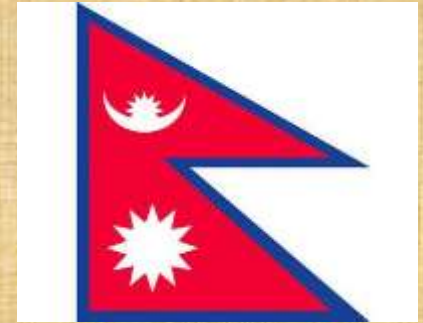


Nepal : Identity Politics and Economic Deprivation



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Introduction

- Nepal is a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual country.
- Geographically, Nepal is divided into three different regions : Mountain, Hill and Terai.
- Terai is the flat lowland expanded from the eastern to the western region of Nepal, also known as Madhesh.
- The identity of Madhesh and Madheshis is the convergence of geographical and political factors, which makes it a dynamic and contested issue in Nepalese politics.

Identity Politics in Nepal



- Nepal witnessed a series of peasant rebellions against the state and landed aristocrats in the 20th century, culminating in a full- fledged Maoist revolution that overthrew the old order.
- Dozens of political groups emerged demanding political autonomy for indigenous people and identity-based federalism in Nepal.
- Taking advantage of this, urban and ethnic elites, have reconsolidated their political and economic power.

- The Maoists had effectively mobilized the idea of ethnic autonomy to enroll the rural peasantry into the revolution, not realizing this might eventually boomerang and reproduce, via new forms of identity-based political mobilization, a return to upper-class dominance.
- Ethnic identity politics became particularly strong in the Terai region, where the Madheshi people faced the most entrenched economic inequality and caste discrimination in the country.
- They have been long exposed to racial slurs and being framed as Indians or illegal migrants.

Madheshi Identity

- Madheshis are very distinct from the rest of the population of the country in terms of language, rituals, lifestyle, food habits and attire. These attributes have shaped their unique collective identity in Nepal.
- Madheshi identity politics is based on ethnicity. The shared exclusion, misery and extreme poverty, along with their search of common rights, and self-determination brought all Madheshis together and formed a common Madheshi identity.
- The Madhesh Uprising of 2007 showed the dissatisfaction to the government, the Maoist, mainstream political parties and the interim constitution.

Economic causes of the conflict

- ⊙ Economic factors have also played important roles in initiating conflict in Nepal.
- ⊙ After the establishment of a democratic system in 1990, the aspirations of people for economic development went up astronomically.
- ⊙ Nevertheless, aspirations of people could not be met because of the lack of political stability, clear vision, commitment, and political consensus.
- ⊙ Rather, unemployment, inflation, and resource competition provided the breeding ground for the conflict.
- ⊙ The failure to adopt an all-inclusive economic policy widened the gap between rich and poor.

- ⦿ People from the oppressed community, scheduled caste, and minority ethnic groups did not have a stake in the country's economic activities.
- ⦿ Corruption, mismanagement, nepotism, and bribery moved the economic situations from bad to worse.
- ⦿ Although there was no profound discriminatory economic policy by the government, unequal economic opportunities, unequal access to resources, and vast differences in the standard of living were seen as unfair and illegitimate by the disadvantaged members of the society.

Economic Deprivation : Challenges and Impacts

- Displacement has major impact on living conditions in the country. According to Relief Web, “Between 1996 and 2006, the civil war between government armed forces of Nepal and Maoists left thousands of people dead, and many more displaced”.
- Nepal faces the problem of hunger and undernourishment. High food prices make it unaffordable for people in poverty.
- Nepal has been the victim of numerous natural disasters. With an struggling economy and problem of political stability, earthquakes in Nepal have also affected the pace of the economic development.

- ⊙ Rampant corruption further deteriorates the situation. Abuse of authority leads to a biased economic system and unfair distribution of resources, perpetuating the issue of poverty in Nepal.
- ⊙ Lack of health care and education access in impoverished regions.
- ⊙ Being a landlocked and mountainous region, development and transportation of resources becomes difficult.
- ⊙ Lack of advanced farming methods made it hard for progress against poverty in Nepal.
- ⊙ Unemployment and underemployment significantly contributed to poverty rates in Nepal.

The Way Forward

- Most of the ethnic conflicts are caused due to the deep-rooted socio-economic discrimination and mal-practices.
- The issue of Madhesh Uprising requires dynamic multi-stakeholder approach to resolve the conflict.
- Development and meaningful representation of marginalized sections of population is necessary to address the root causes of the conflict.
- The policy reforms might bring long term sustainable peace.

Conclusion

- Underlying causes of conflict in Nepal have not been resolved like poverty and discrimination based on caste and ethnicity.
- Nepal's governance and development challenges have been exacerbated by frequent changes in government.
- So, there is need to exert pressure on state authorities, political leadership and policymakers to work for collective interests of the country and ensure inclusive growth.

Thank You...!!!