



Gender and Labour in the Global South

Audio Transcript

Dalit women in the Nepali labour market

NARRATOR: Let's go deeper into Nepalese society, where caste and religion-based discrimination still exists. In Nepal, one of the key factors in the persistence of poverty is the economic and social exclusion of certain social groups. Caste, as an institution and system, is a hierarchical differentiation of ritual status. The term Dalit is generally used to identify those on the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy. Dalits, who are one of the most marginalised groups in Nepal, continue to face several forms of discrimination in all sectors, including employment. As a result, Dalits have relatively high levels of poverty. Mirta, who is Dalit, talks about her life and access to paid work.

MIRTA: I have experienced discrimination because of my caste. Many don't give me work due to my caste. They always ask what caste I am, especially in the Patan area. Due to caste, they call me to work and always ask for my citizenship card. If I show them, then they know what caste I am. People tend to hate those who belong to my caste. They say, don't come here and don't touch this.

NARRATOR: Like women from other castes, Dalit women perform both unpaid and paid work; however, paid work options are not easily accessible due to the social practice of segregation. Mirta decided to lie about her caste in order to have better access to work, housing and schooling for her children. This is also the reason why she wants to remain anonymous.

MIRTA: For 10 years I have been lying about my caste and living here. To this day, my caste is still giving me difficulties. I have registered my children in school under a different name, otherwise they could not be a member of this school. I feel like if I had told them my real caste, then I would not even have found a house to stay at in this place. And if I had to go back to my village, there would be no work there. So how would we eat? Who would earn for me and my children? That's the way I feel. Before COVID-19, I had gotten a little bit of work and was somehow managing. I used to get 400 to 500 Nepalese Rupees worth of work. People would call me to wash clothes. The wife would call me to wash clothes and the husband would try to misbehave with me.

NARRATOR: Then came the COVID-19 pandemic. This had a huge impact on Mirta's livelihood.



MIRTA: Business was not as good as always, it was less. By less, I mean that sometimes I would make 50 Nepalese Rupees and sometimes nothing at all. I did ask for help, but no one helped. I had registered my name for the ration, but they said that I cannot get it without my citizenship card, so even though I had registered myself, I did not get the ration. I did not get any ration as they did not give it to me. And I did not get any form of help from others throughout the corona pandemic. Before, I somehow managed to pay the rent. But with the pandemic, I couldn't pay the rent at all. A while back, my landlords said that I neither pay the rent nor do I leave. I cannot even go to anyone or anywhere, as I do not know anyone. When I looked for other rooms to move to, I couldn't find a room at all. I told my landlords to give me some time, and that I would pay the rent little by little. Since corona started, I have been buying vegetables to sell, and I only have business of about 100 to 150 Nepalese Rupees. All of it is spent on 1 kilogramme of rice, salt and lentils.

NARRATOR: Mirta's statements clearly show that it is not only the category of gender that opens up or hinders access to decent work. Caste also influences social and economic inclusion. The COVID-19 pandemic affects human development. To respond to this global crisis, the intersecting forms of inequality, discrimination and marginalisation must be taken into account. They must all be considered in order to formulate effective and evidence-based policies that offer sustainable solutions.