nepal, their history, and origin.
- Highlighting the challenges and demands of the marginalised communities in Nepal's democratic transformation.

METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY:

This study has qualitative dimensions. This study has been done on the primary and secondary data, primary from the books, journals, and news articles related to Nepal's democratic transformation, the Madhesi community, and their struggle and demands in Nepal.

1. Democracy and Nepal

According to the origin of the word, democracy is a combination of two different Latin words, 'Demos' and 'Kratia'. Demos refers to the people, and Kratia means rule. James Bryce stated that democracy is a form of government in which the ruling power is largely vested not in any individual in a particular class but in the members of the community as a whole (Bryce,1921,p.20). Democracy is fundamentally a competitive process. However, as Przeworski argues, it cannot function effectively in a modern representative system unless all relevant participants adhere to a consistent approach regarding all political matters. He believes that the most essential factor for establishing a democratic society is the necessity for all democratic regimes to reach a solid agreement on a basic set of rules and a constitutional framework. This consensus is crucial for facilitating the process of democratisation, even at a minimal level (Thapa & Sharma,2015,p.1).

The democratic process of Nepal has a uniqueness of its own. The democratic journey of Nepal has many ups and downs. From gaining independence, from the Rana rulers to the party-less absolute panchayati system to the secular Republic, Nepal experienced a lot. Each phase tells Nepal's unique democratic journey, which makes Nepal different from any other state. The journey of democratic Nepal is discussed below:

1.1 First Phase (1951-1960): The first phase of democracy started in 1951 with the end of the century-old Rana oligarchy (1846-1951), giving way to an assertive monarchy. For the first time, ordinary Nepalis got involved in the nation-building process. In this new political system, the monarchy holds supreme authority, commanding the nation with a powerful presence. Under the new political dispensation, the monarchy was still the country's supreme authority, in control of the army, the most powerful force in the nation. At the political level during this period, several power-seeking political parties continued to emerge and there were also some attempts to build a political base but they failed to bring in fundamental change. Since the political parties remained divided on the issues of elections of assembly, by the late 1950's, the freshly crowned king Mahendra shocked the world by unilaterally presenting a new constitution to the nation state of Nepal. King Mahendra introduced a new political framework and announced parliamentary elections without consulting the existing political forces (Thapa & Sharma,2015,p.34).

Though the introduction of democracy was a prominent breakthrough, the ruling system was in the hands of some specific ethnic groups. The upper caste groups – Brahmin and Chhetri dominated the administrative and political positions (Bhandari, 2016:34). The Panchayat regime expanded the scope of the State to contain ideological crosscurrents through Nepalization, Sanskritization, nationalism, public sector economy, and diversification of external relations, but created a “limited access order” (Snyder, 2010, p.287).

Within 18 months of the installation of an elected government, the king declared an emergency by using the military and, in a single stroke, dissolved the parliament on 15 December 1960. Several factors emboldened the king to take these actions, including the personal feud and bickering among political leaders, as well as the personality clash between Koirala and an ambitious Mahendra (Thapa & Sharma, 2015, p.37).

1.2. Absolute Monarchy (1960-1990): Although there was a setback for democracy in 1960, it remained a crucial component of the legitimacy King Mahendra sought in his vision for a democratic, modernising, and reforming Nepal. During this period, a new civil code was established, ensuring equality before the law regardless of caste, creed, or gender. The implementation of the Land Reform Act of 1964 included provisions for ceilings on landholdings, protection of tenancy rights, and regulation of land rents. Over time, these measures fundamentally undermined the hierarchical dependencies on upper-caste landholding families in many areas of the country. This was accompanied by rapid advances in infrastructure, including education, health, transportation, and communications, which produced a growing middle class and an urbanised population. Despite the progress in infrastructure and education, job and income generation opportunities have become increasingly difficult to achieve. This led to frustration among the middle class (Hachchetu & Gellner, 2010, p.5).

King Mahendra had embarked upon creating a constitutional structure that would remain as a pivot. Political parties were banned and freedom of expression was throttled, much to the delight of the traditional forces. It was amended in 1967 and 1975, but only the amendment in 1980 was forward-looking, as it allowed adult franchise, even though the heart of representative democracy - political freedom and basic human rights continues to be widely abused. Parliament was unicameral, and the judiciary appeared to be autonomous, but there was hardly any press freedom. However, the non-party system led by the King collapsed in 1990 under the weight of a popular movement led by the National Congress with strong backing from the United Left Front, consisting of communist parties (Thapa & Sharma, 2015, p.38).

While Nepali nationalists argue that Nepal has been a Hindu land since Prithvi Narayan Shah unified it in the late 18th century, the idea of Nepal as a Hindu nation-state became dominant during the panchayat era. In 1962, it was officially declared that Nepal was a Hindu Kingdom. The Hindu identity of the nation was performed through daily broadcasts of ritual music and sermons on Radio Nepal, and by funding of Sanskrit schools. Hindu holidays became national holidays. National symbols promoted during the panchayat era, including the red colour, the cow, and the flag, are drawn from Hinduism, and other national symbols relate to the active Hindu monarchy (Hagen, 2007, p.12).

1.3 Democracy after 1990: Democracy was reestablished in Nepal in 1991 through the popular people's movement led by the Nepali Congress (NC), a liberal democratic party, and several communist parties to fight against the party-less Panchayat rule. The movement brought the country back into a multi-party democratic system. A coalition government led by the NC, comprising representatives of both the left and the king, brought forward a new constitution, which adopted a Westminster model of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy (Hachchetu & Gellner, 2010, p.6).

In 1990, the new constitution came into force, and Nepal was declared “a multi-party democratic kingdom of Nepal”. The constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990, under “Right to Equality” stated that all citizens shall be equal before the law, and no discrimination shall be made against them on the grounds of religion, race, sex, caste, tribe, or ideological convictions (Bhandari, 2016, p.34).

With the restoration of multiparty democracy, people expected that the representation of the nation would become more inclusive. In May 1990, the Constitution Recommendations Committee was formed, and the majority of suggestions the committee received focused on regional, linguistic, ethnic, and religious identity issues (Hutt, 1994, p.35).

Though this constitution of Nepal was considered one of the best constitutions in the world, it couldn't address the issues of inclusiveness properly. The people who were marginalised and excluded for a long time couldn't be brought into the mainstream governance system (Bhandari,2016,p.34).

Overall, Indigenous and marginalised groups were dissatisfied with the 1990 constitution. Although it declared Nepal to be a multiethnic, multilingual state, it still maintained the older model of nationalism by retaining its identity as a "Hindu kingdom". Religious conversion was still banned in an attempt to keep Nepali citizens from being wooed away to Christianity or other Hindu religions (Hagen,2007,p.13).

During this period, Nepal faced significant challenges in restructuring the state. This involved creating a liberal democratic, republican, multi-structured system. However, the lack of active engagement in both social and political spheres hindered meaningful negotiations.

1.4. Democracy after 2002: until the royal coup of February 2005, political struggle took the form of a triangular conflict with different roles and motives for each of the key actors. The king, while sidelining the political parties, attempted to tackle the Maoist insurgency alternatively by negotiation or suppression. The mainstream parties, united under the banner of the seven-party alliances, launched a series of street protests against the king's regression (Hachchetu & Gellner,2010,p.11).

The seven-party alliance formed in May 2005 against the direct rule of King Gyanendra to restore democracy in Nepal had met CPN(Maoist) in New Delhi on 22 November 2005 and concluded a 12-point agreement. In March 2006, the seven-party alliance and CPN(Maoist) issued their memorandum of understanding and appealed to all democratic forces, civil societies, marginalised and oppressed people, the press and the public to actively participate in a peaceful movement to restore people's sovereignty. On 21 April, the king offered to return all the executive powers to the people and requested the Seven Party Alliances to recommend the name of the prime minister who would run the government. The Seven Party Alliance refused the offer and presented their three core demands the next day: reinstatement of the dissolved parliament, formation of an all-party government and elections to a constituent assembly that would draft a new constitution. The movement of seven party alliances forced the king to bring back the dissolved parliament, start the republican journey, by bringing the Maoists into the mainstream (Bhandari,2022,p.31).

It was on 21 November 2006 that the government of Nepal and the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) signed the comprehensive peace agreement. The draft of an interim constitution was prepared in line with the spirit of the comprehensive peace agreement. The interim constitution 2007 incorporated provisions like progressive restructuring of the state in order to address existing ethnic, class, regional and gender imbalances. The interim constitution was markedly different from previous constitutions. It emphasised liberal inclusive democracy, secularism, expansion of fundamental rights and commitment to a constitution derived from the constituent assembly. The Constitution had to be amended as many as 12 times to accommodate the emerging concerns of political and social groups (Dahal,2022,p.49).

The interim constitution did incorporate a federal system, but there was no discussion on the number, nature, and boundaries of federal units. No party in the constituent Assembly had a clear majority to resolve outstanding political questions. These unresolved issues were ultimately responsible for the first constituent assembly's dissolution. Other causes for its failure were a power-centric mindset among political leaders, frequent government changes, and a lack of clarity on the issues to be incorporated into the constitution. The marginalised communities of Terai were convinced that the state would once again lose the urgency of addressing their grievances. For most Nepalese, what Jana Andalon 2007 signified was the end of King Gyanendra's dictatorship, on one level, the gradual stripping of Monarchical power over various realms of society from a more macro viewpoint. More importantly, it fagged the beginning of a radical transition from Monarchy to a more democratic form of governance (Deyarkar,2015,p.690). Monarchical rule in Nepal had, in many ways, suppressed the grievances and needs of many marginalised groups. The abolition of the monarchy removed this suppression, allowing long-ignored issues to resurface. Democracy has since provided a new avenue for these groups to advocate for change from the ground up.

1.5. Nepal's New Constitution: The first Constituent Assembly was dissolved on May 28, 2012, without finalising the constitution due to a lack of consensus on critical issues among the major political parties. Elections for the second Constituent Assembly were conducted on November 19, 2013. However, continuous interparty disagreements hinder the constitution-drafting process, and as a result, the second Assembly failed to meet its deadline of January 22, 2015. In the aftermath of the earthquake, the constitution-making process was temporarily stalled. However, the constitution-making process went forward again on June 30, when the Assembly introduced the preliminary draft of the constitution. Despite protests from the Madhesi community, the constitution was formally enacted on September 20, 2015 (Bhandari, 2022, p.34).

Although the new constitutional framework has failed to satisfy the Madhesis. The new constitution has a provision for a 165-member parliament, but the constituencies have been demarcated in such a way that the people of the hill and mountain region would get 100 seats, even though their share in Nepal's total population is less than 50 per cent. On the other hand, the Terai region constitutes over half of the country's population, and has been allocated only 65 seats (Jha, 2015, p.1).

The agitation Madhesh-based parties have been protesting for over four months against the seven-province model proposed in the new constitution that divides their ancestral land as a way to politically marginalise them. They have blockaded Nepal's border trade points with India, causing a shortage of essential goods and medicines in the landlocked country (Deyarkar, 2015, p.691).

2. Ethnic Diversity in Nepal

Nepal is a multiethnic country. There are various and overlapping identity categories that have shifted over time. According to the 2001 census data for 100 groups, including 52 castes, 44 ethnic groups and 4 other social groups. Currently, the most politically significant socio-cultural groups are the caste hill Hindu elite (CHHE or "high" caste Hindus from the hills), the "low" caste Hindus (Dalit), and indigenous nationalists (Adivasi janajati), the Madhesi (people from the Terai region, including both indigenous and caste groups), and the Muslims. The CHHE comprise 30.89% of the population, Dalits 14.99 %, and indigenous nationalists 36.31%. Madhesis from 16.59% of the population, but when Dalits and indigenous nationalists from the Terai region are added, this rises to 32.29 %. Muslims comprise 4.3 % of the population (Hagen & Lawoti, 2013, p.9).

Brahman ranked "highest" in the caste hierarchy, followed by Kshatriya, the second-highest group, and then low-caste groups such as Kami, Damai, Sarki, Chamar, and Musahar. The traditional "low" caste groups are collectively known as Dalits, and "High" caste Hindus and many other ethnic groups consider them to be inherently polluted, and thus often refuse to allow them into their homes. The Dalits from both the hills and the plains have been excluded the most from state resources and power. The indigenous nationalists have ancestral homelands in the Terai, the hill and the mountain regions. This category includes more than 60 culturally and linguistically diverse ethnic groups, including Gurungs, Sherpas, Limbus, Rais, Magars, Dhimals and Tharus. Like other excluded groups, the indigenous nationalists demand access to economic and political resources. They have formed nationalist movements that seek autonomy for self-governance (Hagen & Lawoti, 2013, p.10).

The etymology of the word "Madhesh" is contested, but it is generally believed to originate from "Madhya-Desh", a geographic reference distinguishing the plains from the hill region (or Parbat, from which is derived Pahadi, meaning hill dweller) of present-day Nepal. A Madhesi, therefore, originally referred simply to an inhabitant of this plain region. Deriving from Gaige's (2009) definition, people of the Terai are those whose culture is significantly different from hill culture, like caste, language, dress pattern, and food preferences. This implies that Madhesis are not just citizens of the Terai, but a distinct ethnicity with cultural structures, languages, names, and religious rituals that are distinct from both Indians and Nepali Paharis. The various caste and ethnic groups among the Madhesis include: Yadav, Muslim, Teli, Chamar, Koyar, Brahman, Bhumihar, Amat, Mali, Tatma, Kanu, Rajdhobi, Meche, Satar, Dhimal, Mushar, Dom, Dushad, etc. The Indian Madhesis are linguistically divided into Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Abadhi, in the eastern, central, and western regions, respectively (Nayak, 2011, p.641).

Muslims are one of the few groups in Nepal that are primarily defined by their religious affiliation. There are three major groups of Muslims in Nepal: the Kashmiri Muslims, who are based in Kathmandu, and first arrived in Nepal in the fifteenth century; the Churata (bangle sellers) Muslims, who first settled in the Western hill region at the end of the seventeenth century; and the Terai Muslims, the largest group of

Muslims in Nepal with 97 percent of the total Muslim population. The Terai Muslims live in different districts of the Terai. The Muslims seek equal recognition and treatment of their religion and community, a right to practice their faith without restrictions, and proportionate representation in the state organs (Hagen & Lawoti,2013,p.12).

3. Challenges of the marginalised communities in the nation-state of Nepal

State building in Nepal has led to ethnic stratification, as different groups have been incorporated into the system on unequal terms. This inequality fosters a sense of self-determination among marginalised communities, which, in turn, has sparked agitation throughout the country. Below are some of the forms of discrimination that exist:

3.1. Special privileges of Nepali Hilli High caste Hindus: From the very first high caste Hindus from the hill region got special treatment from the Nepali rulers. High-caste Hindus residing in Nepal's central hills were closely situated with the state and held positions of power (Hagen,2007,p.7). Although the high-caste Hindus benefited from the state formation, it created economic deprivation for others. High-caste Hindus who contributed to the state's expansion were honoured with land grants. By providing them with positions in the army, the state succeeded in winning the adherence of groups of people who resided in the areas close to Gorkha (Regmi,1971,p.64). The unequal treatment among the citizens created dissatisfaction among the other ethnic communities, and they also demanded equal benefits from the state.

3.2 Citizenship: The Citizenship Act of 1964 and the Constitution of 1990 decided that citizenship would be given based on 'descent' and the ability to speak and write Nepali. As a result, in the absence of valid documents, Hindi-speaking people were denied citizenship certificates. Without a citizenship certificate, they could not get land titles and were deprived of government benefits (Nayak,2011,p.642). The provision of citizenship based on the Nepali language and descent has sparked significant anger among marginalised citizens, leading them to protest against this policy. The exclusion from the nation-state of Nepal is particularly affecting the Hindi-speaking Madhesi community. The Madhesi communities raise their demands for citizenship rights.

3.3 Propagate Hindu nationalism: During the panchayat era (1962-90), the state consolidated the idea of Nepal as a Hindu society and tried to create a culturally homogenous population. The state promoted the Hindu religion, the Hindu monarchy, and the Nepali language as indicators of the nationality of Nepal. In the panchayat era, the state tried to create cultural uniformity by propagating the slogan 'one language, one form of dress, one country'. State-published school textbooks delivered nationalist ideology to children. These books banished the cultures, histories, and languages of other ethnic groups of Nepal. History textbooks presented a unifying national history, highlighting high-caste Hindu heroes while excluding narratives about noteworthy individuals from other communities (Hagen,2007,p.12). In a multiethnic state, every ethnic group is equally important to form a nation, If the state only promotes and glorifies the culture, history, and language of one specific ethnic group, it can lead to feelings of exclusion among other ethnic groups. This is particularly relevant to the marginalised communities of Nepal, which advocate for the recognition of their own identity.

3.4 Political Under-representation: Nepal's interim constitution specified that constituencies would be created based on population in the Terai region. However, the new constitution declared that constituencies will be allocated based on both population and geography. Supporters from the Terai region are concerned that this change will lead to a decrease in their representation, as Terai comprises about 23% of the country's geography but over 50% of its population. In the constituent assembly, there were 240 constituencies, out of which 116 were located in the Terai. In the new legislature, which consists of 165 constituencies, the Terai region is seeking a guarantee that 83 seats will come from the plains. The revised formula, which includes geographical considerations, could potentially reduce this number to 60(Hindustan Times,2015). The Madhesi community, Dalits and other indigenous communities feel disheartened as they do not get enough political representation in Nepal, and they demand more political representation.

3.5. Underrepresentation of marginalised ethnic communities in State structures: Nepal's key institutions, including the bureaucracy, army, and police, have very low representation of Muslims, Dalits, Madhesis and other indigenous groups. Although they comprise a significant portion of the Nepali population, their representation indicates their lack of inclusion in the country.

Key findings reveals that the High caste Pahadi Hindus (Khas/Arya) represent the bureaucratic structure of 63.50%, while Muslims, Dalits, Madhesis and other indigenous groups are significantly underrepresented at 0.60%, 2.30%, 15.40%, and 19.5% respectively (Guragain, 2024:95). According to data, the government service employs up to 63.50% Khas/Aryas, but only 0.60% Muslims, 2.50% Dalits, 15.40% Madhesis, and 19.5% indigenous people are represented (Bhul, 2025, p.1841). The figures presented indicate the inequality among the citizens of Nepal.

3.6. Economic exploitation: The Terai region of Nepal is naturally rich in minerals and has fertile land, though the inhabitants of Terai, a large proportion of Madhesis, are socio-economically deprived. Madhesh accounts for 70 % of the agricultural production of Nepal and 65 % of the GDP. 76 % of the total revenue of the country is collected from Madhesh. Ironically, however, there are no good colleges, universities, infrastructure, or health facilities in the region.

As a result, Madhesis face high poverty and lag behind the Pahadis in the education and health sectors. Despite having fertile land and industrial hubs, the Terai region has the highest unemployment rate, and its per capita income is lower than that of the Hills region. Historical policies, such as monarchical land reform, further worsen the conditions of Madhesis by favouring the pahadis (Nayak, 2011, p.643).

Although the Madhesh region has high productivity, the people residing here receive no benefits; therefore, the Madhesi people have demanded their rights. This uneven development has fueled feelings of neglect and driven the Madhesis to demand their rights.

4. Demands and movements for an egalitarian state in Nepal

During the 1950s, the Terai witnessed an extended movement in support of Hindi as a language of instruction in schools and resisting the compulsory imposition of Nepali in the education system. The language controversy began with the National Education Planning Commission report of 1956, based on which the education ministry of 1957 ordered all schools to use Nepali as the medium of instruction. The protests gained momentum after the educational ministry attempted to implement the language policy. Public meetings, protest marches, and strikes were organised in many districts, and considerable turmoil occurred. On November 19, 1957, pro-Hindi and pro-Nepali groups clashed in Biratnagar, and at least 25 people were injured (Gaike, 1975, pp.111-112).

The constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal of 1990 was enacted under the multiparty democracy. This new constitution declared Nepal a 'Unitary Hindu and constitutional Monarchical Kingdom'. Even though the 1990 constitution recognised Nepal as a multiethnic and multilingual nation, it retained the Hindu identity of the State, and did not recognise languages other than Nepali as the official language. Thus, the hegemony of the religion and language of the high caste hill group continues even under the 1990 constitution. Non-Hindu indigenous groups and other religious minorities continue to demand that Nepal should become a secular state instead of a Hindu state. These groups demanded a multilingual policy with the right to use local languages in the local administration instead of only Nepali. The demands for religious and linguistic rights were closely allied with the federalist agenda. Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim associations, and ethnic organisations representing predominantly non-Hindu hill indigenous groups, demanded that Nepal be declared a secular State instead of a Hindu state. These groups demanded a multilingual policy with the right to use local languages in the local administration instead of only Nepali. They also demanded news to be broadcast in all languages, Sanskrit to be an optional instead of a compulsory subject in school education, and state support for school-level education in all mother tongues (Sen, 2014, pp. 408-411).

The one language, one religion, and one culture led to further radicalisation of the Madhesi movement as the basic medium of communication. This excluded them from obtaining any state services and, most critically, their acceptance as equal Nepali. Lack of representation of Madhesi in civil services is one of the major reasons for their dissatisfaction. Representation of the Madhesi community at the class 1 officer level in the Public Service Commission in 2012 was 9.6% while there were only two special class officers.

Further, Madhesi comprised only 2.2% of second-class officers and 9.92% of the third-class officers (Jha,2017,p.46)

In the Interim government, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalists has made four minimum demands: ethnic based proportional representation in the constituent assembly elections, a quick decision on how a federal system would be set up, linguistic liberty, and a new national emblem. Although Nepali is the only official language named in the interim constitution, indigenous nationalists want all languages to have an equal status. Federalism is one of the core demands of the indigenous nationalists movement, as well as the Madhesi movement. The movement regards federalism as the best way to grant ethnic autonomy to these groups, enabling them to exercise self-determination, gain adequate representation in the political systems, and support their cultural traditions. Federalism is widely supported among the indigenous nationalities. Indigenous nationalists and Madhesi activists, and scholars advocate ethnic federalism, which will ideally create territories where each ethnic group is a majority (Hagen,2007,pp.48-49)

The Madhesh movement peaked in 2007. Madhesis demanded state restructuring and autonomy as the draft Interim Constitution failed to include "federalism." This led to widespread protests across the plains, drawing national and international attention. The movement resulted in 30 deaths and 800 injuries due to harsh government measures. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala sought to address grievances by promising more electoral constituencies in Terai and reaffirming support for federalism. On February 8, 2007, the MJF suspended protests after a 22-point agreement with the government was signed. However, the constitution-making process remained stalled until the 2013 elections, primarily due to issues surrounding federal demarcation and electoral representation (Jha,2017,pp.42-44).

The opposition to the 2015 constitution began in Madhesh ever since the big three parties, namely Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and CPN-M, concluded endorsing an eight-province model, leaving the demarcation for later. However, under rapidly changing circumstances, the big three presented a six-province model with demarcation. On 19 August 2015, Madhesi, Tharus and Janajatis were staging separate protests against the Six-Province model. The objective of the alliance was to pressure major political parties for a new federal, democratic and republican constitution. In spite of the heightened protests and agitations, the Government declared the constitution on 20th September 2015. Protests along the Terai escalated throughout September, and the borders were blocked in an attempt to halt the flow of petrol, gas, and other goods into Nepal. They have blockaded Nepal's border trade points with India, causing a shortage of essential goods and medicines in the landlocked country (Jha,2017,p.46)

Conclusion: Egalitarianism is the belief in human equality, particularly in terms of political, social, and economic rights. In Nepal, a multilingual and multiethnic state, inequality persists among its citizens, prompting marginalised communities to demand equal rights. While the new constitution of Nepal recognises the country as a multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural state, the dominance of the high-caste groups from the hilly regions remains evident. The constitution acknowledges the demand for an ethnic federal structure; however, only eight districts in the Terai region were granted provincial status, while 16 districts were merged with hilly districts. Consequently, groups such as the Madhesis and Tharus were marginalised throughout the constitutional process (Deysarkar,2015,p.691). Proportional representation is unclear due to the new constitution's 45% reservation for jobs in state organs and public employment, which covers 17 groups, including socially backwards women, Dalits, Adivasis, Janajatis, Khas-Aryas, Madhesi, Tharus, and various minorities. Affirmative action has lost legitimacy by including the Khas-Arya community, which is already dominant in politics and state institutions, thus failing to adequately address historical marginalisation (Himalayas Times, 2016).

In a multiethnic country like Nepal, the implementation of inclusion is essential. However, true trust and ownership among citizens can only be achieved when individuals from all segments of society feel represented and able to participate in government mechanisms. The government of Nepal has adopted various approaches to include marginalised groups in politics, but it has not fully satisfied these communities. Complete inclusion has not yet been realised. There are concerns that total ethnic provincial federalism could lead to separatism, posing a challenge to the unity and integrity of Nepal. In summary, although there have been significant achievements, further efforts are needed. This requires positive and constructive support and collaboration from the government, political parties, civil society, media, and individuals.

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