



Women empowerment and its challenges in Terai region (Madhesh) of Nepal. Psycho study

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ABSTRACT

This paper is examined status of madheshi women in Nepal. In Nepalese context, the madheshi women as being on the lowest rung of caste hierarchy are deprived from the accessibility of different types of capital, symbolic, economic, and cultural except the social capital. They have low partake in different part of development activities of the country. Madheshi women are backward than Pahadi women communities women because of restricted equality and discrimination recognition due to deficiency of literacy.

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1. Introduction

A country with geographical and cultural diversity followed by unique unity in diversity represents rare identity of Nepal. But natural human gender diversity is still not shadowed under common umbrella of equality. The contradiction to maintain balance between reliable modern culture of gender equality and provocative ancient masculine tradition gives a transparent vision creating an inhabitable issue of today's Nepalese society. Modern Nepalese society reflecting conflicting socio-economic status has focus on concept of women empowerment for development which is resisted by traditional belief of masculine society [1]. In this scenario, rising women's empowerment maintained by education and awareness have not gained sustainable position yet. The approach of governmental, and various private sectors lighting lamp of women empowerment have shown some fruitful improving outcomes. But it seems not enough; the rising critical contradiction is visualized by prominent gap of women status between urban and rural areas of Nepal. There are a lot of things to be improved from each and every member of Nepalese society [2]. After all, women empowerment is not only burning issue representing women's right but also a duty of every man which should be radiated as heat of inspiration; respect and love from their soul. Empowerment doesn't only include efficient approach to education and employment but also natural right to decide, equality and understanding. Withdrawing any of these factors can lower women status in human society. Urban areas having effective education and awareness have maintained a good slandered of women potential in socio-economic aspect but its still seems unserviceable in field. Although there is easy reach to legal activity, communication, awareness and other additional support but still the women empowerment is not accelerating in urban areas. The activities like; indoor gender discrimination, sexual harassment and assault in public place,

illegal polygamy etc. is still prevalent in city areas. The women illiteracy is also a key drawback of Nepalese society resisting women empowerment in Nepal.

N	Female literacy rate	Male literacy rate
1	46.7%	71.1%

The Terai-Madhesh constitutes more than 50% of the total population of Nepal. Nepalese society is divided into two major categories. Indo - Aaryan and Tibeto- Burman. Most of the previous studied on the status of Nepali women have concluded that Gender roles are less stratified in Tibeto Burman than Indo-Aryan groups however enjoy considerable freedom both within and outside the family. The women of the Tibeto-Burman community not only enjoy equal status in the household they also hold more power and authority than their men. It is also seen that women of Hill-ethnic-tribal and occupational castes are granted a higher degree of public mobility by their respective culture and traditions. Madheshi women are backward than other Pahadi communities women because restricted equalities and discriminatory recognition [3]. It has also increased voices from madheshi people that they have not got respect, proper identity by the state. The policy still is scrawny and has not address properly to all women of Nepal.

In Nepal context, the madheshi women as being on the lowest rung of case hierarchy are deprived from the accessibility of these different types of capital, symbolic, economic, cultural expect the social capital i.e. net work of family and kinship. Thus empowerment as a solution, with the aim to improve the status of women in all the spheres of life, has been used in different ways such as the process of giving power, giving access to resource and decision making. It is said that this is the process of providing access to opportunities, which was denied in the past.

Women empowerment refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of the society by giving them power to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic domains which would enable them to move from the periphery to the centre stage. This paper examines the empowerment status of Madheshi women in Nepal.

2. Literature review

The information presented in this paper is part of quantitative and qualitative information collected from a sample of 400 currently married madheshi women of age groups of 15-45 belonging to different ethnic groups of different districts of Madhesh. Systematic random sampling technique was used to select samples from clusters of VDCs and wards of the districts. Sampling size of each listed cluster was determined following population proportionate sampling technique. Interview and focused group discussion tools were used to collect information [3]. This has been analyzed using distribution method of research.

3. Results and Discussions

This huge difference of male and female literacy rate is a result of gender discrimination prevalent in Nepalese society. Nepalese family gives educational priority to boys as a result many young girls are deprived of school education and forced to engage in household works. The condition of women in rural areas is even more critical due to lack of education, awareness and income source. The traditional masculine social concept followed by lack of education and awareness is still prevalent in many villages of Nepal. Hard labor for gathering livestock and struggle to join their hand to mouth has resisted women to explore from their limited source. The early marriage and socially deprived from right to decide pregnancy; women in remote village have caused frequent maternal and infant death. The maternal death rate of Nepal is 170 death/100,000 lives. (2010AD) The women education and awareness works as key to improve life standard of women in rural areas. Moreover, filtering and polishing social concept of masculine society as well as enhancing gender equality by establishing women right to decide from mutual intersexual respect helps to maintain women empowerment in Nepal. To maintain women empowerment madheshi women in Nepal [4]; the women participation in economic activity and household decision making plays a prominent role. The relationship between women's economic participation and their input into household decision making can improve family quality of life. Hence, women empowerment is essential for development of the country. Women in rural areas especially of madheshi women need education, stop child marriage awareness, eradicate dowry system and skill training to increase their personal income and this economic input in family helps to initiate women empowerment. Skill training of any handicraft product, technical education rising agricultural productivity can be efficient way to increase women's income in a family. "Spark of education creates gender equality." Women's right and empowerment are associated with each other. If women right is established in society properly, it helps to create natural uplifting of empowerment resulting gender equality.

3.1. World Scenario

In the world even though women are the major founders of the society, yet women have not achieved equality with men. Of the world's 1.3 billion poor people, it is estimated that nearly 70 per cent are women. Between 75 and 80 per cent of the world's 27 million refugees are women. There are many countries where women are second-class citizens.

No matter how talented they are, they never get a chance to develop. A lot of countries are there where women are treated as subordinate and second class citizen, though the equal rights is preserved in the constitution [5]. The political participation of women in the world seems relatively low and it is due because of the existence of the patriarchal mindset even in the political parties in almost all countries in the world no matter how advanced and socially, economically, culturally and politically sound the countries are. The participation of women in parliament of Japan and USA is only 7.1% and 17% respectively [6]. While in the countries like Rwanda it's 49% and in Sweden it's 46%. The status of women in the developed countries is also lower in all sectors. Leaving some exceptions of European, American and Asian countries, women in the world are socially, economically, culturally and politically dominated and they are excluded from the opportunities. Throughout the world, women face violence every day. From the battlefield to the bedroom, women are at risk from violence in all areas of life. Violence against women persists because of society canopy. Virtually every culture in the world contains forms of violence against women that are often invisible because they are seen as normal or acceptable. The underlying cause of violence against women lies in gender discrimination – the denial of women's equality with men in all areas of life.

3.2. Women in South Asia

South Asian countries are primarily linked with the status of women in family, society and the state structures. Traditional ethical code of the society expects women to remain restricted within four walls of home, which is still a common occurrence. In some of the countries of South Asia women are outlawed even to cast votes. In South Asian region, women are discriminated, because of son preference traditions of the society dominated by religious beliefs. Daughters are discriminated from birth to funeral ceremony. Women are also suffering from domestic violence, wrong tradition and cultural malpractices. Some awful examples of violence are: sex selective abortion, wife battering, child marriage, polygamy, rape, sexual violence, trafficking of women & forced prostitution, sexual harassment, dowry, Tilak system, suicide, killings, and domestic violence, still prevailed. They are still accused in the name of Witchcraft. Women in South Asian countries are witnessing changes through development initiatives. Women are considered as poor people in developing countries, live under the same conditions as men, but suffer additional social and policy biases. Though this problem affects almost all sections of the people, women are recognized to be among the most disadvantaged groups. Political participation of women in the state structure and mechanisms is still a far dream even in this advanced century [7]. Though, constitutions of all the countries have ensured equal status of all citizens without discrimination based on gender in every layers of governance, political participation of women in South Asian countries is very low. The decision and policy level positions are remains occupied and dominated by males majority of them with the patriarchal psyche.

3.3. Status of madheshi women in Nepal

Nepal, a Himalayan country situated in South Asia, is one of the poor countries of the world. Major reason behind this is the political instability and undemocratic rule for long. Other crucial factors for being the country very poor are due to lack of awareness and access to quality education. As a result, people have superstitious beliefs, there is gender

discrimination, and political leaders have decreased political vision. The socio-economic status of women in Nepal is very poor. The women are being discriminated in every aspect of the society. These and so many other factors have contributed to turn Nepal a lower human development state [8].

3.4. Socio-Economic Status

Nepal is a country of great geographic, cultural, ethnic, religious diversity. Across the diversity, the majority of communities in Nepal are patriarchal. A woman's life is strongly influenced by her father, husband and son. Such patriarchal practices are further reinforced by the legal system. Marriage has a great importance in women's life. The event of marriage determines the way of her life. The early marriage generally depreciates the women's life. A woman's power to accept or reject marriage partner is evidently an index of the degree of freedom she exercises in the management of her own life, and thus also of her status [9]. The status of women is determined by the patriarchal social system, values, and women's right preserved and protected by the state, and state policy for the development of women in Madhesh. Women's relative status, however, varied from one ethnic group to another. The economic contribution of women is substantial, but largely unnoticed because their traditional role was taken as for granted. Empirical data have proved that situation of Nepalese women is too severe to compare with men. Woman's situation is very poor in health, education, participation, income generation, self-confidence, decision-making, access to policymaking, and human rights. The insurgency for more than 10 years between the State and the rebel has further widened this gap. National statistics shows that women's literacy rate is 30 percent while 66 percent to male and the national literacy rate is projected as 40 percent. The enrollment of women in higher education is only 24.95 percent but for madheshi women is 0.1 percent. Women's involvement in technical and vocational education is also lower than men. This is due to the social norms and culture that we follow also. As in rural areas girls are considered as "paraya dhan" (others property) and they don't get the opportunity to get education [10].

3.5. Violence against Women

Due to illiteracy and poverty of madheshi women in madhesh the violence against women is rampant. Several research projects in Nepal have indicated that 66 percent of women have endured verbal abuse, 33 percent emotional abuse, while 77 percent of the perpetrators were family members (UNICEF 2001). Violence against women is happening day by day but the government and the other civil society members are doing their best but still there is plenty of room to work and control the forms of violence against women. The violence against women in politics is also rampant but we are unaware or the cases have not been come out in the realm of violence against women due to its ignorance. And, even the political leaders are unaware whether the violence happening in political parties to women leaders is duly the violence against women in politics.

3.6. Women in Politics

Due to descriminacy and illiteracy of madheshi women represented suppose to be negligible in politics. In Nepal, people were greatly influenced by different freedom struggles.. In 1960, the king of Nepal subverted the democratic Panchayat system to an autocratic one. This put a sudden end to all associations and their activities. Women, however, remained politically active. In protest against the undemocratic royal proclamation of 1960, a group of women

organizations openly waved black flags in a public procession, and were imprisoned. Later, in the people's movement of 1990, women actively participated to get rid of the autocratic Panchayat system and to usher in multiparty democratic system. Women of various regions and ideologies contributed greatly to the success of this movement. The participation and contribution of women in the people's movement of 2006 and movements for the freedom from long run was very high. However, there is very low participation of women at decision making of all sectors [11]. While we talk about the women's participation in politics, the common and general answer constitutes as the root cause in poverty and lack of education indeed. The state policy is the most important factor that contributes and ensures to the increased-participation of women at the state mechanism. The important issue is to increase the participation of women and pro-women-male at policy making bodies and lawmakers. The sources of women representation at lawmaking and state bodies are political parties. The participation of women in the people's movement (April movement of 2006) was very high and indeed encouraging. There is no doubt that both men and women contributed equally in people's movement and protection and promotion of human rights, good governance and sustainable peace. However, men only fulfill the state positions. Nepali women have made significant contributions for the democratic processes in Nepal. However, discrimination against women still exists even within the politics. Women face hegemonic character from their male counterparts. They have always been kept away from the decision making roles.

Facts on Woman's Situation in Politics

- Only 32 women have been Members of Parliament after restoration of democracy (1990). Till now, the provision for woman representatives in the National Assembly and House of Representatives is only 3% and 5%, respectively.
- Not more than three members have been women so far in the central committees of the national parties like Nepali Congress, CPN (UML) and RPP. The political parties have not adopted the 33 % reservation seats for women in their manifestos.
- There were only two women in the special class which totalled 85 seats of Nepalese civil service some five years ago, occupied all the remaining seats by men.
- Even in the third class posts, which totalled 7,418 seats, women occupied only eight percent.
- Negligible nomination or representation of women found in constitutional bodies, task forces, and organizations.
- The conservative feeling that women should not involve in politics is still prevailed in the Nepalese society.

After the restoration of democracy in 1990, only 32 women elected as the Members of Parliaments (MPs). In general, election of 1999, which was the third election held after the restoration of democracy (1999), only 12 women out of 205 seats that is hardly six percent elected as Member of the House of Representatives. The newly reinstated parliament has declared 33 percent seats as the reservation for women. Nevertheless, there is no any action plan for its proper implementation for women who occupy more than half (50.1%) of the total population of Nepal. Few women elected to executive positions in local election; only 289 seats of the 3993 wards returned women chairpersons in the last election for VDCs and municipalities. There was not any woman has so far been elected as mayor, deputy mayor or DDC chairperson. There was not any women representative in constitution making body in 1991 and very few in interim

constitution draft committee in 2006 after the struggle of women rights activists. Women less represented in political parties as well. Not more than 3 to 5 members have been women so far in the central committees of the national parties and other political parties. There were only two women in the special class, which totaled 85 seats of Nepalese civil service some five years ago, occupied all the remaining seats by men. Even in the third class posts, which totaled 7,418 seats, women occupied only eight percent but in civil service it has also supposed to be negligible. The participation of women in politics seems insufficient for decision making levels representation. The participation of women in the people's movement (April movement of 2006) was very high and indeed encouraging. But the interim constitution ensured only 33% women participation in candidacy (process) and not in the result, though the spirit of proportional representation is expressed in the constitution [12]. When constituting the constitution, the political parties almost forgot the contribution of women made at the movement.

4. Challenges

- No control of women leaders over the state mechanism
- Lack of opportunities and access and control over resources
- Difficulties to manage the time for political participation
- Challenges to be updated on human rights, inclusive democracy and women empowerment issues including international treaties, and provisions etc.
- Challenges to cope the barriers of cultural values and practices that are firmly entrenched in systems and structures of society.
- Patriarchal structure of society hinders women's social, cultural, economic and political participation.
- Challenges to upgrade and raise the illiteracy rate of women in Nepal, which severely limits women's participation in politics.
- Rampant poverty, illiteracy, ill health, gender, caste discrimination, political conflict and religious fundamentalism.
- Rampant Violence against women limits interest and active involvement in political activities.
- Families regard female members as weak and in need of protection throughout their lives and women who interact outside prescribed relations are viewed with suspicion of contempt, thus the challenges to overcome such concept.
- Unhealthy power relationship.
- Deficiency of literacy and freedom of Madhesi women.

5. Recommendation

We all know that democratic institutions evolve with vision, hard work and foresight of wise leaders – and leadership is not created overnight. People brought in for emotional reasons interrupt and halt the democratic process, and at times have easily undermined democratic institutions. The quest, and consequent, lust for power is not leadership indeed. Corruption and insatiable ambition are the hallmark of many a leader in region and even women leaders could not free from it. Thus, women leaders need to change this record of political playing and they have to be more visionary by being involved in political participation and lobbying for maximum participation of women in politics. A lot of women leaders have such capabilities and they are waiting for the opportunity indeed. There are many women leaders who are talented and politically gifted to enter into the political arena but an encouraging environment should be created. Lack of proper life skill training for women's empowerment and awareness is required unless the women are educated they cannot come forward so informal education needs to be

focused. The women need to know about their rights and more work needs to be made on it. The major issue of women, we have to consider is women are affected differently in war, violent conflict and any human rights violation cases. There is always the cost the women pay is very high in comparison to men in any situation. However, the contribution of women always neglected. The issue of women not addressed in the conflict transformation process. There is a need of women's struggle to break the patriarchal thought, and increase the women's share in governance and political leadership. The concept on women as weaker-sex and subordinate to the man can be changed through the involvement of women in decision making level at politics, and working in the area where there is more man involvement such as army. So, to generate the strength of women movement for making just society, women organizations and activities have to unite and build solidarity to fight against all kinds of discrimination and promoting women in politics, and state governance. Socially and economically madhesi men are always considered as superior to women, breadwinner, head of the family and the care taker and this is major cause for the low participation of women in civil services in Nepal is in the transitional phase even though women are participating in the political field but it is not up to the level. In order to change the status of women in Nepal socio-cultural change is required which takes a lot of time. Gender discrimination is common in the Nepalese society. The Nepalese women are discriminated in economic, socio-cultural, political and legal spheres. According to the Census 2001, women comprise 50.45 per cent of total population of Nepal. It is not a homogenous group. It can be characterized by diversity in terms of race, caste, ethnicity, language, religion, culture and region [13]. Women have been victims of gender discrimination but the nature, forms, degree and intensity differ among different caste/ethnic, religious and cultural groups. Therefore, some Nepalese women are victimized more than the other women. This presents a rather sad picture of the status of the Nepalese women in general even when rapid strides have been made for granting equal status to them [14]. In this respect, the Madhesi women face multiple forms of discrimination such as regional, cultural and linguistic discrimination in comparison to other women [15].

Conclusions

From the above discussion we have concluded that Madhesi women have never been fully integrated in the overall political, social, economic and human development agenda of the country. There is widespread feeling among them that they have been strongly discriminated and are not given proper opportunities. They lack proper share in development activities as well as in political or decision making process. The Madhesi people feel highly discriminated against despite comprising of 32 percent of the country's human resources. The imbalances ought to be rectified considering their contribution to the total socio-economic development of the country. This is an area that needs the total focus of the political leaders and the parties. Many of the modern day basic facilities have not yet reached Madhesi people. Nearly 40 percent of the Madhesi population comprise of Dalits and indigenous Janjatis who are inherently disadvantaged in many social and economic aspects. Again, poverty is very high among the Muslim population living in rural areas. There has been little effort to prevent social, economic and political exclusion and to reintegrate those who have become excluded through unemployment, landlessness and homelessness. Only very recently, women were granted the political right to own property.

For the first time in the history of Nepal, women's 33 per cent representation has been ensured in Constituent Assembly. There are 197 women CA (Constitution Assembly) members out of 601 CA members who are the representatives of diverse women group. Among them, 42 women are of Madhes origin. It can be considered as a big step towards inclusion of the Madhesi women in the national political mainstream. However, the representation of Madhesi women in CA is under representative compare to its total population (31.2 percent). There is still room to work for ensuring Madhesi women's equal participation at all levels of state mechanisms. The realization is there but the need is to materialize the action plan. Political inclusion provides a space for rational arguments, debates, acceptance of disagreements, cooperation, peaceful competition, compromise and tolerance of the views of other communities and groups. It builds an environment of trust, understanding human feelings and formulate joint policies and projects for all. It influences all the socio-economic and other mechanisms of the state. The effort of state or government alone is not sufficient for the inclusion. The political parties are at the centre, and have base at the grassroots level, state institutions, parliament and government. Hence, they represent social interest and state action. So, they should adopt the inclusive democratic political culture to create a real sense of inclusion and justice. When reviewing the status of Madhesi women in major political parties of Nepal, their presentation in meaningful positions is found to be nearly negligible. They are treated as incompetent, illiterate and second class citizens. They are only viewed during the time of elections. They feel that they are always ignored by the state and political parties, which should undergo a sea change for the better. On the one hand, male dominated society, cultural taboos, lack of knowledge of their own rights, unequal access to the resources, feelings of incompetence and psychological inferiority complex create reluctance in Madhesi women towards politics. On the other hand, political parties of Nepal still do not have a concrete policy to provide political justice to the Madhesi women. Even the donor agencies who have been speaking for the inclusion of women in every sphere do not seem to be specific about the Madhesi women. These are the major reasons that have contributed towards the Madhesi women lagging behind from being active participants in the political mainstream. So, for the meaningful inclusion of the Madhesi women in the main political stream, there should be a strong agenda for their advocacy at all levels of the state and the political parties should address the concerns by reforming their party policies.

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