

Possibilities and Opportunities in Dialogue among Civilizations: Inclusion of Dalits in Nepalese Society

Som Prasad Niroula

Program Coordinator

South Asia Forum for Human Rights

Nepal

In 1998, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. There are a number of possibilities and opportunities envisioned to be achieved in that proclamation. One which particularly concerns many marginalized groups worldwide is the possibility of “*actively promoting a culture of peace – respect for one another – regardless of belief, culture, language, and not fearing or repressing differences within or between societies but cherishing them as a precious asset of humanity*” (Toh, 2008, 2).

In 2005, the UN established The Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) as a follow-up to the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The AoC aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions, thereby helping to counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism. While the Alliance of Civilizations appears to address global issues, many prejudices, misconceptions, and polarization take place everyday in villages, communities, and micro societies characterized by class, cultural, economic and political disparities. This paper will focus particularly on the Dalits of Nepal, how they have been excluded from mainstream Nepalese society and the initiatives undertaken by the Dalits themselves in solidarity with numerous local, national and international civil society organizations and the government to break down historical, cultural, attitudinal and structural barriers to their full participation in society. Finally, some recommendations are offered for reforms in the educational system, particularly on teachers’ training and Dalits’ access to education.

Background

The Hindu civilization is one of the oldest civilizations in South Asia. The Hindu religion started with the Indus Valley Civilization around 2600-1900 BC. Hindu culture and religious practices are diverse and widely observed in the India sub-continent - Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh and Pakistan. Majority of the Hindus in the present context reside in India and Nepal. They are minorities in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The caste system within the Hindu religion, which is based on the notion of “pure” and “impure” has been practiced for a long time. The higher caste people (Brahmins) were considered the “pure” or clean and the Dalits (Sudras) were considered “impure.” The basis of this division was the nature of work (labor) performed by each group. The Dalits were assigned to work as tailor, blacksmith and leather worker. The caste-based discrimination and the perpetuation of “untouchability” is the severest form of discrimination in Hindu society. Namala (2006) noted that there are about 167 million Dalits facing caste-based discrimination and exclusion in its most severe forms, such as untouchability.

In 1963, the practice of untouchability was declared illegal in Nepal. Despite the legal ban, the practice of untouchability and denial of the basic human rights of people labeled as “polluted” or “impure,” a practice sanctioned by religious traditions, is the most insidious manifestation of caste-based discrimination. Caste-based discrimination denies a fraction of society access to public services including water, education, health, land, employment, social services and other resources. The segregation and exclusion of the Dalits from the mainstream of governance and institutions has been practiced since the beginning of Hindu religion and cultural practices. It is therefore crucial that the notion of untouchability and impurity is challenged through inter-community dialogue among the Dalits and non-Dalits (Brahmins, Chettri and other communities). The practice of inter-community dialogue will decrease the agony of the Dalits and promote cultural harmony among Dalits and non-Dalits.

The purpose of this paper is to briefly give an overview of the situation of the Dalits. Has Nepal ratified the international instruments of human rights? Who are the Dalits? What obligations has Nepal assumed to protect the rights of the Dalits? What are the constitutional and statutory rights of Dalits in general and their educational rights in particular? What is the nature of discrimination experienced by Dalits? Do they experience discrimination in educational institutions, especially, in schools? In addition, this paper will present a preliminary overview of the country's economic condition, the status of education, and administrative structure and division.

About Nepal

Nepal is a land-locked country bordered by India in the South, East and West and China in the North. According to the 2001 Census, the population of Nepal is 23.4 million with about 60 castes/ethnic groups. The total land area of Nepal is 147,181 sq. km. It has been divided into three geographic regions: mountains of the great Himalaya in the north, middle hills with many river valleys, and southern plains also known as Tarai. Administratively it has been divided into 5 development regions, with 75 districts which are further divided into 3914 village development committees and 58 municipalities. The 1990 constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal and the 2006 Interim Constitution guarantee fundamental human rights and an independent judiciary. Majority of the political parties have accepted liberal democratic practices as guiding principles for governance.

Agriculture is a prime factor of the national economy which provides livelihood for 80 percent out of 85 percent rural population. Agricultural productions support 40 percent of the gross national product, industry and services provide 22 percent and 38 percent respectively. In the countryside, 44 percent live below the poverty line compared to 23 percent of the urban population. The country's per capita income is \$250 (CBS, 2001).

The annual population growth rate is 2.4. The average family size is 5.45. The infant mortality rate is 66 out of 1000 live births. Maternal mortality rate is 540 out of 100,000. The average life expectancy is 59 (HMG, 2002). According to the National Human Rights Commission (2003, p. 84) about 47 percent of the children suffer from malnutrition.

The national literacy rate is 51 percent which varies between the female (39 percent) and male (63 percent). Nepal Human Rights Report (2003, p. 3) stated that the literacy and participation of the Dalits and Janajatis is almost half of the national level literacy rate. The Janajati are those ethnic groups who have their own territorial areas, mother tongue, religions, and cultures. Nepalese scholars argue that the Janajatis do not fall under the Hindu caste-based hierarchical order (NHRC, 2003 p. 94).

The social structure of Nepal is complex based on the caste structure of the Hindu religion. According to the Hindu religion, Brahma, the creator, created Brahmin from his mouth, *Kshetria* from his head, *Vaishya* from his thigh and *Shudra* from his feet. Therefore from the very beginning of creation, the *Shudras* are shown to have originated from the disrespectful part of the body of the creator, so they had to serve all other classes of people through manual work. *Kshetrias* ruled the country, Brahmins were the priests and *Vaishyas* used to handle the economy of the country. Mabuhang (2004) noted that the caste system is deeply rooted in Nepalese society since the Mall period in the 14th to the 17th century. The first Shah King (Ram Shah) formally introduced the caste system in Nepal. The first *Muluki Ain* (civil code) in 1854 codified the caste system according to the four Varna of the classical Vedic model including *Janjatiees* (ethnic) peoples also who were not Hindus. The wearers of holy thread (*Tagadhari*) are put into the highest position, followed by alcohol-drinkers (*Matwali*), Impure but touchable castes (*Chhoi chhito halnu naparne*) and Impure and untouchable castes (*Chhoi chhito halnu parne*).

According to caste categorization, the Brahmins are assigned to work as priests and advisors of the government. Chetries are assigned as rulers and serve in military. The Matwali (Janjaties) are assigned to work as pastoral. The Dalits, considered as untouchable, are groups of people who have different functions

like stitching cloths, blacksmith, preparing agricultural tool, and cobblers doing leather work.

According to the 2001 population census, there was a total population of 30,30, 067 male and female Dalits. Of the 13.33 percentage of the total dalit population, 58.11 percent were the Dalits who resided at the Hills. The (30 percent) of the Dalits consists of Kami (blacksmith) where the lowest population which consisted of Halokar (CBS, 2001).

Defining Dalits

The literal meaning of Dalit is a person who is oppressed. In the context of South Asia, Dalit is a common term used to address the culturally, economically and socially marginalized people or community. Gurung (1996) cited in Dahal et al (2002) prefers to mention Dalits as "caste groups." While the caste group gives a broad understanding of the categorization of different caste groups, it does not provide a deeper understanding in terms of the condition of the Dalits. According to Koirala (1996) cited in Dahal et al (2002) Dalit refers to a group of people who are religiously, culturally, socially and economically oppressed, who could belong to different language and ethnic groups. This definition is too broad since it includes all caste groups who are marginalized, like the Newari Society who are considered indigenous people. However, there are also different caste groups among the Newars. Thus it is essential to define specifically the Dalits. Bishwakarma (2001) prefers to use the term Dalit exclusively only for the so-called "untouchables." Considering the different definitions, this paper conceptualizes the Dalits as a group of untouchable people marginalized in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres in society.

The Problem of Untouchabilities

People belonging to lower castes or "untouchables" had led a miserable life for a long time. They were not allowed to acquire property, construct comfortable houses, touch higher caste

people, and education was far beyond their reach. Muluki Ain (National Code) of 1853 further formalized the caste system which created atrocities for lower caste people as they were further deprived of attending social festivals. The higher caste people invited Damai (musicians) during marriage ceremonies. But they could not touch people or food at the festivals. The lower caste people were banned from taking part in any funeral gathering of higher caste people (Brahmins and Chettries). For similar kind of crimes, there were different punishments for different castes. If a Dalit came across higher caste people, he/she had to make way for the higher caste people and salute them. The Dalits were required to use formal and polite language. According to Karel:

Many adolescents have lost friends once they have revealed their Dalit identity. They have been mistreated and humiliated in school and have refused to go back to school for fear of being called "Podes." Parents note that many children in the community drop out of school due to discrimination, financial problems and some drop out in search of jobs (Kharel, 2006: 6)

A large number of Dalits have changed their family name to look similar to the higher caste people. This process has somehow prevented the Dalits from getting humiliated for a certain period of time. The humiliation on the basis of caste is not only limited to families but also in the school and public institutions like the village development committees and temples. There are many incidents where lower caste children are barred from drinking water in schools due to the untouchable stigma on them.

Unfortunately, the education system in Nepal does not address discriminatory social and cultural values. The social structure is based on hierarchy where the high caste people have to be always respected by the lower caste. The lower caste people always have to address the upper caste people in respective words like *Hajur* and follow without question, instructions from high caste people about social practices. The conception of superiority always dominates the so-called lower caste people. There is no dialogical interaction between the higher caste and

lower caste people. The higher caste people always dominate the lower caste people in terms of social participation and interaction. The caste superiority is therefore a real obstacle for dialogical interaction among the different groups in society and in schools.

International Normative Framework on Human Rights Education

Human beings are born with certain inalienable fundamental rights. The right to equality and peaceful existence are basic and inseparable rights of every human being. The 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) identified human rights as fundamental to the achievement of peace and progress. Based on the United Nations Charter and the UDHR, various international covenants incorporated various aspects of human rights. Nepal has signed and ratified international covenants and is working to implement and assimilate them into the mainstream development effort (HRAP, 2004).

Article 13 of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural rights is very clear about the state's obligation to "education for all." This covenant recognizes that receiving a primary education is a right of all children. All member states of the UN agreed that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (UN 1967, ICESCR, Article 13). Article 5 of the CERD mentions that the State has an obligation to promote the human rights of all disadvantaged groups. This article integrates the civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights and shows all rights are interdependent, indispensable and indivisible. Furthermore, States have to guarantee the rights without distinction as to race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin, to equality before the law (CERD, Article 5).

Nepalese context of normative framework and fundamental rights

The government of Nepal is a state party to more than 16 international instruments of human rights. These include the major six conventions - on civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, racial discrimination, discrimination against women, rights of the child and against torture. These conventions provide a normative framework on rights to education and peace education.

Nepal adopted the international human rights instruments in its domestic laws. Nepal's Treaty Act of 1990 is one of the very significant laws in Nepal, which respects international laws not only in a moral sense but also as binding laws. Section 9 (1) of the Treaty Act 1990 accords international treaties the same legal status as domestic laws. In case of conflict between the provisions of the domestic laws and the treaty, the treaty provisions do prevail over the domestic laws. Such an application is extended only to those treaties which are ratified, acceded, accepted and approved by the Parliament. Moreover, The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 and Interim Constitution of Nepal 2006 guaranteed the following fundamental human rights: right to equality; right to freedom; right to press and publication; rights regarding criminal justice; right against prevention and detention; right to information; right to property, cultural and educational rights; right to religion; right against exploitation; right to privacy; and rights to constitutional remedy (Constitution of Nepal, 1990 and Interim Constitution of Nepal 2006). While non-governmental organizations are promoting human rights education in non-formal and informal education, the government has not yet introduced human rights education in the formal school system. Nevertheless, the government has prepared a national action plan on human rights.

The government has committed to promote the international human rights instruments by legally ratifying the human rights conventions. Notwithstanding all these instruments, the Dalits of

Nepal are still discriminated against in almost every aspect of their lives.

Discrimination faced by Dalits

The Dalits have been marginalized in almost every activity in Nepalese society such as access to natural resources, access to economic activities and educational institutions, and participation in socio-cultural practices and political institutions.

Educational Status of Dalits

The Dalits' educational status is lowest compared with high castes Brahmin, Chhetri, Newar and Janajatis. The highest literacy rate for Brahmins is 58 percent while the Dalits' remain at 23.8 per cent).

Table- 1: Educational Status of Dalits

Caste / Ethnic Groups	Literacy Rate (among 6 years and above population)
Brahmin	58
Chhetri	42
Newar	54.8
Janajati	35.2
Dalit	23.8
Total in Nepal	65

Source: NESAC, 1998

Dalit students have been discriminated against not only by the wider society but by teachers as well. They have been facing problems of housing as well as equal participation in the classroom and outer activities. There are few cases about such discrimination of Dalit students.

*Shalik Ram Kharel threw out Binod Pariyar of Bulingar
VDC-3 of Nawalparasi district from his house after he came to*

know Binod was a Dalit boy. Binod had rented a room at Kharel's house situated near Janaki Higher Secondary School of Gaindakot to sit in the upcoming School Leaving Certificate examinations. Binod and Prakash Giri had rented the room on 13 February 2006 for two months. However after 13 days Kharel asked both students to leave the room. Kharel is an accountant at the Janaki Higher Secondary School. However Prakash Giri said Kharel threatened and accused him that he brought the Dalit boy to his house without prior information. According to Binod, Kharel had confessed that his parents do not accept even the food he serves (Jagaran Media Centre, 2008:1).

The above incident illustrates the discrimination faced by Dalit students even by members of educational institutions. Dalit students have to suffer such discrimination which impacts on their psychological well-being distracting them from concentrating on their studies. Moreover, while the government has ratified the international instrument on human rights and accepted to offer free education, the Dalits are still not entitled to free education. The students have to pay an admission fee which is a burden to the impoverished communities, particularly the Dalit community. Dalit students are barred from attending school due to financial constraints. It is difficult for the Dalits to buy school dress and school supplies like paper, notebook, and pencil.

Though there is the provision of free education to Dalit student up to the secondary level, the Dalit students of Nanda Uma Secondary School, Odraha VDC-2 have been told to attend their classes only after bringing Rs. 250 as the new admission fee. Since then, the Dalit students are tilling lands at the nearby district- Udaypur, for generating money. Khusilal Paswan, Manju Kumari Paswan, and Durgi Paswan of grade 6, 8, and 9 respectively, and dozens of others have left going to the school because of the same reason. Manju Paswan who passed the exam of grade five, quit going to the school when her mother was unable to provide her the admission fee (Jagaran Media Centre, 2008:2).

The stigma of untouchability is also a serious problem that Dalit students have to face in school from a high caste teacher.

The case described below demonstrates the discrimination against Dalit students practiced by teachers at school.

Six Dalit students of Fadkedhunga lower secondary school, Majhphant Parvat, were denied the vocational exam of cookery. They were 7 graders Anita B.K., Durga Pariyar, Tikaram Pariyar, Som Bdr. Pariyar, Narayan Pariyar and Durge Pariyar. Subject teachers Shankar G.C., Kapur Malla, Tulasi Paudel along with other students treated the Dalit students very badly. When people from every walk of life protested against their discriminatory act, the perpetrators organized a co-fest, asked excuse in public, and provided Rs. 35 thousand as compensation to the Dalit students. However, the support from one of the teachers influenced other non-Dalit students and they started abusing the Dalits with vulgar words. The Dalit students went to teachers Kapur Malla and Tulasi Paudel for support, but they were suggested to create musical environment by singing and dancing. They were termed as eaters of buffalo, non worshippers, etc. by the teachers. The Dalit students returned home without getting a chance of sitting in the cookery exam (Nepali, n.a).

Human development indicators of Dalits

The table below represents the human development indicators based on the average life expectancy and per capita and consumption in Nepalese Rupees. As indicated in the table, the situation of the Dalits is worst compared to other caste/ethnic groups. The national average life expectancy is 55 in 1998 whereas the Dalits is 42 years. Similarly, the per capita income varies between high caste and lower caste people where Dalits have almost half of the per capita income of the high caste. The millennium development goal (MDG) national need assessment report mentioned that:

About a fourth of the children of primary school-going age are out of school, but also one half of those who enroll never complete the primary level. There are several reasons for such low completion rate. If social and economic constraints are important reasons, the education environment in the schools is also a factor. (MDG, 2006)

Table- 2: Selected Human Development Indicators
by Caste / Ethnic Groups, 1998

Caste / Ethnic Groups	Indicators (1USD= NRs. 74)		
	Average Life Expectancy (in years)	Per Capita Income (in Rs.)	Per Capita Consumption (in Rs.)
Brahmin	60.8	9921	1533
Chhetri	56.3	7744	1197
Newar	62.2	11953	1848
Janajati	53	6607	6911
Dalit	42	4940	764
Nepal (average)	55	7673	11866

Source: NESAC, 1998

The Dalits' condition in terms of life expectancy, income level and consumption are the lowest compared to higher castes. This shows that the Dalits are marginalized in almost all kinds of economic activities.

Access to Resources

Most of the Dalits are deprived of land ownership. The categorization of occupational groups, the low caste people like Kami (black smith), Damai (tailor), are asked to carry out their occupations. Further, Dalits cannot compete with modern technology led by industrial productions, therefore they leave their traditional occupation. Thus, they have to depend on subsistence agriculture, which makes land their prime assets. Obviously, Dalits have a hard time sustaining their livelihoods due to lack of land ownership. The agricultural wage laborers are paid very low wages.

Table - 3: Landownership of the Dalits

Dalit Caste	Land ownership Status (%)					Total Cases
	Landless	Less than 5 Ropanies	6-10 Ropanies	11-20 Ropanies	More than 20 Ropanies	
Kami	11.2	46.5	18.8	17.1	6.5	170
Damai	28.8	55.1	11.5	3.2	1.3	156
Sarki	7.6	47.8	24.2	16.7	3.8	157
Badi	39.1	39.1	13.0	4.3	4.3	46
Dhobi	33.3	66.7				3
Doom	88.2	11.8				17
Gaine	41.2	45.1	9.8	3.9		51
Hudke	100.0					8
Kasai	23.5	73.5	2.9			34
Musahar	33.3	55.6		11.1		9
Pode	21.7	56.5	21.7			23
Total	23.0	48.7	15.6	9.6	3.1	674

Source: FEDO, 2002: 83 (Table 3)

The survey of FEDO (2002) stated that about 23 percent of Dalits are landless. The largest piece of land owned by Kami is 17.10 percent of the total land coverage. In contrast, the Hudke are 100 percent landless. Thus, the Dalits' livelihood is dependent on being agricultural laborer due to the fact that many of them do not own any land.

Dalits have been marginalized in society, in a number of ways, from sharing the available resources in the community. The higher caste people do not share the same water source with lower caste people. Most of the water sources are owned by the higher caste people in rural areas. The lower caste people have to fetch water from long distances.

Socio-cultural factors

Socio-cultural factors are important in education. Research show that social discrimination by upper caste students and teachers is a major cause of a high dropout rate of Dalit students. Rasaili stated (2004 pp. 33) that "sometimes the Dalit students can not

drink water from the same tap used by the upper castes' in schools.”

Dalits are forbidden from entering social institutions, particularly the temple. The Hindu considers the temple as a sacred place. The conflict arises in the entrance of temple between Dalits and higher caste people. While the so-called lower caste people also belong to the Hindu religion, the higher caste people continue blocking entry of the Dalits into the temples. Although they are members of the society, the Dalits are still not allowed to share food, enter the temple and are restricted from various public places and functions.

In schools, the Dalit is not accepted in a peon post because the peon has to serve water, tea and food to the teachers. In restaurants they are forced to wash utensils. Inter-caste marriage is restricted. There are numerous cases where girls and boys have to leave the village after entering into inter-caste marriage. Neither the society nor the families accept inter-caste marriages.

The higher caste people do not want to see Dalits early in the morning. They regard it is an inauspicious encounter. They believe that their days will not be good once they encounter lower caste people in the morning. Similarly, if they see a Dalit at the first instance while leaving for a long journey, they believe their work will not be completed. The high caste people have numerous superstitious beliefs against the Dalits.

The Dalits' social status is always undermined by calling them 'Ta' (thou). But the higher caste people expect to be addressed as 'Tapai' (you) by the lower caste. Similarly, the socialization process in the society teaches the rest of the people to address the Dalits as 'Ta'.

Discrimination against the lower caste people is rampant in society even though such discrimination is legally restricted. There are hundreds of prejudices on the “untouchables” influenced by cultural, religious and social contacts.

Access to Social and Political institutions

A meaningful participation of the Dalits in social and political institution would help to emancipate them from discrimination.

Lawoti (2005) acknowledges that inclusion of marginalized people in socio-political institutions and activities, like attending schools and equal sharing of the benefit of the development would make their lives better. However, the table showing the representation in government offices of the State by castes, clearly demonstrates how the Dalits are almost non-entities in government leadership.

Table -4: Number of Representatives on the Top Level of the State by Caste/ Ethnic Groups, 1999

Sectors	Caste / Ethnic Groups				
	Brahmin / Chhetri	Newar	Janajati	Dalit	Total
Constitutional Commission	181	32	4	0	235
Minister	14	6	2	0	25
General Administrator	20	3	4	0	32
Manager	159	20	36	4	265
Political Leader (Central Level)	97	18	25	0	166
Local Governor	106	30	23	0	190
National Industry & Business	7	20	0	0	42
Education Professional	75	11	2	1	96
Culture Corporation	85	22	6	0	113
Science & Technology	36	18	2	0	62
Civil Society	41	18	1	0	64
Total	1011	231	108	5	1525

Source: Neupane, 1999.

The above table indicates that high-ranking positions of government are filled by the high caste Brahmin and Chhetri, and Newar. The Dalits' participation in governance is zero except 4 managers and 1 in education. In addition, the Dalits have been restricted from certain occupations. They can perform only low paid manual jobs like cleaning and disposal of carcasses. A few Dalits are employed in the security forces as cleaners. The

participation of *Dalits* in the social and political institution is negligible. The social exclusion of *Dalits* is immeasurable in governance system.

Dalits Initiatives for Upliftment

The Dalit movement has started in Nepal after the advent of democracy in 1990. The political parties, non-governmental organizations and social organizations have joined hands to combat discrimination against “untouchables” and caste-based discrimination. The development plan of Nepal also involves mobilization of internal resources, training, sharing of experiences to bring about continuity and effectiveness in their organizations, programmes and resource identification.

There are several International non-governmental organization (INGOs) such as Action-aid Nepal (AAN), Save the Children US, Care Nepal, and Department of International Development (DFID) working in the field of development for the Dalits. Their programmes are focused primarily on social transformation by raising awareness and public campaigns; economic development; career (personality) development with improvement in education, health and living conditions; and improving the participation in decision making process. In addition, Deutche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), Lutheran World Service, Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), OXFAM International, Canadian Cooperation office Nepal (CCO-Nepal), United Nations Development agencies, Plan International and others have also conducted programmes on Dalits and other disadvantaged groups.

Likewise, there are about more than 100 Dalit organizations focused on Dalit issues in Nepal. Dalit NGO Federation (mother organizations of 101 Dalit organizations) has been working as an umbrella organization of Dalit-based organizations. Its activities mainly focus on social enhancement, cultural change, women empowerment, income generation, legal awareness, etc. Some NGOs like IIDS (Institute for Integrated Development Studies),

RSDC (Rural Self-reliance Development Centre), Atma Nirbhar Bikash Monch (Self Reliance Development Forum) have made the Dalits as their community. They are mainly focusing on poverty alleviation and improvement of living conditions of the Dalit community. Similarly, Jagaran Media Center spreads information, message and education to raise Dalits self confidence through programmes such as Face to Face, Journalism Training, KATWAL Community Radio Program, Jagaran Lekhmala (paper series), etc. Jun Utthan Pratisthan (JUP) has been working to create an equitable society regardless of caste system and its mission is to empower and integrate the Dalit community in the mainstream of national development.

Moreover, political parties in their election manifestos have made a commitment to the promotion and protection of Dalits at various level. However, the implementation of many of their commitments remains on paper. Dalits and other minority groups have insignificant presence in the government, public institutions and civil society organizations. The initiatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations to uplift Dalits in the economic, social and cultural spheres have still a long long way to go.

The official curriculum barely addresses the problem of the caste system in Nepal. The text books also portray the practice of discrimination by mentioning the different layers of social status and segregation of the community based on the caste and work entitled to different groups. The segregation and division in the curriculum further strengthen caste and prejudice towards the Dalit community. The government reformulated the curriculum after the advent of democracy in 1990 and signed the international instruments on human rights. The Human Rights Report of Nepal (2003) mentioned that the school curriculum should be amended to create awareness in society to give a respectful place to Dalits. However, the curriculum and teachers training package has not been radically formulated to eradicate the age-long caste based discrimination on Dalits.

Conclusion

Dalits make a large segment of Nepalese society. They are industrious but most of them have been leading a miserable life. They have very low access to education, to economic opportunities and are discriminated against socially, culturally, and politically. Their representation in governance is almost nil. Their per capita income is 36 percent less than higher caste people. Most of the Dalits are landless, yet their livelihood is dependent on agriculture. The governance system that makes policies and programmes does not address the needs of Dalits.

Dalit students face discrimination in schools as well as the wider community. Teachers discriminate against Dalit students by not allowing them to use the same pot to drink water at school. When they look for renting house, they are given low priority. They face discrimination from friends. They are given low priority in terms of accessing opportunities after they complete their education and go looking for jobs. This is obviously a failure of the educational institutions to provide non-discriminatory education and to formulate policies to dismantle discriminatory practices.

It is therefore most urgent that they are uplifted from such marginal existence so that they can flourish in a culture of peace and harmony. As discussed above, education is a foundation for personal and community prosperity. Thus, this paper recommends that revisions be made of the current teachers training packages to include values formation education based on the normative framework of peace and human rights education. The teachers pre-service training should be based on non-discriminatory principles in school or in community regardless of caste, class, gender and colour. The curriculum should be focused on the formation of values of love, harmony, cooperation, and promotion of the dignity of Dalits. The government should encourage the employment of Dalit teachers. Moreover, Dalits students should be provided sufficient scholarship quotas to increase their access to education.

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