

Jagaran Media Center (JMC)

"Media Alliance Against Caste Discrimination"

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"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

- Martin Luther King, JR

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Teachers responsible for discrimination within classrooms

More than 125 children from Musahar community were forced to leave their school, the BaliramLowerSecondary School of Pokhari Bhandra VDC-6 of Mahottari District. The teachers and the school administration forcefully sent the children home, blaming them as being member of the Musahar community that cannot produce birth registration certificates.

There is a joint appeal from the ministry of local development and ministry of education and sports that students are not required to produce birth certificates for school admission. The BaliramLowerSecondary School violated this appeal.

UNICEF had reported an incident in a school at Saptari where a teacher used to punish Dalit students by pelting stones to them instead of beating them, fearing he would touch them.

The Musahar community has the lowest literacy rate among all the communities of . The plight of the 125 children from this community is not heard by anybody nor does anyone have concern over the gross violation of their right to get education.

The school has received the orders from the District Education Office, Mahottari to admit the children without birth certificates during the admission campaign. But the school still did not admit the students. The only reason behind this reluctance was - they were from the Musahar community, which is considered untouchable.

In a similar case, some 50 children from the Dom community were barred from going to their school, the RastryaPrimary Schoolin Saptari district. The reason behind this was the Muslim teacher who teaches at the school. Muslims discriminate people from the Dom community, who keep pigs for their livelihood. The whole Dom community has been refrained from getting education, just because the so-called upper caste is afraid to be touched by this Dom community.

These are just few examples. There are lots of Dalit school dropouts, who are mentally and physically tortured, just because of the fact that they are from Dalit community. As an example of the extent of discrimination within the school premises, UNICEF had reported an incident in a school at Saptari where a teacher used to punish Dalit students by pelting stones to them instead of beating them, fearing he would touch them.

According to Bhanu Pathak of UNICEF Nepal, they could not bring the teacher pelting stones at Dalit students to justice, even after having sufficient proves.

The 'Food for Education program' provides daily hot mid-day meals to those primary school children of the districts which have high food shortage or insecurity, high educational need and also show other indications of vulnerability and a higher than average gender gap in education. The program was implemented by HMG by Ministry of Education and Sports and World Food Program (WFP).

But in many schools, the discrimination against the Dalit children while providing the meals is much distressing. The children from the targeted communities are deprived of the food due to the discrimination. The woes does not end to that alone, it has been reported in the newspapers that the Dalit students are sent home during the Tiffin(lunch) hours. With no orders from the higher authorities, the schoolteachers have monopoly over the students on how to implement the 'Food for Education' program. Even the program coordinators have failed to instruct the schoolteachers and the school administration to distribute the food equally to all the students.

However, the Ministry of education claims the program has been successful.

The discriminatory acts of the teachers and the school administrations have compelled the students to leave school. Various programmes launched by the government for the Dalit students have been confined to the able and competent ones.

According to the studies conducted by the department of education and several NGOs, some 14 per cent of the children drop school due to mistreatment, punishments and racial discrimination (out of which 85 per cent children are from Dalit communities!). The government statistic has also suggested that 16 per cent of the children are away from school. This figure includes children mostly from the deprived Dalit & Janajati(indigenous) communities.

The "Education for All" program, a UN program that declares education should be available for all children, seems a distant dream for Dalit children.

Dalits students are humiliated in the classroom by their teachers and classmates.

Unless campaigns are launched against such discriminatory acts, these practices would continue. So critics say that the campaigns should be immediately launched with punishments to teachers who are guilty of discriminatory behaviors towards Dalit students.

Unfortunately, this issue has not been incorporated in the government's programme to make the first grade - a 'child friendly' class. A national consensus is necessary to make classrooms discrimination-free zone. The role of the organizations actively working for the Dalits is crucial in this perspective.

Rental problems for Dalits and the ways to solve it

Dalits, living in rented apartments at various parts of the Kathmandu valley, are facing a big problem because of the existing social discriminations against them. Victims of the rental problems have stated that they are suffering from various problems after the District Administration Office (DAO) strictly sought details of all the people renting apartments at the house of all the house owners.

Speaking at an interaction on "*Rental Problems for Dalits and Ways to Solve it*" organised by Jagaran Media Centre (JMC) here on Friday (23 September 2005), a victim Khem Nepali said the government should make the provision of one Dalit in each and every rented house of the city to end discrimination made by landlords. Another victim Rajan Biswokarma said the attitude of Dalits should be changed and they should seek rooms with their own caste and

be proud of it. "If anybody objects, they should fight for their rights," she said. She opposed the attitude of the Dalits leader! s who are still living in rented house, pretending to be a Brahmin.

During the same function Raju Rasaili of Palpa said he was also ousted from the rented room because he was born to a Dalit family.

Interesting aspect of the problem is that even the Dalit house owners use to hide their real identity just because non-Dalits may not stay at their houses. Min Biswokarma said presently he was living at a Magar's house for which he had to lie that his mother was from the Magar community.

Another victim Rajendra Gautam confessed that he was feeling guilty for disguising himself as a person from other than his own caste.

Advocate Yam Bahadur Kisan said though the Constitution of Nepal has not accepted discrimination in terms of caste the rental problem has not been defined as caste-based discrimination. There is no clear laws on private matters as the almost all of the cases are on discriminations on public places only. He also said there is a provision to punish the house owners if they tried to oust any Dalit from the rented room just because of the caste. The DAO can punish such discriminatory house owners.

Chaudhary Threatens Dalits to evacuate land

A study report has stated that Mrs. Bhagawati Chaudhary of Lahan municipality-1 had threatened the landless Dalits who were living at Ghariya Tole of the same municipality to evacuate the land where they have been living for years.

Raju Biswokarma and Dhan Bahadur Lamsal from Dalit Welfare Organisation (DWO) have studied the case on July 19 2005.

It was on July 18, that Mrs. Bhagawati Chaudhary had urged the Dalits to evacuate the land within a month.

Some 16 households of Musahar and one of Paswan living at the place are now seriously concerned after they received threat from Chaudhary. She has claimed the 17 Katthas of unused land and has also filed a case at the Siraha District Court.

But the victims have different story to tell. According to them their families have been living at the same place for generations. Before their forefathers had settled, the land was

jungle.

They have also claimed that the so-called upper caste woman has threatened some 200 Dalits with the support from the administration and local leaders. According to Jogendra (age 45), one of the Dalit victims, Mrs. Chaudhary claimed that 3 out of 17 katthas were registered two years ago. He also said the Dalit community refrained Chaudhary's men from measuring the land.

Former President of the ward number eight of the Lahan Municipality Bindeswor Mahato, however, said that the Dalit community was living there for centuries and the land belongs to nobody. "Chaudhary has been threatening the unfortunate Dalit community just for her personal interest," he said. Mahato has asked the Dalit community not to leave their place and unite to struggle against the threat. The victims also said Chaudhary had ruined the lives of lots of Dalits at various parts of Siraha District, including Biharpur and Matiyarawa. The Saptari District committee of the Dalit Welfare Organisation has condemned the threat to evacuate the land. DWO district secretary Lalit Kumar Sardar has appealed all the human rights organisations, journalists, lawyers, administrations and all concerned to help them live where they are living for a long time.

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