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Struggling Against the Caste-based Inequalities: A Study of Dalits in Devasthan VDC, Baglung, Nepal

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to examine the struggle of Dalit (untouchable) people against the caste-based inequalities in post-conflict Nepal. The objective of this research is to bring forth the Dalits' voice against the caste-based inequality and their subtle experiences on the way to struggle. It analyses the ongoing efforts of Dalit Movement and its impact on achieving equality, freedom and social justice. To meet the goal of these objectives, the study draws fourteen qualitative interviews with the members of Dalit community. In addition, the study applies the concepts of subalternity and empowerment in order to analyze the Dalits' struggle.

The study findings indicate that caste-based discrimination is the root cause of Dalits' struggle. Dalits are still facing social problems owing to stigma of untouchable low caste despite the constitutional provisions against the caste-based discrimination. Though the continuous struggle of Dalit people along with their involvement in Maoist's insurgency has played vital role to make them aware of their access opportunities and social rights, it has not brought fundamental change in their socio-political status.

Analytically, the study seeks to provide a theme of social transformation through the socio-political struggle. It contextualizes the Dalit struggle for positive social transformation. Fundamentally, the analysis of the study shows the importance of long-term Dalit struggle that has brought changes into the issues of caste-based discrimination and socio-political marginalization of entire Dalit population. Yet, Dalits are struggling for their equal access to the state opportunities as well as the implementation of constitutional provisions against the untouchability.

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Acronyms

BA: Bachelor of Arts

CA: Constituent Assembly

CBS: Central Bureau of Statistics

CHRGJ: Center for Human Rights and Global Justice

CPA: Comprehensive Peace Agreement

CPN-UML: Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist

DAC: Dalit Awareness Centre

DDR: Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration

DNF: Dalit NGO Federation

DNGO: Dalit Non-Governmental Organization

FEDO: Feminist Dalit Organisation

FPTP: First Past the Post

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organization

MA: Master of Arts

NRS: Nepalese Rupee

SLC: School Leaving Certificate

SS: Subaltern Studies

UCPN-Maoist: United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist

UNMIN: United Nations Mission in Nepal

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

USA: United States of America

VDC: Village Development Committee

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Source of Caste System

Caste or ‘Varna’¹ system is the basic foundation of Hindu society where different groups and individual interact with each other in different ways (Bhattachan et.al, 2009). Similarly, the caste system is defined as a division of society based on differences of wealth, inherited rank or privileged profession, occupation or race. In Hindu caste system, we find four fold of caste divisions; ‘Brahmins’, the priests and scholars, ‘Kshetriyas’, the warriors and administrators, ‘Vaishyas’, the merchants, and ‘Sudras’ (untouchables), the servants and rubbish collectors (Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2008). In accordance with the Hindu religious scripture Manusmriti² the caste system is based on the differentiation of people in terms of their work and profession (ibid). Moreover, the origin of caste system has also other many religious and biological views. The Hindu religious theory defines that caste system was originated from Rig-Veda. It further states that “the primal man, Purush (male), destroyed himself to create a human society and the different parts of his body created the four different Varnas. The Brahmins were from his head, the Kshetriyas from his hands, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet” (Deshpande, 2010:18).

The caste system is closely associated with Hinduism in South Asia. It is considered as the oldest surviving social hierarchy in the world, with a 2,000 years old history (Pyakurel, 2007). However, it is mostly dominant in Nepal and India where, “it is considered one of the rigid stratification systems without any possibility to change one’s caste or move between caste categories. Caste of a person is determined by his/her birth into a particular social group” (Pyakurel, 2007:2). Likewise, the caste system is an inseparable aspect of Hindu society and keeps close nexus with the Hindu philosophy, religious belief, custom and tradition connecting with marriage system, moral and manner, food, dress, habit, occupation, hobbies and professional skills etc. It is also an identical tool to determine the social stratification, differentiation and segmentation of Hindu society. In Nepal, the institutionalized exploitations on Dalits (untouchable) dates back to the medieval period in 13th century when King Jayasthiti Malla introduced the caste system (Pyakurel, 2007). Junga Bahadur Rana, the former prime minister of Nepal, further formalized the caste system through the Muluki Ain

¹ Sanskrit word which means ‘class’ or ‘caste’

² Hindu ancient legal text

(Civil Code) in 1884 with caste hierarchy as; (1) "Sacred thread wearing" or "Twice-born", (2) "Liquor drinking", (3) "Touchable Low Castes", and (4) "Untouchables" (Hoffer, 2004). This way of caste-based social division, created huge gap between Dalits and non-Dalits in Nepalese society pushing Dalits towards a marginal space (ibid).

1.2 Untouchability and Social Division

In Nepal, the caste system is characterized as a form of discrimination where, Dalits are considered as a lower caste and untouchables. Untouchability represents the discrimination perpetrated on Dalit communities who are believed to be impure and polluted. Therefore, the so-called high castes sprinkle holy water if their house is visited by the untouchables (Bhattachan et. al, 2009). Throughout the history of Nepal, Dalits are treated as low caste human beings and denied access to education, property rights and professional jobs. Dalit Community refers as “left behind in social, economic, educational, political and religious spheres and deprived from the human dignity and social justice due to caste based discrimination and untouchability” (Bhattachan et. al, 2009:3). The discriminatory social practice has created social dichotomy between Dalits and Non-Dalits, where, the entire Dalit population is forced to be isolated from mainstream politics of Nepal. The situation has pushed them backward in gaining respectable position in the society (Khanal, et. al, 2012). Moreover, in spite of constitutional provisions, Dalits are denied access to temples, private homes, festivities, restaurants, public water sources as well as denial in marriage with members of non-Dalit castes (Khanal, et. al, 2012).

1.3 Consequences

Although the origins and causes of caste division are not identified, it has been deeply rooted and practiced in the Nepalese society. Due to caste system, there is a socio-economic gap between Dalits and non-Dalits (Bhattachan et.al, 2009). The formal legitimacy on caste system through the declaration of Civil Code of Nepal 1884, gave more space for caste based discrimination which stated that Dalits are untouchable and water and food cannot be shared with them (Khanal et. al, 2012). Moreover, untouchability victimized Dalits with “denial of entry of Dalits by higher caste into their houses, temples, hotels and restaurants, teashops, work places, food factories, dairy farms and milk collection centers, etc” (Bhattachan et.al, 2009:11). Even Dalits are restricted to use the public properties like drinking water resources, school, community forests etc.

1.3.1 Backwardness in Justice

Dalits' access to justice in Nepal seems very poor due to low level of awareness about citizens' fundamental rights and constitutional provisions. They are so-called subordinated and untouchable caste and facing discriminatory behavior in justice system (Bagchand et.al, 2009). Another reason for being lowly placed in the justice is their "low level of participation in judiciary, poor implementation of acts and anti caste discriminatory laws and pathetic socio-economic status" which has hindered meaningful access of the Dalits to justice (ibid:1). According to the amended constitutional provision of 1992, there are punitive measures in practice of untouchability that "no one shall, on the basis of the caste system, enact on another person discriminatory untouchability practices or restrict another from public places or prevent another from making use of public resources. Anyone who does so may be punished with jail for one year or a fine of NRS 3,000 or both" (JUP, 2004, ref. in Vasily, 2009:219). This kind of constitutional rights for Dalis have not been implemented because of their less access to justice. In many cases, Dalits have tolerated different forms of caste-based discrimination due to their poor knowledge about constitutional measures.

Dalits, being in bottom rags of social ladder, are dehumanized and oppressed due to ineffective criminal justice system. According to law, justice means more than able to raise one's case in a court or other relevant institution of justice or fairness of rights, however, in Nepal, Dalits are being denied from their access to justice system. The way society and so-called high caste people are treating them as lesser humans or sub-humans have destroyed their self-esteem and pride of being human and severely violated the human dignity and humanity. Consequently, "they are subjected to many forms of discrimination namely exploitation, suppression and physical violence, which are jeopardizing their basic rights guaranteed by the national as well as international laws" (Bagchand et. al, 2009:2).

1.4 Dalits' Struggle

Dalit struggle refers to a socio-political movement of Dalit people to demolish caste-based discrimination in Nepal. It is also a struggle for equality, freedom and social justice in human society. In the past history of Nepal, there have been several Dalit movements; basically these have been analyzed from four stages, before 1950, after establishment of democracy from

1950 to 1963, during the Panchayat³ regime from 1961 to 1990, after restoration of democracy in 1990 and onwards (Vishwakarma, 2002). Dalit struggle started in 1946 with the groundbreaking act of Sarvajeet Bishwakarma who challenged the so-called upper caste people by following the cultural tradition of wearing sacred thread called *Janai*⁴ that was not supposed to be worn by the Dalits (ibid).

After then, several Dalit movements happened to break socio-cultural restrictions through different ways such as, using the same water resource with non-Dalits, forceful entry into the temples, burning the ‘furnace’ where Dalits used to make iron material for non-Dalits and rejecting the act of playing musical instruments in the marriage ceremonies of high caste people and so on. These were the forms of initial Dalit movement in village area (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014). The successful ‘Pashupatinath Temple’⁵ Entrance Campaign, 1984 was the first Dalit assertion in capital city of Nepal. It was “a forceful temple entrance movement of untouchable community from where they got inspiration and continued attempting such actions in the other parts of the country” (Pyakurel, 2007:6). After restoration of the democracy in 1990, Dalits changed the form of struggle and raised their voice for political representation. In this phase, they also realized that the struggle for caste-based discrimination cannot be achieved without political reformation, therefore, they demanded proportional political representation on the basis of Dalit population (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014).

1.4.1 Participation of Dalits in Civil War

Dalits as a marginalized group joined the Maoist insurgency with a hope of eradicating caste-based discrimination and acquiring proportional political representation. The contribution of Dalit community in the insurgency was crucial in the CPN-Maoist’s efforts at attaining political power. In ten years long peoples’ war, 1105 Dalit cadres were killed by the state that consists of 12.6% of total deaths from a side of the state security force (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014). Similarly, the first martyr in peoples’ war was Dil Bahadur Ramtel who was from Dalit community which shows that Dalits had strong support to Maoist with the hope of being freed from a claptrap of the caste- based inequalities. During the war, ‘Dalit Liberation Front’

³ Panchayat is the political system of Nepal where the King directly ruled from 1961-1990.

⁴ ‘Janai’ is a cotton string worn across the chest by so-called upper caste Hindu male.

⁵ Most sacred Hindu temple in capital city of Nepal where Dalits were not allowed to visit.

was formed as a sister organization of Maoist party, the basic motto of this this organization was to find out grievances of Dalit population (ibid).

Furthermore, Dalits involvement in Maoist war hints that Dalits are aware of their marginalized status and they want liberation from caste cum socio-political marginalization. The major reasons for Dalits to join the Maoist insurgency were; caste discrimination, social exclusion, poverty, injustice and unemployment. It was the war of low class people who were excluded and destined to bear extreme level of exploitation. In fact, Maoist revolution was targeted to subvert the old concept of Hindu philosophy and class gap between the people, therefore, Dalits had high expectation of liberation from century long caste-based discrimination (Vasily, 2009).

1.5 Problem Statement

This research focuses on Dalit peoples' struggle for equality in post-conflict Nepal. It is about Dalits' struggle against caste-based discrimination and socio-political marginalization. It specifically highlights the ongoing political strategies of the Dalit movement and their strategic partnership with other Nepalese political actors. Further, the study taps into recent constitutional developments and policies to highlight efforts at addressing caste-based inequalities. It finally provides insights into individual and collective Dalit experiences and strategies against marginalization.

1.6 Research Questions

The following questions have been formulated to highlight the Dalits' struggle against caste-based inequalities in Nepal.

1. What is the focus of Dalit struggle?
2. Who are the key actors in the struggle?
3. What is their modus operandi?
4. Do they have non-Dalit partners? If yes, who are they?
5. What is the relationship of this partnership?
6. What are the Dalit reflections about individual and collective strategies against inequality?

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. In the next chapter, the context of the study is further described by focusing on the history of Nepalese civil war. Chapter 3 highlights the methodological issues of the study. The fourth chapter focuses on the conceptual framework of the thesis. Chapter 5 discusses the data presentation and analysis. Finally, chapter 6 outlines a summary and concluding remarks.

Chapter 2. Civil War in Nepal (1996-2006)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the civil war in Nepal from 1996 to 2006. It specifically focuses on the causes and consequences of the decade long civil war led by Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist. Moreover, it also highlights the peace building efforts, constitutional review process through Constituent Assembly election, and restructuring the state with federalism.

Additionally, it emphasizes the struggle of minorities, ethnic groups and especially Dalits for the guarantee of privileged rights in new constitution.

2.2 Background

Civil war broke out in Nepal in 1996 against the state, and remained up to 2006. This ten years period became so hazardous for Nepalese people and took 13000 lives with huge loss of national property (Basnett, 2009). It was launched as a reaction over the government's failure to address the 40 points memorandum submitted by Maoist to the then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in February 1996. The 40 points memorandums were related to nationalism, democracy, livelihood and socio-economic policies. But, these issues were not addressed by the government rather were ridiculed (Asia Report, 2005). Similarly, civil war also was a result of historical relations of oppression and unfulfilled promises of democracy in Nepal. In an initial phase of war, major political actors became ignorant and tried to dominate it with state security force. But soon after the attempt of domination and random torture to the innocent people suspecting as Maoist's supporter, the war took its new dimension (Sharma, 2006). The marginalized people, ethnic groups, women and Dalits strongly supported the war and within 10 years period it became somehow parallel to state force in terms of power structure (ibid). The central agendas of civil war were; end of monarchy, Constituent Assembly, federalism, equal rights to the marginalized groups, equal opportunity to all in state structure and privileged rights for Dalits and women (Do and Iyer, 2010).

Six years before the civil war, there was mass movement against the king's direct involvement in Nepalese politics. This movement brought significant changes in political course and re-established democracy in 1990 (Muni, 2010). After re-establishment of democracy, new constitution was formulated, however, low class people, ethnic groups, women, Dalits and myriad of others could not get benefit from democratic government

(Basnett, 2009). Similarly, the struggle of Nepalese people for absolute democracy remained unfulfilled due to upper class domination in state mechanism. Likewise, constitutional provisions also became partial and Nepal was declared as Hindu state, which could not address the grievances of multi-caste and multi religious people (Shakya, 2006).

In this historical background, civil war spread in Nepal in an initiation of Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoist) by incorporating marginalized people from different social strata especially from Dalit community (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014). The war brought significant changes in political arena of Nepal. In the ground of this war, many political agendas were foregrounded and taken larger space in political reformation process. Along with the political reformation process, the voice of marginalized mass for their liberation, identity and involvement in mainstream politics reached in optimum phase. This war made aware and conscious to all the voiceless people, ethnic groups, women, minorities and Dalits (Cameron, 2007).

2.3 Causes of the Civil War

Landlessness, inter-group inequality, and economic cum social vulnerability seem to play major role in motivating and sustaining the civil war in Nepal. The condition of horizontal or inter-group inequality and caste hierarchy led the society in the verge of conflict (Murshed & Gates, 2004) Since the long run past history of Nepal, there seems always domination of certain privileged caste and group of people in every aspects of the society and state mechanism. The major portion of the population was always backward and their voice was suppressed unnecessarily (Murshed & Gates, 2004). Moreover, civil war was basically focused on social, economic and caste issues in the ground of lacking good governance and failure of developmental strategies. It is mainly intensified and fueled by poverty and social exclusion of marginalized mass (Hatlebakk, 2009). According to Harka Gurung (2005), Nepalese civil war is an outcome of social exclusion, lack of employment opportunities and marginalization of Dalits, indigenous peoples and social minorities. Likewise, Upreti states that long standing feudal political system and institutionalization of social exclusion, discrimination and political subordination truly contributed the civil war (Upreti, 2006). It is worth to state that civil war started from the Mid-West hills, which was the centre of insurgency. The hill ethnic groups and Dalit population of Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan Dailekh and Jajarkot districts strongly supported the civil war. The sole reason of supporting the war was not other than that of lowest ranking districts in human development index of Nepal. Due to

centralized government system, the political actors and policymakers were unwilling to understand and solve the grievances of countryside people (Hachhethu, 2008).

2.3.1 Caste System

While analyzing the civil war from the view of sociologist and ethnic activists, “the hill caste Hindus, Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar (an urban ethnic group) with their combined strength of 35 percent in total population have long been in dominant position in the power structure of the country” (Hachhuthu, 2008:139). Other marginalized ethnic groups, tribal groups and Dalits were excluded and deprived from the state opportunities. The sort of class and group gap happened to outbreak of civil war in Nepal. Similarly, corruption, political syndicate system and centralized state policy truly contributed to develop the ground for civil war (Shakya, 2006). Maoist as the leader of insurgency, proliferated its political policy for social change by incorporating the subaltern and marginalized masses with the key agendas; abolition of monarchy, political and social inclusion of historically marginalized groups, establishment of ethnic identity, constituent assembly election, federalism, religious secularism and right to self-determinism for indigenous people. These agendas helped to motivate the ethnic and Dalit people and strongly supported the Maoist’s political mission of socio-political transformation (Cameron, 2007).

2.4 Consequences

Nepalese civil war left many negative impacts in social, economic and political phenomenon of Nepal. It created enormous upheaval in nation’s economy because large amount of national budget was used in security issues instead of developmental programs (Sharma, 2006). In 1996, before beginning of civil war, security spending was about 0.9 percent of GDP. In 2006, it was increased in 2.5 percent due to higher expenses in purchasing arms and ammunitions for Nepalese army. As more money was pumped into the war effort, only fewer funds were available for development targets. The government also curtailed the budgets in the areas like health, education, roads and public investments (Shakya, 2006). In one hand national budget was spent in conflict, on the other, income generating sources were decreased. The tourism sector was totally affected, local businesses were largely hampered and banking and financial sectors were not safe from the rebellion. Such factors pushed the country towards an economic vulnerability (Upreti, 2006).

2.4.1 Social Disintegration

Civil war has vigorously affected Nepalese society in numerous ways. The war destroyed development infrastructures like, VDC buildings, range posts, bridges, government buildings, roads, schools, telephone etc. that created complex situation in the livelihood. The forty percent of the Village Development Committee buildings were destroyed, 2000 schools, mostly private were periodically closed and health sector was totally affected (Devkota & Teijlingen, 2009) Moreover, due to economic opportunities and insecurity from warring parties, more than half a million people had been forced to leave homes and migrated to district headquarters, capital city and even third country. This kind of horrible and terrifying civil war created upheaval in the society and destroyed the peace and harmony of integrated social life (Asia Report, 2005).

2.4.2 Human Rights Abuses

The civil war also invited serious condition in human rights issues. At the time of war, common people were doubly victimized; one from Maoist cadres and another from government security forces. This situation obliged them to live life with no freedom (Pathak, 2005). At this moment, the livelihood of Nepalese people was complex and they were forcefully displaced due to security reason. Likewise, people were severely traumatized owing to human rights violations by both warring parties. People were killed, tortured and abducted in front of their family suspecting them as spies. It also promoted impunity around the state and increased criminal activities (Shakya, 2006). Many people joined the war to take revenge against their personal enemies. Not only this, Maoist cadres also forcefully abducted children for military recruitment, which violated the education rights of the children. The “schools became a platform for either sides of the warring parties or a place for recruitment, arrests, torture and killing. This affected the education of children in major ways both in terms of access and reintegration in education” (Shakya, 2006:7).

2.5 Peace Efforts

After decade long armed conflict, mass dysfunction of infrastructure and thousands of deaths, finally Nepal entered into a domain of peace process through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in November 2006. This agreement is also called historical breakthrough in the political history of Nepal. The agreement between government and Maoist set forth the

new political dimension in the socio political career of Nepal (Bhatta, 2012). After the agreement, both peace stakeholders took high responsibility to lead the peace process to a logical end. In addition, the key elements of the peace agreement were “democratization of the state’s arm, weapon control and a six-month deadline for discharge, integration and rehabilitation of combatants” (Bleie and Shrestha, 2012). In the first phase of the peace process, United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was formally established on 23 January 2007 for one year in the request of Nepal government and CPN-Maoist. However, the period was extended seven times and remained until January 15, 2011. In four years period, UNMIN played vital role in DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) process with its fullest effort, however this mission was officially closed before completing the reintegration process. At the initial phase of DDR, all the active Maoist combatants had been centralized into different cantonments and their arms and ammunitions were collected into the containers with the monitoring initiation of UNMIN. The total 19601 verified Maoist combatants remained in the cantonments. This was first and foremost historical ice break in the peace building exercise in Nepal (Bhandari, 2014).

After completion of disarmament and demobilization, the third phase became more complicated because of disagreement between government and UCPN-Maoist in the process of reintegration. However, after the long debate, both parties came to the agreement to give choice to the combatants whether they want to be integrated in official Nepal army or exit with handful of cash financial benefit. The decision of giving large sum of money was quite debatable between Nepal government and international agencies that the cash amount could be misused. Therefore, United Nations and other donor agencies rejected this plan of providing financial benefits to the combatants. Nevertheless, “Nepal government made unprecedented decision to manage the required funds for voluntary retirement packages through the national treasury” (Bhandari, 2014:9). By stepping on this decision, the peace stakeholders planned to complete reintegration process of combatants where 15630 combatants agreed and accepted the financial package and took voluntary retirement and rest of 1422 were integrated into the security forces. Form this evidence; it has been clear that the reintegration process succeeded to a greater extent. After the reintegration process, most of the combatants have been involved in small business in new locations and some have paved their ways towards abroad for the sustenance of their further life (Bhandari, 2014).

2.5.1 Constituent Election and New Construction Making Process

Making inclusive constitution through the CA⁶ election, restructuring the state with federalism, abolishing monarchy and declaring Nepal a religiously secular state were major agendas of Maoist's war (Ogura, 2008). After 10 years war, Nepal went through major political transformations and all political parties agreed upon these agendas and finally the dream of Nepalese people to write new construction through constituent assembly came true in 2008. The first Constituent Assembly was held on 10 April 2008 where CPN-Maoist was placed in first position that made it easier to implement its own agendas. Following the agenda of CA election, the first session of Constituent Assembly on 28 May 2008 took historic decision to overthrow the King and declared Nepal a federal democratic republic country (Bhandari, 2012). Afterwards, there was long debate in the issues of restructuring state, election system, administrative system and addressing the grievances of minorities, indigenous people, women and Dalits in forthcoming constitution. However, Major political parties could not come to the conclusion in these issues, which made Constituent Assembly failure to draft the new constitution as expected by the ordinary people (ibid: 2-3).

Similarly, after being failure of first Constant Assembly to promulgate new constitution up to four years, it was dissolved according to the verdict of Supreme Court in 2012. The sudden dismissal of CA created political vacuum and constitutional crisis in the country. But, after long debate, the political parties agreed to appoint a chairman of the government from a neutral organization and second Constituent Election was held in November 2013. In this election, Nepali Congress is placed in first position and UCPN-Maoist is in third position though it was placed in first position in first CA election. This CA has also crossed the predicted deadline to promulgate new constitution and currently Nepalese politics is passing through critical phase. Currently, CA as a legitimized body to promulgate new constitution by including the major agendas of civil war has been neglecting the peoples' verdict. Some political leaders are trying to draft the constitution by excluding the agendas of minorities. Now, in one hand, government has responsibility to maintain peace and security around the state, on the other, minorities, indigenous people, women and Dalits are seeking constitutional guarantee of their privileged rights. Moreover, there has been problem in restructuring the state and demarcating the provinces of federal state (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014).

⁶ Constituent Assembly

2.5.2 Push for Caste Reform in New Era

Nepal has experienced various ways of constitution making process in different epoch of history. However “those constitutions were promulgated only the ruler and by a group of people who ruled the country and consequently those constitutions could not underpin the roadmap for the over all development of various castes and communities” (DNF, 2012:1). Moreover, those constitutions were not inclusive in nature. Therefore, the agenda of writing new constitution through CA came up with the result of numerous struggle of Nepalese people since a long time, the armed revolution, peaceful movement, peoples’ war and 19 days peoples uprising, Madesh Movemnet and other several movements launched for justice by different ethnic groups and communities (Acharya, 2014). In this process, Dalit leaders are trying to attempt and identify fundamental agendas of entire Dalits community to be established in upcoming constitution by analyzing “economic, social, political and educational and health related issues” (DNF, 2012:1). The continuous struggle of Dalits in the issues of caste-based discrimination and representing their agendas in new constitution, the interim and yet to be rectified constitution of Nepal has mentioned the special provisions for Dalits in item 6 of part 3 “all types of exploitation-operation including untouchability of the Dalits shall end and special rights shall be ensured for the Dalits in all sectors” (Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007).

2.5.3 Empowerment Efforts

In the political career of Nepal, Dalits are constantly making efforts to eradicate caste based discrimination and socio-political marginalization. Their strategies of struggle have been changed in different fractions of the political history; however, the central motto is always same that they want equal opportunity and social rights in every parts of social structure. They have also made high effort for the guarantee of their socio-cultural and political rights in new constitution (Khanal et. al 2012). For this, the Kathmandu Charter of Dalit Rights 2007 has declared basic concerns of Dalis in the following ways; Dalits participation in restructuring the state, ending caste discrimination and untouchability, inclusive formation of political parties, economic and employment opportunities, education, health and other economic rights, social, religious and cultural rights, law, justice and fair administration etc. These agendas were formulated for constitutional guarantee of Dalits’ rights in new constitution of Nepal (UNDP, 2008).

2.6 Chapter Summary

The civil war took place in Nepal from 1996 to 2006 between the state and CPN-Maoist. The reasons behind the civil war were, landlessness, inter-group inequality, and economic cum social vulnerability of marginalized people. It left many negative impacts in social, economic and political phenomenon of Nepal by creating enormous upheaval in nation's economy. Along with the negative impacts, it also played transformative role to create awareness among the marginalized groups of people including Dalits. Similarly, it also subverted the level of caste hierarchy and pushed the country into a new era of social reformation.

Chapter 3. Methodological Approach

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on methodological issues. It specifically looks at the study area, informants' selection, informants' size, field access, data collection techniques and ethical consideration.

3.2 Study Area

Devasthan, one of the Village Development Committees of Baglung district, situated in western part of Nepal, was the site for the study. It is located 125 km far from the district head quarter and expanded in 41 square kilometer with a sub division of nine small wards (sub division of territory). There is an interesting history behind its name, about four hundred years ago, one statue of a female was found in the area and people made temple placing the statue inside it. Similarly, the temple was named as 'Devasthan', which means 'Deity's place'. Devasthan VDC is heterogeneous in terms of caste and ethnic composition. The Dalits have predominant population and Brahmins, Chhetris, Gurungs and Thakali are other ethnic groups who are in small number of population (Ghimire, 2012).

There are number of reasons behind the selection of this place as my study area. Firstly, it is one of the major areas of Dalit community where the population of Dalit people is 2638 out a total population of 9597 (Ghimire, 2012). Secondly, it is the Dalit community that turned out to be the stronghold of the armed conflict launched by Maoist. Thirdly, the population of this VDC is higher than other caste people but their status is backward (ibid). Generally majority rules over the minority, however, this concept is not applicable in the case of Dalits. Likewise, it is worth to state that no other researchers have conducted any research concerning a social life of the Dalits from this VDC. Therefore, Dalit community of this VDC was purposively selected for the study area.

3.3 Gaining Field Access

Gaining access in fieldwork is one of the essential tasks of qualitative research as it affects data collection and the quality of research (Johl & Renganathan, 2010). The act of gaining access to the research field consists overall value to fulfill the target of a research. Further, a researcher should be very conscious about how to gain access and how to build social rapport to get access to the real informants (Shenton & Hayter, 2004). Therefore, gaining access is not

an easy task; it involves a combination of different strategies, goal, hard work and environment. However, I got access in fieldwork due to my years long belongingness in the same communal framework. My targeted field was Devasthan VDC of Baglung District where majority of Dalits had their residence. I was also from same VDC, therefore, I was already somehow familiar with the socio cultural scenario of surrounding. However, I did not have minute information about everything because I lived in capital city and other places since a long time. Therefore, I took help of my friends and relatives to gain access to the informants. While obtaining access to the informants, I faced difficulties and challenges due to caste difference between the researcher and the informants.

In fact, gaining access depends on the research context, subject matter, language, country, participants and most importantly whether the researcher himself or herself bears the ability of research to tackle the odd circumstances (Shenton & Hayter, 2004). Similarly, gaining access is not difficult itself, the real challenge and difficulty lies in maintaining access and managing relationship with the research participants (Brahler, 2012). As Brahler says, my research issue was socially sensitive and could undermine the social harmony if informants' information was leaked. In this context, I had a challenge to maintain mutual understanding and privacy however; I convinced them through Dalit leader of the VDC who was familiar with me from the first Constituent Assembly election mission. Similarly, my research was targeted to find the hardships and suffering of Dalits and their struggle against the caste-based inequalities as well as post-war predicament for gaining equal socio-political status in the society. For this, I had to collect more information with their life history like; how they are living in a society and why they are facing caste discrimination, within a short period of time. But, I was benefited due to their trust as I was from the same region and I made them believe that the research was not for my personal benefit. In one sense, they were happy because I was the first person to approach them for the research work from a non-Dalit community.

3.4 Selection of Informants

This study primarily endeavors to find out caste-based inequalities, injustice and post-war predicament of Dalit people in Post-conflict Nepal. Further, it also focuses on Dalit peoples' struggle for existential coherence with Non-Dalits. For this, I applied purposive sampling tool for the selection of informants. According to this method, a researcher deliberately chooses the informants by generalizing the informants' quality to deliver the information (Dolores & Tongco, 2007:147). As this method, I chose the informants who were directly and indirectly

involved in Maoist war and they were also more conscious about their rights within a same caste and communal frame. In this process, I did not feel difficulties due to my a priori knowledge about the field setting. I also chose the homogenous group of people who had same caste, culture and background except age group.

3.5 Size of Informants

When I left for fieldwork to Nepal in June 2014, I had planned to interview more than 20 people of different categories like; grassroots Dalit people to national level Dalit politicians. However, I became able to approach only fourteen. The total number of informants in study area was eleven, and two were from Kathmandu, among them eight were male and five were female. Similarly, I also interviewed one Dalit student of same VDC though Skype returning from fieldwork who studies in United States. In surface level, the number of informants is representative, however, keeps great value in subtle level because in qualitative research, numbers are unimportant rather quality of information is important and it favors small number is beautiful (Sandelowski, 1995). Likewise, qualitative investigations basically consists small choice, however, sample choice bears more important consideration (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007:242). In this regard, I am fully believed that the information gained through small number of informants play vital role in my research to fulfill the targeted aim and concretize struggle of Dalit people against caste-based inequalities in post-conflict Nepal.

3.6 Data Collection

In the process of data collection, qualitative method of interviewing was applied with the practicality that it digs out and explores the targeted range of audiences' voice and perception. As (Creswell, 2009) opines that qualitative research can explore and understand the experiences of an individual or group. Furthermore, it also provides a picture of a social world where we live and how things go around us as well as how individual or groups have different looks at their own world (Handcock, et.al, 2007). As my research was focused on 'how' and 'why' Dalits were struggling against caste discrimination cum socio-political marginalization. These issues could merely been addressed through qualitative approach of data collection. Hence, I obtained the primary data concerning to Dalits' current life situation, hardships and predicament as a lower caste and applied interviewing as a main tool of data collation. Further, I applied semi-structured method with the key informants and unstructured with the general informants. Similarly, necessary secondary data were collected through different

sources like, newspaper, literatures, historical documents and additional help of related films and documentary.

3.6.1 Interviews

The interview is considered as the most common source of data in qualitative studies, it is “probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research” (Bryman, 2001:312). As my study is about caste-based discrimination and its impact on the so-called untouchables, can reflect the hardships and predicament of Nepalese Dalits. Further, it also carries the theme of their struggle to be free from a century long stigma of untouchable low caste. While going insight to dig up their struggle against caste-based inequalities, I applied the general interview guide approach, which was really beneficial to gather information from the real voice of Dalit people of western Nepal. Altogether eleven people were interviewed through the semi-structured process in Devasthan village development committee. Out of eleven, six were male and five were female, one was political head of the Ward⁷, one was secretary of Dalit Awareness Centre (DAC) other three were local politicians whereas, all five female informants were manual workers. With interview guide, I went to their homes and met personally, three were met in a paddy field where they were working. I frequently met some informants more than three or four times to make them more open to gather the information. We also exchanged out cell phone contact each other to build up good rapport. Among all the informants, three were directly involved in Maoist revolution and one had lost his son in the war.

Furthermore, two interviews were conducted in capital city of Nepal, one was a schoolteacher in Kathmandu who was from same VDC and another was one of the active members of National Dalit Commission. Additionally, I took one interview with Dalit student from Tromso through Skype who studies in USA. Similarly, I also tried to take interview of some National level Dalit political leaders however, my endeavors failed due to their busy schedule.

3.6.2 Focus Group Discussion

As one of the essential parts of qualitative research techniques, the focus group discussion became crucial tool in my data collection strategy. According to (Bryman, 2001:342) it is descriptive way of collecting information from the participants through unstructured way of

⁷ One of the nine small territories within a ‘Devasthan’ Village Development Committee

questioning, it is more flexible in nature, however, researcher has better chance of getting access to the information. Further, the focus group is designed in small groups where researcher strives to catch information through free discussion with the participants. Similarly, it also allows free space to the participants to overflow their conscious and unconscious views towards the subject matter (Berg, 2000:111). In order to get detail views concerning on caste-based inequalities, difficulties and grievances of Dalits being a lower caste and their struggle against the caste discrimination, focus group discussions were conducted among the participants who had similar backgrounds, experiences and feelings as marginalized caste (Morgan, 1996). In the discussions, agendas were about caste-based inequalities and their grievances as well as the reasons of their involvement in Maoist armed struggle. Similarly, their attitude towards non-Dalits, and nature of struggle and efforts to fight against the caste discrimination were discussed. Moreover, the state's mechanism for empowering the Dalits, their pre-war, war and post-war status and changeable life scenario in post-conflict setting also were discussed. In this process, six participants were involved, among them four were male and two were female.

3.6.3 Observation

Observation of field was done to gather true information of the community setting, diverse perspective of the different castes people and especially for gaining an understanding of the physical, social, cultural and economic context in which participants live and maintain relationship between the caste based hierarchies (Mack et.al, 2005:14). During the observation, I did not directly participate rather observed alone due to the time limitation. Through the observation, I was able to know about attitude of Dalit people to the Non-Dalits, their hardships and difficulties as an untouchable low caste and social behavior of non-Dalits towards them. Similarly, involvement of Dalit people in different organizations and role of Dalit leaders to struggle against the caste-based inequalities were observed from the periphery. This observation provided important additional information relating to the study in a data collection process.

3.6.4 Document Review

Document review is an important part of research method in qualitative research. In the process of research, the historical background and relatively important information of surrounding phenomenon can be studied through the document analysis. Similarly, "the review of documents is an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying values and beliefs of

participants in a setting (Marshall and Rossman 1995:116). For the additional information in the process of data collection, I gathered information from the oral testimony of eyewitnesses, written materials like; textbooks, novels, newspapers and other forms of communications; music, art, pictures and political speeches. Likewise, I also thoroughly studied the sources of historical data; contemporary records, legal papers, personal notes and memoirs, pamphlets and government documents to know and understand the history of Dalits. As a part of document review, visual anthropology or film ethnography also became useful tool for gaining sufficient knowledge for my data collection. By reviewing the document, I got sufficient reasons for involvement of Dalit people in Maoist Armed Struggle and unflinching efforts to overthrow the caste-based inequalities.

3.7 Field Reflections

Being a non-Dalit researcher from the same community where I conducted fieldwork proved worthy for acquiring better reflexivity in data collection despite the chance of being influenced due to my belongingness of same community. I could stand in middle path to play the role of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ at a time. I was insider in the sense that I was from the same community, having similar language, culture and religion. Similarly, I was familiar to the social surroundings, having a priori knowledge about the social setting, caste-based hierarchical social structure and good relationship with some Dalit political actors. According to Unluer (2012:1), insiders really know the politics of an organization and formal hierarchy of a society. In general, they have great deal of intimate knowledge and ability to act accordingly. Moreover, the lived experiences, insights and permanent resident of same communal frame further proved that I was insider. In contrast, I was also ‘outsider’ because I was so called higher caste man vis-a-vis the informants. In addition, there were differences between informants and the researcher that I could not understand what they have experienced being a Dalit because I was from so-called elite upper caste.

The status of a social researcher as ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ is neither static nor one-dimensional, it is best way of acquiring reliable information from the middle path (Rabe, 2003:150). Being insider and outsider at a time in a collaborative way can be viewed as the best research approach, which I practiced in my data collection procedure. As Breen (2007) illustrates that insider status helps for building up social rapport and trust with the informants, whereas, outsider positioning facilitates for being critical and objective while gathering the information. In this sense, ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ are mutually exclusive within the context to

maintain a good distance with the participants. In the same way, I also maintained the guidelines of insider and outsider strategy while approaching the participants. My informants had less chance to provide false information because I was more resourceful than the outsider about the general information. In other way, they could not influence me with the intention of making me bias due to my caste position. Therefore, I took double advantage in maintaining a relationship with the informants.

3.8 Research Ethics and Challenges

Ethics is an indispensable part of the research due to its moral and professional constraints to limit the researcher's subjective views (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). It makes a researcher more responsible while collecting the data and publishing the outcomes. Similarly, ethical consideration limits the act of generalization in research subject and maintains privacy of the participants for doing good and avoiding harm (Orb et.al, 2000:93). Moreover, ethics is about partnership between researcher and informants to balance the researcher's power regimes imparting on subjectivity (Thoody, 2006:143). During the process of data collection, I designed the project where I could address the issues since the beginning of my fieldwork. As a part of ethics, I did not hide my personality, took informed consent and maintained privacy of the participants considering the fact that ethical issues are present in any kind of research (Orb et.al, 2000:93).

Apart from considering the ethical issues; I faced lots of challenges during my fieldwork. Firstly, the time I went for the fieldwork was in rainy season, which created more difficulties while reaching to the research destination. The research area was 400 K.M far from the capital city, however it took two days time to reach there, I changed six vehicles on the way and mostly walked with bare feet due to muddy road. Secondly, my research was based on socially vulnerable group, which bears high degree of challenges. In fact, my challenge began when I planned to establish contact with them despite of their busy schedule in farming. Moreover, difficulties and challenges more sored up while establishing rapport with the Dalit informants and convincing them about my position and purpose of the research. Likewise, my caste position also posed challenge in the process of research because some Dalit informants felt hesitation in front of me and some were suspicious that I was collecting money in the name of Dalit research. However, I carefully made clear about my position and purpose and overcame the prostrating challenges in a sincere way. Finally, I internalized all precautions

and ethics and respectfully understood the sentiment of Dalit people by minimizing hindrances and difficulties to achieve the goal.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has sought to highlight the methodological issues of the study. Data collection was carried out in Devasthan VDC of Baglung district, Nepal from June to August 2014. This place was occupied by majority of Dalit population. The total number of informants in this area was eleven, and two were from Kathmandu, among them eight were male and five were female. Similarly, one interview was taken with a Dalit student through Skype who was in USA. In order to emphasize the view of ordinary Dalit people against caste-based discrimination, I deployed qualitative semi-structured interviewing and focus group discussion as the primary source of data collection. The informants were selected through purposively sampling method that I deliberately chose the informants who were socially and politically conscious. I am fully believed that the information gained through small number of informants play vital role in my research to fulfill the targeted aim and concretize the struggle of Dalit people against caste-based inequalities in post-conflict Nepal.

Chapter 4. Conceptual Framework

4.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts a conceptual framework to the study of Dalit Peoples' struggle against the caste-based inequalities in post-conflict Nepal. Firstly, it focuses on the concept of subalternity and its relevance in vocalizing the marginalized mass and highlights structural social relationships. Secondly, it discusses the concept of empowerment to enable understanding of motivations and experiences of Dalit struggle against inequality. Finally, it highlights the interplay between the concepts of subalternity and empowerment.

4.2 Concept of Subalternity

The term 'subaltern' refers to someone who is in lower rank in military or class or caste system and always remains in the bottom of social, political and economic hierarchy (Guha, 1982). It is about a person who is dispossessed, marginalized, oppressed and powerless in a society. It also can be defined as a social group, which is out of social, political and economic representation in a hegemonic power structure and reduced to face jumble of discriminations based on class, ethnicity, race or caste (Sahoo, 2014). The voice of subaltern people is not heard in a society, therefore, they are almost like speechless fitting them with a model of oppressor (Guha, 1982). In fact, the subaltern concept came up with the motto of systematic discussion of subalternity in South Asian society with fullest effort for examining and evaluating the general themes and attributes of subalterns in South Asia. It was like a political movement to subvert and change the history of social structure in the influence of post modernism and post structuralism (Arnold & Hardiman, 1994).

According to Gramsci, the term subaltern suggests a group of people who are in lower rank in a society and they become a subject to the hegemony of ruling class people and cannot build up their own history (Gramsci, 1971). The subaltern classes fundamentally refer to "any low rank person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation" (Louai, 2012:5). Similarly, Dipesh Chakrabarty, argues that citizenship requires certain kind of subject position in a modern state. However, many rural and illiterate subalterns do not have this position due to their exclusion from mainstream official history. Therefore, subalterns' representation in

mainstream history and literature is so different that they are not, in fact, lower class citizens, indigenous groups or lower-caste people who are marginalized in such a way as not to have a voice (Chakrabarty, 1994).

The originality of subaltern studies came to rewrite the state-centered national discourse that replicates colonial power in a world of globalization (Ludden, 2002). This new kind of theoretical perspective consists of seeking fragmented and unexpressed voice of lower class people who sacrificed their life but did not get representation in mainstream history and politics. The subaltern theorists “stand together again to secure a better future for subaltern peoples, learning to hear them, allowing them to speak, talking back to powers that marginalize them, documenting their past” (Ludden, 2002:16). Further, subaltern theory also focuses on the issues of identity, socio-political rights and proportional representations in state apparatus.

4.3 Education and Consciousness

Education is known to be an active agent of social change and transformation. It makes people conscious and aware about surrounding phenomena and drives them to act accordingly (Patil, 2012). Similarly, it also brings psychological and ideological change in the mindset of a person through which one can pursue new way for life. According to Durkheim (1977), education is empowering tool for individuals, which makes the individuals able to see and play own role in social transformation. Likewise, Francis J. Brown (1947), also prioritizes the role of education in gaining consciousness for social transformation, he further defines that education is a process, which brings fundamental changes in outlook and behavior of a society and enables every individuals to effectively participate in the social activities for positive contribution.

4.4 Development of Subaltern Consciousness

Education is a prime factor for bringing subaltern consciousness to the Dalits of Nepal that made them able to question the national narratives and Hindu philosophy. Before development of modern trend of education, there was Sanskrit education system in Nepal where only Brahmins and Chhetris, as a high caste people were benefited. The modern trend of education started in Nepal after restoration of democracy in 1951, which became milestone for gaining education by the marginalized people (Stash & Hannum, 2001). This educational

opportunity helped Dalit people to study about history and politics of Nepal; they also studied Hindu philosophy and found that they were misrepresented in national narratives, which heightened the consciousness of Dalit subalterns. Similarly, they also realized that nationalist narratives tend to be elitist and exclusive which has hegemonized them with discursive power. Therefore, they need to break their silence for the liberation. According to Margery Sabin, subaltern consciousness starts when they know the undeniable truth that they have been misrepresented in a society as ‘other’, which is partial, imaginative and fictitious elite discourse (Sabin, 2008). Moreover, Dalit people also gained consciousness through different political movements of Nepal where they were directly and indirectly involved, these political movements made them learn about state politics and space of their own. In this scenario, they knew that they were marginalized and used for fulfilling other’s vested political interest and became conscious about their own rights that led them towards asserting their own position.

In fact, Dalit struggle in Nepal can be referred as a subaltern struggle for their socio-political inclusion and empowerment after being conscious about caste-based discrimination and socio-political marginalization. Dalit people as a marginalized and oppressed mass began to demand equal opportunity, social dignity and self-esteem in the society. In this phase, they also joined their hands with non-Dalit actors who supported and promised to fight against caste-based discrimination. Similarly, majority of Dalit population accepted Maoist armed revolution as an ultimate solution to address the Dalit’s issues in Nepal. After being conscious, it was their obligation to fight against discriminatory practices because they were on the bottom of social hierarchy due to caste system (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014). They were always segmented and marginalized by the so-called high caste people and never got space for dignified social life. Therefore, they tried their best to improve their lives with a golden ray of hope to get equal space in the society. This hope and unflinching effort for vigorous social change, they tried to understand the national and international minority movements to assert their leading space in the state (Khanal et.al, 2012).

4.5 Subaltern Resistance

Though many critics interpreted subaltern resistance from different perspectives, its main purpose is an elimination of elite domination. It is equally remarkable that the scholars from inside and outside Subaltern Studies have established subaltern people’s resistance against the elite classes as the basic feature of life (Pandey, 1994). Dipesh Chakrabarty argues “subalternity is the composite culture of resistance to and acceptance of domination and

hierarchy” (IV). Similarly, Bhadra (1989) states, “The idioms of domination, subordination and revolt, I believe; are often inextricably linked together; we separate them here only to facilitate analysis. If this true, it follows that subordination or domination is seldom complete, if ever. The process is marked by struggle and resistance”(54). Subaltern people go for resistance because of their lower social status, caste hierarchy and socio-political marginalization. The marginal groups, untouchables, immigrants, women, children, domestic servants and myriad others are subalterns who always get no space in an authoritative domination of elite class people therefore, they struggle from the bottom so as to assert equality, freedom and socio-political rights (Pandey, 1994).

According to David Ludden, subaltern peoples tend to seek their socio-political space from bottom by asserting the complete autonomy of lower class (Ludden, 2002). Similarly, subalternity also made revolution in the mind of so called lower caste people that they are dominated and marginalized by authority, therefore they need to raise their voice to improve their conditions. The misery and poverty of subaltern people are not only due to foreign exploitations, they are also victimized by national elites and ruling class people within a country. This concept heightened political consciousness of the subaltern people and stimulated them to revolt against caste, gender, social and economic inequalities (Ludden, 2002).

According to Gautam Bhadra, subaltern people are rebellious in nature, he particularly writes that “the poor and the oppressed have time and again, and in different histories, made voluntary sacrifices in favour of the rich and the dominant, at least as often as they have rebelled against the latter” (Bhadra, 1989:54). When subaltern people were unconscious, they sacrificed their lives for the sake of elitists. But, after gaining consciousness, they revolted for the quest of their own rights (O, Hanlon, 2002). After the extreme form of domination, subaltern people began to resist against the postcolonial rulers with a declaration of subaltern resistance, they revolted through a back door for the reconstruction of subaltern autonomy (ibid:138).

4.6 Theory of Empowerment

According to Deepa Narayan (2005), empowerment is a multidimensional social process, through which people gain control over their lives issues. This process makes people aware and confident to compete with their surrounding social phenomena. It is a “construct that

links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to social policy and social change” (Rappaport, 1981 ref. in Perkin & Zimmerman, 1995). It is also a major agent of social change with its inherent principle of uplifting people from previous status to a better position. It carries the pervasive social values to strengthen individuals and make people aware about social influence, political power and legal rights. It is a “multilevel construct applicable to individual citizens as well as the organizations and neighborhoods; it suggests the study of people in context” (Rappaport, 1987:121).

Empowerment depends upon the context and situation of the people especially how they have been marginalized and sabotaged from public policies and opportunities. Therefore, social empowerment is nothing other than uplifting the status of people from vicious circle of social domination and segmentation (Lord & Hutchison, 1993).

Empowerment is a value-oriented process that enables the targeted group to be aware of social realities and enhances their understanding the consequences of social realities (Sadan, 2004). Likewise, value oriented empowerment process consists of certain goals, aims, plans and strategies for implementing change and treating them equally for their involvement in socio-economic and political ongoing process. It is “a process where individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes” (Mechanic, 1991, ref. in Zimmerman, 2000:43). Empowerment is also a desired and intentional process focused to the targeted group for mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation through which people can share equal social and political benefits and gain control over the available opportunities and resources (Zimmernam, 2000).

The above-discussed principles feed into the concept of subalternity, which is also about how socially and politically disadvantaged people gain control over their lives. Similarly, subaltern theory and empowerment basically deal with deconstructing and redrawing the social structure to deliver social benefits to the marginalized populations. In addition, subaltern project tries its best to raise social and political consciousness of the people for strengthening and empowering the isolated social groups (Guha, 1982). It also aims at dismantling the mainstream history, politics and socio-cultural traits on which the elite people exercise their power. Therefore, subaltern theory speaks for the people whose voice is mute in a society (Chakrabarty, 1994).

4.7 Critiques of the Concepts: Subalternity and Empowerment

Vinay Bahl argues that the subaltern theory excludes the social order and institutions articulated in the formation of subject or how is the link between social and psychic reality to be spelled out. In short “subaltern studies left out from their consideration of material culture, such as clothes, food, furniture, living and working conditions, housing, technology and financial system and failed to show how material culture is produced by human agency in the process of social interaction” (Bahl, 1997:1333). Moreover, the concept of subalternity is not also cable of granting emancipatory politics to the masses because of its limited vision (Bahl, 1997). Most of the scholars of subaltern studies are product of western academic institutions, and influenced by prevailing trends of historical writings, which is irrelevant in South Asian context, therefore it is a failure project (ibid).

Hannah Altern, writes that subaltern theory has nothing new, it is merely an interpretation of Marxism and post-modernism. It was “strongly influenced by the English Marxist historical practice of histories from below” (Altern, 2012:59). While defining the condition of subaltern people, Ranajit Guha (1989), in his essay “Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography” (*SS VI*) says that “to discern the play of paradoxes on the subaltern side as well in the peasant rebel’s vision of God as a white man who writes like a court clerk, the lower caste attempts to move upward by emulating the conservatism of the upper caste” (272). He further says that subaltern people have no agency of their own to free themselves from the shackles of chronological linear time. According to him, subaltern people raise their voice but their voice is unheard in the colonial mode of elitist society. Subaltern people do not get space in their own home because they are only the play dolls in the hand of capitalist colonial agents. This concept of Guha about subaltern theory seems heavily influenced by the work and theories of Antonio Gramsci, from whom, Guha radically redefined subordination and inferior rank of subaltern people in apparently invisible way (Altern, 2012). These “theoretical and intellectual influences worked alongside the specific historiographical and political context of India. By 1980s a generation of modern, internationally connected scholars from India perceived that Indian historiography sorely needed a review in light of contemporary politics” (Altern, 2012:59-60).

Another subaltern critic Eva Chermiavsky also shows the historical limit on the concept of subalternity, which only deals about the situation of colonial India. It lacks universality to apply it on American subalterns. She says “U.S. history is marked by a convergence of

nationalism and colonialism, so that independence transfers power from imperialist interests abroad to imperialists interests on American soil-from white men to white men” (Cherniavsky, 1996:86). She criticizes Guha’s concept of ‘dominance without hegemony’ to the effect that the colonized were consistently coerced rather than persuaded which is not applicable in American history where indigenous and nonwhite labor had been systematically displaced through the exercise of consent hegemony (ibid).

Moreover, the empowerment theory also has been criticized due to its contradictory discourses. Lennie (2001:14) argues, “the concept of empowerment is highly problematic and raises many difficult issues for contemporary social research”. She further says that the empowerment process is an attempt to exercise power over the powerless; it does not bring social change in meaningful way. Similarly, Aiken & Goldwasser (2010) opine that empowerment theory has fundamental misconceptions and false assumptions. Another scholar Vijaya Kumar (1998) asserts that empowerment is a politics, which is played with the sentiment of the poor people. In the name of social, economic and political rights, different empowerment agendas are foregrounded, however, marginalized people are not empowered as empowerment projects promise to them. Therefore, empowerment project is simply a political project, which gives only false hope to the marginalized people (Kumar, 1998). He further argues that it is a disempowering project in the name of empowerment planned by economic planners, technocrats, trained bureaucrats and political leaders for the fulfillment of their vested interests (ibid:131).

Despite the criticisms of the concept of subalternity and empowerment, they are relevant for highlighting Dalit experiences and struggle in Nepal. Subalternity and empowerment addresses to social change. Empowerment particularly looks at social change as promoting “people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 2001:19). Subalternity on the other hand, brings awareness to the marginalized people and makes them able to subvert unequal socio-political hierarchy. Hence, both issues subalternity and empowerment are worthy to deal with Dalits in post-conflict Nepal. Dalit people, having the subaltern position, are facing caste-based socio-political discrimination and always struggling against their marginalized position in Nepal. They are struggling from bottom so as to assert their social and constitutional rights as envisaged by the concept of subalternity. According to Guha (1982), subaltern people are always denied state opportunities and live with fragmented and episodic life. In Nepal, for instance, there is denial

of entry of Dalits by higher caste into their houses, temples and restaurants etc. (Bhattachan et.al, 2009:11). Even Dalits are denied access to resources like; school, water bodies and community forests. It shows that Dalits in Nepalese society are treated as inhumane. Likewise, in the shadow of caste-based discrimination, Dalits are treated and considered as ‘other’, which means exclusion from social opportunities, jobs, education and justice. In this context, the concepts of subalternity and empowerment regardless of their weaknesses provide analytical tools for understanding Dalit conditions and political struggles in Nepal.

4.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has sought to outline the conceptual framework to the study of Dalit Peoples’ struggle against the caste-based inequalities in post-conflict Nepal. Firstly, in order to understand and explain the Dalit struggle in Nepal, I have foregrounded the concept of subalternity. The term ‘subaltern’ suggests the group of people who are in lower rank in a society and they become a subject to the hegemony of ruling class. Subaltern peoples tend to seek their socio-political space from bottom by asserting the complete autonomy of lower class. It has further highlighted the relevance of subaltern theory in vocalizing the voice of Nepalese Dalits and their structural social relationships.

Secondly, it has discussed the concept of empowerment to enable understanding of motivations and experiences of Dalit struggle against inequality. Here, empowerment is understood as a peoples’ desire for gaining control over their lives issues. It is also understood as a major agent of social change with its inherent principle of uplifting people socially and politically.

Finally, it has outlined the interplay between the concepts of subalternity and empowerment for highlighting Dalit experiences and struggle in Nepal. Subalternity and empowerment addresses to social change. Empowerment particularly looks at social change as promoting “people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (Kabeer, 2001:19). Subalternity on the other hand, brings awareness to the marginalized and makes them able to subvert unequal socio-political hierarchy. Hence, both issues subalternity and empowerment are worthy to deal with Dalits in post-conflict Nepal.

Chapter 5. Data Presentation and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the field data. It initially focuses on the informants' background information, especially age, sex, education, occupation and political affiliation. Further, the data is categorised into themes and discussed within the conceptual framework. The thematic categories include suffering and hardships of Dalits and their strategies for caste-based equality.

5.2 Maintaining Anonymity

Untouchability is a sensitive issue for vulnerable social group in Nepal. The research on this topic can thus be more complicated if privacy is not maintained. Crow and Wiles assert “anonymity and confidentiality of participants are central to ethical research practice in social research” (2008:1). The anonymity of informants is more essential if research subject is about vulnerable social group (Goodhand, 2000). Therefore, the names of my informants have been changed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. In the present data presentation and discussion, pseudonyms have been used for the informants.

5.3 Background of Informants

Table No. 1

Pseudonyms of the Informants	Age	Sex	Education	Occupation	Political Affiliation
Kalu	32	Male	SLC	Self-employed	UCPN-Maoist
Padam	40	Male	SLC	Shopkeeper	UCPN-Maoist
Sete	45	Male	Primary	Politician	UCPN-Maoist
Harke	60	Male	Primary	Shopkeeper	UCPN-Maoist
Thule	62	Male	Literate	Farmer	UCPN-Maoist
Sante	35	Male	BA	Civil Servant	Unknown
Gore	37	Male	MA	INGO Worker	Unknown
Rame	28	Male	BA	Teacher	UCPN-Maoist
Dalle	42	Male	Primary	Self-employed	Unknown

Suntali	45	Female	Primary	Farmer	CPN-UML
Maya	41	Female	Literate	Farmer	UCPN-Maoist
Kumari	25	Female	Literate	Farmer	Unknown
Suni	35	Female	SLC	Teacher	UCPN-Maoist
Sani	32	Female	Literate	Farmer	UCPN-Maoist

Source: Field Work, 2014

Table 1 above presents the background information of the informants especially their age, sex, education, occupation and political belongings. The data indicates that 65% of my informants were male and 35% female. The male respondents were more conscious about their position in comparison to female respondents. It is due to a social structure that women were subordinated to men. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, women are doubly marginalized in in subaltern society; once they are marginalized as a subaltern and the other they are women (Spivak, 1988). Likewise, female respondents had faced double marginalization, once as an untouchable low caste and another as women.

Regarding education, six informants have passed school level education, among them; three informants have gained higher level of education. Other eight informants have only below primary education. This trend of Dalit education indicates that Dalits have less access to educational opportunities. The informants, I chose purposively, were relatively aware and educated than rest of other Dalit population. Hence, it becomes clear that other Dalit people are even poorer in education. The Data further suggests that most of the informants are involved in farming and local business, which often have low economic returns. They are economically vulnerable and incapable of meeting everyday welfare needs. The informants' occupation cannot fulfill their basic need. Out of 14 informants, only 4 informants have comparatively good occupation, however, they are also victim of untouchability.

Table 1 also indicates that most of the informants have political affiliation with UCPN-Maoist. Before intervention of Maoist revolution, they had no affiliation with any political party; even some were unaware of the different political groups. But during war, they became politically conscious and supported Maoist to come out from the vicious circle of caste-based discrimination. The informants Kalu, Padam, Sete and Harke were directly involved in war and remained underground during the wartime. Vasily, asserts that caste-based inequality, poverty and injustice were the major reasons for Dalits joining the Maoist war (Vasily, 2009).

Some informants denied knowing about their political affiliation due to the mistrust on political parties.

5.4 Reasons for Dalit Movement

5.4.1 The Struggle Against Caste-based Inequality

The major motif of Dalit struggle is directed towards gaining caste-based equality and socio-political empowerment. Almost all the informants meant that they were oppressed by state policies and excluded from mainstream national development agendas due to a lower caste. Similarly, they were suffering from vicious circle of poverty over many generations and equally facing inhuman behavior from so called high caste people. Majority of the informants had similar view for the reason of Dalit movement, which was not other than existing caste-based discriminatory practices, biased state policy, and unequal distribution of resources. For instance, Kalu says, *“all the Dalit people are deprived from opportunities in life. Non-Dalits do not want to provide opportunities for us; they don’t allow us to participate in important discussions. They also don’t hear our voice because they behave us as untouchables* (Field Interview, 2014). According to Kalu, Dalits are facing caste-based inequalities as untouchables. So, they want to eliminate the caste-based discrimination for a dignified life. The main appeal of Dalit struggle is to establish an equitable society where all persons can live with dignity regardless of their caste (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014). Therefore, Dalits are being collectively organized to fight against the caste-based discrimination. In this regard Padam says:

“For the promotion of Dalits’ status we have established DAC (Dalit Awareness Centre), which is currently making Dalits aware about their rights and how to face challenges of caste-based discrimination. Further, it also provides educational scholarship to the Dalit children. Similarly, it fights against caste-based discrimination by ensuring that Dalits are no more designated as untouchables in the constitution of Nepal (Field Interview, 2014).

Due to continuous struggle of Dalits, Nepal’s Interim Parliament prohibited the practice of untouchability both in public and private spheres and criminalized caste-based discriminatory practices. “This was a great achievement of the Dalit right based movement, which is also regarded as the first step to ensure the effective protection of Dalit Rights” (FEDO, 2012:1).

5.4.2 Self-esteem

Seeking self-esteem is one of the major reasons for Dalit struggle. Due to lack of respect, Dalits often feel inferior among other castes. Most of the informants opined that they feel disrespected as if they were non-humans. As Harke says:

“We ‘Dalits’ are historically marginalized social group. We are treated as if we are non-humans ... and the upper caste people treat us like animal. We don’t have self-esteem . . . and living in extreme upper caste domination. We have also same blood as high caste but society treats us separately. We are living but also dying at the same time” (Field Interview, 2014).

The narrative represents the everyday experiences of Dalits. It is a narration of subaltern people who always have to endure domination and humiliation (Zene, 2010:11). In such contextual horizon, Dalits are seeking their self-respect in the elitist society by struggling against the caste-based discrimination. In this regard, Sete states that *“we are looking for respectable status in the society, we should have equal social status as other so-called high caste people. We do not want to be dominated more because caste-based domination has been practiced for a long time. Now we want freedom ...” (Field Interview, 2014).*

5.4.3 Social Justice

Social justice refers to the fair redistribution of resources, equal access to opportunities and rights, fair legal system and due process and protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged people (Vishwakarma, 2002). The contrary of these principles, Nepalese Dalits are being treated as low class human beings; who have no rights to available resources (Ibid).

Regarding the social justice, all the informants had similar view that they were excluded from socio-economic opportunities. Dalits are often afraid to talk about the issues of social justice because of threats from other groups. The informants had vulnerable position in the society, they never got social respect, and even they were not allowed to collect water from the same resource with non-Dalits. One of the informants said:

“There is vast difference between Dalits and non-Dalits. Basically Dalits do not have access to facilities available to non-Dalits, they don’t share water and food with us. We survive by working in the houses and farms of non-Dalits. We are not able to run our own businesses because non-Dalits hesitate to buy from Dalits’ stores. In this sense, we Dalits have lower economic opportunities in comparison to non-Dalits.” (Field Interview, 2014)

Now, Dalits are breaking the silence and moving towards seeking social justice, all the Dalits from different social strata have been organized for the genuine access to the grassroots Dalit people. They think “iniquity is not only the work of the evil among us, but also a product of the silence of those who bear witness to it” (Nyoka 2005:8). Similarly, some Dalit NGOs are also carrying out short as well as long-term projects for the empowerment of Dalits. Not only this, Dalit right activist and political leaders are also strongly opposing the caste-based inequality and oppression of non-Dalits (Kharel. 2007).

5.4.4 Implementation of Constitutional Provisions

The constitutional provisions are not being implemented due to general institutional failure. In many rural areas of Nepal, Dalits are being treated as second-class citizens in relation to social, economic and political opportunities (CHR & GJ, 2008). Many of the informants reported that the constitutional provisions against untouchability have not been implemented. For example, despite the constitutional provisions, the high caste people maltreat untouchables in public places, temples, water collection sites and schools. One of the informants said, “*when I was planning to open a new shop in the central area, I was threatened by high caste people that it was not task of Dalit to do business. However, I did not listen to them and opened my shop but the non-Dalits threw stones at the shop at night*” (Field Interview, 2014). This behavior of non-Dalit is against the law “no one shall, on the ground of caste, race, decent community or occupation, prohibit anyone to carry on profession or business or compel anyone to carry any occupation or business” (Offence and Punishment Act, 2011:4).

Due to the caste-based hierarchy, Dalits are being excluded from a social sharing system. Basically, aged people are rigid in caste system because of their narrow vision to look at the society and Hindu religious doctrine (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014). Another informant reported:

“Constitutionally, we Dalits are equal to non-Dalits but in social behavior we are treated as untouchables. It is also due to the lack of awareness, poor implementation of law and poor education. Most of us do not know that untouchability is a social crime. So, Dalits bear a discrimination as their fortune” (Field Interview, 2014).

The narratives show that Dalits are truly subaltern people because they have less access in cultural and social institutions. They are also hegemonized and being a subject to the activity of ruling groups (Bill & Griffiths, 2004).

5.5 Forms of Dalit Struggle

5.5.1 Accessing for Public Space

In the post-conflict era, Dalit people have become more conscious and aware about caste issues. They have begun to participate in public debates on social issues (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014). According to the study informants, Dalits have heightened their social and political consciousness, which has given them courage not to be submissive to the high caste. One of the informants said:

“Previously, we were humble and submissive but now we have created our own space for Dalits vis a vis past. Even, all non-Dalits have elected me as a village representative and I have to handle social issues affecting the local community. Previously, non-Dalits used to think that Dalits have no right to participate in decision-making structures” (Field Interview, 2014).

This change was possible only through continuous Dalits’ struggle at national and local levels. Another informant said:

“In the first CA election, I was involved in the voting campaign for Maoist party and even convinced non-Dalits to vote for the Maoists. But in the past elections, our elders used sell their votes for cash or food; they did not know the difference between good and bad politics. After winning elections, political leaders used to treat the Dalit electorates as second-class citizens. Though, the Dalits are still not guaranteed their desired rights, attitudes towards them have been changed considerably in the post-civil war era.” (Field Interview, 2014)

This view of the informant suggests that Dalits feel empowered through involvement in political activities against the caste-based inequality. In this connection, Vasily notes that Dalit struggle has brought significant changes in terms of social, political and legal representation that can assist in bringing about social justice for Nepali Dalits (Vasily, 2009).

5.5.2 Changing Profession

In post-conflict Nepal, many Dalits have changed their professions to improve their life situation. The major motif for changing profession is to come out from traditional occupations. Pokhrel and Chhetri (2006) write:

“According to the traditional allocation for caste based occupations, Damai (Dalit sub-caste) stitch and repair clothes and they play the traditional Panche Baja (traditional musical instruments) during important festivals and ceremonies including marriages and some religious rituals. The Kami (Dalit sub-caste) are the blacksmiths, who mainly manufacture and repair pots and pans and other household implements made out of iron, copper and brass. They also make and repair farm implements like spades, plough blades, sickles, etc” (65).

Assigning work to the people on the basis of caste, symbolizes the hegemonized condition of subaltern people, who are not even free to choose their own professions (Guha, 1982). As said by Pokhrel and Chhetri (2006), the primary occupations of my informants were mostly in farming, sewing cloths for high caste people, playing musical instruments during marriage ceremonies, plough the field, making iron materials and so on. These were low grade of raw professional skills, which could not benefit them financially. Due to these low-skilled and low-income jobs, they were reduced to the bottom rungs of social hierarchy. In this way, Dalits were victimized in two ways; first as a lower caste and then low skilled and income worker. In recent times, some Dalits have changed or modified their traditional occupations. In this connection Dalle said:

“In the past I was involved in sewing clothes for high caste people and they used to give me Bali⁸ during harvest season. I used to go to their houses to sew their clothes. But now I have opened a tailoring shop where non-Dalis come to sew and repair clothes in the shop and give me cash in return.” (Field Interview, 2014)

The trend of changing traditional occupations has been rapidly occurred in the Dalit community, leading another informant to say that *“My father was a tailor for non-Dalits, but I did not want to continue the same occupation as my father did. So, I went to school and I am now a teacher in the capital city. Here, I somehow feel free from caste-based discrimination and do my job independently with non-Dalit colleagues”* (Field Interview, 2014). This

⁸ Dalits used to collect crops in harvesting season from high caste people as their wage

symbolizes that Dalits were marginalized due to their poor education and inability to obtain high skilled jobs (Bishwakarma, 2011).

5.5.3 Gaining Education

Nepalese education system had been dominated by Sanskrit education based on Hindu religion and mythology for a long time. This made it difficult for marginalized people to obtain education due to the upper caste influence in power structure (Paudel, 2013). This education system only benefited so-called high caste people; other common people and Dalits did not have access to formal education. In the absence of education, Dalits were reduced to serve the high caste people throughout their entire life. One of the informants said:

“During the time of our forefathers, Dalit people did not get opportunity to go to school. They devoted their lives to the service of non-Dalits. They were servants in the houses of non-Dalits and used to think that they were fortunate to serve them. They never knew that they were dominated, rather thought that they were born to serve upper caste people” (Field Interview, 2014).

This view supported non-Dalits’ arguments that Dalits were born as untouchable human beings so as to serve the high caste. But after the restoration of democracy in 1990, the government policy of ‘Education for All’ made formal education accessible to everyone including Dalits (National Plan of Action, 2003). Notwithstanding, Dalit children faced caste discrimination from their fellow students and teachers. One of my informants captured this in the following terms:

“When I was admitted to the school, I used to sit alone because I was a Dalit. The non-Dalit children did not share their food with me because I was untouchable. That time I used to think that I was really untouchable but now I feel what a dreadful discrimination I faced at the time” (Field Interview, 2014).

According to Bishwakarma, “Dalit community is facing caste-based discrimination in educational institutions. In schools, Dalit children face the discrimination by teachers and peers directly and indirectly” (Bishwakarma, 2011:2). The comparative data of Dalit education is shown below:

Table No. 2. Caste wise literacy rate and education

Caste	Literacy rate (6 years and above)	Matrik (SLC) and above	Bachelor and above
Nepal	53.7	17.6	3.4
Brahmin/Chhetri	67.5	24.7	5.4
Tarai	41.7	16.7	2.7
Dalit	33.8	3.8	0.4
Caste groups	56.6	12.9	2.0
Religious minority	34.5	9.0	1.6

Source: CBS 2001 ref. in Bishwakarma, 2011:2

This data indicates that Dalits have lower rank in education. The literacy rate of Dalit community is only 33.8 percent whereas; the national average is 53.7 percent. The situation seems even more vulnerable in SLC and Bachelor level in comparison to other caste groups. The national rate of SLC pass and above is 17.6 whereas Dalit has only 3.8. Likewise, national average of bachelor and above is 3.4 but Dalits have only 0.4. This imbalance in education shows that Dalits people in Nepal are marginalized as subalterns. Though Dalit students are still facing caste discrimination even today, their parents are determined to educate their children to come out of the vicious circle of domination. Consequently, some of Dalit children have become schoolteacher, bureaucrats and politicians. Dalits have even gone to abroad for higher education. One of the informants, Gore who has been to USA for higher study, said the following:

“I gained primary and secondary education under traumatic circumstances. I used to walk for two hours every day to go to school but I always came on top during exams. I gained higher education in the city and then came to USA for higher studies. Gaining education by Dalits is a symbolic challenge to non-Dalits; it shows that we also compete with other so-called higher caste if we get similar opportunities.” (Skype Interview, 2014)

This statement by Gore suggests that Dalits are gaining education with the motif of changing social hierarchy between upper caste and lower caste. When people become educated the degree of caste discrimination becomes comparatively lower. So, Dalits want revolution in gaining education to get proper representation in every stakes of social structure.

5.5.4 Internal and External Migration

People choose migration to take advantage of jobs and other life opportunities. Large scale of Dalit population in Nepal has been migrated internally and externally (Gurung, 2008). The

reason for the migration is to grab the better opportunities. One of my informants said, *“in village we do hard labour but we get less payment that cannot fulfill our daily needs. Now I am in capital city and working as a teacher in a school. I support my study and family through my income. In city, the effect of caste-based discrimination is comparatively low”* (Field Interview, 2014). It shows that the level of education also affected the migration issue. When Dalit people became educated, they began to search better opportunities through migration. Another informant Maya said:

“My husband has been to Malaysia to work. Before going to Malaysia, he was a ploughman and had very poor income, which was not sufficient for the household expense. But, when he went to Malaysia to work, we saved enough amount to build a house and bought a piece of land for farming” (Field Interview, 2014).

This means that migration empowers the Dalit youths socially and financially. The Dalit youth want to empower their community to “exert and improve competence, as well as developing critical awareness to collaborate for the betterment of organizations and communities” (Ledford et. al, 2013). In this regard, another informant Gore also said:

“When I finished my higher education in Nepal I worked for an INGO for two years till I came to USA for my further education. During my studies, I faced many challenges but I endured them to empower myself for the dignity of life. From here (USA) also, I am fighting against the untouchability and caste discrimination and trying to improve conditions in my community.” (Skype Interview, 2014)

5.5.5 Forming National Level Dalit NGOs

With the goal of eradicating caste-based discrimination and untouchability, Dalits have formed different organizations in collaboration with international donor organizations. “The organizations place emphasis on equal rights and living with dignity and freedom” (Kharel, 2007:59). The major efforts of these organizations remain at integrating development agendas along with their objective of establishing an equitable society (ibid: 59). According to my informant, Sante:

“ Dalit organizations focus on eliminating caste-based discrimination by empowering the entire Dalit population through awareness, training, education and development. There are many different organizations which are working on the behalf of Dalits which are launching

awareness for capacity building through TV program, street drama, seminar and interaction in the co-ordination with National Dalit Commission.” (Field Interview, 2014)

The functions and strategies of national level Dalit Non-Governmental Organizations are as shown below:

Table No. 3

<p>Dalit human rights organization (DHRO) (www.dhro.org.np)</p>	<p>Establishing an egalitarian society with full enjoyment of human rights</p>	<p>Creating public awareness against the improper social practices including suspension, caste discrimination and environmental degradation Bringing the Dalit community into the socio-political mainstream of the national development</p>	<p>Producing and broadcasting materials relating to the protection and promotion of human rights of the Dalit Community Understanding research to monitor human rights falling under the purview of national, international laws, treaties and protocols, enhancing economic, social, political capacity by conducting various informal education and income generating programs</p>
<p>Dalit Welfare Organization (DWO) (www.dwo.org.np)</p>	<p>A movement for social justice Envision a society where people respect each other with justice and live with dignity regardless of caste, race, status, profession, and ethnic groups they belong to.</p>	<p>To support and advocate for the eradication of the caste-base discrimination system. To provide a holistic program for the development of Dalits.-To unify as a people in attaining Dalits’ emancipation To gain equal rights and dignity among Dalits and non-Dalits alike.</p>	<p>Awareness of capacity building:-Radio, TV, Tele film, Street drama, training, seminar, interaction, discussion and co-picnics, Cultural programs, Legal literacy Networking, and mobilization; Advocacy Educational Support Programs- Early Child Development Center – Child and adult literacy class and parents and social awareness literacy; Scholarship and educational support; Skill development training; Textbook and amendment of curriculum; Self-help and income generation</p>
<p>Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) (www.fedonepal.org.np)</p>	<p>For a just and equitable society Emphasizes the role of Dalit women &</p>	<p>Awareness building among Dalit women Advocacy for</p>	<p>Participatory approach to developments with programs focusing on: Education: increasing Dalit</p>

	children in the upliftment and liberation of Dalits society.	Dalit rights and against caste discrimination. Caste and gender mainstreaming to promote human rights and social justice Implementing development programs focusing on Dalit women and children based on their needs.	women's literacy rate, inspiring girls to join school Economic Empowerment-promoting self-sustaining and economically profitable micro enterprises; mobilizing Dalit women groups in income generating and skill development activities for their economic empowerment; modernizing occupational skills of Dalits Health and Sanitation programs; Advocacy, awareness campaigns and research
Lawyers' National Campaign Against Untouchability (LANCAU Nepal) (www.lancaunepal.org.np)	Elimination of the crime of Untouchability and all forms of Untouchability based discrimination	Advocacy and sensitization programs for the elimination of Untouchability and caste based discrimination. Innovative campaigns against caste-based discrimination Promotion of human rights and social inclusion of Dalits	Consultations and workshops in District networks Awareness campaigns Mass Media Research and Publications
Jana Utthan Pratisthan (JUP) Academy for public Upliftment (www.jup-nepal.org)	Nobody is born impure, all humans are created equal	Raising awareness about human rights, socio-economic development, environmental deterioration, and prevailing superstitious social customs, such as caste discrimination.	Empowerment and advocacy strategy Training programs to enable self-reliance, decentralization, good governance and community mobilization Lobbying at the international meetings in accordance with the laws of the UN, European Union and international organizations, international treaties and conventions, international Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) Coordinating its activities with other Dalits movements.

Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organisation (NNDSWO) (www.nndsw.org.np)	Envisioning an equitable society	Uplifting the living standard of the Dalits communities and mainstreaming this isolated sphere	Advocacy for Basic Human Rights of Dalits Promoting Dalits Rights
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Source: Kharel, 2007: 59-60

Table 3 above shows the function and importance of Dalit organizations, which are working to empower Dalit people through different strategies. The need of these organizations was felt owing to extreme level of caste-based discrimination, illiteracy, poverty and lack of awareness that put them in bottom rags of social ladder. Therefore, DNGOs are working on improving the life situation of entire Dalit population with an initiation of Dalits themselves (ibid).

In the absence of significant Dalit political party, the Dalit NGOs have made immense contributions in mainstreaming the Dalit voice even if they have not been very successful in this mission. The actions of DNGOs are focused to the process of social empowerment to strengthen the Dalit community. At individual level, actions become “ineffective in influencing the outcome of the life events” (Lord & Hutchison, 1993:2). So, DNGOs are collectively exposing the subtle behavioural forms of psychological domination and humiliation of Dalits in Nepalese society. However, Dalit NGOs have not made substantial change among rural Dalits because there are problems within the Dalit NGOs (Vasily, 2009). This behaviour has reinforced psychological barriers to more assertive action. As one of the Dalit Activist noted:

“Even now, what we think is the main problem of the people is ... not only just in our village, but all over the place, we are wrestling with these absences and insufficiencies ... we’re entangled in this ... no interactions are had; no explaining is done; no meetings are held, no one is empowered, no one’s feelings of their own power, their own energy, their own courage is encouraged. It is because of this that all of our movements have been ruined ... meaning that they’re weakened by these things. We need to create that sort of power.” (Interview, December, 2004 ref. in Vasily, 2009:226).

This narrative shows that DNGOs are not taking uniformed action for the empowerment of Dalits due to an absence of coordination between the members of DNGOs, which has complicated the Dalit movement to find a solution to the caste-based inequalities.

5.5.6 Socio-economic and Cultural Changes

Modernization, globalization and urbanization are major agents of socio-cultural changes (Gurung, 2008). Due to the effect of modernization, Nepalese society has been more open in comparison to past. Development programmes such as; improved transportation, electricity, English medium schools and modern technology have led to socio-cultural changes. These modern facilities have changed traditional mindset of the people including Dalits. According to Padam:

“Electricity has made it possible for us to watch television. Now, we see news about Nepalese politics and other social matters including Dalit issues. Sometimes, we hear that still now Dalits are not given equal access in public properties; even they cannot share same water sources with non-Dalits. But, in comparison to the past, we have got more space due to our continuous struggle against the caste discrimination” (Field Interview, 2014).

Similarly, Dalits have been more aware in gaining education and they send their children to school as one of my informants said:

“I have two sons and one daughter, who attend a state school. I am illiterate because in our time, schools were not available to all common people. Neither did we have money. So, I spent my whole life working for non-Dalit landowners. Now, I am proud that my children also study with other higher caste children and compete with them.” (Field Interview, 2014)

Moreover, Dalit peoples’ social relationship with so-called higher caste has now reached a new dimension. The participation of Dalits in social activities, exchanging labour and involvement in non-Dalits’ marriage and vice-versa show that Dalits are getting integrated into the Nepalese society. One informant put these changes in the following terms:

“Now I can proudly say that I am Dalit because the mind set of Non-dalits has been changed. Non-Dalits are not so biased as they used to be in the past. Basically, after the Maoist Peoples’ War, Dalits have become more conscious about their social rights and self-esteem. Though some orthodox upper caste people are still biased against Dalits, but the younger generations are not so much concerned about untouchability. So, we also share food in hotels

and restaurants but not in their private homes because the parents of youngsters do not allow us to enter into their houses.” (Field Interview, 2014)

This narrative shows that the socio-cultural behavior towards Dalits has been changing with new consciousness of young generations.

5.6 Strategic Partnership with Non-Dalits

5.6.1 Involvement in Maoist War

As a historically marginalized caste, Dalit people were seeking Non-Dalit partnership for caste-based equality and freedom. Therefore, they involved in Maoist’s war to eradicate the tag of being untouchables (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014). The Maoist Revolution was launched on February 13, 1996, and “formulated initial goals around moving Nepal away from a Hindu kingdom and towards a more secular republic that committed itself to the principles of gender and caste equality and to addressing centuries-old exploitation of Dalits” (CHRGJ, 2005:3). The long-standing plight of Dalits in Nepal and lack of representation in political landscape forced them to step on the most risky way by supporting the Maoist’s armed insurgency. Though Dalits comprise almost about one-fifth of the population, they are extremely unrepresented in local and national government bodies. In occupying this position of marginalization and disempowerment, obliged to support armed revolution (ibid: 3). One of my informants who was directly involved in the armed insurgency, said the following:

“I was involved in the Maoist insurgency due to poverty and caste-based inequality. Throughout history, we had been distanced from non-Dalit community because the so-called upper caste people used to think that we were born to serve them. We did not have social respect and dignity. Even, we did not have right to step into their houses, we were treated as untouchables and they did not use to share water and food with us. These social injustices forced me to get involved in the Maoist war by supporting their principles and agendas.” (Field Interview, 2014)

5.6.2 Seeking for Forced Caste-based Equality

Due to century long caste discrimination, Dalits were typically restricted to the respectable work and occupations and stigmatized as filthy and polluting caste for “upper caste” communities. Therefore, they were compelled to hide their “surname” with the fear of being discriminated, which misrepresented their real identity. This social scenario forced them to

seek their own identity by supporting armed insurgency. When Dalit people directly involved in Maoist's insurgency, they became powerful with the support of Maoist cadres and forcefully stepped into the houses of non-Dalits. They punished the people who were supposed to be feudalists. They also began to expose their surname in front of non-Dalits.

According to Sete:

“Due to the caste-based discrimination, Dalits never got respectable position in a society. We always had to bow down in front of Non-Dalits. But when I along with other friends joined the Maoist party then we began to step into the houses of non-Dalits forcefully. We also punished some people who were involved in caste discrimination. In past, we were silent but it did not mean that we were happy therefore; we grabbed the opportunity for revolution against caste-based discrimination in a leadership of Maoist party.” (Field Interview, 2014)

5.6.3 Gaining Political Position

The subaltern “masses resist, rebel and challenge not for anybody else, but to change their own lot” (Banik, 2009:181). Subaltern people resist the domination to uplift their social status. Along with this, they also struggled to gain political power to exercise their rights in every social structure. Dalits, as a subaltern people of Nepal, are seeking political position to subvert an old concept of caste system. They want to restructure and redefine the caste system as per the new social dimension. In this process, they supported the Maoist revolution so as to gain political positions and to assert themselves as one informant said:

“Dalits are politically marginalized caste due to century long caste-based discrimination...I know that our forefathers had experienced slavery that was perpetrated by so called upper caste people...I was looking for the best opportunity to get involved in politics, the Maoist party finally provided that opportunity. I joined Maoist insurgency after three years of its formal declaration and participated in different wars ... my major aim of joining Maoist was to seek political and social power to tackle non-Dalits' domination. Now, after the peace process, I am established as a local politician.” (Field Interview, 2014)

This view undercuts the notion of non-Dalits that Dalit people do not have ability to hold political positions because they were born to serve the upper caste. One's ability should not be determined by birth rather by opportunities and achievements and therefore, Dalits think that they can also lead the nation if given the opportunities (Maharjan & Kisan, 2014).

5.6.4 Biased Attitude of National Security Force

Though the level of Dalit involvement in Maoist activities, during the conflict is difficult to ascertain, an important implication of the widespread belief is that Dalits were attracted to Maoist's political ideologies due to the fear and unnecessary harassment by state security forces (Vasily, 2009:223). During the conflict, state security forces targeted Dalits owing to assumption that Dalits are poor so, they support Maoist's insurgency. Entire Dalits had a sort of fear that any time they may be arrested and killed with the blame of being Maoist, therefore, they joined the Maoist in obligation in some cases. One of my informants said:

"I heard that one of my neighbours who was from Dalit community, was arrested by the Royal Nepal Army and was kept in army camp. The army forcefully tried to establish whether he was involved with the Maoist through torture. That time I also had fear that they may torture me in the same way they did to my neighbour.....and other Maoist cadres also threatened me by showing the condition of my tortured neighbor. Finally I decided to join the Maoist due to the fear of being arrested by state security force." (Field Interview, 2014)

Due to fear of being tortured by state security forces, many Dalits involved in Maoist's ideological war against the state policy. On one hand, they were discriminated by so-called upper caste people; on the other hand state security forces brutally tortured innocent Dalits. Vasily (2009) also mentions the perspective of government towards Dalits during the Maoist's insurgency through the voice of Dalit right activist:

... on the one hand, the government has the perspective that Dalits are Maoists. One reason for this is that Dalits, having been denied their own rights, have now started speaking about these rights and entitlements. The government has the understandings that whoever speaks about their rights are Maoists. If we had to speak about ourselves, it happened that we were jailed for 15 days. In actuality, there was no reason for us to have to be jailed for 15 days. We are not Maoists. We have our own political views. We're doing our own work. Primarily, what we're doing is speaking on behalf of Dalit human rights, on behalf of Dalits and justice. Now, we have found that the government views as a Maoist whoever is having a movement on behalf of justice, or against caste untouchability. (interview, Decemner 2004 ref. in Vasily, 2009:224).

5.7 Dalits Involvement in First CA Election 2008

After the peace agreement between the CPN-Maoist and seven political parties in 2006, Nepal entered into a new political domain, which guaranteed the CA election to draft a new constitution (Bhatta, 2012). It was a historic moment in Nepalese political history because all the political leaders agreed to address the grievances of minorities, Dalits, women and indigenous people through the new constitution. Similarly, due to the proportional election system, Dalits also got an opportunity to be represented in parliament where they could raise their voice against the caste-based discriminatory issues. The Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) also had mandatory provisions for Dalits, which states that “to enable Dalits...to participate in all organs of the State structure on the basis of proportional inclusion” (2007:art.33). Due to this provision in Interim Constitution, Dalit leaders got representation in first CA parliament as shown in the table below:

Table 4. Dalit Candidacy Under First-Past-The-Post in the Constituent Assembly Election 2008

Political Affiliation	Dalits/Total Candidates	Dalits/Total Elected
Communist Party of Nepal Maoist	18/240 (7.5%)	7/120 (5.83%)
Nepali Congress	1/240 (0.42%)	0/37 (0%)
Communist Party of Nepal-UML	3/239 (1.26%)	0/33 (0%)
Madhesi Janadhikar Forum	0/103 (0%)	0/30 (0%)
Terai Madhesi Loktrantrik Party	0/94 (0%)	0/9 (0%)
Sadbhavana Party	2/87 (2.30%)	0/4 (0%)
Nepal Mazdoor Kissan Party	6/98 (6.12%)	0/2 (0%)
Janamorcha Nepal	21/203 (10.34%)	0/2 (0%)
Rastriya Janamorcha	16/122 (13.11%)	0/1 (0%)
Communist Party of Nepal-ML	9/116 (7.76%)	—
Rastriya Prajatantra Party	3/232 (1.29%)	—
Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal	2/204 (0.98%)	—
Rastriya Janashakti Party	5/198 (2.53%)	—
Rastriya Janamukti Party	6/84 (7.14%)	—
Dalit Janajati Party	32/50 (64%)	—

Nepal Dalit Shrmeeek Morcha	1/1 (100%)	–
Independent	33/816 (4.04%)	0/2 (0%)
Other parties without seats in FPTP	38/819 (4.64%)	–
Total	196/3,946 (4.97%)	7/240 (2.92%)

Adapted from Khanal et.al. 2012:97

This table 4 above shows that seven Dalit candidates were elected from Nepal Communist Party-Maoist. But, none of the candidates were elected from other political parties, which indicates that there was strong partnership between Dalits and the Maoists.

Table 5. Dalit Candidacy Under Proportional Representation in the Constituent Assembly Election 2008

<u>Party Affiliation</u>	<u>Dalits/ Total Candidates</u>	<u>Dalits/ Total Elected</u>
Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist	46/332 (13.86%)	16/100 (16%)
Nepali Congress	40/328 (12.20%)	9/73 (12.33%)
Communist Party of NepalUML	44/332 (13.25%)	10/70 (14.29%)
Dalit Janajati Party	35/72 (48.61%)	1/1 (100%)
Other parties	379/4,600 (8.32%)	07/22 (0%)
Total	544/5,701 (9.54%)	43/335 (12.84%)

Adapted from Khanal et.al. 2012:101

Table 5 above too shows the proportional representation of Dalits in CA election where 12.84% Dalit candidates were elected. It indicates that there was majority of Dalit representation in CA house through first Constituent Assembly election, which was held in 2008. However, in the second CA election held in 2013, Dalits' representation was reduced. A Dalit leader Tilak Pariyar explained this, as such:

“the Article 21 of the Interim Constitution of Nepal accepts the principle of proportional inclusiveness on the question of social justice. The population of Dalits is 13.2% as the Government statistics and 20% as per the Non-Governmental one. The number of total members of the Constituent Assembly is 601. So, 78 Dalits as the Government have the instinctive right to represent in the CA. But the electoral system of First Past the Post and mixed system of proportional list is adopted. Multi-candidate direct election system has made

women and Dalits to lose the election as per the system of competition among unequals. The same thing was adopted during the CA election of 2007. At that time, with the influence of 10 years People's war and 19 days People's movement, 7 Dalits had been elected from the direct election. That was 8.2%. Only 6.8% Dalits are representatives to the so called CA recently. Parliamentarians are active not only in reducing the representation of Dalits but also in dismissing the representation by so-called democratic process by vulgarizing the proportional electoral system. The two-third majority of the CA of 2007 was pro-people and now the so-called CA has two-third majority who are anti-people. If they move to the process, the past pro-people achievements will be thrown away and the agenda of reconstruction of the state will surely be dismissed. That's why we believe the CA election, occurred on 19th November 2013, is without legitimacy. If they are ready to make the Constitution to authorize the people and to protect the national independence, it is essential to make the national political consensus on the essence of the constitution by organizing All Political Conference." (Rawat, 2014:2).

This view highlights a theme that Dalits are still facing discrimination at policy level because the state has not addressed their demands and it has failed to deliver its promise to Dalits. Therefore, in second CA election, there is less representation of Dalits in a parliament.

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on data presentation and analysis. The results indicate that Dalits are obliged to face caste-based discrimination and socio-political marginalization till the date. Though the Dalits' struggle has brought some positive changes on caste issues, caste-based discrimination still exists in Nepalese society. It has also analysed the modus operandi of Dalit struggle for the positive social transformation. Dalits have brought significant changes through the struggle against caste- based discrimination. Moreover, the study has contributed to highlight the reasons and consequences of armed struggle in a multi-caste and multicultural society. It also has brought the evidences that subaltern people always struggle from bottom to gain control over the socio-political rights. Furthermore, It has attempted to highlight the Dalits' involvement in Maoist's armed revolution in bringing changes into caste-based issues cum socio-cultural traits. While analyzing the Dalit struggle, the study has applied the concepts of subalternity and empowerment.

Chapter 6. Summary and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the entire dissertation and delivers findings along with concluding remarks. It attempts to highlight the experiences of Dalit struggle against caste-based discrimination and socio-political marginalization. Moreover, it discusses the meaning of strategic partnership of Dalits with CPN-Maoist.

6.2 Summary

The basic motto of this dissertation is to bring forth the Dalits' voice against the caste-based inequality and their subtle experiences on the way to struggle. It analyses the ongoing efforts of Dalit Movement and its impact on achieving equality, freedom and social justice. The major objective of the research is to foreground the role of Dalit actors to change the old concept of caste system and hitherto existing caste cum socio-political discrimination. Moreover, the study also shows the strategic partnership of the Dalits with Maoist in the mission against untouchability. Hence, the study focuses to dig up inherent caste discrimination and undercurrent tone of protest and sense of resistance of Dalits in Post-conflict Nepal.

To meet the goal of research, the study went through fourteen qualitative interviews with the members of Dalit community. The most of the interviewed informants were politically conscious and involved in Maoist's war. The reason behind choosing the informants from this background was to bring forth the voice of conscious Dalit population against a long-standing practice of caste-based discrimination in Nepalese society. In order to analyze Dalit struggle against caste-based inequality, the study applied the concepts of subalternity and empowerment.

6.3 Key Findings

With the analysis of field narratives, the study finds that caste-based discrimination is root cause of Dalit struggle. Dalits are still facing social problems owing to stigma of untouchable low caste despite the empowerment attempts through constitutional provisions. Likewise, large portion of Dalit population has been remaining under the vicious circle of poverty. Due to the long run struggle of Dalit people, the social scenario concerning on caste-based

discrimination has been changed to a lesser extent, which is not enough to address the problems of the entire Dalit population.

Findings related to the reasons behind the Dalit struggle suggest that Dalits are not fairly treated by the higher caste non-Dalits. The government is also indifferent to address their caste-based issues. Similarly, lack of self-esteem and social justice, poor implementation of constitutional provisions and socio-economic gap between Dalits and non-Dalits are major issues for the Dalits' struggle.

Data analysis indicates that the Dalit struggle has been targeted to eliminate 'untouchability' by ensuring the inclusive and proportional representation in state opportunities, health care and employment. They are struggling for the guarantee of their human rights being free from all sorts of socio-political marginalization. Findings also suggest that in post-conflict Nepal, Dalits have been more conscious regarding their socio-cultural rights, education, property rights and constitutional rights that has reduced the level of caste discrimination vis-à-vis past. Moreover, they have also changed their traditional mind set as per the socio-political changes through the armed struggle of CPN-Maoist. Similarly, the development activities and motivational campaigning to them through awareness programs are playing vital role to change their attitudes and concepts, which have gradually increased their social status.

Furthermore, ten years long Maoist insurgency has played vital role to uplift the socio-political status of Dalit people. The insurgency was strongly supported by Dalits, which made Dalit people aware about their access opportunities and social rights. After the peace process, Dalit people strongly involved in national level political mission for the guarantee of socio-cultural, economic and political rights and elimination of the practice of untouchability.

6.4 Analytical Contributions

Analytically, the study seeks to provide a theme of social transformation through the socio-political struggle. It contextualizes the Dalit struggle for positive social transformation. Dalits, as a so-called lower caste people have done considerable change by struggling against the caste-based discrimination and primitive religious dogma. Moreover, the study contributes to highlight the reasons and consequences of armed struggle in a multi-caste and multicultural society. The study also brings the evidence that subaltern people always struggle from the bottom with the motif of empowerment. The process of empowerment is long run task, which needs patience and continuous attempt to meet its goals and objectives (Ledford et. al. 2013).

Furthermore, the study highlights the struggle of Dalit people in a positive way due to its transformative role in the Nepalese society. It also attempts to figure out the Dalits' involvement in Maoist revolution in bringing the major political transformation in modern history of Nepal. The armed struggle made people socially and politically aware about their rights, through which the minorities, women, ethnic groups, Dalits and myriad of other marginalized people heightened their consciousness. Along with the consciousness, they became able to seek their role and identity in the organizational structure of the state (Basnett, 2009). Similarly, the important issues "sidelined by state for more than two centuries such as poverty, social exclusion, discriminations based on caste, class, ethnicity, religion and elite-centric politics and governing system are now in the main stream national debate because of the armed insurgency" (Upreti, 2006:15). It also brought many changes in social and political arena. Fundamentally, it subverted old ideologies, religious biasness, biased constitutional provisions and hierarchical social structure. After ten years Maoist armed struggle, some basic agendas were foregrounded and new interim constitution was formulated. Further, the agendas like, constituent assembly election, religious serialism, federalism, inclusiveness democracy, declaration of republic state, provision of reservation seats for marginalized people, women and Dalits have been bottom line in the constitution making process (Cameron, 2007).

The study analysis also brings the evidence that the armed insurgency is regressive and devastating due to its violent nature. It undermined the value of human lives and destroyed public property with the motif of bringing socio-political equality among all. In Nepalese civil war, more than 13000 people were killed, 1700 were disappeared and more that 200,000 were displaced along with the huge loss of national property (Basnett, 2009; Putori, 20011).

Eventually, the analysis of the study shows the importance of long-term Dalit struggle that has brought changes into the issues of caste-based discrimination and socio-political marginalization of entire Dalit population. Yet, Dalits are struggling for the equal access to the state opportunities as well as the implementation of constitutional provisions against the untouchability.

6.5 The Importance of First Person Narratives

As mentioned earlier, Dalits are subaltern people who cannot speak in public because their voice is always unheard in public space due to their lower position in a society (Guha, 1982). In this sense, the third person accounts cannot reveal their bruised images of social life.

Therefore, this research has focused on first person narratives to recognize ‘how’ and ‘why’ Nepalese Dalits are struggling against caste-based inequality and socio-political marginalization. Varela and Shear (1999) write that first person narratives mean, “the lived experience associated with cognitive and mental events, it is natural to speak of ‘conscious experience’ or simply experience” (1). Moreover, first person narratives are important to gain first-hand knowledge from Dalits themselves about their life experiences.

The study has been directed to deliver in-depth knowledge about the experiences of Dalit struggle against caste discrimination and practice of untouchability. It has sought to highlight some issues that were overlooked in previous academic and non-academic research. The study can help to understand the hardships and predicament of untouchables even in the first quarter of 21st century. It also contributes to seek reasons and strategies of Dalit struggle in post-conflict Nepal through their self-expressions. It further gives a new perspective to explore the loopholes of Hindu caste system by revealing the practice of untouchability in contemporary Nepal. Furthermore, the study helps to understand the connection of Dalits in Maoist insurgency for the socio-political transformation by bringing their own voice into first person account.

Postscript: Dalits’ Rights in New Constitution of Nepal 2015

The constitution has been promulgated recently; it came into effect on September 2015, replacing the Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007). The constitution was drafted by the second Constituent Assembly following the mandate of Nepalese people. The constitution is formulated in terms of inclusive principles declaring Nepal as secular republic nation. Moreover, it was signed and approved by over 85% CA members from various background as some belonging to political party that was involved in armed struggle, Medhes-centric parties and through the participation of the women, Muslims, Dalits, linguistic communities and indigenous nationalities (The Kathmandu Post, 2015).

This constitution guarantees fundamental rights of all Nepalese and special focus is given to the issues of minorities, indigenous groups, women and Dalits. Its preamble indicates that:

“Ending all forms of discrimination and suppression created by feudal, tyrannical, centralized and unitary state mechanism. Determining to create society based on equality on the basis of proportional inclusive and participatory principles to preserve and promote unity among diversity and to ensure economic equality and social justice by ending class-based, ethnic,

regional, lingual, religious, gender-based and all forms of caste-based untouchability.”
(*Constitution of Nepal 2015, Preamble*)

Moreover, Article: 24 (1) notes that “no person shall be discriminated against as untouchable and subjected to discrimination in any form, on grounds of caste, race, community, origin, occupation or bodily condition in any public or private place” (ibid: 11). Similarly, “person from Dalit community shall have right to get employment in civil service, army, police and all other agencies and areas of the State on the principle of proportional inclusive principles. Special provision shall be made for empowerment, representation and participation of Dalits community in public service and other sectors of employment as provided by the law” (Constitution of Nepal, 2015: Article, 40.1: 17). The constitution also has a provision of free education, including scholarship from primary level to higher education to the Dalit students. Dalits, who are landless, will also be provided with land.

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