RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE RHETORIC OF UNEMPLOYMENT, RACISM AND SEXISM IN NEPAL

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INTRODUCTION

Nepal is fraught with many environmental and socio-economic problems. Two big problems are sexism and racism. It is important to quote Ashok Bhusal (2017) who discusses the problems of racism and sexism in his article titled “Emphasizing the suppression of feminist voices.” He states, “because of sexist and racist perspectives, their literary and rhetorical gifts were discredited and were not included in traditional historical study” (p. 56). While sexism suppresses female voices, racism suppresses minority voices. Similarly, Ashok Bhusal (2017), in “The Rhetoric of racism and anti-miscegenation laws in the United States,” shows the importance of bringing minority stories into discussion as a way to challenge racism in society. Bhusal says, “What is necessary at this point is, with the tools offered in critical race theory, is to complete a deeper study of minorities and bring their stories, their voices, into academic scholarship” (p. 88).

In another article titled “The rhetoric of racism in society,” he explains the racist practices of majorities against minorities that are instrumental to all kinds of problems in society. Whether it is pollution or political instability, corruption or unemployment, the present picture of Nepal is far from rosy. Of these many problems, however, unemployment seems to be the most pressing one as a high percentage of the unemployed populace has instigated grave problems such as crime, depression and family breakdowns and posed a serious challenge to peace and development of the country. In the essay, however, we will look at some of the reasons behind unemployment problem in Nepal and how this issue can be addressed. In the context of teaching undergraduate multilingual students, it is important that we include multimodal assignments and encourage our students to create multimodal projects discussing social problems in our society which will help students receive education that enhances their employment opportunities. The new curricula should incorporate adequate multimodal assignments.

Suresh Lohani (2019) asserts that “With the proliferation of the digital media and other forms of technical innovations taking place at an unprecedented pace, it can be assumed that the multimodality will only occupy greater weight in the curricula and require more attention (p.128). Next, Ashok Bhusal talks about how instructors can implement multimodal assignments. Ashok Bhusal (2019) in “Addressing FVC instructors’ lack of technological expertise in implementing multimodal assignments” states that “Because of the emergence of new technologies, the importance of implementing multimodal assignments in first-year composition has increased” (p. 167). It is our responsibility to encourage our students to create multimodal texts as these texts can communicate our social problems in more convincing ways than alphabetic texts can. In addition, we need to keep social justice in mind. Ashok Bhusal and others (2018) says that “Multilingual students deserve to have informed writing instructors who teach in writing programs that encourage a view that language difference is the norm. Only then will our classrooms come close to being equitable spaces” (n.p.). According to Saroj Devkota, former President, Nepal Engineers Association and former Vice Chairman, Center for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), the root cause of unemployment problem in Kathmandu is the inherent flaw in our education system. He opines that our education fails to impart skills in students which would enable them to create jobs for themselves, and impels them to rely on the government or other privately run organizations for hand to mouth. Our faulty academic practice, he maintains, has done little but created a deluge of unskilled or semi skilled manpower. He points out the need to promote technical education which would help people not desperately looks for jobs but rather create jobs for themselves. He posits that in a country like Nepal there are abundant employment opportunities for those who are equipped with some technical knowledge on areas such as agriculture, infrastructure development, health and other service sectors. Talking about the unemployment problem in Kathmandu, he states that many
Indian nationals are heavily profiting out of the labor market in Kathmandu, when ironically, the fellow inhabitants of the valley are desperately seeking employment opportunities abroad. For example, when it comes to repairing vehicles, constructing buildings and even hair cutting, the participation of the Nepalese from Kathmandu is very slim and this void has been largely fulfilled by semi skilled or skilled migrant Indian workers. Most of the people in Kathmandu simply lack the “simple” skills required to perform these tasks. During his term at CTEVT, he says, he launched many such vocational educational and training programs such as plumbing, electric wiring and cosmetic courses aimed at reducing unemployment problems and many in the valley profited out of it. He reiterates that only if Nepalese Government changed the education model and advanced technical education over theory laden school education, the unemployment problem would be solved to a large extent (Saroj Devkota, March, Kathmandu).

Similarly, Shyam Sundar Chaudhary, a Ph. D scholar of Social Sciences at Singhania University, India, and vice- principal, Silkroad International College, Kathmandu, holds culture as one of the key factors behind such a high unemployment percent in Kathmandu. He elaborates that although a metropolis, a big percentage of the populace in Kathmandu still harbor conservative mindsets and this bars them from taking up certain jobs although these jobs pay well. Due to caste system-most of the people in Kathmandu are Hindus- not everyone takes up jobs, regardless of their nature, as they find or can set up easily on their own. For example, sweeping, hair cutting, cleaning and tailoring are some of such jobs which most people of the “high caste” tend to discard altogether. Traditionally, these jobs are only pursued by people from so called “lower castes.” There are then often chances that these vacancies remain unfulfilled as now even people from so called “low caste” have begun switching their professions ignoring the traditional jobs which were solely their domain. Although the situation is slowly changing, still owing to cultural hurdles many people forsake jobs that are not only easily available to them, but also pay quite well. And the ones cashing on these “opportunities” are people who flock to Kathmandu from the Terai, plains in the south, and in most of the cases, Indian migrant workers. Therefore, unless people regardless of caste are made to honor dignity of labor, certain fields of work will continue to keep a large chunk of unemployed population at bay (Shyam Sundar Chaudhary, 11 March, Kathmandu). Shyam Sundar Chaudhary’s view on unemployment also in a way ties Suresh Lohani’s take on culture and lifestyle. Suresh Lohani’s (2019) book Scholar’s Social Studies and Creative Arts talks about how people practice a lifestyle that is so much shaped by the cultural sites that they belong to. This may happen in both visible and invisible level (p.39). And one of the main reasons why unemployment rate is higher in Nepal is due to the cultural mindset which treats manual jobs with a touch of inferiority. This has forced many Nepalese youths to sell their physical labor beyond the frontiers of their country. Next, Suresh Lohani (2019) in “LGBTI in NEPAL, Pakistan, and India: Law, Religion, and Individuals” states that “the legal system of the geography or the religious texts of the community may seem to bind the people living within that geography” (p.63). Thus, the conformity to religious preaching has also hindered employment opportunities for Nepalese, particularly to those belonging to so called “higher castes,” as the Hindu religious texts are opposed to those peoples engaging in jobs that call for physical labor.

Moving on to look at the unemployment percentage, Mukesh Khanal, a regular contributor to The Republica, a national English Daily, says that the unemployment percentage in Nepal has always been debatable. Some say it is 20 % whereas some believe it to be 40%. He shares that there are three kinds of unemployment: structural, frictional, and cyclical. Frictional unemployment occurs when people move from one place to another or when they quit one job to find another. Cyclical unemployment occurs when people lose their jobs due to business-cycle fluctuations. It increases when an economy is in a decline. Structural unemployment occurs when the labor force lacks the necessary skills and training to make itself useful in the new way of doing things. (Mukesh Khanal, Kathmandu, 9 March). The economic growth of Nepal is 3% on average year and so far Nepal has not directly been hit with recession. In Nepal, people from low-opportunity areas have always moved to areas where jobs are aplenty. Also, a dearth of jobs means quitting one to find another has not been a luxury available to Nepali workers. So, frictional unemployment isn’t really a big issue for us. Also, the Nepali economy has been growing steadily at around 3 percent a year. We are not in a recession, and thus, we should not worry too much about cyclical unemployment. Guna Raj Bhatta writes in Nepal’s economic growth scenario published on 11 March 2014 in The Himalayan Times that “the contribution of the major three sectors of the economy, agriculture, industry and service in the total employment is stagnant posing challenges for economic transformation.” This is quite a depressing picture which shows that unless some revolutionary programs are launched with a view to minimizing unemployment problem, more serious social problems, not just economic problems, could surface and these may hold the potential to rupture the peace of the hitherto harmonious Nepalese society. He further goes that the credit for creating 74% of the total jobs in the country still goes to agriculture sector. The remaining 26% of the jobs are offered by industry and services.

If this is to be further divided, then according to an article in E Kantipur.com by Sangam Prasai, in the year 2012, tourism sector was able to provide a total of 3.6% jobs. The report shows that the travel trade provided 553,500 jobs directly in 2012. The contribution was 412,500 in 2011. The WTTC report has projected that the travel trade sector’s contribution to the country’s total employment will rise by 7 percent in 2013. It is thus evident that tourism industry, which is primarily a service industry, can make a significant contribution in expanding the domestic job market and therefore the government should strongly heed to the development of this very sector. It would be pertinent here to quote Alak Babu Prasai as he writes in The Role of Tourism in Economic Development of Nepal, an article published in A Biannual South Asian Journal of Research & Innovation, that “Tourism is labor intensive and service oriented industry, which is a valuable source of employment” (p. 52). Mr Prasai states that since most of the tourists visit Nepal before or after the rainy season, it is of special advantage to the manpower involved in agriculture sector to profit out of tourism related employment opportunities when they are not working on the farms. This will not only provide employment opportunities to the ones who are jobless but help add to the income of those who are already involved in agriculture. Similarly, the report, Labour and Social Trends in Nepal jointly published by National Planning Commission Government of Nepal and International Labour Office ILO Country Office for Nepal in
the year 2010, shows that “the total number of employed persons increased from 9.46 million in 1998/99 to 11.78 million in 2008 (table 4.3)” (p. 24). This exhibits that with the passage of time the number of people enjoying employment opportunities has increased. However, in the same period, according to the report, “the employment-to-population ratio declined between these two periods, from 84.3 per cent in 1998/99 to 81.7 per cent in 2008, reflecting in part higher participation in education” (p. 24). The report also reveals that “while youth unemployment is a key challenge for Nepal, in relation to adults, the challenge is not of unemployment but rather the lack of decent and productive work, which results in various forms of labour underutilization.” The very report also shows that “unemployment for urban youth is acute and the situation has changed for the worse in the past decade. In 2008, the youth unemployment rate in urban areas stood at 13.0 per cent, having nearly doubled from 7.6 per cent in 1998/99” (p. 26). The finding compels one to take up unemployment issue seriously and act promptly before it becomes deplorable.

Our government, in place of trying to create sustainable employment opportunities, has been encouraging these low-skilled laborers to go abroad for jobs. Most of these people are from low economic backgrounds and in tacit or overt ways the power holders prompt them to take up manually taxing jobs overseas. This design which the ruling class orchestrates can be better understood by studying non-traditional rhetoric that basically deals with voices of the margin. Suresh Lohani (2019) in “Constructing Nontraditional Rhetoric: Critical Study on Gloria Anzaldua and Suresh Canagarajah” states how “it would not be an overstatement to assume that nontraditional rhetoric does seem to better foreground the issues of marginalization, suppression, or exploitation through employment of syntactic fusions and reduplications” (p. 15). Shyam Sundar Chaudhary (2013) in *Social Inclusion in Civil Service through Public Service Commission (PSC) Nepal* talks about how the exclusionary policies of the state have further hit the marginalized peoples. In light of this, he suggests that “the theory of justice provided [him] with the insight that Social Inclusion policy and practice should be designed such that it imparts equal opportunity for all and must be focused on fairness to everyone” (p. 60). Next, in “Cultural framework for studying a Tharu community in Nepal,” Chaudhary (2019) talks about the marginalized Tharu community and makes a suggestion on how the state could help them with earning their livelihoods. He states that the “government should launch programs with a view to uplifting the life standard of this heavily marginalized indigenous community. These should be aimed at further honing and preserving indigenous skills” (p. 84). Thus, if the ones involved in policy making take into account indigenous practices of employment, unemployment problem could be addressed to a certain account. Anyway, regardless of the strategies the ruling class devises to engage the ones on the margin in pursuing physical labor based jobs abroad, the contribution of remittance they send back to Nepal cannot be discounted. While remittance from overseas workers has been helping us in the short-run to fulfill our consumption desires, it is not a viable option in the long-run. Studies in many nations that faces employment migration have shown, repeatedly, that remittance does not create jobs and has no contribution in reducing inequality. Our policymakers seem oblivious to this fact, seeing how they have been going about their business of signing agreements with other nations to send our labor force overseas for jobs. Next, growing unemployment problem can also be attributed to the flaw in our education system. Suresh Lohani (2019) in “Does the most effective learning take place away from schools?” talks about the need for the revision of curriculum so lessons laden with theoretical knowledge alone are replaced by the ones that emphasize education that works. For this he argues that simply gathering and reproducing information for the sake of grades is not enough and that the most effective way to do this is to learn from the nature and the society directly thereby discarding the ills of classroom learning. Thus, to address the problem of unemployment through revision of the curriculum is a must. Bipin Shah in *Economic disconnect*, an article published in an online edition of *The Kathmandu Post*, says that sectors which can boost employment opportunities should be identified and promoted, and he tactically criticizes the state for not listing mass unemployment agenda in the priority list. Mr Shah, in this connection, mentions some sectors that could thrive better with greater involvement of human resource than other resources and this would pave way to incorporate more people into the employment domain. Hydroelectricity sector, for example, in Nepal’s context can be one such sector among others where human resource takes precedence over other kinds of resources and if we can expedite the process of launching more hydroelectricity projects, on the one hand we can provide instant employment opportunities to people equipped with varied technical skills and, more importantly, on the other hand, help develop the nation substantially by making it more or less self-dependent on energy needs. Next, even the gender divide, which is heavily perpetuated in society and tacit or overt ways by the ones profiting out of patriarchal mindset, have contributed to the unemployment problem in the country. And since the corporate world is still heavily dominated by male figures, it can be expected to offer preference to male workers and leave women out of the corporate workforce to the possible extent. It has been witnessed how this will add to unemployment problems since a large percentage of female work force will be forced out of the corporate arena. Bhusal and Lohani (2019) in *Pedagogy, Language Ideology and Multimodal Composition* talk about how the corporate sectors paint different job identities for men and women and hint at how this could further problematize the status quo of the sexes in the days to come. In this book, the authors strive to examine, among other issues, how gendered approaches have limited life chances for women and privileged men to enjoy preferential treatment in the labor market. To sum up, unemployment in Nepal could be quite a serious problem, but if people are made to believe in dignity of labor keeping aside their cultural constraints, and if the state implements visionary programs that help boost employment opportunities, the day should not be far when unemployed Nepalese no longer have to be Gulf bound to work for meager salaries in most hostile working conditions.

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