

Prosperity Discourse in Nepal and Dalits

1. Background

The major source of Nepal's present political, economic and cultural system is the caste system. The political-economic system based on Hinduism in Nepal developed a situation where certain caste groups monopolized leadership and ruled over the majority of the population. Several political movements took place to establish a democratic political system and end the autocratic, unitary and discriminatory nature of the Nepali state. With the establishment of a democratic system of governance, it was expected that Dalits and other marginalized communities would be able to enjoy greater democratic rights especially considering the fact that marginalized communities and Dalits played a substantial role and made significant sacrifices to bring about the democratic transformation of Nepal. Dalits and other marginalized communities were involved in struggles against the Rana regime and the Panchayat system. They also played an essential role in the Maoist-led war¹ that aimed to re-structure the state and to end persistent inequalities based on caste, sex, language and cultural values. At the end of the Maoist-led war, a 12-point-agenda-agreement² was reached between the seven mainstream political parties and the then CPN (Maoist) party. The underlying spirit of this agreement was to put an end to the king's autocracy, to establish a democratic system of governance, to end social inequality; and to achieve peace and prosperity. The Maoist civil war, the peoples' movement of 2005/06 and the movement initiated by indigenous people, Dalits,

Publisher:



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¹ A demand paper submitted by Dr. Babu Ram Bhattarai to the then prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on 4th Feb 1996, prior to the start of the people's revolution
² An agreement signed between CPN (Maoist) and the seven political parties on 22 Nov 2005



women, Madhesis and other excluded communities later laid the foundation for the federal democratic republic of Nepal.

One of the main goals of the comprehensive peace agreement³ (21 November 2006) between then CPN (Maoist) and the seven political parties was to address issues facing those who were marginalized because of their caste, gender, region, community and class. The establishment of a federal system of governance, socio-economic development, and social justice were goals associated with this agreement. The main motive of the 2005/06 peoples' movement was to achieve peace and democracy, which was not possible without addressing inequalities and diversity within the country. The first constituent assembly was formed following the spirit of the movement, which meant that there were some positive provisions for historically excluded people. For example, the first draft of the constitution prepared by the first constituent assembly demanded compensation for historical injustices. There was a provision for 5% representation of Dalits in the provincial government and 3% in the local government; which was a positive move towards inclusion.⁴ But, the first constituent assembly eventually dissolved without promulgating a constitution and the provisions drafted in it were not carried forward into the new constitution. Through a second constituent assembly, a new constitution was promulgated in 2015. The preamble of the 2015 constitution made a commitment to end inequalities based on class, caste, region, and language to ensure economic equality, prosperity and social justice through

proportional inclusion and participatory mechanism. Immediately after the implementation of the new constitution, major political parties declared the end of the political revolution and projected development and prosperity as their main agenda in national politics. New political parties were formed and others merged together with the purported goal of development and prosperity.

After the promulgation of the constitution in 2015, which outlined a federal system of governance, elections at the federal, provincial and local level were held successfully.⁶ The manifestos of political parties' at all three levels were particularly concerned with economic development and prosperity. Major political parties including CPN (Maoist), CPN (UML), Nepali Congress and other political parties like Federal Socialist Forum, National Peoples' Party, and Naya Shakti Party; Bibeksheel Shajha Party, all used development and economic growth as important talking points. In the federal election, left alliance comprising of CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist) secured 174⁶ seats (out of 63% of the total seats). TNCP (UML) and NCP (Maoist Centre) were unified on 17th May, 2018. With the help of the Federal Socialist Forum, the left-alliance formed the government with two third majorities. The chairperson of the CPN (UML) was elected as prime minister of Nepal on 15th February 2018. His government pledged to implement the constitution, and brings about stability, prosperity and rule of law. Left-alliance, which ran in the election with the slogan of prosperity, performed well in the election. From the 550

³ A comprehensive peace accord signed between CPN (Maoist) and the Government on 21 Nov 2006

⁴ This includes in the drafted report 2011 prepared by the first constituent assembly

⁵ The local election was held on May 14, June 28 and Sep 18 of 2017 in three phases, and the election of federal and provincial parliament held on 26 Nov and Dec 7 of 2017.

⁶ CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist) secured 123 and 53 seats from first-past-the-post and proportionate system respectively. The unified party formed (on 17 May 2018) by merging two parties has now 176 seats in the federal parliament.



seats in the provincial government, the alliance was able to secure 351⁷ seats, 64% of the total number. This alliance secured two third majorities in both the federal and provincial government, coming into power in six provinces. The Federal Socialist Forum came into power in province two. Among the elected representatives of 753 units at the local level, the left-alliance secured 400⁸ seats (53.12 %). The majorities show that the left alliance has an extremely powerful presence at the federal, provincial as well as the local level and therefore in the position to execute the agenda of development and prosperity with little hindrance from opposition parties.

The government adopted "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali" as its slogan, declaring 2019 to be a year of creating history through ambitious policies in the fiscal year 2018/19.⁹ Similarly, the National Planning Commission also prepared the approach paper of the 15th periodic plan, which outlined a long-term approach till 2021 to eradicate abject poverty by the fiscal year 2022/23 and become a more developed country by 2100. The long term national goals outlined by "Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepali" are prosperity through massive infrastructure development, connectivity, capital formation, full utilization of natural resources, sustainable production and consumption, and high, equitable national income. Similarly, another national goal is to achieve happiness by ensuring dignified life, security, civilized and just society, good health and clean environment, rule of law, strong democracy and unity. This plan includes 31 result oriented

goals. Though there are tangible goals towards economic growth, poverty eradication, gender equality, and human development, there are no specific goals to end caste based discrimination and untouchability. There are 4 result-oriented goals in the approach paper of the 15th periodic plan which include: 1) high and equitable national income 2) human capital development and full utilization of the potential 3) accessible modern infrastructure and interconnectedness and 4) high sustainable production and productivity. Likewise, there are six goals to achieve happiness: 1) dignified life 2) secure, civilized and just society 3) healthy balanced environment 4) rule of law 5) strong democracy and 6) national unity, security and respect.¹⁰ End of poverty, discrimination, violence, and a society free from crime where there is rule of law are prerequisites for achieving prosperity and happiness. Ending violence against women is included as a goal, but there is no clarity in the national goals about ending discrimination against and atrocities committed upon Dalits.

Following these goals and plans of the federal government, the provincial and local governments have also made their agendas, policies and plans accordingly. Though the government's main goal is to achieve prosperity, neither the government nor the political parties have adequately outlined a roadmap about how this is to be achieved at the federal, provincial and local level. They seem to have made prosperity a political slogan and subject matter to their political manifesto but failed to interpret the modality of prosperity needed for Nepal. What are the basic characteristics of the

⁷ Among the 550 provincial assembly members, 243 were elected from then CPN (UML) and 108 were elected from then CPN (Maoist)

⁸ The then CPN (UML) claimed leadership in 294 local governments and then CPN (Maoist) won in 106 local governments

⁹ The policy and programs presented by president Bidhya Devi Bhattarai on 21 May 2018

¹⁰ National Planning Commission. 2075 BS. 15th Periodic Plan (FY 2076/77-2080/81) Approach paper. National Planning Commission, Singhadarbar, Kathmandu.



prosperity that we are talking about? Prosperity for whom? What is the foundation for prosperity? What is the roadmap towards achieving prosperity? How does this prosperity address diversity in terms of caste, language, religion and culture? How to achieve prosperity that brings changes to the structure of Nepalese society to make it more inclusive and non-discriminatory? The government's policies and programs, political party manifestos, and experts in the field of public policy have not articulated a clear vision for what prosperity entails for Nepal despite the emphasis placed in public discourse around said prosperity. According to the census of 2011, Dalits comprise of 13%¹¹ of the total national population. They have been long excluded from political as well as bureaucratic positions. According to the Nepal Standard Survey of 2011 conducted by the Department of Statistics, 25.2 % of Nepali people are under the poverty line. But, disproportionately, 42%¹² Dalits are living in poverty. In addition to this, they are experiencing added burdens from the inhuman practices of caste-based discrimination and untouchability. Despite being unconstitutional and illegal, caste-based discrimination and untouchability are rampant practices in many parts of the country.

This policy paper raises questions pertaining to the national dogma of prosperity in relation to the Dalit population. Is it possible to achieve prosperity with social justice without addressing caste-based discrimination and atrocities being committed upon Dalits? Where are Dalits in the national agenda of prosperity, and how does this address the multi-faceted marginalization that Dalits face? What actually brings prosperity to Dalits? This paper revolves

around seeking the answers to these questions.

2. Objective

This policy paper has the following objectives:

- ♦ To review the national discourse of prosperity from the perspective of Dalits
- ♦ To discuss the underlying aspects of the Dalit hoped-for- prosperity
- ♦ To discuss the role of the state, political parties and other stakeholders in achieving the prosperity for Dalits in particular

3. Methodology

Three different approaches have been used to prepare this policy paper. First, an effort was made to study and analyze the available publications in relation to prosperity discourse. Second, Dignity Initiative conducted dialogue series in all provinces seeking out the perspectives of Members of Parliament, intellectuals, political parties, human rights activists and journalists on what actually brings prosperity to Dalits. In all seven provinces as well as in the national discussion, there were 330 participants. Among them, 216 were male and 94 were female participants. 20 Members of Parliament from both the federal and provincial government also participated in the discussions. The information, facts and opinions that surfaced in those programs were included in the analysis presented in this policy brief. Third, an attempt was made to meet and interact with analysts, writers and the political leaders who are engaged in dialogues about Dalits and prosperity. The information and ideas that came up in these discussions were also analyzed to prepare this policy paper.

¹¹ According to the census 2011, the population of Dalit is 12.6 %. This fact is wrong due to various reasons and therefore Dalit NGOs have estimated Dalit population around 21 % (Aahuti 2004)

¹² Nepal Living Standard Survey 2011, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Kathmandu, Nepal



4. The Discourse about the concept of prosperity in Nepal

The major political parties of Nepal claim in their political manifestos that Nepal has now completed its political revolution stage and therefore the focus needs to be on prosperity and development. The election manifestos of both the CPN (Maoist) and CPN (UML), parties that have now merged, concluded that political revolutions in Nepal have accomplished their goals. The parties adopted slogans such as "Fair election is the foundation of democracy, leftist government for good governance and prosperity. "Their election manifestos stated that the main agenda of their government would be economic prosperity with social and distributive justice and socialism-oriented national industrial revolution.¹³ Similarly, Nepali Congress presented a slogan of "Peace and Constitution under Congress leadership, Prosperity campaign under Congress too" during the election. In its election manifesto, Nepali Congress claimed that its national agenda would be focused on economic prosperity, stating that the phase of political struggle and transformation was complete, and it was time to fight for¹⁴ economic transformation and social progress. The manifestos show that all the major Nepali political parties have adopted prosperity as their major political agenda, but they do not pay attention to the diversity and inequities of Nepali society.

There are several approaches and dimensions to understand and explain the idea of prosperity.

Former Prime Minister Dr. Babu Ram Bhattarai¹⁵ has interpreted prosperity as being about rapid economic growth, inclusive development and social justice, environmental protection for sustainable development, and spiritual fulfillment for individual happiness. He believes that prosperity can be achieved by addressing poverty, unemployment, economic dependency, inequitable distribution of wealth and discrimination based on class, ethnicity, region, gender and caste.¹⁶ Dr. Bhattarai further writes that bringing about prosperity requires a multi-dimensional approach that includes an increase in production and productivity, equitable distribution of wealth, sustainability of the resources and environment and individual happiness/satisfaction.¹⁷ This is what collectively determines the quality of human life.

Prosperity is also elsewhere defined as an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), poverty eradication, high economic growth, industrialization and infrastructure development. Economic analyst Bhim Bhurtel has discussed prosperity as the situation of having strong institutions for economic activities like high per capita income (minimum 12236 US Dollar per annum), high production, exchange of goods and services, distribution, capital accumulation, investment and redistribution as well as the resilient ability to face upheavals during economic crisis.¹⁸ Sociologist Dr. Yub Raj Luintel has interpreted prosperity from a sociological perspective as being about improving people's livelihoods, easiness in the

¹³ House of representative and provincial assembly election- 2017, CPN (UML) & CPN (Maoist Center)- common declaration

¹⁴ Election manifesto of Nepali Congress: House of representatives and provincial assembly election 2017

¹⁵ Bhattarai, Dr. Baburam. 2018. Proposition of Social Justice and Economic Prosperity for Nepal. Keynote speech, presented in a "Conference on Public Policy and Governance in South Asia: Towards Justice and Prosperity", 28-29 June, Nepal Administrative Staff College, Jawalakhel, Kathmandu, Nepal.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ A thought presented by Dr. Babu Ram Bhattarai among the PhD candidates of Tribhuvan University on 3 August 2019 entitled "Direction of Nepal's Political Economy."

¹⁸ Bhim Bhurtel, 2017. JaruriKoShyalHuinya (Kosheli) 17 March <https://www.kantipurdaily.com/koseli/2018/03/17/152126227357476016.html>



coordination of means of livelihood, self-reliance, end of scarcity and poverty, respect, dignity and choices in life not dictated by compulsion.¹⁹

British writer and politician Matt Ridley and other prominent western scholars believe that prosperity is primarily economic strength or increase in GDP. In his famous book entitled, "The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves," Ridley has defined prosperity as the situation where accessing any product or service is easy and convenient. According to him, if people can meet their needs easily and have good livelihoods, that is prosperity.²⁰ He has emphasized the need for the construction of physical infrastructures; an attempt to increase production and consumption of goods; equitable distribution of products, individual happiness and satisfaction to achieve prosperity.

Some scholars have looked at prosperity as a condition where individual freedom and supreme democratic rights are protected. The UK-based Legatum Institute has defined prosperity- it is created by both economic wealth and social wellbeing working together in a relationship where each benefits and advances the other.²¹ This report further explains that lasting and high material prosperity is impossible to achieve without strong social capital. The essence of this report is that physical development is not possible without human development. According to Legatum Institute Prosperity Index released in 2019, Nepal is ranked 115 out of 167 countries in terms of prosperity.

In Nepal, prosperity is largely understood as the synonym of economic growth and physical development. Till now, sufficient analysis has not been done to understand how discrimination in a diverse population and the exclusion that entails is related to the aspiration of country-wide prosperity. It is not possible to work towards social justice and the creation of an equitable society with a development and prosperity model that perpetuates existing inequalities. Sociologist Chaitanya Mishra opines, "Prosperity is primarily an increase in the income of both individuals and the nation. We need to concentrate on how to link that prosperity with equity."²² "However, there is no clear roadmap outlining how prosperity can be achieved with the values of inclusive democracy, a socialist economy, and an equitable society at the forefront.

The major political parties in Nepal believe that prosperity can be achieved through infrastructure development and stable economic growth. This is reflected in the policies adopted by the government at both the federal and sub-national level. For example, the sub-national governments have placed special emphasis on the building of 'smart cities' and the operation of monorails, whereas the federal government has projected plans involving ships, trains and mega hydropower projects. These massive infrastructural undertakings do not seem to address the immediate needs of the Nepali population in the pursuit of prosperity.

¹⁹ A paper presented by Dr. Yuva Raj Luintel entitled socio-economic dimension of prosperity, presented in a program organized by Nepal Sociologist Association on 17 May 2018

²⁰ Ridley, Matt. 2011. *The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolve*. HarperCollins. New York. USA

²¹ Legatum, 2016. *Legatum Prosperity Index 2016, Methodology Report*. London, United Kingdom

²² Mishra, Chaitanya. 2018. Interview. *Nepal Weekly*. Kantipur Publication. Kathmandu <http://nepal.ekantipur.com.np/news/2018-06-27/20180627171532.html>



The present conversation surrounding prosperity doesn't answer the following two pertinent questions: 1) what are the indicators of prosperity and 2) prosperity for whom? A conversation that doesn't address these fundamental questions takes us nowhere. During the Rana rule and the Shah monarchical regime, most people lived in abject poverty but the lives of kings and rulers were undoubtedly prosperous. Does the proposed prosperity of the current political moment serve the needs of regular people or of the ruler? Does this prosperity make rich people richer or elevate people from extreme poverty and scarcity? Does this prosperity ensure people's right to live with justice and dignity or is this just a project to continue to perpetuate discrimination and exclusion? Without seeking answers to such questions, the ongoing debate of prosperity can't serve the right purpose.

Currently, Nepal is undergoing a transformation from feudalism to capitalism. There has been a historic tendency for people who are already wealthy and influential to benefit from this kind of development and prosperity. According to the analysis of sociologists Suresh Dhakal and Sanjeev Pokharel, regardless of the successes and failures of development projects, influential people who have access to resources can contract public procurement and benefit economically. The state allocates substantial resources for huge infrastructure development projects as well as national pride projects. The vested interest of the people in political leadership, the business community, security agencies, and their various interlocutors play

a vital role in determining the fate of such projects.²³ The lives of people living in extreme poverty do not improve and they continue to be exploited. There is a risk that Dalits will continue to live in servitude and suffer from discrimination and injustice even as the nation becomes "prosperous" by the definition of political elites. Therefore, there is an urgent need to break down structural barriers and ensure equitable access to resources and wealth. Otherwise, economic growth this will only perpetuate exclusion and discrimination, benefiting the already privileged and further marginalizing those who are already trodden upon. A social justice lense is essential to any discussions of national prosperity.

Political analyst Hari Rokka argues that as long as the powerful have disproportionate access to resources like water, forest, land, industry, and businesses; and inequalities in education, health, employment opportunities, and public institutions persist; only a handful of people will be prosperous.²⁴ This means that discriminated and excluded people can't achieve prosperity without social justice. "The journey of prosperity can't be initiated without seeking the answers to underlying questions pertaining to prosperity," says Aahuti, writer and political ideologue. He further writes:

"Prosperity is a core demand of every Nepali. But, the question arises; what type of prosperity is it? Does it have a political ideology and is it political? Does prosperity have any class? These fundamental questions related to prosperity remain unanswered. Why is Nepal underdeveloped and since when? What are reasons for persistent poverty? Have the root

²³ Suresh Dhakal and Sanjeev Pokharel, 2018. Development: How? For whom? Kantipur 3 Jan. Page 6 <https://www.kantipurdaily.com/bibidha/2018/01/03/20180103070841.html>

²⁴ Political analyst Hari Rokka on 5 Sep 2019 presented a paper entitled The Roadmap of Urgency with Social Justice in a program organized in Kathmandu.



causes of poverty been eradicated? If these causes are still present, how can they be defeated? These are some questions which require courage to answer with historical explanations without which the journey towards prosperity can't be started"²⁵

It is imperative to integrate the needs and aspirations of Dalits to the discourse around national prosperity, which requires the eradication of caste-based discrimination and exclusion. The ongoing conversation about prosperity in Nepal has focused on economic growth and infrastructure development. While lip service is paid to the creation of an equitable society, in order for prosperity to actually be equitable the realities of the socio-economic, political and cultural system that is largely shaped by caste need to be seriously reckoned with.

5. Dalits in Prosperity Discourse

Theoretically, prosperity is an economic & materialist concept derived from capitalism. This concept focuses on economic growth rate, increase in Per Capita Income, quality of life, personal liberty, concepts that are highly individualistic. But this focus on individuals cannot address the issue of economic, political, and socio-cultural transformation that needs to take place collectively. In the context of Nepal, the dominant discourse about prosperity can continue to perpetuate caste-based inequality if it doesn't actively seek to restructure societal relations and hierarchical institutions. A focus on economic and individualistic welfare alone is not an adequate program to address exclusion, exploitation, lack of access to the means of production and untouchability. It is possible that prosperity programs, if implemented

successfully, can benefit some Dalits. But linking prosperity with social justice can benefit not just a few individuals, but the Dalit community at large.

Dalits have been discriminated against since the advent of the Hindu varna system, and the current condition of Dalits is a consequence of centuries of caste-based violence and marginalization. In 200 A.D, the king Manu codified a system of caste that formed the framework for caste based laws that were in practice during Licchavi and Malla rule in Nepal. King Jayasthiti Malla (1360-1395 AD) imposed caste-based discrimination in the name of social reform, and the Gorkha king Ram Shah (1605-1636 AD) built on this system of social stratification. The dynasties that followed continued to strengthen the caste system: from the so called "actual Hindustan" campaign of Prithivi Narayan Shah to the Muluki Ain (Civil Code) of 1990 issued by Janga Bahadur Rana, all rulers were concerned with caste-based purity. Rukka from a directive to a law, making Dalits socially excluded, economically deprived and politically marginalized. This deprived Dalits from the rights and ability to have dignified lives. The Manusmriti of 200 A.D and the Muluki Ain of 1910, despite being from completely different time periods, are constant in that they codify caste-based discrimination. With the Panchayat system, multi-party democracy, and a republic system of governance, laws may have changed but the accretion of generations of caste-based trauma has left its mark. Dalits can not achieve prosperity without historical injustice and discrimination being addressed with strong programs towards social justice.

²⁵ Political thinker and writer Aahuti wrote an article in Kantipur daily on 27 Jan 2019



6. Situation of the Dalit community

Because Dalits are placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy, their collective welfare needs to be the fundamental yardstick through which to measure prosperity. The fact that Dalits remain excluded from state institutions can be gleaned via the fact that their representation in the legislative, executive and judiciary bodies is abysmal. The constitution has accepted proportional representation as an ideal but there are only 19 (6.91 %) Dalit representatives in the federal parliament and 7 in National Assembly. Dalits also have low representation in the provincial assembly. Among the 550 members in all provinces, only 32 (5.82%) members of parliament are from the Dalit community. When we look at the local level, there are only 6 Mayors (2.05 %), 12 Deputy Mayor (4.10 %), 1 Chairperson in the Rural Municipality (0.22 %) and 15 Deputy Chairpersons of the Rural Municipality (3.26 %) and one Dalit women member in wards across the country.²⁶ Among the elected representatives in federal, provincial and local level, the representation of Madheshi Dalits in comparison to Hill Dalits is low. Among the Hill Dalits, representation of Badi and Gandarv is particularly weak. The fact that Dalits have been deprived of their right to proportional representation based on population has directly impacted the policy formulation and implementation process. All the participants in the seven provinces as well as national level meetings organized by the Dignity Initiative complained that Dalit don't have adequate representation in government and therefore are unable to advocate for their community. Even Dalit officials who are elected are often ignored

when it comes to actual decision-making processes, which is indicative of the still highly unequal power relations based on caste. The concluding argument of participants in various dialogues was that the status quo remains largely unchanged despite the political revolutions that have taken place.

The fact that Dalits are the poorest people in Nepal is an important reason why the inclusion of Dalits in the prosperity discourse is imperative. According to the Nepal Living Standard Survey 2011 conducted by the Department of Statistics, 25.16 % of the population lives in poverty,²⁷ whereas 42% of Dalits live under the poverty line. Brahmins and Chhetris, the dominant caste groups, have 14% of their total population living under poverty. More than 76% of people in Nepal rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, but most Dalits do not have access to the resources necessary for agriculture i.e., land. 23 % of Dalits in the Tarai and 44 % of Dalits in Hills are landless. If people who own less than 2 Ropanis of land are to be considered landless, then 77 % of Hill Dalits and 90 % of Tarai Dalits are landless.²⁸ Exploitative labor systems such as Haruwa, Charuwa and Haliya are still in practice in province 6 and 7. Because of caste discrimination, many goods produced by Dalits are not consumed in the national market, making economic subsistence through business an unviable option. At the same time, there is a historical tradition of Dalit labor being considered "free" so Dalits are largely excluded from the labor market. This exclusion of Dalits from various spheres of economic life has led to the miserable economic conditions faced by the Dalit community.

²⁶ An unpublished statistic prepared by researcher J B Bishwakarma regarding the representation of elected representatives at all three levels

²⁷ National Living Standard Survey. 2011. Central Department of Statistics, Kathmandu

²⁸ Aahuti.2012. Verna System and Class Struggle in Nepal. Edited by Rajendra Maharjan. Kathmandu, Samata Foundation



Employment in the public and private sector is another important means of livelihood. But, since many Dalits are unable to get quality education because of poverty, they are excluded from this as well. The literacy rate of Dalit community above 6 years old is 52.4 % and it is 34.5 % among Madhesi Dalits. The average literacy rate of Dalit women in Nepal is 45.5 %. Even more alarmingly, the literacy rate of Madhesi Dalits like Mushar and Dom is about 17 %.²⁹ This highlights the precarious situation of Dalit community due to limited access to education.

According to government statistics, Dalits have only 2 % representation in government service. Among them, representation of Dalit women, Madhesi Dalit and marginalized Badi, Gandarv, Mushar and Dom is low.

Just as important as economic marginalization is the intense socio-cultural discrimination faced by the Dalit community, practices of untouchability still extremely rampant. Dalits are not able to enjoy dignified lives due to the discrimination they face on an everyday basis, especially in the Tarai. There is discrimination at public taps, temples and teashops Dalits are frequently beaten, expelled from their villages, and killed for inter-caste marriages. Despite the constitution of Nepal outlawing caste-based discrimination with the Caste Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act of 2011, the mental and physical violence Dalits are subjected to have not subsided. The laws put in place have not been effectively implemented

by state institutions. 14 Dalits killed because of their caste by 2018 have not received justice yet.³⁰ As long as physical violence, humiliation, exploitation and discrimination continue to occur on a daily basis, Dalits can't experience prosperity.

Prosperity is also linked to good health, and Dalits have largely been deprived of basic health facilities. In Nepal, 55 % of Dalit people can't afford health services. A study has indicated that 60.6 % Dalits in the Hills and 66.1 % Dalits in Tarai can't afford health treatment. Not only this, 43 % Dalits in the Tarai and 14.6 % in the Hills experience caste-based discrimination when they seek out health services. Such people are 79 % Dalit women in Hill and 85 % Dalit women in Terai.³¹

It is clear, through these examples, that for Dalits, prosperity discourse needs to address issues of fundamental human rights and social justice. The country can only be said to be truly prosperous if Dalits can enjoy the fundamental rights and dignity as enshrined in the constitution. The present capitalist political system has been beneficial to very few Dalits who have advanced economically and socially. Despite several Dalit movements and lobby/advocacy groups fighting for Dalit rights, the majority of Dalits are still living under extreme poverty. Therefore some intellectuals are arguing that a new economic-political system needs to be developed to address the problems facing Dalits. Dalit leader and ideologue Aahuti writes, "The capitalist model of prosperity that pushes

²⁹ 2015. Human Rights Situation of Dalit in Nepal. submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal for second Cycle, Twenty Third Session of the UPR, Human Rights Council, 2-13 November 2015. Dalit Civil Society Organizations' for UPR Nepal and International Dalit Solidarity Network (ISDN)

³⁰ Names of the people killed after the implementation of Caste-based discrimination and untouchability act 2011: M1. Sete Damai (Dailekh), 2. Manbire Sunar (Kalikot), 3. ManaSarki (Kalikot), 4. Shivasankar Das (Saptari), 5. Ajit Mijhar (Kavre), 6. Laxmi Pariyar (Kavre), 7. Rajesh Nepali (Parbat), 8. Shreya Sunar (Kaski), 9. AsmitaTolamiSarki (Jhapa), 10. Sanhita Pariyar (Tanahu), 11. Jhuma B K (Taplejung), 12. Maya B K (Kailali), 13. Ditiya Rasaili (Dhanusha), 14. Rupmati Kumari Das (Morang)

³¹ Nepal Social Inclusion Survey (NSIS) 2012, Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Nepal
<https://kathmandupress.com/breaking/exclusive-story-on-caste-based-discrimination>



people and the planet towards death is exterminatory. History suggests that this model of prosperity only promotes exploitation, oppression and war; not brotherhood. Therefore, the capitalist model of prosperity is actually anti-humanism. Therefore, we must go for the new model, structure and ecosystem of the prosperity."

7. Prosperity for Dalits

The major pillars of prosperity discourse are development of infrastructure, qualitative economic growth, and increase in per capita income availability of employment opportunities. Development of infrastructure and economic development is essential to take the country forward. But, the way these things impact the Dalit community need to be thought about seriously. To measure prosperity, the increase in Human Development Index (HDI) needs to be a metric so that Dalit access to education, health and employment, meaningful participation in policy making as well as end of all kinds of exclusion and discrimination and the guarantee of the justice and dignity is given the importance that it deserves.

The development and prosperity programs should be linked with the needs of the people. The people who have hitherto enjoyed all state privileges and Dalits who have been marginalized, even brutalized, have different needs. Only economic-political programs that are based on social justice can address prosperity for Dalits.

Improvement in economic indicators and prosperity measured vis-a-vis the success of infrastructure projects do not necessarily bring changes to the lives of average Dalit people. For them, programs that help with their access

to education, health, employment, and political participation as well as the abolition of all kinds of discrimination are much more linked with prosperity. This kind of prosperity really serves the Dalit community and makes the slogan meaningful. Based on the Dignity Initiative's interaction programs with Dalit community and stakeholders in all 7 provinces of Nepal; it has been analyzed that there should be assurance of minimum social justice, inclusion based on altering power relations, compensation for historical discrimination including additional representation, Dalit's share in development, guarantee of justice as well as ensuring dignified life. Only then can Dalits experience prosperity. The following indicators have been identified to ensure Dalit prosperity:

7.1 End of Structural Discrimination

Historian Yuval Noah Harari argues that most of the injustices in the contemporary world result from large-scale structural discrimination rather than from individual prejudices.³² Therefore, there is a need for appropriate state structures that legally and constitutionally promote equality. The Dalit community has been struggling for decades to demand that the government atone for the oppression that it has been responsible for through exclusionary laws. The Dalit movement in Nepal has been ongoing since 1946, and the cornerstone of the demands of the movement has been liberation from oppression, exclusion, discrimination, tyranny and humiliation.

The Dalit community has made immense contributions to political revolutions including anti-Panchayat protests, the Maoist war, and the people's movement of 2005/06, these revolutions have brought the Dalit agenda into the national consciousness.

³² Harari, Yuval Noah (2018). 21 Lessons for the 21st Century. Spiegel & Grau, US, and Jonathan Cape, UK.



Because of the Dalit movement and Dalit contributions to the various political revolutions that have taken place in the past couple of decades, Dalits have succeeded in getting constitutional and legal assurance from the state that historical injustices will be rectified. The 2015 constitution states in its preamble that discrimination and untouchability has been rejected and under the article 24 of fundamental rights, there is a provision of the right against untouchability and discrimination. The article states that no person shall be subjected to any form of untouchability or discrimination in any private or public place on the basis of his or her origin, caste, tribe, community, profession, occupation or physical condition. Any act of untouchability and discrimination is punishable by law as a severe social offence, and the victims of such acts have the right to obtain compensation in accordance with law. Similarly, article 40 of the constitution of Nepal has the provision of Dalit rights. The article states that Dalits have the right to participate in all bodies of the state on the basis of the principle of proportional inclusion. It also has other provisions like free education with scholarship from primary to higher education as well as special provisions for Dalits in technical and vocational education. There are further provisions for one time land-grants to Dalits, and housing for the Dalits who do not have housing. Article 42 of the constitution on Rights to Social Justice has also ensured that socially excluded women; Dalits, and indigenous people shall have the right to participate in state bodies on the basis of inclusive principles.³³

However, the new constitution has not addressed the issues of Dalits in an adequately

satisfactory manner. The Dalit movement had demanded additional 10% proportional representation in the federal, provincial and local level as compensation for historical injustices.³⁴ The constitution's provisions for proportional inclusive representation have not actually translated into the election act and the constitution has not ensured compulsory representation of Dalits in the executive bodies at all levels. Not only this, the constitution also does not ensure Dalits compulsory proportional representation in constitutional bodies, civil service, the army, the police, the judiciary or judicial committees. Dalit activists had demanded that the judiciary adopt a fast-track approach to look into caste-based discrimination cases, and make a provision for a Dalit cell in the structure of Nepal police; neither of these demands was met. Without constitutional and legal backing for Dalit rights, Dalits cannot lead prosperous lives. It is, therefore, essential that the rights that have already been enshrined in the constitution towards Dalit welfare be implemented and the constitution be amended to meet the needs that still remain. The first basis of Dalit prosperity lies in creation and implementation of constitutional and legal rights.

7.2 Guarantee of Social Justice

Social justice requires that structures and institutions be based on the idea of equity; allowing all people the right to dignified lives and equal opportunity. Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar has analyzed justice based on moral values and dignity; which is related to achieving social, political and economic justice. According to Ambedkar, freedom, equality and brotherhood are ideals that are the cornerstone of

³³ Constitution of Nepal 2015. Secretariat of the Constituent Assembly. Kathmandu, Sinhadarbar

³⁴ United Political Dalit Struggle Committee formed by the Dalit sister organizations affiliated to different political parties has been raising this issue consistently.



democracy³⁵ Indian economist Amartya Sen has identified the basis of social justice as freedom to live a full life, access to resources, happiness, equity, and dignity.³⁶ For the Dalit community in Nepal to thrive, democracy with social justice is required. Under the fundamental rights of the constitution of Nepal, the right to live with dignity, right to freedom, right to equality, right against untouchability discrimination, exploitation, right to get free education, women's rights and social justice rights are included. The practical implementation of the rights as enshrined under the fundamental rights of the constitution may establish Dalit access to social justice. But despite provisions in the constitution, Dalits in Nepal continue to experience discrimination and exclusion in education, health, and access to employment.

Education plays an important role in human development. However, most educated people in Nepal are still involved in discriminatory practices. Dalit students are being discriminated against by teachers in schools and the issue of Dalits has not been included effectively in university curricula where knowledge production takes place. The intellectuals and thinkers produced by the current education system seem much more invested in the status quo and the perpetuation of the caste system than they are in social justice. A system where knowledge producers are invested in caste-based exclusion is fatal for social transformation and justice.

Getting health facilities equally from the state is the right of the citizens. But, in Nepal, 68.5 % women have access to good nutrition.

Only 69.5 % Dalit women in the Hills and 51.1 % Dalit women in the Tarai have access to nutritious food. The child mortality for Nepal is 54 deaths per 1000 live births. For Dalits, it is 77 deaths per 1000 live births. The maternal death rate averages 46 in Nepal, whereas it is 67 for Dalits. 33.9 % Hill Dalit and 36.3 % of Madhesi Dalit children are suffering from malnutrition. 60.5 % Dalit in Hill and 66.1 % Dalit in Madhes have access to health services with their own income.³⁷

All citizens should have equal access to facilities provided by the state. This is a fundamental characteristic of democracy. As long as Dalits are deprived from basic opportunities and to be excluded or discriminated against, there will be no social justice. Prosperity can't be achieved for Dalits without ensuring that there is social justice.

7.3 Guaranteed Proportional Inclusion

A major reason for state failure is a state's exclusionary structure that serves only the interests of the elite. Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's bestselling book, "Why Nations Fail", also discusses that states are bound to fail if they do not transform their political and economic structure to account for the needs of all people. The authors argue that state structures need to be inclusive for the state to be prosperous. The roadblock to this is that elites who have been enjoying privileges are reluctant to lose some of their privileges and therefore fight against efforts to make institutions inclusive.³⁸ This means that elites and dominant class groups serve as a barrier to the success and prosperity of the country. In

³⁵ Ranjukumar, A. 2011. Ambedke's Notion of Social Justice: A Different Prespective. International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research, Volume 2, Issue 12, December-2011

³⁶ Sen, Amartya. 2009. The Idea of Justice. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts

³⁷ Social Inclusion Survey 2013. Department of Sociology/Anthropology TU.

³⁸ Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson. 2013. Why Nations Fail. London, Profile Books, Ltd.



the context of Nepal, dominant caste groups have been enjoying a monopoly over state authority, power and resources for generations. Their resistance to change, therefore, is a major obstacle to social transformation.

Though Nepal has accepted proportional inclusion in principle, exclusion continues in practice when it comes to the formulation of policies and their implementation. Even the small numbers of Dalits who have made it into decision-making posts often tend to lack actual power because the dominant castes continue to monopolize power and resources. The principle of social justice talks about the unequal distribution of rights and the opportunities in unequal societies. This means that same rights to both weak and strong further perpetuate discrimination and exclusion. Therefore, the weaker section of the society should be provided with additional rights to enjoy social justice. This should be strictly implemented through state policy and programs. Dalit community should be provided with additional rights to create an equitable society and bring programs to end historical injustices committed to them.

Meaningful participation and representation of Dalits in the policy making process is essential to address their needs and concerns via effective implementation of policies and programs.

7.4 Equal Access to Resources

In Nepal, land is a major source of livelihood. But due to the exclusionary state policy, most Dalits don't own land. They are forced to engage into exploitative labor conditions due to their landlessness. In Karnali and the far-west in general, many Dalits are still forced to work as Haliyas. Due to landlessness, Dalits in

province 2 and 5 are forced to work as Haruwa and Charuwa. Other exploitative labor relations like Balighare and Khalo have also not been completely abolished. Similarly, because of the same landlessness problem, the Badi community is forced to live in riverside land that is prone to flooding and other difficult geographical locations. Most Dalits do not have enough land to feed themselves through farming. Article 40 of the constitution has the provision of providing land to landless Dalits and providing housing, but this hasn't been implemented. Dalits can't enjoy full freedom unless they have the bare minimum to sustain themselves economically. The amended land reform act has made the provision of providing land sufficient to build a house. This doesn't solve Dalits' land problem.³⁹ Their access to natural resources such as forest and water should be established. Otherwise, they will continue to be left behind. We shouldn't forget the fact that this is closely linked to their prosperity.

7.5 Guarantee of Equal Opportunity

The state creates different opportunities for its people. Primarily the state recruits public, civil, administrative, Army, Police, Teacher, and Technician to run the state. There is only 2 % Dalit representation in public administration. Civil administration is said to be the permanent government and therefore Dalit representation should be upgraded to the proportion of their population. Not only this, there is a need of policy reform to ensure Dalit's meaningful participation in the decision making level. For this to happen, the state should make a special provision. Otherwise, dominant caste groups will continue to enjoy their hegemony and monopoly over state structures.

³⁹ Biswokarma, JB. 2019. Politics over Dalit's Right to Land. Naya Patrika Daily. Jan 31



Dalit representation in state mechanisms such as meaningful participation in decision making bodies, appointment in the government and other influential agencies, public service Army, Police, Teacher, Health services are very low. Without Dalits' proportional representation in these institutions, formulating laws in favor of them or the implementation of the existing laws is unthinkable. In addition, Dalits have very low representation in the judiciary as well. An environment could be created by reforming judiciary and ensuring proportional representation of Dalit for the same. Therefore, ensuring Dalit representation in the judiciary is another important part of prosperity.

Discrimination in the school system could be abolished by transforming education policy and promoting justice and dignity. The provision of syllabus revision and Dalit representation in school management as well as proportionate recruitment of Dalit teachers should be ensured. Dalits' compulsory representation in the public service only ensures Dalit access to justice. The state has also launched different programs like poverty alleviation and youth self-employment. Dalits should be able to enjoy such opportunities proportional to their population. Dalits can't achieve prosperity without meaningful integration into these institutions and programs.

7.6 Dalit Share in Development Programs

Along with prosperity, another prioritized sector of the government is the development sector. All three tiers of government have projected development as a highly prioritized sector. Infrastructure development is important, but it needs to take place in accordance with human needs. Current development is not moving towards the development of human consciousness, quality education, and health

and meeting other basic needs. Nor has the state considered increasing productivity, utilizing human resources to the optimum level, increasing the GDP and initiating an inclusive development process by addressing social diversity of the country. When we review the development process of Nepal, we can see that the Dalit community has not been able to reap the fruits of development. Instead, Dalits have been displaced from their traditional occupations. Far from improving their lives, modernization has taken traditional Dalit livelihoods away without providing alternative occupations, actually worsening the economic condition of many. The state has not formulated policies to modernize traditional occupations, develop professionalism and channel Dalit skills and occupations to development work.

The government has declared the building of the East-West railway, smart cities, running monorails and ships, and initiated mega electricity and irrigation projects. Big investors, industrialists, businessmen and brokers are likely to benefit from such mega projects related to infrastructure. But marginalized groups are not going to gain from these huge investments. Projects that are undertaken with tax-payer money need to benefit all citizens, not just the already rich. When the state embarks on any project; it should be questioned on how the project is going to benefit Dalits. Mega-projects need to take into account the needs of marginalized populations if they are to be worthwhile initiatives, and this needs to involve an accounting of Dalit needs.

7.7 Dalit Participation in Economic Growth

Economic development is at the center of the ongoing prosperity conversation in the country. Increase in GDP and Per Capita Income and alleviation of poverty are seen as prosperity indicators. In Nepal, 25.16 % people



live below the poverty line whereas 42 % Dalit live below poverty line. So, if Dalit are not prioritized in the economic development programs; their status will remain as it is. There will be no relevance of the economic growth rate if it isn't able to address Nepal's most deprived communities. An attempt should be made to transfer traditional skills of Dalits towards commercial pattern by ensuring provision of investment on traditional jobs carried out by Dalits. The state should also provide loans to Dalits without collaterals. It should provide grants and waive taxes for certain time periods. The state should further adopt policy measures to promote Dalit traditional skills and encourage Dalits to run small scale industries.

The mobilization of labor and capital for the growth of the economy has not been adequately discussed because the state has focused on strengthening the national economy through conducting national pride projects, developing road and railway networks, tourism, electricity, etc., with little regard for how these projects benefit the marginalized. Recent policy and programmatic proposals presented in parliament have the goal of lifting the general standard of living through an increase in per capita income. But when we look at what is actually happening on the ground, rich people are becoming richer while the lives of the poor and marginalized are becoming even more miserable.

Nepal's economic system is transitioning from a feudal to capitalist mode of production, and capitalists are reaping the maximum benefits from this. Dalits living under the poverty line are not in the position to raise their status by mobilizing capital, nor has state

adopted policies to utilize Dalit skill, art and labor. This has created a situation where Dalits are likely to be excluded from the investment opportunities and labor market benefits. In the absence of equitable economic development and distribution system, Nepal may achieve economic growth and targeted per capita income, but this does not mean that Dalit lives will necessarily improve. Dalit prosperity requires an economic system that prioritizes equity, not merely unfettered capitalism.

End of Impunity

The judiciary of Nepal is not in favor of Dalits and other marginalized communities. The structure of the judiciary has high dominance of the Khas/Arya community. According to one statistic from 2017, 71 % district judges are Brahmin and 15 % of them are Chhetri. Altogether, Khas/Arya enjoys 86 % dominance in the judiciary.⁴⁰ Dalits have low representation in Appellate court and Supreme Court as well as the judicial committee in the local level. Not only is this, the attitude of judges and the people responsible for implementing laws discriminatory and insensitive. This fact combined with the lack of accountability of judicial servants has made justice a distant dream for Dalits. Because of this lack of justice, crimes against Dalits continue to be normalized.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the Dalit community has constantly been the victim of caste discrimination and untouchability. They are living humiliating lives in the Nepalese society where one's status is determined by birth. Dalits have made some achievements after over 70 years of struggle. Despite this, justice and equality have not been achieved.

⁴⁰ Published in Judicial Council bulletin of 2017



There have been no fundamental changes in the exclusionary socio-political structure and cultural values. As long as Dalits are not able to experience justice and they continue to face various kinds of humiliations, development and prosperity are nothing but sweet and empty slogans.

7.8 Guarantee of the life with dignity

Discriminating against people on the basis of caste, gender, language, religion and culture is a violation of human rights. All citizens should be able to live with equal status, respect and dignity. Such a state is truly a democratic state in practice. But, Dalits in Nepal have been historically confronting political exclusion, economic exploitation and caste discrimination and untouchability. Neither the state nor the society becomes truly democratic without ending exclusion and discrimination faced by Dalits. Therefore, Dalit movement has been consistently demanding agenda of the right to live a dignified life.

The kind of prosperity Dalits seek is one where they are not discriminated against and are given the respect that they are entitled to. This requires equal access to state resources, a just distribution system, participatory decision making processes, fair share of opportunities and an end to caste-based discrimination.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The aspiration of all Nepalese people is a prosperous life. However, Dalits who have been discriminated against and excluded for the last 3500 years need more than slogans about prosperity. Without addressing political exclusion, economic deprivation, lack of access to resources and discrimination based on caste created by the caste-based political economy, the conversation of prosperity can't march forward. Without ending the situation of entire

political economic system based on caste, Dalit prosperity is not achievable. Prosperity is linked to the agenda of entire political, economic, cultural transformation and the state should take this fact into account. There is no reliable basis to believe that the current political economic system brings prosperity to Dalits. Since prosperity is the prime agenda of the government, the government should define prosperity comprehensively and draw a roadmap to achieve it.

Nepal transformed from unitary and autocratic regime to federal democratic republic. Proportional inclusion became accepted constitutionally and politically. But in practice, the state is still run by oligarchs of dominant caste groups. The tokenistic inclusion that we are currently practicing cannot fundamentally transform traditional power structures. Substantive change in the power structure requires collaborative efforts of Madhesi Dalits, Dalit women and the Dalits from geographically excluded areas. Therefore, prosperity cannot be achieved without ensuring Dalits' meaningful representation and involvement in the participatory decision making process. The state, political parties and the stakeholders need to be actually inclusive of marginalized groups and not merely inclusive in name

Another important aspect of prosperity is increase in productivity and per capita income. As capitalism is becoming the political-economic system of Nepal, there is a possibility of Dalits being excluded from the overall process of development and prosperity as they lack access to the means of production. The state has also failed to increase Dalits' access to means of production, and to end exploitative labor relations, link Dalits' traditional occupations with modern opportunities and change their economic status. Dalits are likely



to sink deeper into poverty in the absence of access to resources and proportional inclusion in the job market. Prosperity for Dalits is not possible when feudal lords, wealth creators and brokers are enjoying a stronghold in the capitalist model of development. Therefore, the governments as well as political parties in Nepal should present a clear roadmap to prosperity that directly impact Dalit livelihoods ensure social justice, and an opportunity to live a dignified life. The slogan of prosperity for Dalits doesn't hold water without strategies and programs that clearly benefit them.

The preamble of the new constitution states a commitment to ending all kinds of caste discrimination and the creation of an egalitarian society through proportional inclusion and participation to ensure economic equality, prosperity and social justice. It also states a commitment to building a prosperous nation through the principles of socialism. However, these lofty goals require action to bear any

resemblance to the Dalit community's actual reality. A situation where Dalits truly experience prosperity can't be achieved without political commitment of the government as well as political parties. The state needs an action plan towards prosperity that ends structural discrimination, ensures social justice, guarantees proportional representation, and ensures access to means of production and its distribution. In addition, Dalits' equal share in development projects, meaningful participation in economic activities, and the end of impunity so that they can live dignified lives also need to be ensured.

Dalits can experience prosperity only when the action plans as indicated by the roadmap are implemented effectively. The leadership of political parties, government and policy makers can refer to this to understand Dalits' perspective on prosperity and further use it as a reference document while formulating strategies, plans and programs towards prosperity.



Interaction programs conducted by Dignity Initiative

Province	Place	Date of program(B.S)
Province 1	Biratnagar	2075 Asoj 6
Province 2	Lahan	2075 Jestha 11-2
Bagmati	Chautara	2075 Kartik 18
Province 4	Pokhara	2075 Asar 11
Province 5	Butwal	2075 Shrawan 12
Karnali	Surkhet	2075 Asoj 21
Sudur Pashchim	Dhangadhi	2075 Asoj 14
National level Interaction	Kathmandu	2075 Poush 2



About Dignity Initiative

Dignity Initiative is a Kathmandu-based research organization which focuses on issues of Dalits and marginalized communities in Nepal. It has been established by Dalit academics, researchers, writers and activists. In Nepal, there is still economic exclusion, political marginalization, untouchability and discrimination based on a caste based economic-political system. To end all kinds of discriminatory practices, ensure justice, liberty and dignified life to everyone; Dalits in Nepal have been struggling for seven decades. The result of the struggle has provided some constitutional and legal rights and there has been a reduction in discrimination against the Dalit community in some respects. However, researchers, critics and public intellectuals have historically ignored issues pertaining to the Dalit community. Dignity Initiative aims to rectify this by actively working on a multi-dimensional approach to the Dalit community through research and knowledge production as well as critical engagement in public debates to help the Dalit movement.

**Prosperity Discourse in Nepal and Dalit
Policy Paper - 1**

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