

Dom: Identity, Social Perception and Social Distance

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Abstract— Nepal is a country having multiple caste, ethnicity and religious groups. Among them Dom is also one of the so-called lower caste in our society. The aim of the study of this research is to know the "Social Perception, Social Distance and Identity" of Dom Community and its relation to Pahadi and Madheshi community who used to mark themselves as higher caste. The study was done within three castes with 150 samples i.e. 50 samples were taken from each caste. Similarly, 15 case studies were done i.e. 5 samples from each group. The study was based on three factors; Identity, Social Perception, and Social Distance. Bogardus "Social Distance Scale" (modified by B. Kuppaswami in 1951), "Perception of Self Others Test" of Osgood et al and "Twenty Statement Test" of Kuhn and Mc Pharland (1954) were used as a tools for the study. The study was done by using mixed method. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to find the detailed information to meet the problem. Similarly, Twenty Statement Test was also used to find the solution related to the problems. All the information was analyzed through descriptive and SPSS-21 version. Through the analysis of data, the result supports all the objectives.

The result highlights the Madheshi, Pahadi and Dom perception as well as their social distance towards them as well as towards others group. As a whole the result of Madheshi and Pahadi group shows negative perception but positive social distance towards Dom. Similarly, the Dom social perception and social distance was highly positive as well as very highly positive towards Madheshi and Pahadi. The Dom social distance towards Dom is very highly positive. Similarly, the Madheshi and Pahadi social distance towards them is also very highly positive. But, the result highlights the Pahadi social perception towards Pahadi is negative.

The study also highlights that Dom people is being surviving their life by making buckets of bamboos and some of them used to work in sub-metropolitan office as a staff who used to collect wastage as well as who used to clean the dumping areas. The study also revealed that the Madheshi community used to buy Dali (materials which is made by bamboo and used in marriage ceremony). Similarly, both Pahadi and Madheshi community used to buy Dhakki which is used in Chhat Puja. Without these two things the ceremony is not completed. Dom people are self employed and make various things like; Daura, Dhakki, Supali, Taraju, Bena, Dali, Nanglo, Bhakari, etc. with bamboos. In india there is "Banarash Ghat", where Dom is "Raja" who used to give permission for Daha Sanskar.

Through observation method as well as using Twenty Statement Test, this study indicates the social aspects as well as cognitive aspects of our society. The so-called higher caste used to discriminate Dom community and even they are famous with their nick name i.e. "Untouchable" group. They cannot fetch water from well. Similarly, they shouldn't touch anyone, they are not invited in any festivals, they are not allowing to perform any tasks related to social welfare, and most unfortunate is that they are not supported by any political parties to uplift their environment.

The identity and social perception as well as social relation of the Dom and others caste is found not as a satisfactory relation but there is also one part which has changed a lot i.e. "Young Generation". The feeling of untouchable among young generation is being limited. The older people have necessity to come in close contact with Dom community for various reasons i.e. to buy baskets, to ask them to clean their wastage products, etc. And the political parties were in close contact in the election period with the Dom community. But the young generation used to come in the Dom's house to drink alcohol and eat pork meat as well as used to celebrate their festivals.

Due to discrimination based on negative perception and negative social distance people may suffer from various psychological problems like; stressfulness, anxiety, depression. Similarly, people lack self-esteem, self-worth, self-motivation, and well-being which are directly related with the psychological adjustments of an individual. The study investigate that discrimination is related to negative feelings as well as with our negative beliefs and thoughts.

The study considered the people experiences by studying how negative perceptions and social distance are associated with identity and its contribution to psychological factors. The present study doesn't reveal any psychological areas from which the participants suffers but can predict the future outcomes due to those discriminatory factors i.e. negative social perception and negative social distance based on racism. The outcomes can be depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, drugs or alcohol addiction, personality disorder, trauma disorder, bipolar disorder, suicidal ideation thoughts, emotional disorder, schizophrenia, etc and so on.

Keywords— Identity, Social Perception, Social Distance, Untouchable, Discrimination, Psychological factors, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Identity is the qualities, beliefs, personality, looks or expression that makes a person or group. Identity relates to self-image, self-esteem and individuality. Identity indicates the significant degree how one views oneself both as a person and in relation to other people, ideas and nature. Other aspect of identity highlights the racial, religious, ethnic, occupational etc. Identity also refers to the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self. Identity is a process in which a person negotiates with society at large regarding the meaning of his or her identity. Identity also indicates with our language, dress, behaviour and choice of space, whose effect depends on their recognition by other social beings.

Social perception refers, how people form impression. Social perception highlights others feelings and emotions by picking up information's they gather from physical appearance, verbal and non-verbal communication. Social perception deals with how people think about and make sense of other people. It focuses on factors that influences the ways in which people understand other people and how people process, recognize, and recall information about others. Social perception is the part of perception that allows people to understand the other people in their social world. Social perception allows individual to make judgments and impressions about other people. It is primarily based on observation and pre-existing knowledge. Social perception also provides information about how people behave usually across situation.

Social distance is a perceived construct that is different for each individual, but it is influenced by the culture in which a person lives. Social distance is influenced by race, ethnicity, age, gender, economic class, feeling, perception, thinking, beliefs, etc. Social distance describes the difference between groups in society. Social distance refers to the degree to which a person from one group feels sympathy and empathy for persons from other groups. Similarly, it is also one of the differences which perceive between us as members of the groups and others who are not the members of the

same groups, i.e. "US" and "THEM" or "INSIDER" or "OUTSIDER". Social distance is the psychological gap between members of two prejudiced groups.

OBJECTIVE

Present study is an attempt to examine the Dom group within existing socio-cultural matrix. Dom people exist as subaltern yet with a distinct identity. Dom is stigmatized as 'untouchable' from the historical time in the context of Nepal. The study is an examination of how Dom perceive themselves and other groups as well as till up to date what type of identity they belongs to, and how they subjectively prefer the others in terms of social relation as well as in terms of social identity can be an interesting starting point to see glimpse of personal and social life of Dom as well as their psychological well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to "Racism and Mental Health" (2016), report given by American Psychiatric Association, Racism and racial discrimination adversely affect mental health, producing depression, anxiety, and heightened psychological stress in those who experience it. Racism and racial discrimination create a unique environment of pervasive, additional stress for people of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. In a University of Arizona study on emotional and physical stress from perceived racism, 18.2 percent and 9.8 percent of black participants reported emotional and physical stress, respectively. The rates of stress were significantly lower among white participants, with 3.5 percent and 1.6 percent reporting emotional and physical stress, respectively. Racial discrimination is more closely associated with the development of lifetime depressive and mood disorders as well.

According to D.P Rasali, PhD. "Caste Discrimination: A Core Problem in Nepal's Development" (2004) study, the caste-based discrimination is one of the most important problems that have been the root cause of the Nepalese society, is still under the shadow due to lack of sufficient thrust it deserves. It has been the main basis

for retention of traditional feudalistic regimes. Shah dynasty thrived throughout the history of 237 years of reign in what came to be known as Nepal, mainly due to its societal position as the mythical warrior Kshatriya caste among four Hindu Varnas. Autocratic Ranas ruled for 104 years until 1950 by way of superseding the powers of Shah Dynasty and establishing themselves as ruling class rivals with Shahs. The systematic discrimination rampant between any other two Hindu castes and within any caste and/or any caste groups was the basis for both these dynasties to “divide and rule” the largely ignorant masses. The history of what came to be known as Nepal has been nothing more than the playing field for these two dynasties, by turn, suppressing the masses as slaves. In that context, Nepalese society must abandon their traditional belief of so called “high” and “low” castes, and discard the associated social evils like the practice of “untouchability”, which is still rampant in the society.

In the Muluki Ain 1854, all castes knowledgeable to the then rulers were scheduled as “high” to “low” in their hierarchical order. The penalty for any civilian criminal was inversely proportional to their hierarchical order in the caste structure. If a Brahmin man (a priestly caste considered as the highest by law) raped a lower caste woman, he would be fined in cash, degraded to a “lower” caste or forgiven at the discretion of the judge, but if a so called “untouchable” man had consensual sex with a woman of so called “high” caste, he would be sentenced to a death penalty. This is only one example of discriminatory legal provisions that were in the first Muluki Ain (i.e. until 1963). As a result, today, the people of oppressed castes, who make up about 20% of the country’s whole population, are still alienated from the mainstream society.

According to Sanjay Austa, “Dom Raja: Untold story of the untouchable keeper of Varanasi's scared flame” (2015) study, the actual origin of Dom according to his article is a big climb-down from days of 'Kallu'; his ancestors and the first Dom Raja who according to Indian mythology, had kept the vow-abiding King Harishchandra as an apprentice.

The Dom community has traditionally been the custodian of cremation grounds. The Doms are keepers of the scared fire, which is never allowed to die down, and are the cremators of the dead. The CHIEF cremation undertakes at Manikarnika and Harishchandra ghats in Varanashi are called 'Dom Raja'. Also called 'Choudhary', Raja Harishchandra a King in ancient times. It is said that if the person begin cremated is to achieve 'moksha', the fire for dead's funeral pyre must be taken from the Dom Raja.

According to Krishna Khanal, Frits Sollewijn, and Uddhab Prasad Pyakurel, “Dalit Representation in National Politics of Nepal” (2014) report, no dalits were elected in the House of Representatives of 1959. And out of a total of 786 candidates contesting the election, only one was a Dalit. During the 30 years long panchayat period (1961-1990), only 4 Dalits were nominated as representatives by King Mahendra. It was only after the insurgency escalated into a civil war the dalits were appointed in the Government. Between 2002 and 2006 a total of 7 Dalits were appointed in the cabinet. In the cabinet of 2006 to 2012, only 13 Dalits were nominated. Similarly, the Constituent Assembly (CA) 2070 B.S of Nepal elected 40 Dalits. Following the list from 2073 to 2075, very few of the Dalits were presented in the list of Government cabinet where as in the parliament. Similarly, we can see that from 1950 to 2075, no any Dom is presented in any list of National politics.

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES

The objective is to study the identity, social perception, and social distance of Dom, Pahadi, and Madheshi community of Nepal.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was a pilot study. The study area was area of Bara District, Kalaiya-9, sub-metropolitan, Nepal. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to collected data and examine the existing attitude, perception and social preferences of Dom people. Thus, a non-probability sampling method was used for data.

Table 1: Following are the information’s which choosen for the study.

Sample Area	Nature of Data	Sampling Method	Sample Size	Tools Used
Bara District	Quantitative	Non-probability	Dom: 50 Pahadi: 50 Madheshi: 50	Standard Questionnaire Tools • Bogardus "Social Distance Scale" (modified by B. Kuppusswami in 1951)

			Total: 150	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Perception of Self Others Test" of Osgood et al. (1957) • "Twenty Statement Test" of Kuhn and Mc Pharland (1954)
Bara District	Qualitative	Non-probability	Dom: 5 Pahadi: 5 Madheshi: 5 Total: 15	Interview Guidelines/Observation

This present study is based on the consideration of primary as well as secondary data. Primary data were collected through field survey. Similarly, secondary data were collected through published and unpublished

materials such as research articles, related books, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Election Commission of Nepal and related profiles.

Table 2: The Social Perception tool is based on 7 point Likert's scale which consists:

Social Perception Level	Score
Very high positive social perception	51 to 34
High positive social perception	33 to 16
Positive social perception	15 to 1
Neutral social perception	0.92 to -0.92
Negative social perception	-1 to -15
High negative social perception	-16 to -33
Very high negative social perception	-34 to -51

Table 3: The Social Distance test is based on 5 point Likert's scale which consists:

Social Distance Level	Score
Very positive social distance	6 to 4
Positive social distance	3 to 1
Neutral social distance	0.92 to -0.92
Negative social distance	-1 to -3
Very negative social distance	-4 to -6

The Twenty Statement Test (TST), has widely been used to describe the content of self i.e "Who am I". This test is very effective in extracting the information of knowing, understanding, and thinking about self which consists 20 different answers.

RESULT

The result is based on two analysis i.e. quantitative and qualitative methods. The first section of the chapter indicates the quantitative description and the second description are based on qualitative purpose.

QUANTITATIVE SECTION

The quantitative section is based on the "Perception of self and others tests" developed by Osgood et. al. and "Bogardus social distance scale" which is modified by B. Kuppusswami in 1951.

The section is based on Likert's scale. The social perception is based on 7 points Likert's scale whereas the social distance is based on 5 points Likert's scale. The section is assessing by MsExcel and SPSS-21 version.

Table 4: Social Perception of Dom, Pahadi, and Madheshi

Factors	Social Perception Level with Percentage	Comparison between Male and Female with percentage
Madhesi Social Perceptions towards Dom	Negative (56%)	Male (40%)

Madheshi Social Perceptions towards Pahadi	Positive (56%)	Male (40%)
Madheshi Social Perceptions towards Madheshi	Positive (56%)	Male (44%)
Pahadi Social Perceptions towards Dom	Negative (62%)	Male (44%)
Pahadi Social Perceptions towards Madheshi	Negative (50%)	Male (34%)
Pahadi Social Perceptions towards Pahadi	Negative (54%)	Male (36%)
Dom Social Perceptions towards Madheshi	Positive (54%)	Male (40%)
Dom Social Perceptions towards Pahadi	Positive (62%)	Male (42%)
Dom Social Perceptions towards Dom	Negative (1%)	Female (1%)

(Source: Field Survey 2022)

Table 5: Social Distance of Dom, Pahadi, and Madheshi

Factors	Social Perception Level	Comparison between Male and Female
Madheshi Social Distances towards Dom	Positive (76%)	Male (54%)
Madheshi Social Distances towards Pahadi	Very Positive (100%)	Both (100%)
Madheshi Social Distances towards Madheshi	Very Positive (100%)	Both (100%)
Pahadi Social Distances towards Dom	Positive (88%)	Male (52%)
Pahadi Social Distances towards Madheshi	Positive (100%)	Male (66%)
Pahadi Social Distances towards Pahadi	Very Positive (100%)	Both (100%)
Dom Social Distances towards Madheshi	Positive (98%)	Male (76%)
Dom Social Distances towards Pahadi	Very Positive (100%)	Both (100%)
Dom Social Distances towards Dom	Very Positive (100%)	Both (100%)

(Source: Field Survey 2022)

QUALITATIVE SECTION

The qualitative section was done by using “Twenty Statement Test” of Kuhn and McPharland (1954). Similarly, the section was also based on the observation and case study of the respondents. Respondents described the nature of the identity and social perception based on their experiences and its effects on their life. So, following are some findings related to the study.

The Dom community described them as they are dalit, they are lower castes of Terai region, they are untouchable caste so they are maintaining as Dom in the community. According to the study, Dom participants described that they are Aachut i.e. they are untouchable group who are never invited by any other group members in the society for any purpose. We are discriminated due to lower caste because the higher caste people used to purify them even they touch with

them mistakenly. An effort to maintain our life, we have our cultural business. The cultural business is based on our social roles. According to Dom participants the Cultural business based on social roles influence the Dom community used to make various things like: Dhakki, Nanglo, Supali, Bhakari, Bena, Taraju, D ali, etc, by using bamboos. Society used to make our decision without our permission whereas, we are treated like animals too. People used to think that there is no any work related to us in any social events. We are only to clean wastages. We belong to lower caste and we have low socio economic status due to that reason we are deprived from education. We want to give their child good education but that untouchability always used to lead us. From Government side sometimes we are facilitated with Praud Sikshya but that is not enough to know us, as literate one. We are not satisfied with these

words as, inhumanity, discrimination, untouchability, etc. These words always de-motivate us. We want to build friendly relation with all people in society. We want to celebrate each and every festival in society. According to Dom they were only used as voter. At the time of vote, we were given various promises but when voting ends no one used to come at our home to ask their condition. Now days we think, we are only born for voting in this society.

Similarly, Pahadi and Madheshi community share their experience as; we belong to Brahmin and Chhetri community so we are higher caste in the context of Nepalese society. Whereas, according to Madheshi respondents we belong to higher caste comparison to Dom community. The statements based on ethnic-identity and education was as: "I am Pahadi", "I am Madheshi", "I am hindu", "I am Brahamin", "I am chettri", "I am Yadav, Das, Thakur, etc", and "I am educated". We used to participate in every societal program to enhance and build-up the society. According to participants, we used to participate in every decision belonging to society. We used to work as facilitator in the society. We follow non-discrimination pattern in the society. According to participants, we used to help everyone who belongs to our society. We never discriminate any other human according to their caste, race, religion or ethnic group. We treat equally to everyone and want to make balance in the society.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Result of the present study shows that The Dom community is traditionally an occupational caste. They are "Sudra" and known as "Achhut" (untouchable). They are backward in every field i.e. socially, educational, economically, health, political, cultural, etc. This scenario focused that they are only voter bank but they have no rights to participate in any local or national affairs.

The result highlights the Madheshi, Pahadi and Dom perception as well as their social distance towards them as well as towards others group. As a whole the result of Madheshi and Pahadi group shows negative perception but positive social distance towards Dom. Similarly, the Dom social perception and social distance was highly positive as well as very highly positive towards Madheshi and Pahadi. The Dom social distance towards Dom is very highly positive. Similarly,

the Madheshi and Pahadi social distance towards them is also very highly positive. But, the result highlights the Pahadi social perception towards Pahadi is negative. The Pahadi social perception towards Pahadi group is negative due to socio-economic conditions. Pahadi who are economically well established use to separate them with other Pahadi's in the community. Similarly, Pahadi who belongs to Madhesh were culturally associated with Madheshi community and perform like Madheshies and so on.

This present research also focused that some so-called higher castes used to sprinkle sunpani to purify them if mistakenly they touch the Dom people. In today's world they use to drink tea in their own separate glass in village hotels and they used to clean that glass and keep it to safe place to use tomorrow. The study shows the contradictory result at some point, in one situation the response given by Pahadi community to Pahadi group shows very different scenario. But as a whole we can know that the Perception and Social Distance of Pahadi and Madheshi towards Dom are negative whereas the Perception and Social Distance of Dom towards Pahadi and Madheshi is positive.

The present study revealed the clear map of the Dom people. Dom people are very laborious, kind, helpful towards others and self. They are positive towards their caste and group of society. They believe in traditional marriage and most of them preferred to stay within joint family. The identity of Dom was found that they are honest, good, and cooperative yet they are perceiving themselves as low, sad and weak related to other caste group. The research focused that higher caste used to maintain gap with the lower caste groups in the society. Dom is not given any social responsibilities in the society. The higher castes are strengthened by stereotyped perception. They don't like to make social relation as well with Dom community.

Different NGOs and INGOs are working to improve and enhance the lifestyle of Dalits, but there is not seen any positive sign of improvement in the Dom's life style. Gradually, social awareness is improving and enhancing the Dom community of the study area due to the effect of modernization. HMG/NEPAL (2002) has also stated the Dom's are considered the lowest untouchable caste groups of the terai. Even today, Dom's are not allowed to fetch water either from private or public tube-wells. They have their own separate tube-well to drink water.

This type of mentality seems that what type of perception we have regards to Dom community.

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