

Who are Madhesis?

Nepal is topographically divided into three areas: Mountains (Himalayan range), Hills (covered by Mahabarat and Shivalik ranges) and Madhes or Madhes (the southern plains). Madhes consists of 22 districts. Historically, most parts of Madhes close to the Sivalik ranges was covered with dense tropical forest. They fought with malaria, wild beasts and humid hot climate to clear the forest and cultivate the fertile food bowl. The communities living alongside the rivers, closely linked linguistically, socially and culturally with northern India are brown in color. The inhabitants of Madhes are called Madhesi, who are the original dwellers of Madhes. The residents of hill are called Pahade. Because of easier life, Pahade have migrated not only to urban but also to rural areas of Madhes, whereas Madhesi have migrated to urban centers of hills. Some of the Madhesis living close to the Indian border have property in both the countries whereas some Pahades have property in hills and Madhes of Nepal. Only after Malaria eradication was initiated in the 50s, Pahades began migrating to Madhes and claimed the fertile land. Similarly, many Indians have migrated into Nepal after the Treaty of 1950 with India. In 1954, the total population of Madhes 35%, but after 25 years it rose to 52% and 2001 census shows it to be 57%. The overwhelming growth of the Madhes population rests not only to migration of the Pahade but also to Indian migrants.

Madhes is divided into Maithili, Bhojpuri and Abadhi in eastern, central and western region respectively along with Tharu in the mid- and far-western according to linguistics. Maithili is the second largest language (11%), Bhojpuri is spoken by 8% and Abadhi by 4%. The Tharu in Mid- and Far-western speak three different dialects.

Although majority of the Madhesis are Hindu, the cultural traditions differ between the Hill and Madhes Hindus. Similarly, the Muslims and Tharus have their own socio-cultural and religious traditions. Madhesi people include different castes/ethnic groups: Tharu, Yadav, Muslim, Teli, Chamar, Koyar, Brahman, Bhumihar, Amat, Mali, Tatma, Kanu, Rauniyar, Rajdhobi, Tamoli, Kathaoniya, Hajam, Sonar, Lohar, Tajpuriya, Bantar, Jhangar, Dhanuk, Rajbanshi, Meche, Satar, Dhimal, Mushar, Dom, Dushad, etc.

The Problem: Since History till Date

The problems of Madhes are a fusion of political, socio-cultural and economic complications, for which Madhesi people have waged movements for definition and identity. The problem has been culminating from time to time due to non-confidence, discrimination and exploitation by the State, political parties and

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elites. The core issues relate to recruitments in State security forces, language, culture, citizenship, etc.

King of Mithila Hari Singh Dev, defeated by Mugals in 1324, arrived in Bhadgaon (present Bhaktapur) and formed an army of Mithila. Approximately 240 years ago during unification of the small warring states, Prithvi Narayan Shah defeated the Sen dynasty Kings of Madhes and then won Kathmandu valley. When Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1774 attacked Kathmandu, Jaya Prakash Malla had 12,000 strong Mithila army that was known as Tirhoot army. Prithvi Narayan Shah demolished the Tirhoot army upon conquering it. Then, enrolling Madhesis in army had been stopped and it had been continued in the later regimes. Madhesis have felt not inclusion in the national army as an insult.

In 1816, the colonial British army (then ruling over India) defeated Nepali forces. The then few landlords in Madhes had supported the British during the war. They were then on labeled ‘followers of British and adversary of Nepali’ that also defamed them. The article 7 of the memorandum on Sugauli Treaty between the British and the then King on December 1816 stated that the Nepali government would not take any action against the people living in Madhes, but many Madhes dwellers were ill-treated, tortured and punished on the charges of treason. The consequences of the deception of some of the landlords were poured over the common Madhesis. During the Rana Regime prior to 1950, because of their relationship with the British, the latter was silent to the ill-treatment by the former to Madhesis. The Madhesis had to issue passports to visit Kathmandu from the *Badahakim* (Regional Administrator).

Madhesi people contributed significantly to the democratic movement during 1951, they did not get what they expected from the State – equal participation. In 1954, the National Planning Commission recommended compulsion of Nepali language for both official and teaching in the schools where Hindi was used in Madhes then. In 1956 Dr. K.I. Singh’s government banned teaching of Hindi, which split the population into pro-Hindi and against-Hindi that led to formation of committees ‘to protect Hindi’. After the first elected Prime Minister BP Koirala introduced Hindi in the curriculum in Madhes in 1959, but was revoked after the coup by King Mahendra and imposed ‘*Hamro Bhasa, Hamro Bhash, Pran Bhand Pyaro Chha*’ (our language and costume are dear to us than life). Even during the Multi Party System after the Popular Movement I, the parliamentarians were bound to wear *Daura Surwal and Nepali Topi* (Nepali costume) and *Nepali Topi* (cap) in government offices.

The citizenship issues in Madhes have been complicated due to the Treaty of 1950 with India, because many Indians migrated to Nepal. Most of the Pahades

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migrating to Madhes have brought their citizenship certificates. Because of language, marital, social and cultural linkages of Madhesis with north India, many have dual citizenship. Similarly, criminals operating along border areas and migrating workers either from Nepal to India or from India to Nepal have dual citizenship. The government is arranging for citizenship certificates to all the people born in Nepal after 1990 prior to Constituent Assembly (CA) elections. All the people, including Madhesis, born or living in Nepal since long should get citizenship without discrimination.

Untouchability between the Madhesi 'higher' castes and dalits and within dalits themselves is high in Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari and Rauthat districts. Madhesi dalits include Khatwe (Mandal, Khanka), Kakihaya, Kalar, Kori, Khapi, Chamar, Rabidas, Chidimar, Dom, Dushad, Dhobi, Bantar, Mehtar, Tatma, Pattharkatta, Mushahar, Sarbhanga, Hajara, Gaine, Satar, etc.

Different forms of violence against women exist in Madhesi communities, including of 'witchcraft', dowry, battering, etc. Dalit women face three pronged discriminations: they are women, they are Dalits and they are Dalit women. Pahade women are more open and mobile as compared to Madhesi women, who are confined within households. Early marriage is in vogue. Child marriage is rampant because of dowry, which involves 'buying of groom' through cash and kind.

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