

Madheshi people and the necessity of federalism in Nepal

Raj Narayan Yadav
Department of Mathematics
Tribhuvan University, MMAM Campus
Biratnagar, Nepal

Swapan Kumar Chakrabarti
Department of Physics
Tribhuvan University, MMAM Campus
Biratnagar, Nepal
E-mail: skc_2007@yahoo.com

Abstract— Nepal is a calm and quiet Himalayan country famous for its flora and fauna, picturesque landscape and incredible heights. It is the land of Lord Buddha, preacher of peace throughout the eastern globe. It is God Shiva's heavenly abode—a habitation for truth, nonviolence and beauty. But for the last three decades the country has been suffering from agitation, revolution, guerrilla fight and what not. Its king, queen, prince and princess are brutally assassinated. Now Nepal is facing severe dissatisfaction of the Madheshis. The nation is, as if, on the verge of another civil war. Here we have pointed out the reasons behind such mass grievance and highlighted what the agitating people ultimately want.

Keywords- Terai; Madhesh; revolution; martyr; provincialism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nepal is a land-locked country—multicaste, multilingual, multicultural and multireligious. Geographically it can be divided into three regions: mountainous, hilly and Terai. In the northern i.e. mountainous region the ethnic inhabitants are Bhote, Sherpa, Rai, Tamang, Dolba, Humli, Lhomi, Thakali etc. People of the caste and creed Gurung, Magar, Limbu, Lepche, Newar, Raute, Surel, Gaine, Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakuri, Sunar, Dhami, Manjhi, Damai, Kami, Sarki etc. live in the hilly region. From east to west the vast plane land of Nepal just adjacent to the provinces of West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand of India is called Terai or Madhesh. From south to north Terai is 30 km. wide on the average. From east to west it is almost 800 km. long. It covers 23% of the total area (147,181 sq. km.) of Nepal [1].

Madhesh can be classified into two parts: (1) Inner Madhesh and (2) Outer Madhesh. Inner Madhesh consists of the plane lands of Sindhuli, Udaypur, Makwanpur and Dang districts of Nepal at the northern side of Chure hill. Outer Madhesh covers the entire districts of Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, Chitwan, Nawalparasi, Rupandehi, Kapilvastu, Banke, Bardia, Kailali and Kanchanpur [2]. The inhabitants of this Madhesh are called *Madheshis*. However, all the people of Madhesh are not Madheshis. Madheshis are the sons of the soil—leaving there for centuries.

According to sociologist Dahal the Madheshis of Terai can

be classified into four categories [3]. First category comprises of the indigenous people e.g. Rajbanshi, Tharu, Dhimal, Gangai, Tajpuria, Jhagad, Danuwar, Koche, Meche etc. According to Hindu caste system, in the second category come Brahmin, Bhumiwar, Rajput, Yadav, Teli, Suri, Kalwar, Rauniyar, Sonar, Haluwai, Mushar, Dushad, Barai, Kamat, Kurmi, Majhi, Dhobi, Mali, Kumhar, Mehtar, Chamar, Dom etc. The third category includes different communities of Indian origin like Bengalee, Marwari, Santhal etc. In the fourth category there are people of different religions other than Hindus e.g. Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Sikh etc.

Madhesh has a very long history. In ancient ages there were kingdoms in Terai like Mithila, Birat, Lumbini etc. In the medieval period there were kingdoms like Makwanpur, Bijaypur, Shalhes, Kochila etc. In the modern era King Prithvi Narayan Shah extended his kingdom of Gorkha by capturing Chaudandi, Makwanpur, Bijaypur, Kathmandu etc. and established in 1773 the unified Nepal [4].

In order to establish a people's republic there happened a revolt in Nepal in the year 1950. In 1979 a referendum was organised. The mutiny of 1989 followed by the revolution of 2006 ultimately transformed the Kingdom of Nepal into the full-fledged Republic of Nepal. At that time so many Madheshis died. It was hoped that the Madheshis would now be able to enjoy their due right. But no steps were taken by the government in this aspect. The present agitation of the Madheshis is the outcome of such ignorance on them. Madheshis are oppressed for the last 243 years since the reign of King Prithvi Narayan Shah. So, the Madheshi intellectuals, journalists, politicians, labourers and even peasants are now agitated to form a separate province for the Madheshis.

II. DIFFERENT PROBLEMS OF MADHESHIS

Madheshis have been suffering from different problems for centuries.

A. Lingual Problem

There are nineteen different languages in vogue in the Terai belt of Nepal. Out of them mostly spoken languages are Maithili, Bengali, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Tharu and Hindi. In his own family and society a Madheshi uses to talk in his mother tongue but as a common language for all the Madheshis Hindi prevails. For the conservation and development of these languages not only the past kings but also the present government has taken no action. In a multilingual country the government should have a positive principle on languages. But by force the introduction of Nepali as the sole language for the country created really a trouble for the Madheshis. In the year 1951 Kulanand Jha and Baldev Das established Terai Congress to make a strong protest against the language policy of Nepal. The outcome is that the government introduced Nepali since 1957 as the sole medium of instruction in the schools of Nepal.

In the Constitution of Nepal, 1990 teaching in mother tongue up to the primary level was recognised. In the local administration also local languages were allowed. But soon it was stopped by the intervention of the courts of justice.

In this way the languages of Madhesh could not at all be developed. Due to this one-sided language policy of the government the Madheshi people could not compete for the government jobs. They could not reach at the higher level in the political sector. The Madheshis are deprived in the social, economic and political sectors because majority of them are incompetent in Nepali language [5].

B. Social Problem

Madheshis have their own reach culture. They have their own dresses, rites, customs, festivals etc. Their sculpture, paintings, arts, songs, dances etc. are famous. But from the era of the kings until now the government has shown no interest for the development of these things.

In Madhesh there are world renowned Janakpurdham and Lumbini, birth places of Sita and Buddha respectively. For the Hindus there are several holy places of historic interest e.g. Jaleswar temple, Jaleswar; Chhinnamasta temple, Rajbiraj; Gahawamai temple, Birganj; Garhimai temple, Bara; Bhatnadevi temple, Hetauda; Churiamai temple, Chure hill; Baraha temple, Barahakshetra etc. For other religions also there are different *stupas*, churches, mosques etc. But all are gradually limping towards ruin because the government does not bother for their renovation and maintenance.

C. Financial Problem

The financial position of the Madheshi people is really critical. Out of total population of Madhesh 68.5% are below the poverty line.

The main source of income in Madhesh is agriculture. More than 60% cultivable land of Nepal is in Madhesh. Madhesh is called the 'food store' of Nepal. The contribution of Madhesh in the GDP of Nepal is 65%. In industrial sector the contribution is 72%. 76% of the revenue income of the

government comes from Madhesh [6]. But Madheshis have no grip on the economic sources of Nepal. According to UNO report there are 24.44% landless unprivileged people in Nepal. In Madhesh 48.98% people belong to this category whereas in the hills this figure is 15.32% only. In Madhesh the problem of educated unemployment is furious. The guardians make their wards educated even by selling their lands. But after being educated there is no job. This is due to the practice of internal colonisation of the government of Nepal.

D. Discrimination Problem

King Prithvi Narayan Shah made this united Nepal 243 years ago. Since then Madheshis are treated as second class citizens. Madheshis got no identity even in their homeland. The people of the hilly areas considered Madheshis as Indians whereas the Indians regarded them as Nepalese. Thus Madheshis became, as if, stateless people. They got no representation in the local administration and in the government. Before 1951 Madheshis were treated not as the citizens of the country but as the subjects of the colony. Just like foreigners they were to procure passport for going to the capital Kathmandu.

After 1951 there was great discrimination on Madheshis during the Panchayat regime also. In the constitution of 1990 too Madheshis were neglected. In protest of the dictatorial panchayati rule Madheshis fought for 30 years. In this course Durganand Jha was hanged to death by the government in the year 1963. Fighter Kameshwar Kushebashar became a martyr in 1972. In 1985 Surya Nath Yadav was killed by the police. Lakshmi Narayan Jha, Dilip Chaudhary, Satya Narayan Pathak, Saket Mishra etc. were concealed by the government.

Just before introduction of the new constitution in 1990 Sonawati Yadav, Bhubneshwari Devi, Janki Devi, Uday Shankar, Ram Bishal Thakur and Ram Narayan Yadav were killed by the police in course of revolution for throwing out the monarchy system.

Darshan Yadav, the first martyr of the people's war, 2006, belonged to Madhesh. Thereafter in the Madhesh agitation 52 were killed and thousands were seriously injured. But the Madheshis are yet to get their due right and appropriate position in the country.

III. FORMATION OF PROVINCES

In this world there are different types of political system. In Nepal geographical reconstruction of the country has been realised by different political parties since 2007 only. The consideration of such reconstruction is found not for the benefit of different castes and creeds, ethnic and indigenous people, unprivileged groups, backward communities and minorities but for capturing the power by the limited upper class people.

In this world some countries are of unitary nature, some federal. Looking into the burning problems in Nepal, as mentioned above, federalism can be considered as the best fit. A province should be characterised by its people. The state government will look into the aspirations of its people. The

central government should confer on the state governments sufficient power so that the later can function independently in this regard.

IV. CONCLUSION

Madheshis are victim of different problems: problem of citizenship, problem of suitable constitutional area for election, problem of shifting and resettlement and so on. After becoming a republic now to unify the people of different castes, creeds, languages, religions etc. federalism is a must for Nepal. By such federalism USA, Canada, South Africa, China, India, Pakistan etc. have been able to bring the people from every nook and corner into the main stream for overall development of the countries. So, the propaganda in Nepal is totally baseless that federalism will lead to shattering of the nation and, ultimately, ruin of the country. The entire Madhesh should be declared as an autonomous province. The constitution of Nepal

is to be amended accordingly. All the Madheshis—from famers to intellectuals—should be united to compel the government to achieve this goal.

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