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## Social Exclusion Of Muslims In Nepal: A Case Study Of Banke District

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### Abstract:

*This research paper is a part of a larger study on Role of Education in Social Inclusion Muslims in Nepal, which was carried out in Banke district of Nepal in 2011. This paper addresses the present socio-economic scenario and the level of exclusion at the household and community levels of Muslims in Nepal.*

*Muslims are one of the highly disadvantaged, marginalized and excluded minority groups with distinct religious and cultural identities in Nepal. They have been excluded from the social, economic, educational and political institutions; which, is reflected in their low literacy, high poverty rate and low representation in civil service, police, military and other decision-making levels of the state. Historically, they have been ignored by the state and excluded from the mainstream development processes due to their origin, religious minority status and territorial/regional identity.*

### KEYWORDS:

Exclusion, Inclusion, identity, Minority, Institution, Inequality, Poverty, Illiteracy, Representation, Disadvantaged groups, Marginalization, household, Community.

### INTRODUCTION

Theoretically, inclusion is a positive concept in the context of change and development of a society, community and the nation as a whole. In Nepal, the concept of social exclusion was not officially recognized till the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002), though various forms of exclusion persisted throughout history. In Nepal, social inclusion/exclusion has gained prominence in public and development policy discourse after it was included as one of four pillars of the Tenth Plan (2002-2007). In recent years, inclusion has become a policy agenda and the most populist political agenda for development and social change among various groups in the country. Similarly, it has also become a single most important theme of discourse among scholars and an important research topic in social sciences as well.

The twin terms social inclusion and exclusion are often contested, multidimensional terminologies and fluid in nature, as the term is associated with multiple meanings in different contexts and situations. In the context of Nepal, not only the state machineries but also the geography, history, language, religion and culture have become equally responsible in shaping the process of inclusion/exclusion over the years.

The social exclusion of a group of people could occur in both vertical and horizontal forms and take shape in various dimensions of larger social, economic and political indicators. But, the level and scale of exclusion of a group is not in the same degree in these various indicators. A group of people could be more excluded in social dimensions whereas the same group could be better off in social and political dimensions (Dahal, 2009:132).

In Nepal, Muslims are one of the highly marginalized and excluded groups. Historically, they have been excluded from social, economic, political and other decision making levels of the state. A various factors have been contributed to place the Muslims as a disadvantageous group. The nature of centralized

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state governance structures and other discriminatory practices in the country have contributed to the exclusion of these communities in the past. During the Rana regime (1848-1951), only family members and loyal supporters were entitled to socio-economic opportunities; their power was further strengthened by social exclusion in Nepal. During this feudal regime, any dissent, in the form of alternative 'institutions' or ideologies, was brutally suppressed, and the privileges of the dominant group were further reinforced by the state.

After major political changes in 1951 there has been a centralization of power largely within three caste/ethnic groups (hill Brahmins, Chhetris and Newars) who constitute only 35 percent of population in Nepal. The Muslims, Madhesis, indigenous peoples and other socio-religious minority groups have largely been excluded from the decision and policy making levels in the government, and therefore, they have been deprived of the opportunity to articulate their needs and priorities through forming government policy in their favor. Thus, due to their exclusion from decision making and policy making frameworks, they have remained poor, illiterate and exploited in Nepal. The adverse effects of unequal opportunities and a political power, on development, are all the more damaging because the educational, economic, social and political disadvantages are reinforced time and again across generations.

Nepal has been remained a Hindu state for the last decades and has been ruled by the, so-called high caste, Brahmins. The Caste system was a state protected ideology in Nepal which played a key role in shaping the character of the national society, where hill castes, through their cultural legacy, continue to dominate the political power structure of modern Nepali state.

Nepal is largely a Hindu dominated society. The Muslims are a minority group, constitute 4.3 percent, out of the total population of the country (CBS, 2003). In the past, the state has imposed one religion, one language and a one culture policy in Nepal. Nepali has long been the only national and official language and mode of education in Nepal. Of course, Urdu is the mode of education in Madrasas throughout Nepal and Urdu is a lingua franca majority of Muslims residing in different linguistic zones. Linguistically, the Muslims are a minority group and it has its own disadvantage in facing an adverse situation in education, employment and administration.

Similarly, the social, economic and political power of Nepal has long been dominated by Pahadi (people of hill origin) over Muslims and Madhesis (people of plains origin). Madhesh or Terai is homeland to more than 95 percent Nepali Muslims. Muslims constitute the largest population group of five Terai districts: Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, Kapilbastu and Banke; however, none of these districts have a high Human Development Index (HDI). In Banke, Muslims constitute the largest group (21%) within the total population of the district, which falls into 46th positions in the HDI rankings for the 75 districts in the country (NESAC 1998: 264-265).

The Muslims have been facing double disadvantages, as a minority religious and linguistic group as well as inhabitants of disadvantaged area. The marginalization of Muslims is clearly evident by the lower values for Muslims in all the indicators of HDI (life expectancy, income, literacy, etc.), as well as some indicators of economic development and their representation in national legislature. The national average HDI value is 0.509, compared to an average of 0.401 for Muslims. Additionally, 41 percent of the Muslim population lives below the poverty line, 10 percent more than the national average of 31 percent. Between 1995 and 2003, the reduction in the number of Muslims living below poverty line was only 2 percent, compared to 11 percent reduction in poverty at the national level overall. Moreover, the number of Muslim representatives in the national legislature has always been lower than the size of the Muslim population.

## RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

Banke district of Nepal, which has a high percentage of Muslim population, was purposively selected for this in-depth field study. Furthermore, the study areas in the respective districts were selected based on high concentration of Muslim population. Thus, Jaispur, Puraini Village Development Committees (VDCs), and Nepalgunj Municipality from Banke district were selected.

For the household survey, out of the sampled VDCs, 30 percent or 350 households were selected by applying simple random sampling method. The key informants and focus group participants were selected by applying the snowball-sampling method.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied in this study. The quantitative information on socio-economic and political condition of Muslims was collected through household surveys with the help of a structured questionnaire. The qualitative information was collected through focus group discussions, key informant interview, case studies to supplement the individual household, and community level data. The field methods were designed to obtain information from the perspective of excluded households and groups.

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS OF MUSLIMS IN NEPAL**

Socio-economic condition is an important indicator to measure the development level of any community and nation as well. Socio-economic status attainment refers to the achievement of persons' relative position of education, occupation and income within that particular social system.

In the society, social institutions are functionally interrelated and interdependent. They have correlation between each other. Ownership of physical assets (especially land) and human capital (especially education) not only affects employment opportunities but also determines occupational patterns. Relatively poor access to these assets may force workers to remain at the lower end of the labor market hierarchy. Employment, education and investments in physical assets interact dynamically. It has been argued that the positive impact of education crucially depends upon the existence of market (employment) opportunities. Without economic returns to education provided in the form of a higher probability of getting employment or earning higher income, investment in human capital formation will not occur. Similarly, while ownership of physical capital creates opportunities for employment, growth in employment generates resources for new capital formation.

**POPULATION COMPOSITION**

The total family member of surveyed households of Muslims by age and sex is given in table 1.1. The table shows that the average household size is 5.4 person in the study area, which is higher than the national average of 4.7 person (CBS, 2011).

**Table 1.1 Population compositions of family members by age and sex**

Age group	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total	Percent
0-4	77	8.1	85	9.3	162	8.7
5-9	155	16.4	140	15.3	295	15.8
10-14	152	16.0	135	14.7	287	15.3
15- 20	182	19.2	206	22.5	388	20.8
21-40	191	20.1	186	20.3	377	20.2
41-60	147	15.5	126	13.8	273	14.6
60+	44	4.7	39	4.3	83	4.6
Total	948	100.0	917	100.0	1865	100.0

Source Field survey 2011

In the study area, it was found that male population is higher than female population. Around forty-five percent of surveyed Muslim households had dependent population because of having children below 14 years (40 percent) and older population 60 years and above (4.6 percent). Economically active population was 55.6 percent, which is higher than national average of 52 percent.

**ECONOMIC CONDITION**

Economic status of a group is generally measured by their possession of material wealth and possession of regular jobs. Their houses, household assets, land and production is a kind of gauge to generally assess the material wealth of the people concerned. Absence of Job opportunities and lack of means of productive engagement of people comprising active working age population has been a common feature of Nepali national life. Hence, majority of these people live at a subsistence level or even below. Income poverty therefore remains one of the crucial indicators of pauperization of the people. Besides the traditional occupation, the economic activities of the people in Banke are strictly limited. Very few Muslims are engaged in government services. Some Muslims are found working in non- government organizations (NGOs) and international non-government organizations (INGOs). Normally, Muslims are excluded from government services because of their low education. Though there are not any visible or constitutional restrains on/for Muslims to enter into government jobs but Muslims for various reasons, including their low education and very low preference for female education miss the opportunities to benefit from government services. Moreover, out of ignorance and dogmatic thinking some jobs have become taboos for Muslims. Similarly, very few were engaged in big trade and business activities.

The economic condition of Muslims of Banke district is assessed on the basis of their productive activities and engagement in various occupations. The section below discusses the landholding pattern, ownership of house, occupation, source of income and expenditure to reflect the level of economic status among Muslims. The intention here is not only to show the existing economic conditions of Muslims but also to reflect the degree of economic marginality and deprivation of education and occupation.

LAND HOLDING

Land is the one of the main means of production, sources of income and mode of livelihood to people plays very important role in Nepali society as a whole. In Nepal, almost 80 percent peoples are depending on agriculture for their livelihood.

The Muslim is one of the highly marginalized groups in Nepal. Majority of the Muslims are landless and economically they are one of the poorest groups except dalits. At the national level, 41 percent Muslims population living below poverty line as compared to national average of 31 percent. Economically backward position of Nepali Muslims is clearly reflected in the findings of the study. Among the Muslims, out of the total almost 69 percent have no agricultural land at all and 12 percent owned less than 1 Bigha land, which is not sufficient for their livelihood. Only 4 percent families have more than 10 Bigha land in the study area, suggesting that very few Muslims are relatively comfortable in terms of land holding (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Land holding situation by respondents

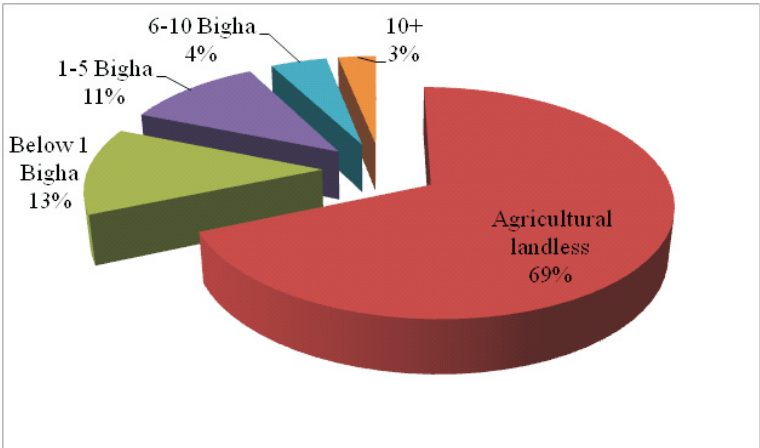


Table 1.2 shows that almost all the surveyed Muslims have their own house but majority if Muslims do not have agricultural land. However, Muslims live in Terai region, which is one of the major paddy production areas of Nepal, but Muslims have no sufficient agricultural land for farming. Due to this, they are involved in wage labor, small trade and as carpenter, mason, butcher, sweeper, barber and mechanics for their livelihood.

Table 1.2 Average house holding of Muslims

	Average holding	No of families	Percent
Houses	Yes	345	98.6
	No	5	1.2
	Total	350	100
Types of houses	Cemented	55	15.7
	Wooden	33	9.4
	Tin	45	12.9
	Mud and Hay	217	62.0
	Total	350	100
No of stories	One storied	299	85.4
	Two Storied	36	10.3
	Three Storied	15	4.3
	Total	350	100
House ownership	Self	335	95.7
	Other family members	10	2.9
	Rented	5	1.4
	Total	350	100

Source Field survey 2011

OWNERSHIP OF HOUSE

Almost all Muslims own a house. Out of the 350 households 345 (98.6 percent) have their own house. Only 1.2 percent, those who lives in the Nepalgunj municipality and working as butcher had no own house as personal belonging. They were living in rented house. A majority of the Muslims lives in thatched huts/mud houses with some having tiled or zinc roofs.

Further, the respondents were asked about the building materials used in the walls of their house. A majority of the Muslims had built walls by using stone and timber with mud plaster. In other words, it was the mud wall erected in housing construction. During the field survey, researcher observed that majority of the village houses constructed by mud and hay with thatched straw roofs. It was also found that the majority of the village houses were one storied but there were some 2 to 3 storied houses in the city area and Jaispur VDC of Banke district.

Occupation

Occupation determines the overall social well being of individual and family in the society. Generally, father occupation determines their child education and later their occupation as well.

Wage labor is the main occupation of Muslims in the study area. Majority of the Muslims are landless. Because of this, they are compelled to go for wage labor and other occupations. Muslims are generally engage in construction works and agriculture in Nepalgunj municipality of Banke district. They work as masons, carpenters, plumbers and laborers. They earn around Rs. 200 to 400 per day.

Table 1.3 Distribution of respondents by occupation (15 years of age and above)

Occupation	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total	Percent
Student	3	0.9	0	-	3	0.9
Agriculture	26	7.4	5	1.4	31	8.9
Trade/business	71	20.3	-	-	71	20.3
Wage labor	108	30.9	-	-	108	30.9
Rickshaw pullers /Tanga drivers	65	18.6	-	-	65	18.6
Gov. school teacher	5	1.4	-	-	5	1.4
Butcher	35	10.0	-	-	35	10.0
Household chores	-	-	27	7.7	27	7.7
Non occupation	5	1.4	-	-	5	1.4
Total	318	90.9	32	9.1	350	100

Source Field survey 2011

Banke district is adjacent district of Baharaich, India. The distance from the Nepalgunj municipality to Rupediya market of India is only 7 kilometers. Rupediya is one of the main shopping markets for the Nepalese. Majority of the people from the Nepalgunj visit this market. Muslims are also involved in boarder business. They import rice, onion, potato, sugar, cloth and cooking utensils from Rupediya and sell it in Nepalgunj municipality. Majority of the Muslim boys are engaged in this business. They earn around 200 to 300 rupees in a day.

A sizable number of Muslim have taken up small business like as teashops, mobile repairing centers, fruits shops, meat shops and cloth shops in Nepalgunj municipality.

Majority of the Kingariyan Muslims are rickshaw pullers and Tanga drivers. They earn around 200 to 500 rupees per day from this occupation. Rickshaw is the main means of income but they are unable purchase Rickshaw on their own due to poverty and lack of loan facilities for them. Because of low education, very few Muslims are engaged in government job as a school teacher.

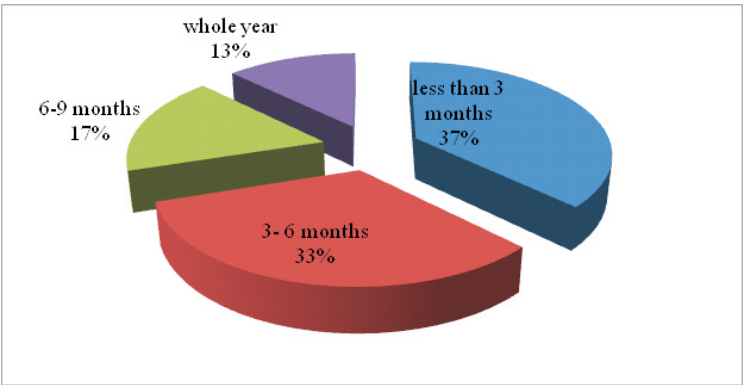
CROPS PRODUCTION AND FOOD SUFFICIENCY

In the study area, out of 350 households only 110 households have agricultural land. They produced paddy, maize, wheat, pulse, buckwheat, potato, oil seeds and sugarcane. The Muslims are generally live in Terai (plain) area; temperature is suitable for paddy production. Therefore, paddy is the main crop production in the study area followed by wheat, maize and millet. Majority of the Muslims produce crops only for their own consumption.

In real sense, the majority of the Muslims are small farmers having less than 3 Bigha of land per family. Very few Muslims household have more than 10 Bigha land, therefore; majority of Muslims families are facing the problem of inadequacy of food from their production.

During the fieldwork, a majority of the respondents said that they generally suffer from starvation and they could not produce enough to cover their annual needs. Out of the total, 37.3 percent respondents said that their production covers the households for 3 months only. 17.3 percent respondents could sustain their households for 6- 9 months a year. On the other hand, only 12.7 percent respondents said that their food production is enough for a whole year. Thus, the majority of the Muslims have no other way out than either to buy or find other means to sustain them, which included heavy borrowings for the purpose. According to filed survey, an average food sufficiency month among Muslims is around 6 months. Borrowing, obtaining help from relatives, buying food from non-farm income are the main livelihood strategies to make up with food deficit.

Figure 1.2 Food production sufficiency



Note: A total of 240 Households have no agricultural land and they are not included in this figure.

EDUCATION

Education is fundamental of human capital and one of the important social indicators of Socio-economic status of a person and development of people, community and the nation as a whole. Education plays a significant role in the dissemination of modern attitudes, values, approach and rational outlook. Access to educational institutions with the level of education has direct relationship with the process of inclusion/exclusion. Educational level of a society or a community cannot be judged from its literacy rate, though it is an important indicator for making a distinction between literate and non-literate. A literate person is not defining on the basis of his/her educational attainment but only on the basis of knowledge of reading or writing any of the language.

Thus, it is important to analyze educational attainment of population. Educational attainment refers to acquiring education in a systematic way through formal and informal education. There are various levels of education in Nepal like primary, lower secondary, secondary, higher secondary and graduate and masters degree.

By modern standards, the surveyed respondents were characterized by high illiteracy. Of the total respondents, 61.1 percent was illiterate and only 39.9 percent was literate, which is 16 percent lower than national literacy rate of 54.3 percent. In the study area, higher-level degree holder is negligible (Table 1.5). According to Demographic and Health Survey data (2001) attendance of Muslim children in primary and secondary level is only 32.1 and 7.9, which is the lowest in percentage in comparison to other caste and ethnic groups.

Table 1.4 Literacy rate and level of education of respondents by sex

		Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total	Percent
Literacy status	Illiterate	185	58.2	29	90.6	214	61.1
	Literate	133	41.8	3	9.4	136	38.9
	Total	318	100	32	100	350	100
Level/standard of education	Primary	55	42.3	2	66.7	58	16.6
	Secondary	51	39.3	1	33.3	51	14.6
	SLC	2	1.5	-	-	2	0.6
	Higher	22	16.9	-	-	22	6.2
	Total	130	100	3	100	133	100

Source Field survey 2011

From the gender perspective, among the Muslims there was wide gender gap in literacy and level of education. Overall, 90.6 percent female respondents were illiterate. There were no higher-level educated Muslims women in the study area. This data clearly show that female literacy rate is lower in comparison to



male among Muslims. According to participants of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key informant interviews, they pointed out that the main reason behind low literacy and low educational attainment in higher education among Muslims is poverty, early marriage and lack of religious education in government schools and lack of proper access to education.

They further added that because of prevalence of patriarchy, customary law of the Muslims, purdah system, early marriage, lack of awareness of parents, lack of girls' school in the Muslim community are the main reasons of low literacy rate of Muslim women.

EDUCATION STATUS OF FAMILY MEMBERS

Education is one of the important social indicators of Socio-economic status of a person and development of people, community and the nation as a whole. Access to educational institutions with the level of education has direct relationship with the process of inclusion/exclusion. One of the important indicators reflecting on the social situation of Muslims is literacy and their educational attainment. According to the 2001 census, nearly 46 percent of the total population of 6 years old and above was illiterate in Nepal. The census further indicates that there was a wide gap in literacy rate by sex, district, geographical region, rural/urban and caste ethnic groups (Dahal, 2009:141)

Table 1.5 Education statuses of family members' age 5 years and above

Education Attainment	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total	Percent
Illiterate	316	32.2	339	46.9	655	38.5
Literate	155	15.8	132	18.3	287	16.9
Primary	229	23.4	140	19.4	369	21.7
Secondary	165	16.8	67	9.2	232	13.6
SLC	44	4.5	22	3.0	66	3.9
Intermediate	42	4.3	16	2.2	58	3.4
Graduates and above	29	3.0	7	1.0	36	2.1
Total	980	100	723	100	1703	100

Source Field survey 2011

The table 1.5 indicates that among the Muslims the literacy rate and higher-level education attainment is very low. The total literacy of Muslims is 62 percent, which is higher than national literacy rate of 54 percent (CBS, 2001). This figure shows that the literacy rate of Muslim has improved significantly over the last 10 years. However, the government school attendance of Muslim children is still low in the study area but Madrasa play a vital role to educate Muslims in Nepal, which is one of the main reasons of improvement in Muslim literacy rate.

From the gender perspective, Muslim female children were in disadvantaged situation compared with their male counterparts. Against some 32.2 percent, boys remaining illiterate there were 46.9 percent of girls above the age of 5 remaining illiterate. Only 19.4 percent girls had completed primary level education in comparison to 23.4 percent of boys. In secondary and above School Leaving Certificate (SLC) level percentage was very low. This data clearly shows that female literacy rate is lower in comparison to male among Muslims. In terms of higher education, the number of female is virtually insignificant. According to participants of FGDs and Key informant interviews, the main reason behind low literacy and low educational attainment in higher education is poverty. They reported that large section of the economically poor Muslim families sends their children to Madrasa only.

Besides poverty, early marriage, lack of religious education in government schools and lack of necessary facilities for females are also the responsible factors for non/low participation of Muslims in mainstream schools. Generally, they have a tradition of marriage between ages of 14 to 20 years.

Low literacy rate of Muslim women and higher-level drop out of Muslim girls are clear indications of the dogmatic, gender-biased attitudes of patriarchal Muslim society. However, patriarchy is prevalent among different social and religious groups of Nepal, but customary law of the Muslim society exploits Muslim women. Polygamy, purdah and so-called religious prohibition against family planning are typical problems that Muslim women, is not the women of other religious groups confront. Unlike Hindu women, Muslim women are far behind in education, social mobility and status in society. There are many



social taboos in the Muslim society. Prohibition for family planning further contributes negatively to the poverty and health of Muslim women. Prohibition for social mobility to Muslim women leads their self-confinement.

While as in the rich and socially higher classes among Muslims, women have less social mobility and have to observe purdah and other restrictions, the women of poorer classes cannot afford for remain restricted in this way. They have to work outside their homes for the sustenance. Their families are work, is most cases alongside their male counterparts.

Because of purdah and burqa system, Muslim women's representation and participation in public domain was negligible in comparison to Hindu women.

SITUATION OF EDUCATION OF SCHOOL GOING AGE CHILDREN

Educational status of Muslims is directly proportional to their access to educational institutions in the past as well as in the present. The analysis of the past situation is a main basis of evaluating the impact of opportunities provided in past such as government policies and programs. For this purpose, the situation of school age children in relation to their access to educational institutions was also studied. It was hoped that it would present the present situation of Muslims in relation to education and its probable consequences in the near future. For this purpose, the educational status of Muslim children belonging to school age was studied in the study area. Along with their educational status, the trend of their flow of children to mainstream schools, private schools and Madrasas was also studied. The findings related to educational status of Muslim children belonging to school age level is presented below.

FLOW OF MUSLIM CHILDREN TO DIFFERENT SCHOOLING SYSTEM

The table 1.6 shows that out of total of all the Muslim children of school age (6-14 years), only 79.6 percent are studying in any type of school at the time of this study and the remaining 20.4 percent are not studying in any educational institution. Government schools, private schools and Madrasas are all considered as educational institutions in this study.

Table 1.6 Different educational institutions going children by age and sex

Age group	Government school going			Private school going			Madrasa going			Both going			Not Going		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
5-9	38	26	64	7	3	10	38	18	56	9	11	20	22	19	41
10-14	74	67	141	13	6	19	37	68	105	34	31	65	34	26	60
Total	112	93	205	20	9	29	75	86	161	43	42	85	56	45	101
Percent	54.6	45.4	41.3	69	31	5.9	46.6	53.4	32.5	50.6	49.4	17.1	55.5	44.5	20.4

Source Field survey 2011

(Note: M= male, F=female, T= total)

A gender wise analysis shows that 63.44 percent of boys and 54.10 percent of girls are studying in different educational institutions whereas 11.3 percent of boys and 9 percent of girls are still out of school. The above table indicates the real picture of the flow of Muslim children in educational institutions. Out of the total, a majority of the children, 41.3 percent are studying in the government schools. A large number of children, 32.5 percent are studying in Madrasa, only 17.1 percent are studying in both types of schools and only 5.9 percent are studying in the private schools.

During the field survey, the respondents said that economically poor families sent their children to Madrasa only and majority of the middle class families sent their children to government school and Madrasa both. Muslims sent their children to Madrasas/Maktabas during the early morning hours for religious education and then during the day avail of the mainstream education.

An economically well-off and educated family of the study area sent their children to private schools. They teach religious education to their children in their home by hiring Maulvis in the morning and evening time. However, after the registration of Madrasa in DEO and introduction of mainstream subjects like English, math and science in Madrasas, majority of the Muslims have been sending their children only



to Madrasas.

From the gender perspective, the flow of Muslim children showed that more boys are out of school than girls were. It also showed that more boys are studying in the mainstream schools than girls (boys 53.6 percent and girls 45.4 percent). But, in comparison to the mainstream schools the Madrasas have more number of female students (54.4 percent) than the male (46.6 percent).

Thus, it can be said that more Muslim boys of 6-15 years age group are not going to schools. They preferred to send their children to Madrasa than the government school. Madrasa education was more preferred for girls than for boys as the Muslims of the area, consider the jobs for females as prohibited by Islam. Therefore, among the Muslim community after completion of primary level education girl's dropout rate is very high.

REASONS FOR NOT GOING TO SCHOOL AND THEIR ENGAGEMENT AREAS

Majority of the Muslims reported that poverty is the main cause for not sending their children to school. Among the Muslims children school dropout rate is higher in the upper class than lower class. Because of lack of mother tongue education and inappropriate school curricula, pass out rate is lower than other caste/ethnic group's children.

Table 1.7 Reasons for not going to school and status of their work

		Male	Female	Total	Percent
Reasons for not going to school	Poverty (unable to meet cost)	19	17	36	35.6
	To support family	15	12	27	26.7
	Failed in the school	6	6	12	11.9
	Lack of skill education	9	5	14	13.9
	No job opportunity	7	5	12	11.9
	Total	56	45	101	100.0
What are they doing	House work	19	41	60	59.4
	Wage labor	12	2	14	13.9
	Working in India	7		7	6.9
	Disability	2	2	4	4.0
	Trans boarder business	16	-	16	15.8
	Total	56	45	101	100.0

Source Field survey 2011

The areas of engagement of not school going Muslim children are also studied. The children are engaged in various areas. There is a gender-bound difference in the engagement of such children. A large number of girls are engaged in domestic works, while a large number of boys are engaged in wage earning and Trans boarding business with India. An equal number of boys and girls did not do any work. Their parents stated that they are not given any responsibility because of their unripe age. The other areas of engagement for boys are butchery, tailoring, carpentry and agriculture. However, the percentage of boys involved in these sectors was very small. Based on above analysis, a majority of out-of-school children are engaged in domestic work, wage earning, etc.

PARTICIPATION IN NGOS AND OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

After the restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1990s, NGOs and INGOs have increasingly influenced the Nepali society. However, Muslims are least affected. Among hundreds of NGOs and INGOs working in the surveyed Banke district, there is only few – like Fatima Foundation, Banke-UNESCO Club, Plan International and Save the Children are concentrating on the cause of Muslims only. Almost all NGOs of Nepal are dependent on donors' money. Besides, NGOs and civil society movement in Nepal is dominated by hill high caste Hindus. Muslims are passive beneficiaries rather than an active agent of their own development who have rights and entitlements (Gautam, 2007, cited in Hachhethu, 2009). Muslim as a group least impacted by NGOs movement is further evidenced by the finding of this survey. In the study area, Muslims involvement in NGOs is negligible as compared to others groups in the

community. Out of the total involved Muslims in NGOs, the majority are male, working as junior staff. One of the major reasons behind their less involvement in NGOs is lack of higher educational degree and another is social and religious obligations especially for female.

Muslims representation in school management committee is satisfactory in the study area. Majority of the surveyed school's management committee, Muslims have strong hold in school management committee and in key positions as well but female representation is insignificant as compared to their male counterparts (Table 1.8).

However, in the heterogeneous community, the Muslims representation is not satisfactory. The key positions are hold by high caste and other ethnic groups because of their education, active involvement in politics and other social activities in the communities.

**Table 1.8 Muslims participation in NGOs and school management committee**

Involvement in NGOs	Position	Male	Female	Total	Percent
	Executive board member	3	-	3	27.3
	Program officer	1	-	1	9.1
	Junior staff	5	2	7	63.6
	Total	9	2	11	100
School management committee	Key position(Chairperson, secretary, treasurer)	8	-	8	28.6
	Member	18	2	20	71.4
	Total	25	2	28	100

**Source** Field survey 2011

In Banke, Fatima Foundation is established by Muslim woman leader and working in the Muslim communities for ensuring their rights and social upliftment in the society. Some Muslim female have been working actively in the field of NGOs and politics as well. Disassociation of overwhelming numbers of the Muslim community with NGOs and community organizations is also an indicator of their non-involvement in other spheres of public domain.

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION**

The discrimination in various social, economic and educational areas coexists with low political participation. Political representation is an important socio-economic indicator to measure the condition of a community within a society. Political participation is another indicator of a community's empowerment.

In the village society, production and consumption are not only the daily activities of people but they are also routinely participating in political, civil society organizations and NGOs activities. Individuals and family members are benefitted in several ways once they involved in these activities and organizations. In other words, the process of group mobilization is helping people to overcome some of the institutional barriers of exclusion at the household and community level (Dahal, 2009:151).

Political representation and association of the Muslims are also low despite the history of their political participation in democracy movement in Nepal as evidenced by 1950-51 anti-Rana revolution. Their lower representation in power structure of the country is a hard reality from the very beginning. In a democracy, the legislature is the fountain head of power. Muslims in Nepal are politically powerless community. Besides being an alienated group, absence of legislature from any social group in a plural society puts the group at a clear disadvantage. The Muslims representation in parliament and state legislature was very low as compared to their population.

Many Muslims contested the first general election of 1959 but none of them succeeded. Two Muslims are however nominated to the Upper House. The politics of cooption of few influential Muslim was the rule exercised during the Panchayat period (1960-1990). Their position did not change much after the restoration of democracy because their representation in legislature. 2 percent in 1959, 1 percent in 1978, 2 percent in 1981, 2 percent in 1990s and 3 percent in the 2008 CA elections – is much lower than the strength of the Muslim population (Hachhethu, 2009).

Despite the relatively low level of education, some Muslim male and very few female had started taking parts in local bodies and national politics since the Panchayat period (1960-1990) and this is more so after the onset of democracy in Nepal in 1990.



In the constituent assembly election in 2008, male and female were elected and selected from the various political parties such as Nepal Communist Party, Marxist (CPN-M), Nepali Congress, Nepal Communist Party, United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), Madhesi Janadhikar Forum and Sadhbhawana Party.

Table 1.9 Political participation and association

	Response	No.	Percent
Do you have voting rights	Yes	344	98.3
	No	6	1.7
	Total	350	100
Do you have any political party membership	Yes	30	8.6
	No	313	89.4
	Do not know	7	2.0
		350	100
Level of political representation	Ward/local	21	75.0
	VDC	5	17.9
	District	2	7.1
	Central	-	-
	Total	28	100
Do you participated in the last political election for voting	Yes	268	76.6
	No	82	23.4
	Total	350	100

Source Field survey 2011

In the study area, except a few old people, almost all have voting rights. Around one third of surveyed Muslims said that they had participated in the last political election for voting. It is encouraging in appearance but not in substance. Majority of the Muslims are found indifference to madhesh movement even in their own district because of their low economic condition. Party membership of individual respondents was also found low. Out of the total respondents; only 8.6 percent have party membership of different political parties. Most of the Muslim parties members are remain confined for the position at ward and district level only. Muslims representation in political decision making level is insignificant in number. But, the number of those who participated regularly and frequently is negligible.

Political participation and representation has made the people active, mobile and aware of the situation surrounding them. It has also exposed them to both local and national level reality through interactions and debates with different people at different levels. Their association with people from different places had instilled a sense of belonging and binding to the society encouraging them to engage more vigorously in participatory activities.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Examined from literacy, occupation, land holding and food sufficiency as indicators of material and human resource dimension, Muslims demonstrate poor situation. In the Muslim communities, illiteracy is high, skills are limited and wage labor and small business are the main occupation and source of income.

Economically, Muslims are considered one of the poorest groups in Nepal. Poverty is one of the major aspects of deprivation and exclusion which is systematically embedded with day to day life of people at the household and community level. Majority of Muslims are landless, around 70 percent have no agricultural land and their food production is not sufficient for their survival in the study area.

Educationally, the Muslims are disadvantaged groups. Women have higher illiteracy rate and lesser access to higher education. Discrimination between boys and girls is observed in attending different type of schools among Muslims. The majority of the Muslim children are attending Madrasa than the government schools. In schools, girl's dropout rate is higher than the boys due to their religious and cultural obligations. As a whole, attending the private schools/colleges at home or outside by children among Muslims is negligible.

In the Muslim communities, children facing the cumulative impact of poverty, social discrimination and social exclusion are severely restricted from enjoying their basic rights including

education. Poverty has pulled out many Muslim students from school for work and/or compelled them never to enroll. Social exclusion has pushed them out from their classroom because of the culturally built in caste or other types of taboos.

In this context, the education system is unable to address the multiple challenges that children bring to schools. Many Muslim parents and children are not finding the current education, curriculum, school environment relevant for them as per their needs. There is no inclusive education system, no feeding provisions for hungry children, no social exclusionary issue discussion forums in the school, no pedagogical practice to promote the morals of the socially excluded children and no Muslim cultural friendly environment in school.

There is no provision in the local government to support these runaway/pushed away children. In this situation, children themselves are responsible for their own and their family's survival. Poor quality and rigid education in this situation has no meaning. If by any chance these children enter education, they either end up in resource-poor schools or Madrasas which still have not been fully recognized as educational institution in Nepal.

In Nepal, the gender issue has become a dominant patriarchal model of exclusion. In the study area, the Muslim women are far more discriminated and deprived than men in terms of education, ownership of property, employment, participation in civil society organizations and political parties and overall decision making process at the household and community level.

The Muslims representation and participation in politics, government employment and civil society organizations is negligible. From the gender perspective, women participation and representation in politics and government jobs is almost nil, because of their religious and cultural restrictions and their lower educational status as well. Their representation at various levels of government at the community and district level is also very low, which is the clear reflection of exclusion of people in the development processes of the community and nation as well.

Overall, my research findings clearly show that Muslims are one of the highly marginalized, excluded religious minority groups in Nepal. Poverty, discrimination and disadvantaged position at household and community levels are the key elements of exclusion of Muslims in Banke district. The existing social, economic, cultural and political structures are responsible factors for social exclusion of Muslims in Nepal.

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