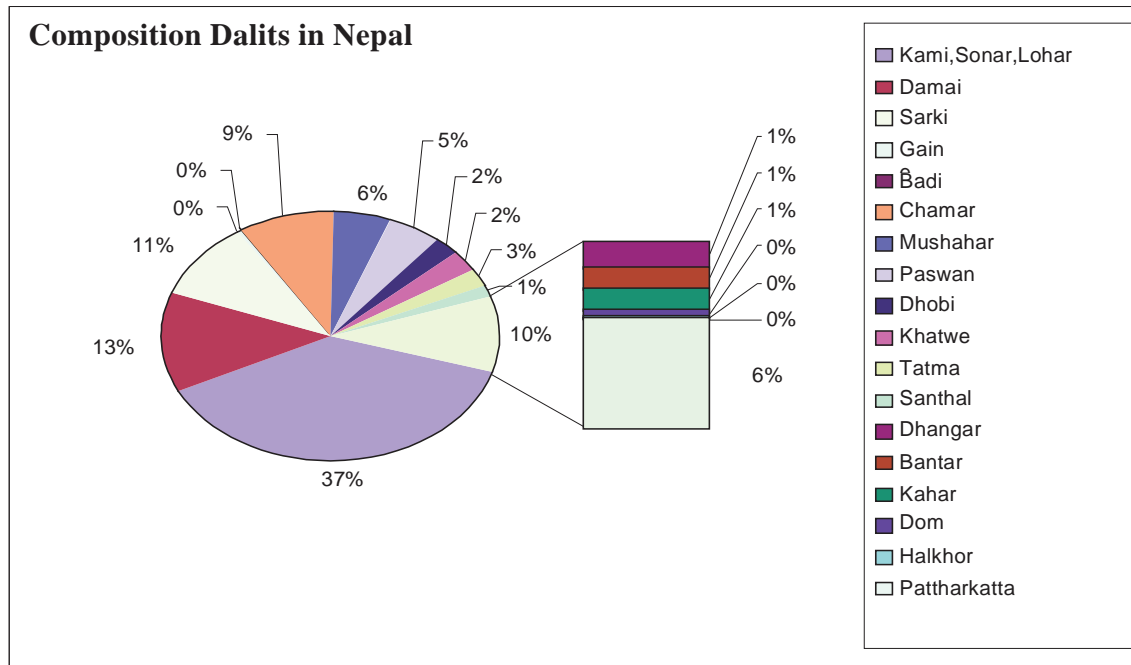


DALITS OF NEPAL

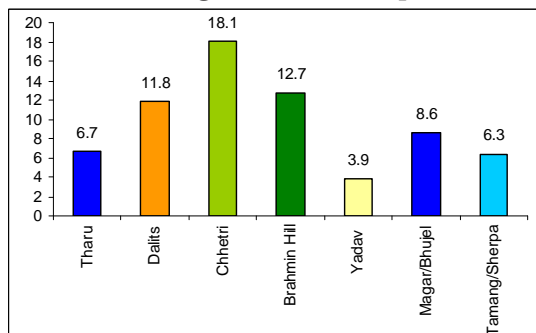
Who are Dalits in Nepal?

There 4.5 million Dalits in Nepal out of a total population of 24 million. This is almost 20 percent of the population. This figure does not include the janajatis, who make up 37 percent of the population. Dalits are discriminated against in both law and fact. Although some protective measures have been introduced in the law of Nepal, but these are not very strong and poorly implemented. Discrimination against Dalits and Janajatis is the overwhelming reality of Nepal's social structure. However, there are hierarchies



and discrimination within the Dalit community with Kami, Sonar and Lohar (identified by the surname Biswakarma) at the so-called top of the hierarchy.

Chart 2. Percentage of National Population



In terms of demographic distribution Dalits are to be found in all parts of Nepal, but in some districts they have a high concentration. Surkhet, Kailali and Kaski are hill districts with high Dalit presence, while the terai districts with high Dalit concentration are Siraha and Saptari. In all there are about 10 districts in which Dalits can win elections on their own. There has been only one Dalit member of parliament in Nepal's 'democratic' history.

The second chart shows percentage make up of the different Dalit castes in Nepal

- As per the law of Nepal until 1963, Dalits were considered polluting and hence water cannot be accepted from them (The legal term for Dalits was *Pani nachalne*)
- The civil code of 1853 termed them as inferior human beings and those people who come into contact with them require ritual purification.
- As per social code the so-called untouchable communities requiring water-sprinkling purification.
- There are 22 caste groups identified by National Dalit commission

The situation of Dalits in Nepal

Some facts and figure

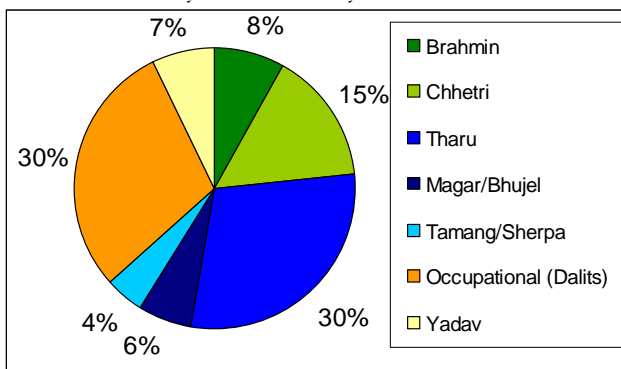
General	Dalit make up 20 % of the population in Nepal (Total population is ± 24 million) 80 % of the Dalit population lives below the poverty line Share of Dalits in cultivable land is 1 %,
Educational	Literacy rate amongst Dalits is 10 % Literacy rate amongst Dalit women is 3.2 %
Economical	the annual income of Dalits is on average US \$ 39.6
Health	The average life expectancy of Dalits is 52 years 70 % of Dalits are malnourished More than 70 % of Dalit children suffer from malnutrition

National data indicates that 60 percent of children of Nepal in the age group 12-23 months are fully immunized. But Dalit children are the worst off. Immunisation coverage for dalit children is a mere 43 percent, which is substantially below the national average.

Under 5 Child Mortality Rate for Dalits is 171.2 per 1000 live births compared to the national rate of 79 per 1000 live births.

Infant mortality rate for Dalits is 116.5 per 1000 as against 52.5 for bahuns. Bahuns and Newars have the lowest infant mortality rate (52.5 and 56 respectively) compared to a national average of 79 per thousand. However, the infant mortality rate of other janajati such as Gurung, Rai, Limbu, Magar and Tamang are significantly high (above 133) compared to the national average

Maternal deaths by caste/ethnicity



There is a tendency to blame lack of development in Nepal on the civil war and conflict. However, even without conflict about 80 percent of the Dalits live below the poverty line. Compared to this only 34 percent bahuns and 24 percent Newars are below the poverty line. For the Dalits below the poverty line as well as most of the others the long-term conflict and current political difficulties have only worsened a grim situation that they were already facing. The conflict is not the original cause of their problem, though it has made it much worse.

Very large numbers (around 50,000 families) have been internally displaced from their homes and villages. Because of this displacement they are unable to claim or receive even the most basic and essential humanitarian needs such as, medicine, clean water, shelter and clothes. Their children can no longer go to school and the adults are unable to find employment or the opportunity to earn their own livelihood in other ways. Many have had to flee to India to seek work.

Independent of the conflict Dalits suffer 205 different kinds of discrimination on the basis of caste, work and descent, in Nepal. There were around 2654 cases of atrocities against Dalit community in 2003. The discrimination deprives Dalits of legal justice and their social, economic, and human rights.

Issues of Dalit Rights

- Dalits of Nepal have suffered atrocities and injustices for centuries not just by society but also by the state itself.
- Dalits have been denied access to education, wealth and job in government services.
- 80% of Dalits are landless.
- Dalits have inadequate representation in the politics and parliament
- Dalits have no representation in the lower house and limited representation in the upper house but do not have the power to present a bill.

Status of Dalit Movement after the Peoples Movement of 1990

- Era of struggle for social justice
- Number of strong issues emerged related to economic, political and social rights
- Formation of Dalit Development Committee
- Formation of National Dalit Commission
- Emergence of Dalit NGOs and Federations
- The leadership of the movement being shifted to a relatively younger generation
- Dalit issue no longer just a national issue but also becoming an international issue
- Lots of attention to the issue created by civil society
- Significant involvement of international development agencies, human rights institutions and solidarity groups/forums.

Poverty eradication, conflict management and restoration of peace are the current burning issues of Nepal. The root cause of all these is the existing caste system, caste discrimination and the traditional caste structure. True development, strengthening of the process of democratization and poverty eradication are almost impossible in the face of such problems and systems of inequality and discrimination. The movement against injustice on the one hand and on the other the movement of Dalits towards their dignified life should not be looked upon only from a national perspective but from a global perspective as well. Humanity is the concern of not only a philanthropic individual but of the whole world. The development, democracy, human rights and poverty alleviation programme should target those who are discriminated on the basis of caste or work and descent. All our strategies, which aim to wipe out injustices, should have the component to fight against caste-based discrimination

Suvash Kumar Darnal

31 March 2005

Chairperson, Jagaran Media Center Kathmandu, Nepal

Ph.0977-1-4226655 ,fax 0977-1-4256780

darnal@wlink.com.np ,dalitright@gmail.com

www.jagaranmedia.org.np