

# GLOBAL CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND FUTURE PRIORITIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY FOR INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE SOCIETY IN NEPAL AND INDIA

Janardan Paudel\*

## **P**URPOSE

*THE paper presents global scenario of higher education and tries to show the challenges faced or reforms to be made in higher education in Nepal, in the future as well as see both Nepalese and Indian societies in a similar way without discrimination. The purpose of this research paper is to make close links between Nepal and India through higher education by making inclusive and equitable societies with the roles of civil society.*

**Methodology:** *The methodology of this study is document analysis and interview with some professors.*

**Design:** *This is a qualitative study and no numerical data have been used here.*

**Findings:** *The paper highlights the challenges which the higher education system faced and proposes few reforms which are needed for inclusive and equitable societies between Nepal and India.*

**Implications:** *This research paper has got in – depth implications for the people of Nepal and India which shows that these two countries have got similar cultures, societies, religions, and common ways of dealing to each other as well as open access to higher education for the people of both countries in either sides.*

**Value:** *This paper has got great value to make close relation among the group of people living in Nepal and India and avoid discrimination among them.*

**Key Words:** *Challenges of Higher Education, Inclusive and Equitable Society, Civil Society, Social Structure.*

## **Introduction**

Nepal is a country situated in the lap of Himalayas in Asia which lies between the two large countries; India and China. Nepal and India are very close neighbours having same cultural, social, and religious base. There is open border between these two countries. So, system of one affects another. The higher education system in Nepal is also same; of two types; fully funded by government and private sector. Among seven universities in Nepal, only two of them are fully funded by government- Tribhuvan University and Mahendra Sanskrit University. Tribhuvan University is the first university in Nepal and has been the root of higher education in Nepal since 1959. The main exchange of higher education in Nepal is related to Indian systems. But now, all of the universities and their colleges are facing the impact of globalization. There are changes in higher education system at present which have caused

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\* Ph.D. Research Scholar, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

global challenges across countries. Due to global challenges, there are problems in building inclusive and equitable society, which is under the need between Nepal and India. Globalization has made this world as a narrow place and there is mobility of students, teachers, and academic group for different purposes all round the world without restriction for quality education. Due to globalization, there is flow of people, goods, ideas, and knowledge all round the world. There are challenges in higher education system of Nepal and India in terms of demographic change, socio-economic role, equity, access, convergence of higher education, divergence for inclusion, study subjects, quality and relevancy, technology, brain drain, funding, politics, and technology. These are global issues in higher education today which need to be addressed by educational policy makers to build inclusive and equitable society. This paper shows some relations between higher education and society to be equitable and inclusive among the people between India and Nepal. Today, there is a discourse that we are living in an age of globalization. Globalization has sought to bring a new age before us and we have to welcome it because the changes are inevitable. In our Mahabharata episode also there is an announcement saying “Nayayugakakareswagat” or welcome the new age. It has been the fact that India and Nepal have remained in close relation since ancient times. In ancient times, saints also used to go for meditation from each side to a beautiful natural location. Veda Vyas, who is supposed to have written “The great Mahabharata” epic, has gone for meditation in Nepal and in his name there is a cave known as “Vyas Cave” in Nepal. The tradition of going on a pilgrimage of the people of both countries is still going on continuously since ancient times keeping close relationship between two countries, Nepal and India.

Both sides have assisted to improve the life style of each other. Almost 90% trade relation of Nepal is with India. Although there are factories and industries in Nepal, most of them are established with Indian support. Most of the vehicles that we see running in Nepalese roads are from Indian motor companies. For gas, oil products such as diesel and petrol, Nepal completely depends on India. Many Indians go to Nepal for trade and many Nepalese also go to India similarly.

There is close relation between people and government regarding education sector. Nepalese students also go to India for education from lower level to higher education. Indian government through Indian Embassy in Nepal, has managed scholarships also to talented Nepalese students to study in India in many subjects for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. Moreover, the Government of India has helped to make many schools and college buildings in Nepal and provided buses and ambulances as donation. Mentioning education in Nepal, Sharma (2005, p. 28) has mentioned, “The present English syllabus is similar to the one British people had applied in Indian schools”. The English education system in Nepal was like that of Indian model. These days also these two countries are going to make higher education courses similar. In this way in every aspect these two countries, India and Nepal are in close relationship to each other. Development or crisis in one side effects the other side, certainly.

India has helped in the establishment of modern education in Nepal. Regarding this situation Sharma (1986) has stated that when the first college, known as Tribhuvan Chandra College, was established in (1906) in Kathmandu, Nepal, it was affiliated to Calcutta University and all rules and regulations were followed as Calcutta University provided. The textbooks were prescribed as per Calcutta University and the students had to go to Calcutta to take examination. Afterwards in 1924, the affiliation of Tribhuvan Chandra College was transferred to Patna University and the teachers were also from India to teach in this college. In this way there was homogeneity in education system between India and Nepal.

The level of School Leaving Certificate (SLC), which is the basic level of education, was also started with the help of Indian Universities. Sharma (1986) further added that, the School Leaving Certificate Examination Board was also affiliated to Calcutta University for 70 years and the affiliation was transferred to Patna University in 1923. In 1929, when Patna University opened its examination center in Kathmandu, students did not have to go to India for taking examination. The Superintendent

from Patna would come to take examination with question papers and after the exams. were over, he would return back to Patna with answer sheets. He would be kept as Guest of government during the time of exam.

These examples show that India and Nepal have got very close relationship since the past and same will be continuing in the days to come. So, this research paper tries to seek about how homogeneity and uniformity in social structure will be maintained in these countries. There is coming and going of thousands of people from both countries daily as there is open border for the people of both countries. Nepal has been as a good market place for almost all kinds of Indian products. India is also a main place for medicinal treatment of Nepalese people. If people become sick, they come to Indian hospitals (in Siliguri, Calcutta, Patna, Delhi, Madras, Mumbai, Vellore, etc.) for treatment.

### **Objective**

Nepal and India are very close neighbors. These two countries have same bases of religion and education. They have open border system and do not need visa and passport to cross border from both sides. Most of the people of India and Nepal have got same pilgrimage. So civil society should try to make equitable and inclusive society in Nepal and India through higher education. In doing so, the people of both countries will know that they two sides of a coin. Taking these points into consideration, the objective of this research paper is to make close links between civil societies of Nepal and India through higher education to develop inclusive and equitable societies in both countries.

### **Social Structure of Nepal and India**

The social structure of Nepal is based on the caste system “Chaturvarnashram model consisting of four broad social classes or Varna: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra”. The Indian society is also the same because both these countries have got same base of religion. Although in both countries, there are Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian religious followers, the traditional social caste system is still deep rooted in society on the norms of culture. In every society, people of different social strata are staying together. About the term, Caste Subedi (2010) has stated, “The word ‘caste’ is of Portuguese origin and was applied to India by the Portuguese in the middle of fifteenth century” (p. 134). There are caste systems in both hilly region and terai region of Nepal and India. People traditionally were divided into higher caste and lower caste. The division of caste in Nepal and India was previously made according to the group of people who used to drink alcohol and those who did not use to drink alcohol. The Brahmins did not drank alcohol and were thought to be of higher caste and they were taken for granted as priests, who worshipped in the temples and in the houses of other people. To worship in the temple of Pashupatinath, previously expert Brahmins were called from India and same group is still worshipping there.

About caste system Bêteille, 1965 has written as follows:

Caste may be defined “as a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system” (p. 46).

Caste system is a kind of social production existing since ancient times. It can be said that when people started to live in groups, they were engaged in different kinds of work and according to work division the caste system was made.

According to Ghurye (1957, p. 1), “the notion of the caste is fundamentally based on following concepts: (i) Segmental division of society, (ii) Hierarchy, (iii) Restriction on feeding and social intercourse, (iv) Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sections, (v) Restriction on marriage, and social

intercourse. (vi) Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation.” Similarly Leach (1960, p. 2) argues that normally “caste conforms to the following criteria: (vii) A caste endogamous. (viii) There are restrictions on commensality between members of different castes. (ix) There is hierarchical grading of castes, the best recognized position being that of the Brahmin at the top. (x) The various kinds of contexts, especially those concerned with food, sex and ritual, a member of ‘high’ caste is liable to be ‘polluted’ by either direct or indirect contact with a member of a ‘low’ caste. (xi) Castes are very commonly associated with traditional occupations. (xii) A man’s caste is initially determined by the circumstances of his birth, unless he comes to be expelled from his caste for some ritual offence” (as cited in Subedi, 2010, p. 137).

Ghurye (1957) view the caste division as related to both Indian and Nepalese societies. Almost in all communities, there is hierarchy among castes. There are similar types of castes in northeast hilly regions of India like that in Nepal. There are still systems of touchability and untouchability in Nepalese and Indian societies although laws have eliminated these systems. It is difficult to uproot the existing traditions. Previously in the past, it was related to the healthy habits of the people dwelling at different places. The habits of taking foods differentiated caste systems. The people who killed animals and ate meat as well as drank alcohol and got drunk were thought to be of inferior class in society. But today, this distinction is in problems because the Brahmins supposed to be of higher caste eat meat of any animals and drink more alcohol than the ones who used to do in the past. The tradition is that someone born in Brahmin family becomes of higher caste and one born in lower caste will be of lower rank in social caste gradation system.

Regarding caste in India, Ghurye (1957, p. 6) has stated as follows:

“Everywhere in India there is a definite scheme of social precedence amongst the castes, with the Brahmin as the head of the hierarchy. Only in Southern India the artisan castes “have always maintained a struggle for a higher place in the social scale than that allowed to them by Brahmanical authority.” There is no doubt as to the fact that the members of this great caste (Kammalan) dispute the supremacy of the Brahmins, and that they hold themselves to be equal in rank with them. In anyone of the linguistic divisions of India there are as many as two hundred castes which can be grouped in classes whose gradation is largely acknowledged by all. But the order of social’ precedence amongst the individual castes of any class cannot be made definite, because not only is there no ungrudging acceptance of such rank but also the ideas of the people on this point are very nebulous and uncertain. The following observations vividly bring out this state of things. “As the society now stands the place due to each community is not easily distinguishable, nor is any common principle of precedence recognized by the people themselves by which to grade the castes”.

Ghurey (1957) has supported that in India, there is system of caste discrimination in many communities in India whose head in hierarchy of the caste is Brahmin caste. The same system is in Nepal. There are some communities in Nepal and India who are leading a very low level of life style. Although government provides some help, it has not been successful. A nomadic tribe from India visits Nepal and lives by killing and eating birds and wild animals. It has been tried to mention that such type of tribes living in India and Nepal have not even enrolled in schools and colleges. It is a distant matter to build inclusive and equitable society through higher education who has not joined lower level of education.

Guhrye (1957) has further added as follows:

A close study of the names of the various minor units, the so-called sub-castes, within the major groups reveals the fact that the bases of distinction leading to the exclusive marking off of these groups were: first, territorial or jurisdictional separateness; second, mixed origin; third, occupational distinction; fourth, some peculiarity in the technique of one and the same occupation; fifth, sectarian difference; sixth, dissimilarity of customs; and last, adventitious circumstances, suggesting certain nicknames.

In the social hierarchy of caste system, there are different factors affecting it. The marriage system across different higher and lower caste has been restricted. If a girl of higher caste gets married to a boy of lower caste, her sons and daughters are also taken as of lower caste. The caste systems are the products of exclusion in social and cultural systems. People have different races, surnames and cultures. Regarding different races in Nepal, Central Bureau of Statistics (2012, p .11) has mentioned “125 different races and 123 mother languages in Nepal.” All of them are not developed and civilized equally. The life style among these communities is also different.

### **Access to Higher Education**

There are many castes and races that have not joined schools and colleges. Although population census shows increased literacy rates, it has not been applied in real life situation. There will be difference between the groups of people who know only to read and write and those who have taken formal higher education degrees. If the percentage of higher education degree holders is taken, the percentage will be low.

Regarding educational attainment of Nepalese people, Central Bureau of Statistics (2012) has stated that the number of people who have passed primary level is 39%; those who have passed classes six to eight is 20.3%; those who have passed SLC is 10.2% and those who have passed above SLC level is also 10.2%; and those who have completed non- formal education is 4.2%. Of the total population, 65.9% is found to be literate in which the male literate percentage is 75.1% and the female literate percentage is 57.4%.

Ministry of Home Affairs, (2011), has shown the “literacy rate of India as 74.04% aged 7 and above. The literacy rate for males and females works out to 82.14 per cent and 65.46 per cent respectively.” The census has also mentioned “the highest literacy rate in two states; Kerala 93.91% and Lakshadweep 92.28%; the lowest literacy rate in two states -Bihar 63.82% and Arunachal Pradesh 66.95%”.

It has been found that more people in urban area are literate than that in rural area. In many remote areas, less number of people is educated because of the lack of access and equity. Regarding access and equity, Agarwal (2009) has pointed that, “issues of access and equity are central to the higher education debate in countries around the world. The expansion of higher education and growing private share had obvious impact upon access and equity” (p. 39). The terms of access and equity have been complex in higher education sector which is going to be covered by costly privatization. Due to neoliberal economy, education has been pushed in the business sector. In this sector, India has made more progress than Nepal. It has been found that students in remote areas have been provided extra assistance to go to schools and colleges, in India. The students in India have got more facilities than Nepalese students in Nepal. So, here comes the point of equitable and inclusive society through higher education between India and Nepal. Due to state facilities, students of higher education in India are better and more satisfied than in Nepal. So, the aim of this paper is to make higher education in Nepal like that in India to bring homogeneity between these two close neighbours.

### **Challenges of Higher Education**

There are different kinds of problems and challenges in higher education due to globally competitive industry and work environment (Sharma, 2012). Although numbers of higher education institutions have increased, access and equity are still a challenge. In many countries the reports of universities mention that the funding for higher education from government is decreasing but the cost is increasing. The university graduates need global knowledge to compete with the global markets but government subsidies are less for them. Higher education should be regarded with new vision today in the era of globalization. Regarding visions for higher education, Khaniya (2007, p. 101) has stated, “it should be appreciated that the very notion of higher education has changed from knowledge producing mechanism to human resource development procedure.” These days’ higher education is not only for getting

knowledge but also for knowledge economy. Higher education needs to be marketized for global competition. The decreasing fund in higher education has created more challenges in higher education sector. Regarding funding in higher education, University Grants Commission (2013, p. 12) has stated “total education budget is 9.6% of the total budget and the budget allocated for higher education is 1.6% of the total national budget.” This situation has not been improved in reality. This type of low funding in higher education does not make investment for teaching technology such as: computer, projector, multimedia, power point, etc., which have been most important in the present scenario of higher education. Jackel (2011) argued for adopting customer-oriented attitude in higher education. It was also stated that Quality assurance is responsible for identifying and correcting any quality defects in a specific service.

Regarding financing, Agarwal (2009, p. 115) has stated as follows:

In framing policies for funding and regulation of higher education, it is realized that increased funding would not automatically result in better higher education. Thus, while the government support decreases noticeably, performance and accountability expectations have increased. The mechanisms for public funding contain important incentives to achieve higher education’s three main goals, i.e., quality, efficiency, and equity. The public institutions are striving to maintain and enhance competitiveness.

In this way, there are challenges in higher education in terms of funding, quality, efficiency, equity, relevance, and equivalence. In international scenario, India has improved these situations and Tribhuvan University and Kathmandu University are also improving their situations but can’t be said same for other universities in Nepal. Indian universities have attracted many foreign students in their institutions but the number of foreign students in Nepal is very less. To attract foreign students in higher education institutions, the delivery and pedagogy system should be of such a high level that the graduates of those institutions should be able to compete with the global job markets. Many bright students and academic faculties are migrating to foreign countries and they do not return back due to scarcity of facilities for earning better and lead a good life style. If higher education is not of good quality, there will be no possible of employment to the graduates.

### **Equitable and Inclusive Society**

This is an imagination whether equitable and inclusive society can be formed within a country and between two countries through higher education. Equitable shows the situation of being fair and impartial. Inclusive shows the situation of including all the services or items normally expected or required. In this way, these two terms show really good governance in a country and it will be possible if people’s views and behaviors come to be at homogeneity. If there is harmony between the group of people and government sector, partiality will be discarded. Creating an equitable and inclusive society is about creating a more just society. If people in all societies are well educated, they can think of global village, global society, and global citizen, which create equitable and inclusive societies across countries.

Mentioning equitable society, Gomes (2008, p. 1) has stated as follows:

Post-secondary education is a key tool that marginalized people can use to improve their economic and social conditions. Creating an institution that provides equal access to students from these communities, and actively supports their success through to graduation, would be an important contribution to creating an equitable society.

Higher education makes mobility of people as Rao (2006, p. 205) has written “higher education is seen as a passport to social mobility in the modern industrial societies. It enhances the prospects of an individual to attain social prestige and honour in a society that places emphasis on individualistic achievements.” If people are highly educated, they have access of required things in impartial way. In

such situation mind set will be globalized and the world can be seen as a single village or society in common sense.

About inclusive societies, UNESCO (2012, p. 3) has written as follows:

Education, or the transmission, acquisition, creation and adaptation of information, knowledge, skills and values, is a key lever of sustainable development. This is based on a vision of inclusive societies in which all citizens have equitable opportunities to access effective and relevant learning throughout life delivered through multiple formal, non-formal and informal settings. As such, education is essential to individuals' development as it is to the development of their families, of the local and national communities to which they belong, and to the world at large.

Education has got different dimensions including transmission of knowledge, establishment of norms and values in people for sustainable development, which eventually pushes to form inclusive societies. In such situation, people have cultivated the feelings of equality so that conflict and discrimination will be eliminated. In this way higher education will be helpful to form equitable and inclusive societies within a country as well as between countries.

## **Civil Society**

About civil society, Ogawa (2010, p. 7) has introduced as follows:

“The concept of civil society experienced an enormous theoretical rebirth following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in the 1980s. Civil society is understood as a self-regulating, self-governing body outside and often in opposition to the state, represented both as the nexus of societal associations expected to generate civility, social cohesion, and morality and as the site of reciprocal economic relations among individuals engaged in market-exchange activity.”

Civil society can be understood to be a political space where voluntary associations deliberately seek to shape the rules that govern aspects of social life. Civil society organizations target formal rules and they seek to change and impose social constructs or social orders. Civil society can also encompass many sorts of actors, and it is much wider than the formal world of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Civil society exists wherever and whenever voluntary associations of any kind try deliberately to shape rules that govern society. Traditional state-based regulations have proven inadequate to govern trans-world phenomena. Globalization has also promoted the expansion of civil society, encouraging the diversification of trans-boundary connections. Widespread dissatisfaction with party politics and the actions of public officials have also contributed to the growth of civil society. Civil society should be capable enough to change the existing traditional evils and apply the scientific approaches in societies.

United Nations (2008, p. vii) Human Rights has mentioned civil society actors as follows: “Civil society actors are individuals who voluntarily engage in forms of public participation and action around shared interests, purposes or values that are compatible with the goals of the United Nations. Civil society actors concerned with the promotion and protection of universal human rights, for instance:

- Human rights defenders;
- Human rights organizations (NGOs, associations, victim groups);
- Related issue-based organizations; Coalitions and networks (women's rights, children's rights, environmental rights);
- Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations;

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- Community-based groups (indigenous people, minorities);
- Faith-based groups (churches, religious groups);
- Unions (trade unions as well as professional associations such as journalist associations, bar associations, magistrate associations, student unions);
- Social movements (peace movements, student movements, pro-democracy movements);
- Professionals contributing directly to the enjoyment of human rights (humanitarian workers, lawyers, doctors, and medical workers);
- Relatives of victims; and
- Public institutions that carry out activities aimed at promoting human rights (schools, universities, research bodies).”

These civil society actors should be so active that if they control evils of society and expenditure in the production of weapons in each country, they can improve the quality of higher education with increased access and equity which eventually will direct to the inclusive and equitable society. If determined honestly, nothing is impossible. Civil society should follow antiracist education system.

Regarding antiracist education, Niemonen (2008, p. 73) has written as follows:

Antiracist education emerged as dissatisfaction with, and is distinct from, multicultural education, which emphasizes cultural awareness as the means to achieve racial harmony. Antiracist educators characterize multicultural education as a deracialized discourse that understands only superficially the processes that create and perpetuate racism. It determines how people treat each other, which groups have access to the material rewards of society, and how such access is negotiated. In the view of antiracist educators, failure to acknowledge this fact results in distorted self-understandings and discriminatory behaviors. Rooted in an autonomous culture, race has a logic relatively unconstrained by material factors. It is an ideological practice that creates, and then naturalizes, group distinctions based on phenotypic or other variations with the intent to establish relations of superiority and inferiority. Racism is a set of institutionally embedded exclusionary practices that create, and then reproduce, socioeconomic status attainment disparities, including tracking in schools and discrimination in hiring. In practice, some antiracist educators are benign. They propose and have implemented curricular changes, continuing education, and racial awareness training.

As mentioned by Niemonen (2008), the social system of racism has brought total discrimination among people in every country. India and Nepal are also not far from such situation. There are many diverse groups of people which belong to higher castes and lower castes. If caste and racial discriminations are eliminated and resources of the nation are equally distributed to educate and raise the life standard of people equally among different groups of people, it is possible to have inclusive and equitable societies in India and Nepal for which civil society organizations have to take determined responsibilities.

## **Conclusion**

There has to be a need based assessment system which shall look into the actions undertaken by the authorities in order to revamp the higher education system (Kumar, 2013). If good governance is established, equitable and inclusive societies are possible. In such societies, government resources will be distributed equally among the people and no one feels as of higher and lower strata, where egalitarianism is experienced. Regarding such situation, Haralambos & Heald (2003, p. 24) has stated as follows:

Men have long dreamed of an egalitarian society, a society in which all members are equal. In such a society men will no longer be ranked in terms of prestige. No one will experience the satisfaction of

occupying a high social status; no one will suffer the indignity of being relegated to a position which commands little respect. No longer will high status evoke difference and admiration or envy and resentment from those in less worthy position.

If this situation takes place, people will have no differences of being of high status and low status. There will be equality in the riches so that no problem of haves and have not will appear in such types of societies. For this condition, systems should have strong power of determinations without any trace of corruption.

About social inclusion Department of Economic & Social Affairs (2009, p. 3) has defined as follows:

Social inclusion is understood as a process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of their background, so that they can achieve their full potential in life. It is a multi-dimensional process aimed at creating conditions which enable full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision making processes.

Almost all societies have suffered from discriminations and inequalities all over the world but there are possibilities of forming equitable and inclusive societies if corruption is controlled and provided higher education equally to all the members of societies. There are diverse societies in Nepal and India which need proper motivation to come to the egalitarian thinking. There are so called high caste of people whose water taps must not be touched by the so called low caste people. If such event takes place, the so called high caste people beat the people of low caste. If there will be inter-caste love or marriage between boys and girls, they have been the subject of expulsion from village and community and even get torture. Today's higher education has been the subject of making money instead of being related to society and social problems. Many NGOs and INGOs are alleged for making money for themselves. The support provided by others for getting relief from natural disasters has been source to collect fund for political leaders and parties' members. If employees will get equal payment in their work, occupation will not be thought as of high class or low class. Being similarities in people's religion, same types of societies and cultures, borderless geographical locations and thousands of people coming in contact each minute, India and Nepal can make model equitable and inclusive societies by motivating people through common type of higher education in both countries. It means one should support another as in Vedic Age. This paper attempts to see the evils existing in both countries eliminated and carried towards egalitarian societies.

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