

Towards Dalit Responsive Policies during COVID-19: A Case of Karnali Provincial Government of Nepal

Upendra Bahadur B.K.

Upendra Baahdur B.K. is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy in Mid-West University, Surkhet, Nepal.

Received: 27 Jul 2025; Received in revised form: 21 Aug 2025; Accepted: 27 Aug 2025, Published on: 31 Aug 2025

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Abstract— *The widening civic space reveals the needs of the needy people during the pandemic while making policies. The article intends to explore the civic space of Dalits in the policies and programs of Karnali Provincial Government during the period of COVID-19 by addressing the questions ahead: Why was the civic space for Dalits shrunk during the pandemic? How did Dalits influence local duty-bearers? The primary and secondary sources of information were interpreted. It found that Dalits were deprived of the civic spaces in terms of policies and programs of the provincial government. As the civil society organizations are overwhelmed by the dominance of non-Dalits in the decision-making levels, the Dalits were less participated in the meetings, forums and debates on the reliefs and resources for the local victims. Non-Dalits had accessed to the reliefs and resources due to their nexus to the policy-makers of the provincial government. There was no impartiality in distributing resources to the COVID-victims. Dalits have had a compulsion to live up to the mercy of others. The reigning ideology of caste system remained proactive to discriminate Dalits. It was reflected in the performances of the political, social and religious elites in the society. The civic space is shrunk even in democracy due to the unchanged power relationships on the basis of caste, class, gender and regional imbalances. It is suggested that the civil society organizations must work to the cause of tolerance and equal footing fostering the values of pluralism. Uncivil society hampers to the spirit of democracy.*

Keywords— *Civic space, Dalit responsive policies, Karnali Provincial Government, tolerance, uncivil society.*

I. INTRODUCTION

More than 2,500 years ago, caste-based discrimination, including untouchability, began in the Indian subcontinent. Humans were classified into four varnas by Hindu holy texts, particularly the Manusmriti: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra. Their assigned traditional occupations were, in that order, intellectual, warrior, economic, and manual labor. Many castes and sub-castes were created from each varna. The foundations of varnas, castes, and sub-castes are hierarchy, ascription, and the purity or contamination of food, water, and the human body. In the hierarchy, Sudra is at the bottom and Brahmans are at the top. Each varna is further subdivided hierarchically into castes and sub-castes. Numerous hypotheses for the formation of castes and varnas have been offered by academics. Sacred religious texts like the Rig Vedic Purush Sukta established a caste system and a division of labor based on caste, which the Manusmriti later strengthened.

Prominent Dalit scholar Yam Bahadur Kisan has identified six causes for the rise of Sudras: The Muluki Ain (the National or Civil Code) of 1854 was enacted by Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana and covered (i) non-Aryan slaves and those defeated in combat, and (ii) Aryan non-untouchability. The structure it adopted, formalized, and strengthened was based on caste. Additionally, it imposed varying penalties for the same crimes—the highest for Dalits and the lowest for Brahmans (*Dalits Of Nepal And The New Constitution*, n.d.). The untouchability was declared illegal first in 1963 in Nepal. The subsequent constitutions in Nepal have outlawed untouchability and caste discrimination. However, the large population of Dalits has been suffering from caste-based discriminations and atrocities for generations. Speaking frankly, Karnali Province comprises of around 29 percent of Dalit population. The community has fallen to a prey to marginalization and subjugation.

In society, Dalits face untouchability and caste discrimination. Nepal still uses the caste system that dates back centuries. The caste system has harmed Dalits for many centuries. Dalits are those groups that have endured centuries of the worst kinds of marginalization and oppression under the guise of caste, which is the main social stratification mechanism in South Asian Hindu civilization. They are called 'untouchables' by the extremist enforcers of the very strict caste division. "Those communities who, due to the horrors of caste-based discrimination and untouchability, are most backward in social, economic, educational, political, and religious fields, and deprived of human dignity and social justice" is the definition given to Dalits. In Nepali society, Dalits face social and cultural discrimination from twenty-three social sub-caste groupings, of whom five are from the hills and mountains, fifteen are from the plains, and three are from the Kathmandu Valley. They remain isolated in every aspect of society. Kami, Damai, Sarki, Gaine, and Badi are among the hill and mountain Dalits, while the sub-caste groups Chamar, Musahar, Dusadh, Tatma, Khatwe, Dhobi, Batar, Chidimar, Mali, Dom, Halkhor, Patharkatta, Pangadiya, Bhahat, and Newar Dalits from the Kathmandu valley include Poda, Chyame, and Halahulu (Upendra-Bahadur-b-k_aLeFU, n.d.).

In order to preserve variety, foster tolerance, and ensure that human and citizenship rights and liberties are respected, a stable democracy must have a lively and open civic space. As an area of unrestricted and non-coercive association, civil society is essential to the associational existence of a community's members. It offers a forum for discussion among a range of viewpoints and unrestricted information sharing among civil society players. According to FRA (2017), it covers the "place that civil society actors occupy within society; the environment and framework in which civil society operates; and the relationships between civil society actors, the state, the private sector, and the public (The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Youth Spaces, n.d.)." The COVID-19 pandemic is the ideal example of the enormous issues that democracy, cities, and citizen engagement will face in the future. The first difficulty has to do with how democratic regimes show that they can manage the current crisis. Building on the fact that over half of the world's population lives in cities, the second challenge describes how urban policies and efforts address the effects of the present COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable groups. How different forms of citizen participation emerge during times of crisis is the third and last challenge. Local participatory practices in European cities provide evidence that makes it possible to organize information about new developments (Gaventa & Barrett, 2010). An open civic space gives youth the chance to

participate actively in community life and share their experiences. Therefore, the growing interest in youth civic participation is essential, since the social advancement of young people depends on their ability to exercise their fundamental civic space rights, live in inclusive and tolerant surroundings, and have access to quality education. Youth civic spaces are settings that encourage youth civic engagement—pathways, institutions, and resources that give youth the chance to participate in critical conversations, acts, and discussions. Both official and informal venues for young civic engagement are included in this (The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Youth Spaces, n.d.). The space outside of the family, the state, and the market where both individual and group actors conduct voluntary activity to further socially meaningful objectives is known as civil society. The various person and group players that function in the civil society sphere are known as civil society actors. The wide spectrum of organized collective actors that can organize themselves in a number of ways, from more to less formal, are known as civil society organizations (CSOs). The process by which individual and group actors voluntarily work in the civil society arena—as opposed to the domains of the family, the state, and the market—in order to accomplish socially important goals is known as civic engagement (UNDP-ICNL-Legal-Framework-for-Civic-Space-A-Primer-EN, n.d.). Federalism was institutionalized with the adoption of the 2015 Constitution of Nepal, which made the country a Federal Democratic Republic. A federal, provincial, and local three-tiered political structure has been developed in accordance with Article 56 of the Constitution. In 2017, the first three-tier government election was conducted under the federal framework. The first elected legislators' five-year term was devoted to the creation of legislation. In May 2022, Nepal held its second election at the local and national levels. The next duty of the recently elected representatives of the people is to lead the fulfillment of people's aspirations; nevertheless, the previous practice has been undermining Nepal's democratic processes and reducing democratic and civic spaces (Bha & Federa, n.d.). This analysis and the information gathered from secondary sources indicate that Nepal's democratic and civic space has been getting smaller and smaller, and the government has passed legislation to restrict civil society. Similarly, there have been numerous reports of bribery, criminality, corruption, and breaches of human rights. Government and public services are also time-consuming and labor-intensive, which contributes to the widespread corruption. These different instances have made the slogan "peace, tranquility, prosperous Nepal—happy Nepali" unsuccessful. According to the 2022 Global Hunger Index, Nepal is currently ranked 81st out of 121 nations having

enough data to determine scores. Nepal's hunger level is moderate, with a score of 19.1. Based on the Global Hunger Index, this indicates that Nepal has a comparatively greater rate of hunger problems. According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) study, 17.4% of Nepalese people live below the poverty level. Furthermore, our econometric models predict that in 2022, Nepal's GDP would trend at 30.90 USD billion, with GDP per capita expected to be around 920.00 USD. In 2021, Nepal's government debt to GDP ratio was determined to be 36.29 percent of GDP (Bha & Federa, n.d.). It is argued by Buyse (2018) ahead. Alongside human rights abuses and a sharp fall in social, civic, and associational activity, we have been seeing an upsurge in anti-democratic sentiments across the democratic world for a while. More and more, affected democratic societies that are losing legitimacy and stability are being characterized as environments that are going through reverse transitions and/or gaps in governance, empowerment, and opportunity (*The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Youth Spaces*, n.d.).

II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

How development is defined and the underlying political economy in any given setting greatly influence how the impact of dwindling civil society space is evaluated in relation to development outcomes. When analyzing the connection between democracy and development, economic growth rates are frequently used as a proxy for development (Doucouliagos and Ulubaşoğlu 2008). Those who are most at risk of being "left behind," however, are given priority in a more comprehensive and human-centered view of development. The UN (2012) states that "persons living in poverty face daily violations of their civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights, which interact and mutually reinforce one another with devastating effects." This illustrates "the indivisibility, interrelatedness, and interdependence of human rights." The "Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights" support the idea that human dignity is the cornerstone of human rights. According to the Agenda 2030 Declaration, development is about addressing power and resource disparities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are to: eradicate poverty and hunger worldwide; fight inequality both within and between nations; create inclusive, peaceful societies; uphold human rights; advance gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment; and guarantee the long-term preservation of the earth and its natural resources (UN, 2015). Any free and democratic society is built on civic space. Citizens and civil society organizations can plan, participate, and communicate without interference when civic space is open. They can express their rights and

have an impact on the social and political systems in their environment by doing this. Only when a state upholds its obligation to safeguard its people and respects and supports their fundamental rights to peaceful assembly, association, and free expression of thoughts and opinions can this occur (Mohmand & Nazneen, n.d.).

Participation in public affairs, which is a fundamental right, is made easier when civic space is preserved and encouraged. It gives citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) the ability to interact with governments, influence decisions and policies, and monitor government operations. Governments may better match laws, policies, and services with the needs of society by advancing and defending the fundamental civic liberties of protected civic space, such as the rights to privacy, peaceful assembly, association, and expression, and by offering tangible avenues for participation at the local and national levels. For democracy and good government to exist, a healthy civic space must be maintained both online and offline (*Civic Space Highlights-4a_ENG_final*, n.d.).

Civic space has been transformed by the emergence of digital technology and the internet, which have opened up new channels for activity and participation. Citizen participation has become more widespread because to social media platforms, blogs, and online forums, which enable rapid mobilization, information sharing, and organization. Digital tools have boosted grassroots movements and democratized information access, giving more voices a chance to be heard. During the Arab Spring, for instance, social media platforms were essential for enabling coordination and communication among demonstrators in the Middle East and North Africa. More people are realizing how important it is to design varied and inclusive public areas that represent the viewpoints and experiences of every community member. Addressing structural injustices and elevating underrepresented voices are essential components of contemporary civic participation. Projects to improve underrepresented groups' representation and involvement have become more well-known, with an emphasis on removing obstacles to involvement. The goal of initiatives like community-led planning and participatory budgeting is to include historically underrepresented groups in decision-making. By ensuring that public space is accessible and egalitarian, these initiatives hope to increase public-institution trust and cooperation. Authoritarian and repressive governments in many areas oppose the growth of civic space. Significant obstacles to civic engagement arise from limitations on the freedoms of expression, assembly, and the press. Governments in certain nations have criminalized activists, restricted online freedoms, and placed strict restrictions on civil society organizations. For instance, the dangers faced

by individuals calling for democratic reforms have been brought to light by recent crackdowns on protests and dissent in nations like Belarus and Myanmar. These difficulties highlight the necessity of international cooperation and solidarity with those who preserve civic space dialogue between institutions and citizens. The way that civic involvement takes place in cities has been impacted by the rapid urbanization that has changed public places. Civic activities can be aided or hindered by the way urban places are managed and designed. Creating multipurpose public areas that promote civic engagement, community development, and social interaction is becoming a greater priority for cities (*Tai-Civic-Space-Study-V13-Final*, n.d.).

Most people agree that civil society plays a beneficial role in enhancing societal well-being.

Civil society, however, can sometimes have detrimental effects, such as harming democracy and political stability, according to study. The argument that civil society is not always good for democracy is not new, but it has gained more attention recently due to the emergence of opposing voices that challenge democratic values and make their presence known in the civil society sphere. The struggle for the common good and fundamental rights are not accepted in this uncivil society. Diverse viewpoints foster democratic discourse in society, which should be acknowledged, but "uncivil society" subverts democratic ideals through nationalist, illiberal, deeply religious, and discriminatory motivations. Typically, these organizations thrive in nations where regressive governments are undermining the principles and ideals of democracy and constitutional rights. These organizations muddy the waters regarding the true nature of civil society, which serves the interests of these authoritarian governments. To undermine civic space, they employ violent and anti-democratic strategies. The terms "uncivil society" and "conservative civil society" are not always interchangeable. Despite their continued criticism of social liberalism, certain sections may be peaceful and democratic while others may be uncivil. Lastly, some governments create or fund "government non-governmental organizations" (GONGOs) in an attempt to further their political agendas by copying civil society organizations. These groups are harmful because they undermine the public's perception of civil society by enabling authoritarian governments to control domestic affairs while projecting an air of democracy, especially through phony citizen engagement initiatives (Dupuy et al., 2015).

III. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the interpretation of primary and secondary information. The primary sources of information

included the statements of the key informant interviews taken with Dalits. Whereas the secondary sources of information included the interpretation of the cooked information based on the reports, books and journals.

IV. DISCUSSION

Only a strategy that combines good governance and participatory development, based on the general socialist tenets, can bring prosperity to the Karnali province. The establishment of a peaceful, prosperous, and just society will enable us to lay the groundwork for a socialist government that is both legitimate and inclusive. If one wants to guarantee children's holistic development, education and health are essential. For our young people to have plenty of work options in the industrial, tourism, and agricultural sectors, we must provide them with platforms. In order for our elderly individuals to be seen as think tanks with valuable political and economic knowledge, we must make sure they are treated with such respect. To accomplish the aforementioned objectives, policies that are exclusively focused on "Investment on Children, Employment of Youths, and Respect for Senior Citizens" must be developed (*Policy and Programme-Karnali Province-Unofficial Translation-Final-ST*, n.d.). During the pandemic, Dalits were further marginalized from accessing to reliefs and services provided by the governments. The local elites had captured the processes of making decisions and providing good and services to the victims. R.N. Badi mentioned that Dalits were separated during the lockdowns. The information of distributing the reliefs only to the victims and their family members was disseminated by the concerned stakeholders. It was not possible in practice. The more affected Dalits received less reliefs. The less affected non-Dalits received more reliefs. This was because of the caste polarization in distributing resources during the pandemic (personal communication, July 20, 2020). T.B. Damai revealed that Dalits were not invited to the local meetings to reveal their concerns during the pandemic. The non-Dalit led civil society organizations and their members took part in the debates and discussions while making policies to address the pandemic. Even the bureaucrats had dominated the Dalit law makers while making operating guidelines and policies to address the effects of COVID-19. This kind of exclusionary attitude and behavior was reflected in the process of distributing the resources and facilities. More and more Dalit were deprived of the reliefs during the pandemic at the bottom (personal communication, July 21, 2020).

The caste system, which is hierarchical and assigns people to high or low social positions based on the concepts of purity and impurity, places Dalits at the bottom. The groups

that are most excluded from society's sociocultural processes as well as from the political and economic spheres are those that are at the bottom of the hierarchical structure. They are still subjected to various sorts of social disadvantages or "untouchability" because they were born into a "lower caste." They can also be identified by their segregated living arrangements and severely limited access to public and private services and facilities, such as markets, land, jobs, housing, water and sanitation, health care, and education. Dalit women are at the bottom of the human development scale, and as a result, there is a significant disparity between the general population and Dalits on the majority of these metrics. Violence is typically the outcome of the Dalits' refusal to serve in traditionally designated jobs. About 220 million Dalits, who are discriminated against on the basis of their race and ethnicity (CDWD), live in Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. They are among the most marginalized communities. Due to their position in the social hierarchy and the essence of their labor, which is determined by the concepts of pollution and purity, these communities have historically been excluded. These communities have experienced various forms of social, economic, and political discrimination from dominant communities and structural structures, which has been perpetuated via violence and atrocities (*Impact-of-Covid-19-on-Dalits-in-South-Asia (1)*, n.d.).

COVID-19 affected the Dalit communities in a number of ways. The loss of livelihood brought on by the lockdown and the ensuing limitations on social communication were among the main effects, which have impacted their chances of finding work and making money. Most of the Dalit workforce was abruptly forced to the verge of unemployment as unskilled and semiskilled laborers in both rural and urban areas. To make matters worse, they had little to no access to the COVID19 mitigation measures that had been introduced and put into place in their respective nations. Promoting and upholding nondiscriminatory laws and policies is the main objective of SDG 16.b, which aims to ensure the sustainable development of all people and groups in society. However, there is a significant lack of attention to the livelihood issues of the majority of marginalized people, who rely primarily on informal employment, where government regulations are less successful. The clear outcome is that Dalit groups continue to be economically and socially marginalized (*Impact-of-Covid-19-on-Dalits-in-South-Asia (1)*, n.d.).

According to Cutter (1996), social vulnerability is one of the consequences of social inequality in whatever form. Social vulnerability is the difference in how different social groups are exposed to a pandemic, the extent of possible loss, the likelihood of being negatively impacted, etc. The

socially vulnerable population may suffer greatly from pre-existing social disparity during a pandemic (Rodríguez, 2008). Social inequality can make certain demographic segments more vulnerable than others in terms of home qualities, basic amenities, and wealth possession (Cutter, 1996). Thus, social stratification is one way that vulnerability can show up. The most vulnerable caste groupings within the social spectrum must be identified, rather than presuming that the pandemic's effects will be uniform across all social groups (Mondal & Karmakar, 2024).

Civic space is the collection of circumstances that dictate how well all members of society can exercise their fundamental civil rights in a free, effective, and discrimination-free manner, both individually and in unofficial or organized groups. There is a wide range of actors in civic space, including both formal and informal civil society organizations (CSOs), such as trade unions, independent media actors, NGOs, online discussion groups, women's organizations, youth groups, social movements, community-based organizations, indigenous movements, and women's organizations, as well as individual members of society (who participate in various civic activities, such as gathering information about government policies or programs or attending a town hall meeting, public assembly, or peaceful demonstration). Therefore, the term "civic space" refers to the collection of circumstances that allow for the many expressions of civic participation by this wide range of players (*Tai-Civic-Space-Study-V13-Final*, n.d.).

The term "deliberative democracy" refers to a broad range of political theory and practice concepts that center on the circumstances surrounding the formation of public preferences and group decisions. Deliberative democracy, to put it simply, centers democracy around rational discourse. According to Bächtiger et al. (2018), it "is based on an ideal in which people come together, based on equity and respect for one another, to discuss the political issues they face and based on those discussions, decide on policies that will affect their lives." Przeworski (2010) contrasts deliberative democracy with more realist conceptualizations that see democracy as "a competitive struggle for the people's vote" in the most basic sense. According to democratic realists, democracy is essentially an election contest between rival political parties. According to this perspective, voters' preferences are combined to create the election process, which serves as the primary means of creating legitimacy. According to Achen and Bartels (2017), this is frequently linked to the belief that

people are too uninformed and uninterested in politics to have logical policy preferences (Willis et al., 2022).

It is argued by Crenshaw (1991) ahead. When it comes to bridging the divide between "open" and "unfree" public spaces, young people are the most vulnerable social group due to the combination of social exclusion, unemployment, and shifting patterns of engagement in both "offline" and "online" spaces (such as social media). We must also stress that the experiences of young people are not uniform since they have multiple interconnected affiliations at the same time, which leads to a system of discrimination or disadvantage that is interconnected and intersects based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, religion, and other factors (*The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Youth Spaces*, n.d.).

The manipulation step involves placing people on rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards with the specific goal of "educating" or "engineering" their support under the guise of citizen involvement. The bottom rung of the ladder represents the distortion of participation into a public relations tool by those in positions of power, rather than true citizen involvement. Group therapy, disguised as citizen involvement, ought to be at the bottom of the ladder in some ways since it is dishonest and conceited. Its administrators—mental health professionals ranging from social workers to psychiatrists—assume that mental disease is linked with a lack of authority. Based on this supposition, the professionals undergo therapeutic group treatment with the public under the guise of involving them in planning. The reason this type of "participation" is so violent is that although citizens are actively involved, the goal is to cure them of their "pathology" rather than address the racism and victimization that lead to their "pathologies." The most crucial initial step in ensuring legitimate citizen engagement may be educating the public about their rights, obligations, and choices. Unfortunately, too much emphasis is placed on a one-way information flow from officials to citizens, with no avenue for criticism and little negotiation leverage. Given these circumstances, especially when information is given late in the planning process, consumers have little say in the program that is "for their benefit." Responses to inquiries, news media, and posters were the most often employed instruments for this type of one-way communication. Asking residents for their opinions, similar to informing them, can be a valid step toward their full participation under consultation. But this rung of the ladder is still a hoax if consulting them isn't coupled with other forms of involvement because it doesn't guarantee that the opinions and concerns of the public will be taken into consideration. The three most common ways to consult people are public hearings, neighborhood gatherings, and attitude polls. Citizens start to exert some influence at this

point, even though tokenism is still evident. Placing a small number of carefully chosen "worthy" citizens on Community Action Agency boards or on public entities such as the housing authority, police commission, or board of education is an example of a placation approach. In the event that the traditional power elite controls the majority of seats and they are not answerable to a community constituency, the underprivileged are susceptible to being outvoted and outwitted. At this rung of the ladder, citizens and powerholders really negotiate a redistribution of power. Through committees for planning, joint policy boards, and methods for breaking deadlocks, they agree to divide up the planning and decision-making duties. It is not possible to unilaterally alter the ground rules once they have been established through some kind of compromise. It is also possible for citizens to get a majority of the decision-making power over a specific plan or program through negotiations with public officials. In order to ensure that the program is accountable to the people, the ladder has been scaled to the point where citizens now hold the important cards. Powerholders must initiate the negotiation process in order to settle disagreements, not give in to pressure from the opposition (1969, Arnstein, *Ladder of Participation*, Original Text OCR C, n.d.).

V. CONCLUSION

During the pandemic, Dalits were deprived of the reliefs and resources. As the participation of Dalits in community support organizations was nominal from decision-making point of view, the civic space for Dalits was shrunk. While making decisions and policies, the elites and affluent were all in all. As the performance of the community support organizations was castized, there was no transparent monitoring and supervision to ensure whether the Dalits got resources or not.

The prevailing ideology of the caste system recognizes Dalits as the lowest social class. Hindu culture is mentally split into vertical and segregated groups because caste hierarchy-based sentiments of superiority and inferiority are so deeply embedded. The social fabric of Dalits is being destroyed as a result of society being pushed into a hierarchy. Consequently, Dalits are weakened and compelled to bow to their community's social and political systems. One indication of the subordination is the dearth of offices and leadership roles in local administrations. Non-Dalits hold a significant number of decision-making positions in a range of organizations, such as social groups, political parties, and municipal governments. Dalits' standing as participants in local governments does not simply have no bearing on decision-making processes. Dalits will consequently continue to be symbolically

represented in all areas of life, but their subjugation in local politics will not alter (Bk, 2023).

It is well established that pandemics allow for significant social change (Das, 2020). Pandemics have eliminated social and economic inequality throughout recorded history, making them effective levelers (Witte, 2020). Roy (2020) is optimistic about the pandemic's future as well, stating that "it is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next." We have the option of imagining an alternate reality or walking through it. Dalits are the group most at risk during this epidemic, as demonstrated by the study's empirical data. The Hindu social order's caste system is firmly rooted in their vulnerabilities. They are unable to "imagine other worlds" as a result of this pandemic. Thus, from a caste standpoint, at least, this pandemic will not serve as a gateway for the Dalits. The caste-based social structure will remain unchanged, and a homogeneous society will result. Instead, caste-based socioeconomic inequity will be strengthened (Mondal & Karmakar, 2024).

According to Carothers and Brechenmacher (2014), the term "shrinking civic space" describes the limitations and threats placed on civil society actors that reduce their range of motion. According to observers, this worldwide tendency began in 2005 (Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014; Rutzen, 2015; Wolff and Poppe, 2015). Although CSOs have primarily commented on the decline of civic space, several academics offer additional proof of this constrictive tendency (e.g. Christensen and Weinstein, 2013; Glasius et al., 2020; Poppe and Wolff, 2017). Based on statistics from Glasius et al. (2020), CSO limits have been continuously rising since the year 2000. Governments restrict the space of civil society organizations for a variety of reasons, according to the authors. In order to limit and constrain the power of CSOs, they discuss a "counter-associational revolution" (Rutzen and Shea, 2006). According to Christiansen and Weinstein (2013), some associate it with a rise in nationalism and a focus on national sovereignty, which are policies frequently carried out by right-wing populist regimes that demonize NGOs with foreign funding or origins. Also linked to a larger trend of democratic backsliding are attempts to reduce the space of CSOs (Glasius et al., 2020; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Luhrmann, et al., 2019). However, as Rutzen (2015) notes, governments may provide a variety of quite different explanations for enforcing limits, such as defending national security, fostering accountability and transparency in the civil society sector, improving the efficacy of aid, or preserving state sovereignty. According to Krizsan and Roggeband (2021), the preservation of the conventional gender roles and family model as well as the sustainability of the country's population are among the specific goals stated when limiting the space for women's rights

organizations. Diffusion and cross-national learning effects are two factors that help restrictive laws expand widely (Glasius et al. 2020) (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge Dignity Initiative for the financial support to pursue the study. The article is based on the report submitted to Dignity Initiative.

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