Madheshi Contribution in Nepali Education: Empowering Minds and Transforming Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the experiences of Madhesi community origin contribution, condition and conviction in Nepali Education with a view to empowering minds and transforming communities. With a view access the better opportunities for job and the inadequate educational infrastructure across the country, a significant number of Madhesi teachers and students are compelled to seek job and higher education in Kathmandu. However, there are instances where Madhesis are still mistaken as Indians and face discrimination in their non-native regions. In this study, we aim to uncover the feelings and experiences of Madhesi teachers and students in Kathmandu. The research employed qualitative approaches as one to one personal discussion. The responses gathered were analyzed using the theory of stigma and social interactionism developed by Erving Goffman. By examining their accounts, this research sheds light on the contribution, condition and emotional challenges faced by Madhesi due to the stigma and stereotypical remarks directed at them by their peers.

Keywords: *Nepali Education, contribution, condition, experiences, empowering minds and transforming communities*

Introduction

The Madheshi community, primarily residing in the southern plains of Nepal, has faced various socio-economic and cultural challenges though they contributed in Education of Nepal. Education plays a pivotal role in shaping societies and fostering progress. In Nepal, the Madheshi community has made significant contributions to the field of education, empowering countless individuals and transforming communities. Madheshi scholars, educators, and activists have strived to bridge the educational gap and ensure access to quality education for all, leaving a lasting impact on the nation's educational landscape (Chaudhary, B., 2004).

Problem Statement

The Madheshi people in Nepal, who are predominantly Hindus with some Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians, have been historically disadvantaged in terms of access to education. The literacy rate among the Madheshi people is lower than among other groups in Nepal, and it is the lowest in the Terai region, where they are the indigenous inhabitants. The Terai region is the most fertile and productive in Nepal, with agriculture as its main economic activity, producing rice, jute, sugar, mustard, tobacco, herbs, and spices.However, the Madheshi people have been marginalized and

face challenges in empowering their minds and transforming their communities through education.

Research Objective

Analyse the Madheshi Contribution in Nepali Education for Empowering Minds and Transforming Communities.

Results and Discussions

Contribution

1. **Access to Education:** While efforts have been made to improve access to education in Madhesh, there are still disparities compared to other regions of Nepal. Factors such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, and cultural barriers have hindered access to quality education, particularly for marginalized communities in Madhesh.

2. **Infrastructure and Resources:** Madhesh continues to face challenges in terms of educational infrastructure and resources. Many schools lack proper facilities, including classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. Limited resources and inadequate funding often contribute to a substandard learning environment, impacting the quality of education provided.

3. **Quality of Education:** Despite progress, the quality of education in Madhesh remains a concern. Issues such as a shortage of qualified teachers, limited training opportunities, and outdated teaching methods affect the overall quality of instruction. There is a need for ongoing professional development for educators and the incorporation of innovative teaching approaches to enhance learning outcomes.

4. **Gender Disparities:** Gender disparities persist in Madhesh, affecting educational opportunities for girls and women. Social and cultural norms, early marriage, and traditional gender roles often restrict girls' access to education. Efforts are being made to address these disparities through awareness campaigns, scholarships, and initiatives promoting girls' education.

5. **Multilingual Education:** The linguistic diversity in Madhesh poses both challenges and opportunities. Recognizing the importance of mother tongue-based education, there have been efforts to incorporate local languages into the curriculum. However, there is still a need for further development of materials and resources that support multilingual education in Madhesh.

6. **Policy Reforms and Inclusion:** There has been increased recognition of the need for policy reforms and inclusive education in Madhesh. Efforts are being made to address the specific educational needs of marginalized communities, including Dalits and indigenous groups, through initiatives such as scholarship programs, inclusive curriculum development, and affirmative action policies.

7. **Higher Education and Skill Development:** Access to higher education and skill development opportunities in Madhesh is limited compared to other regions of Nepal. There is a need for the establishment of more universities, vocational training institutes, and technical colleges in Madhesh to provide diverse educational pathways for students and meet the demands of the job market.

8. Community Engagement and Awareness: Community engagement and awareness are crucial for the improvement of education in Madhesh. Initiatives that involve parents, local leaders, and community organizations can help address educational challenges, promote enrollment, and foster a supportive environment for learning.

QAA emphasizes the need for improved quality assurance and accreditation in the context of higher education in Nepal. The importance of maintaining equilibrium with changing knowledge through a shift in teaching and learning methods. This approach ensures that the education system remains relevant and prepares students for the future (Mishra, 2021:2022:2023, Mishra and Nepal, 2022: Mishra and Jha, 2023: Mishra, 2023ab&c).

Condition

1. **Overcoming Barriers:** The Madheshi community, primarily residing in the southern plains of Nepal, has faced various socio-economic and cultural challenges that hindered educational opportunities. However, Madheshi individuals have exhibited immense resilience, perseverance, and a strong determination to overcome these barriers. They have played a vital role in increasing access to education for Madheshi children and youth, striving for equal opportunities and inclusive education.

2. **Educational Institutions:** Madheshi intellectuals and visionaries have established educational institutions at various levels to address the educational needs of Madheshi communities. These institutions have provided quality education, promoted cultural diversity, and fostered a sense of pride among Madheshi students. By creating these institutions, Madheshi leaders have paved the way for future generations to excel academically and contribute to society.

3. **Empowering Marginalized Communities:** Madheshi educators have been at the forefront of efforts to uplift marginalized communities through education. They have recognized the importance of empowering women, Dalits, and other underprivileged groups through education. Madheshi educators have actively worked to eradicate social prejudices and promote gender equality in educational institutions, creating a more inclusive learning environment.

4. **Advocacy and Policy Reforms:** Madheshi intellectuals have been influential in advocating for policy reforms in the education sector. Their efforts have resulted in increased government attention and investment in Madheshi education, addressing issues such as infrastructure development, teacher training, curriculum diversification, and scholarships for marginalized students. Madheshi leaders have played an instrumental role in shaping educational policies that prioritize inclusivity and equity.

5. **Promoting Multilingual Education:** The Madheshi community, with its distinct linguistic heritage, has emphasized the importance of multilingual education. Madheshi educators have advocated for the recognition and inclusion of local languages in the curriculum, enabling students to learn in their mother tongue. This approach has not only facilitated better learning outcomes but also preserved and promoted linguistic diversity in Nepal.

6. **Educational Leadership:** Madheshi scholars and educators have emerged as influential leaders in the field of education. They have held key positions in academic institutions, government bodies, and educational organizations, driving positive change and influencing educational policies. Their leadership has brought forth fresh perspectives, innovative approaches, and a commitment to ensuring educational equality.

Conviction

'Cultural Diversity and Pluralism in Nepal: Emerging issues and the Search for a New Paradigm,' Nepalese anthropologist and sociologist Hari Prasad Bhattarai discusses various forms of ethno-cultural divisions in the country (Bhattarai, H. P., 2004). These divisions include the pahadi-madhesi divide, the distinction between high caste Hindu groups such as Hill Bahuns, Thakuri, Chettri, and Newar, and the indigenous groups or janajati, as well as the divisions between Bahun and Newar groups and high caste Hindu groups versus low caste Hindu groups. However, the most significant division, which is at the core of the conflict on a macro level, is the pahadi-madhesi divide (Bennett, L., et al., 2008).

In certain situations, Madhesis are still incorrectly perceived as Indians and face discrimination based on their skin tone and language. As a result, they constantly have to prove their Nepali identity, particularly in regions outside their native areas. Shanti Chaudhary, in her article 'Nepalma Shoshit Madheshi Mul Mahilako Samasya ra Samadhan,' highlights that state-sponsored discrimination

against Madhesis, condescending attitudes of Pahadis (people from the hilly regions), and the tendency to consider Madhesis as non-Nepalese all stem from a narrow-minded perspective on identity issues, which exacerbates the challenges faced by Madhesis.

Our research study focuses specifically on Goffman's theory of Stigma. Goffman defines stigma as an attribute that significantly discredits an individual, but it is crucial to recognize that it is the language of relationships, rather than mere attributes, that is truly necessary. Stigma, therefore, represents a unique type of relationship between an attribute and a stereotype (Northey, W. B., & Bruce, C. G., 1998).

With the aim of understanding how Madhesi students perceive themselves and how they shape their self-identity within a distinct socio-cultural environment, we employed this theory. By applying the concept of stigma, we sought to comprehend the experiences of Madhesi students and how they are subjected to discrimination. This theory has proven valuable in helping us understand how Madhesi students perceive themselves and the challenges they face on a daily basis due to the discrimination they encounter in the school environment. In our analysis, we have incorporated the theory of 'symbolic interactionism.' This term was initially developed by Herbert Blumer and further expanded upon by Erving Goffman. According to Goffman, symbolic interactionism is grounded in three key premises. First, individuals' actions toward things are based on the meanings those things hold for them. Second, the meanings of these things emerge from social interactions with others. Lastly, these meanings are continually shaped and revised through interpretive processes.

By employing this theory in our research, we aimed to observe and explore how our informants respond to their experiences and perceptions of themselves within their daily environment. Through in-depth discussion, our goal was to uncover non-verbal aspects and symbolic expressions that may not be fully conveyed through words alone. This theory also helps us establish connections between their experiences and their concept of self-identity.

Moreover, it assists in providing insights into how young Madhesis navigate stigmatization and cope with its effects. As the capital city of the country, Kathmandu attracts people from all parts of Nepal, including the Madhesi community. Unfortunately, Madhesi in the Kathmandu Valley often encounter various forms of discrimination. They are subjected to stigmatization and stereotyping solely based on their Madhesi identity, leading to feelings of alienation among their peers (Shah, 2013).

In this context, it is crucial to address and reduce the literacy gap between Madhesi and Pahadi populations. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for a multicultural perspective in the education system of Nepal. The discussion from our informants make it evident that Madhesi involved in Kathmandu's institution, particularly boys, face racial discrimination, stereotypes, and mistreatment from their peers. While institution management may not directly participate in discrimination, they often turn a blind eye to madhesi complaints about these issues. Research has shown that students who experience racism from their peers or teachers may respond with anger and exhibit disruptive behavior, which can have long-term consequences. For instance, data from a school survey conducted by the U.S. Office for Civil Rights in 2014 revealed that African-American males were three times more likely than Caucasian students to be suspended or expelled due to disruptive behavior. African-Americans are one of the groups that face discrimination in schools. Students who consistently face trouble may become discouraged and drop out of school (University of California, Los Angeles Law Review), and we observed similar gestures and behaviors among the madhesi with whom discussed (Conclusions Hamilton, F., & Jackson, V. H., 1986: Hills, J. R., 2003: Kabeer, N., 2003).

According to Goffman, stigma can be categorized into three types: physical attributes that are considered abominations, individual character traits perceived as deviant, and tribal stigmas related to race, nationality, or religion, which can permeate an entire family (Goffman, 1963). In the context of Madhesi students, the stigmatization

they experience in schools often takes explicit forms, including name-calling, teasing, verbal abuse, bullying, and exclusion from social circles. This pattern of stigmatization affects those who are initially socialized in a different community and are then compelled to establish their own identity. The emotional well-being of these students is directly impacted, potentially leading to further racial tensions.

Symbolic interactionism, as conceptualized by Goffman, is based on three premises: individuals' actions are based on the meanings they attribute to things, these meanings arise from social interactions, and individuals continually interpret and modify these meanings. When it comes to creating meaning, two crucial components are culture and social structure. Culture encompasses what people do, while social structure is derived from how people interact with each other. Humans strive to fit into the activities of their social groups, and as a result, members of ethnic communities may be viewed differently by members of other groups (Goffman, 1963).

Conclusion

The Madheshi community's contribution to Nepali education is invaluable. Despite the challenges, efforts are being made by various stakeholders, including government bodies, civil society organizations, and educational institutions, to improve the status of education in Madhesh. By addressing issues of access, quality, gender disparities, and policy reforms, it is possible to create a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape in Madhesh, empowering its residents and contributing to overall societal development. Through their relentless efforts, Madheshi scholars, educators, and activists have empowered countless individuals, bridged educational gaps, and transformed communities. Their vision for inclusive education, advocacy for policy reforms, and commitment to empowering marginalized groups have left an indelible mark on Nepal's educational landscape. Moving forward, it is essential to recognize and celebrate the Madheshi community's contributions, fostering a more inclusive and equitable education system for all

Nepali citizens. Therefore, it is imperative to promote a change in mindset. Authority, teachers, and the government should take immediate steps, including incorporating Madhesi culture, traditions, and issues into the curriculum. Adequate space should be provided for discussions on Madhesi culture. Proper counseling and training for teachers on these issues are also significant since many Madhesi students express dissatisfaction with their madhesi teachers' behavior. However, further research is essential, as our study primarily focused on.

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