

**Experiences, Participation, and Challenges Faced by Dalit Women  
Representatives at Local Level**

**A Case Study of Lalitpur Metropolitan City, Bagmati**

A Thesis

Submitted to

the faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,

Central Department of Sociology, Tribhuvan University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in  
Sociology

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November, 2023

## DECLARATION

I therefore declare that the dissertation “**Experiences, Participation, and Challenges Faced by Dalit Women Representatives at Local Level, A Case Study of Lalitpur Metropolitan City, Bagmati**” submitted to Central Department of Sociology (TU) is entirely my original work, prepared under the guidance and supervision of my supervisor. Throughout the preparation of this thesis, I have given full credit to all ideas and information acquired from various sources. This thesis has never been presented or submitted anywhere else for the purpose of receiving a degree or for any other reason. I guarantee that no element of this thesis’ material has ever been published before.

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## LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

This is to certify that Ranju Tolange has completed this dissertation entitled **“Experiences, Participation, and Challenges Faced by Dalit Women Representatives at Local Level, A Case Study of Lalitpur Metropolitan City, Bagmati”** under my guidance and supervision for the partial fulfillment of the requirement for degree of Master of Arts in Sociology. I, therefore, recommend and forward this dissertation for final approval and acceptance by the dissertation committee.

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**LETTER OF APPROVAL**

This is to certify that the thesis submitted by Ranju Tolange entitled “**Experiences, Participation, and Challenges Faced by Dalit Women Representatives at Local Level, A Case Study of Lalitpur Metropolitan City, Bagmati**”; has been approved by this department in the prescribed format of the faculty of humanities and social sciences. This thesis is forwarded for the acceptance.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My journey of Post-graduation has been a long and challenging one which also includes the terrific time of for reaching Dalit women local representatives due to busy schedule, made possible only with the help of dozens of friends and colleagues along the way who've exhorted me to keep my eyes on the prize. At the very top of what will be a truly prodigious list, pride of place goes to my dissertation supervisor Associate Prof. Dr. Tika Ram Gautam.

To Associate Prof. Dr. Tika Ram Gautam: You have directed my advancement with a sharp eye for detail and style, never afraid to scoff at a brilliant idea and always reminding me of the bigger picture. During the difficult periods of my postgraduate journey, you were the first person I encountered at Tribhuvan University who made me feel at ease. I shall be eternally grateful for all of your invaluable support and parental wisdom that you have lavished upon me whenever I have needed it. I will never forget how warmly you welcomed me all those time from the outset.

Similarly, I am grateful to Associate Prof. Dr. Youba Raj Luintel, Head of Tribhuvan University's Central Department of Sociology, for allowing me to undertake this dissertation on a topic of my interest. I shall be eternally grateful for your great assistance and guidance in my academic career, which you provided through offering opportunities and access to numerous sociological programs. Mr. Prakash Rai, an incredible teacher and a wonderfully helpful being, will always be remembered for his excitement, persistent advice, and valuable ideas during the early stages of my dissertation. Further, ample of thanks to the entire Central Department of Sociology family for their direct and indirect assistance in completing.

Thanks to my classmates: Ms. Navina Manandhar, and Sugdev Rajbanshi at Tribhuvan University who volunteered their time to help me to maintain my head screwed on the right direction.

I would also like to thanks my family, who has always been there for me, I am very grateful for your support and encouragement over the years in more ways than I can explain.

Ranju Tolange

T.U. Regd. No.:6-2-710-20-2013

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

|        |   |  |
|--------|---|--|
| CA     | : | Constitution Assembly                  |
| DWM    | : | Dalit Women's Movement                 |
| FEDO   | : | Feminist Dalit Organization            |
| GAD    | : | Gender and Development                 |
| IDSN   | : | International Dalit Solidarity Network |
| NFDW   | : | Nepal Federation of Dalit Women        |
| NGOs   | : | Non-government Organizations           |
| NNDSWO | : | Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare    |
| WAD    | : | Women and Development                  |
| WCAR   | : | World Conference Against Racism        |
| WID    | : | Women in Development                   |
| UN     | : | United Nations                         |

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

Dalit women face formidable challenges as local representatives, navigating deep-rooted societal biases and systemic hurdles. Despite these obstacles, their active participation is crucial for fostering inclusive governance and addressing the unique concerns of the Dalit community (Chandrika, 2023). Dalit women local representatives in Nepal confront multifaceted challenges, including pervasive caste-based discrimination, gender bias, limited access to resources, and social exclusion. Overcoming these barriers requires concerted efforts to dismantle systemic inequalities and empower Dalit women in local governance (Bishwakarma, 2017).

Dalit refers to a historically marginalized and oppressed community in Nepal, as well as in other parts of South Asia. In Nepal, Dalits are considered as lower caste people so they faced social, economic, and political discrimination for centuries. Since, Dalits in Nepal have traditionally been considered the lowest in the caste hierarchy, facing extreme social discrimination and exclusion. They were often subjected to menial and degrading tasks, such as cleaning public toilets or handling dead animals, leading to their categorization as "untouchables" (Rao, 2010). Over the years, Dalits have actively engaged in social and political movements to assert their rights and challenge caste-based discrimination. These movements have sought to address issues such as land reform, access to education, and equal representation in government (Folmar, 2007).

Dalit women have historically grappled with entrenched discrimination due to both their gender and caste identities, rendering their political participation

challenging. Nepal's constitution and legal framework include affirmative action measures, reserving political seats for Dalits, including Dalit women, at local, provincial, and national levels (Pariyar & Lovett, 2016). Consequently, Dalit women have managed to break barriers and assume leadership roles in Nepali politics, championing the rights and interests of their community (Guinée, 2014). Despite these advances, Dalit women leaders still have to face social and political discrimination, economic disparities, and difficulties accessing quality education and healthcare. Deep-rooted social norms and stereotypes continue to affect their political engagement and Dalit women leaders have to encounter various challenges in political parties (Bishwakarma, Hunt, & Zajicek, 2007).

Dalit women's organizations and activists have played an instrumental role in advocating for their rights, and the success stories of Dalit women leaders serve as inspirational models. Nepal's efforts to empower Dalit women politically have garnered international recognition, spotlighting the country's commitment to gender and social inclusion (Sharma Gautam & Hearn, 2019). Nepal's constitution and laws have provisions to protect the rights of Dalits. The constitution includes affirmative action measures, such as reserved seats in parliament and local bodies, to ensure their representation. Dalit women are typically underrepresented at the political and decision-making levels of the state apparatus but in recent year, they have made significant strides in political representation in Nepal (Pariyar & Lovett, 2016). They have a presence in federal, provincial, and local governments, and Dalit politicians and leaders hold important positions in various political parties.

Dalit women's political participation in Nepal is growing. However, the government has issued a quota for Dalit women in the election according to rights given to the Dalit women for local, province and national level. Their election

participation has resulted in numerous changes related to empowerment and education in their communities. They can advocate for opportunities, budgeting, and upliftment, among other things. Since its inception in 1994, FEDO (Feminist Dalit Organization) has actively promoted Dalit women's equal political representation and participation, particularly during Nepal's current constitution-making process. Dalit women have faced numerous problems and challenges since their inception, and the situation remains unchanged. There have been no visible changes since I was elected as a ward member. The discrimination, domination and untouchability are still there and are facing by the elected Dalit women. They are facing problems in the budgeting and participation as well.

Dalit women began to question the mainstream women's movement in the early 1990s because it failed to recognize the distinct nature of Dalit women's problems. Dalit women's discourse recognizes the problem of gender exploitation by their men; thus, the Dalit women's movement, like the 'mainstream' women's movement, addresses patriarchy, which prevents women from asserting their choices and participating in decision making in both the community and the family. However, writers on Dalit women's issues have argued that low-caste women, particularly untouchables, have faced discrimination based on prescribed customary provisions in the institution of caste and untouchability, in addition to gender discrimination and economic deprivation. They are deprived on three fronts: gender, poverty, and caste (Sabhawal & Wandana, 2015).

Patriarchal political culture being an important determinant of women's participation, the prevalence of masculine politics signifies the otherness of women, their near total exclusion in decision-making and a corresponding over-representation of men in all public spheres including politics (Connell, 2005). The consequence of normative

masculinity is that the electorate, for instance, expect politicians and leaders to have masculine traits instead of feminine ones as masculinity attributes become critical requirements to run higher offices (Rosenwasser and Dean, 1989; McGinley, 2009). While low level of women's participation in political and decision-making process are global in scope (Agbalajobi, 2020), obnoxious social norms, harmful traditional practices, political exclusion and economic lopsidedness have exacerbated their political voicelessness and intensified their exclusion in decision-making in most parts of Africa, especially Nigeria (Kasomo, 2012). Banda (2021:8) posits that 'deeply entrenched patriarchy in African society has posed many barriers for women in political participation'. In the colonial and immediate post-colonial period in Africa, women's involvement in politics was marked mainly by their presence in the women's wings of the political parties which possessed little or no functional relevance (Kolawole et al., 2013), their roles being largely nominal (Ajayi, 2019). The need to further the cause of human rights in Africa and stem the tide of discriminatory practices against women gave rise to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Charter). As the primary treaty which provides a framework for human rights in the region, the Charter recognizes and affirms women's rights in three major provisions.

In the democratic dispensation of 1999, concerted efforts were made by women groups, women advocate and activists, civil society organizations, the Nigerian government and international agencies and donor communities to increase women participation in politics and decision making but to no avail. Three political parties were registered in the country but none was registered by women. Instead, statistics revealed very low, disproportionate representation of women in political participation. The situation fell below the recommendation of 30% by the Beijing Affirmative

Platform for Action in 1995 and 35% recommendation of National Policy on Women adopted in July 2000. Okolie (2004) defines political participation as "freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, right to influence decision process and right to social justice, health services, better working conditions and opportunity to franchise" (Ewgu, 2015).

Nepal adopted a new constitution in 2015, with the goal of achieving proportional representation and inclusive participation in the 2017 election. This inclusive method ensures that two women ward representatives are elected at the local level, including one woman and one Dalit woman. Non-Dalit and Dalit women were nominated as local ward members in 753 local areas across Nepal under this provision. This was an opportunity for the Dalit community to enter the national mainstream and assume responsibility for performing to the best of their abilities. The 2017 election has thus become a watershed moment for Dalit women who face social, economic, and political discrimination. Thus, this study analyses the situation and investigates the meaningful representation of Dalit women in politics using two distinct theoretical lenses: intersectionality and critical actor theory.

Using an intersectional feminist lens, the purpose of this thesis is to highlight the overlapping oppressive structures at work in the intersectional identities of Dalit women in Nepalese society. Critical actor theory adds a critical perspective to critical mass theory, which I suggest the Nepalese government adopted by controlling the quota system for Dalit women. When evaluating a quota system, critical mass theory focuses on the number of participants without taking into account effective participation, whereas critical actor theory considers both the quantity and the capability and capacity of the representatives. The government of Nepal concentrated on the number of the Dalit women by introducing a 'Dalit ward member quota'

without considering a prior plan to develop their capability and capacity. This study is based upon secondary data sources, including 17 case studies of the elected Dalit women ward members at the local level after the 2017 election and examines the status of Dalit women in the society, their challenges and obstacles before, after and during the 2017 election.

In conclusion, this analysis indicates that the quota system is an important milestone for Dalit women in the 2017 election. Although the government of Nepal has made a positive first step toward include historically marginalized groups in mainstream politics, it is also ignoring other issues that prevent elected Dalit women from taking on significant leadership roles. In the end, this thesis contends that the Nepali government must pay attention to social, economic, and cultural factors that affect the success or failure of Dalit women's positions in local government in addition to the quota system (Mohtey, 2021).

In Lalitpur metropolitan city there are 29 wards but none of the Dalit people are ward chairman which is dominated by Newar's. there is also no single Dalit person selected as vice-chairperson and other local representatives except Dalit women local representative which is the reserve site for Dalit women conserved by constitution of Nepal. In some ward the population of Dalit people is zero so in Lalitpur metropolitan city there are 14 Dalit women elected and other research seat are vacant. Thus, study is conducted to find out the activities carried by Dalit women local representative for the upliftment of Dalit people and the challenges face by Dalit women local representatives.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nepal embarked on a new journey as a federal state after the successful completion of local, provincial, and federal elections in 2017. The number of Dalit women local representatives in Nepal varies depending on the level of government and the type of election. There are 6,567 Dalit women 997.4% ward members out of a total of 6,743 wards in 753 local units across the country in the local election in 2079 BS which are also mandated by the Local Level Election Act -2017. In the local election there are 197 Dalit women ward chairs out of a total of 6,743 wards. There are 6 and 11 Dalit women mayors and deputy mayors respectively out of a total of 293 municipalities. In case of rural municipalities, there are 1 and 16 Dalit women rural municipality chair and vice-chairs respectively out of a total of 460 rural municipalities (Samata Foundation, 2023). These numbers show that while Dalit women have achieved a significant representation in the ward level, they still face challenges and barriers in reaching higher positions of leadership and decision-making in the local government. Dalit rights activists have been lobbying for increased participation of Dalit women in politics and government for decades, and they hope that the newly elected Dalit women will contribute to a more equal and just society (IDSN, 2023).

The Local Level Election Act mandates that two of the ward members elected for each ward must be women and one of the two women must be a Dalit. These mandatories have created a platform where women can be presented in the front face from the political line, but at the same time it has plotted various challenges that questions mark her ability and the strategy to improve for the sake of herself and the belonging wards. Especially, being a Dalit and a woman, locally representation in the society and in the political arena creates a clear mix-up between the assigned role and how to perform that particular role. Moreover, how these challenges are reflected

upon one's life to cope with the additional needs to support this role will be analyzed in this research.

Women have no other public position besides the panchayat. Men and women who identify as Dalits are not allowed to participate in mainstream politics. Even if they are actively involved in the party, mainstream leaders do not permit Dalits to vote. But recently, Dalit women have started voting, whereas before they did not (Khan 2016).

The participation of elected women members in local government bodies remains generally insignificant, as they are not assigned specific duties. The lack of operational guidelines and terms of reference for female elected representatives, their limited capacity to operate in public institutions of this nature, a lack of awareness of their roles and responsibilities, and systematic discrimination and biases by male elected colleagues are all seen as factors impeding women's meaningful participation in local government (Khan & Ara, 2006).

I shall argue that transnational activism significantly influenced the Indian Dalit (previously untouchables) Women's Movement (DWM) in terms of activity and organizational development. One month before the UN Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing, the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) was established, giving the DWM its first distinct organizational shape. Since then, the DWM and NFDW have used a variety of international and global venues to demand recognition of their oppression, identity, and rights as citizens, including the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in Durban in September 2001, the World Social Forum, and the International Conference on the Human Rights of Dalit Women held in The Hague in November 2006 (Jay, 2008).

The study of Bishwakarma (2017) was found that deeply rooted caste hierarchy and discrimination practices are underlying detrimental factors for the depleted socio-economic, educational, and political status of Dalit in Nepal. The conception of Dalit as a common identity is only a short-term strategy to unite them against all forms of injustice including caste-based discrimination, and to achieve equality. Similarly, Upadhyay (2023) reveals that political representation is taken as a crucial tool for enhancement of their competency and it can support the empowerment of the community one represents, though there are some issues to be addressed with due time and efforts. Most of the time, a contextual need overcame a Dalit woman's absence of political awareness to enter politics. Lack of prior experience not only constrained their political mobility and advancement but also their male colleagues and the ward "chairman" intimidated them due to their "politically inexperienced" background. Higher levels of political socialization and leadership training would be more goal-oriented.

Political representation is believed to benefit Dalit women in terms of strengthening their competency and empowering the community they represent. There are studies showing identical significance including an increased political trust, enforcement of democratic practices in representation and boosting up political accessibility of the marginalized communities, Dalits and women at the local level (Bhattarai, Mross & Fielder, 2022). Manandhar (2021) emphasized, it takes more than just a numeric rise for their meaningful representation and it also requires social awareness.

Reservation quotas have been increasing in the political arena to allow for women and Dalit women to participate. But the action which should be done by providing the equal rights in decision making, budgeting, participations and many

more is not provided. Being Dalit women, they have to face many criticisms, obstacles, and challenges from both the society and within the house by their husband and in laws. As well, they have to manage the time for both the household activities and public service. So this research is highly focused on, what types of barriers they have to really experience for the meaningful participation in ward level. This research has discussed on how they are facing the challenges from both the political parties and general public and how they navigate with the challenges.

Following are the research question of the study:

- a. What are the areas of participation of locally elected Dalit women?
- b. What are the experiences of women during the journey of their politics?
- c. What are the major challenges faced by them from the political parties and general public being elected Dalit women?

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

To examine the areas of participation, problems and challenges face by Dalit women local representative referencing to experiences and struggle done by them in their journey in politics is the general objectives of the study. Besides that, following are the specific objectives of the study:

- a. To explore the areas of Dalit women ward members of Lalitpur Metropolitan city.
- b. To describe their experiences during the journey of their politics.
- c. To identify and analyze major challenges faced by Dalit women representative from general public being elected Dalit women.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study aims to explore the experiences, participation, and challenges faced by Dalit women representatives in Lalitpur Metropolitan City. The rationale of the study is it contributes to the existing literature on political representation, gender, and intersectionality. It provides insights into the experiences of Dalit women representatives in local governance and the challenges they face in their political participation. The study also highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding the experiences of Dalit women representatives. Empirically, the study provides a case study of Lalitpur Metropolitan City, which can be used as a reference for future research on Dalit women's political participation in Nepal. The study also provides insights into the challenges faced by Dalit women representatives in local governance, which can be used to inform policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality and social inclusion.

The study is significant theoretically because it contributes to the existing literature on political representation, gender, and intersectionality. It provides insights into the experiences of Dalit women representatives in local governance and the challenges they face in their political participation. The study also highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding the experiences of Dalit women representatives.

Empirically, the study provides a case study of Lalitpur Metropolitan City, which can be used as a reference for future research on Dalit women's political participation in Nepal. The study also provides insights into the challenges faced by Dalit women representatives in local governance, which can be used to inform policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality and social inclusion. Thus, the study is significant both theoretically and empirically. It provides insights into the

experiences of Dalit women representatives in local governance and the challenges they face in their political participation. The study also highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding the experiences of Dalit women representatives. The case study of Lalitpur Metropolitan City can be used as a reference for future research on Dalit women's political participation in Nepal. The study's findings can be used to inform policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality and social inclusion.

This study has helped to understand that how hard it is to work with the non-Dalits being Dalit. As a good result this research reflects the fact things about how actually they are treated, what types of challenges and problems they have to face in their workplace being elected Dalit women. And also, this research has explored how Dalit women are navigating with all the obstacles and challenges.

Moreover, this research study has covered the barriers and opportunities for meaningful participation in decision making and the challenges faced by the elected Dalit women representative in response with the social, economic and political aspects. Also, this research has identified that how they are navigating with the challenges. Thus, this research has identified the capacity and skills of the locally elected Dalit women representatives as well.

### **1.6 Limitation of the Study**

The study has significant impact on Dalit movement, empowerment of Dalit women, policy recommendation and knowledge generation but the study also have some limitation which are listed below:

- The study is conducted in considering the Dalit women local elected representative of Lalitpur Metropolitan city. So, the study used small sample size

represent urban area thus, the results and finding many not represent problems and challenges face by Dalit women local representative of other area due to differences in topography, social structure and social construction.

- The study used cross-sectional data without considering time. Thus, study finding represent only one point of time rather that representing period of time through use of longitudinal data.
- The study finding is based only from Dalit women local representative prospects where study ignore struggle of Dalit women who do not elected as local representatives.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter reviews selected literature relevant to the subject of this research project. It focuses on the barriers; which Dalit women have to face for the meaningful participation in politics. The first section describes the theoretical review where feminist theory that focus on social structure, gender discrimination and inequality on women in society, intersectionality theory that focus on social identities like racism and WID, WAD and GAD that focus on bring the women in main stream for development. In second part, Dalit women in politics, the challenges and problems of Dalit women in politics are present. similarly, in empirical review section the national and international articles related to Dalit movement and Dalit women are reviews to examine the existing knowledge and existing knowledge gap related to research objectives. In last part, conceptual framework of the study is mention showing the dependent and independent variables used in the study.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

In this part the different major theories that explain the discrimination and inequality are explain. In the study, feminist theory, intersectional theory and WID, WAD and GAD are most relevant theory for the study.

##### **2.1.1 Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory encompasses various perspectives that offer unique ways of understanding and addressing gender inequalities and related social issues. There is different philosophy of feminism but liberal feminism, radical feminism and Marxist feminism are the common thought that focus on gender inequality (MacKinnon,

1989). Liberal feminism focusses on achieving gender equality through legal and policy changes. Liberal feminists advocate for equal rights, opportunities, and protections within existing systems (Ferguson, 2017). Similarly, radical feminism critiques the root causes of gender oppression and seeks to dismantle patriarchal structures entirely. Radical feminists highlight the need for fundamental societal transformation to achieve gender equality. Likewise, Marxist feminism analyzes the relationship between capitalism and gender inequality. Marxist feminists argue that economic factors intersect with gender to produce unequal power dynamics (Ferber & Nelson, 2009).

Feminist theory is a diverse and evolving body of thought that focuses on analyzing, critiquing, and addressing the social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities between genders. It seeks to understand the root causes of gender-based discrimination and advocate for the rights and empowerment of all individuals, particularly women and marginalized gender identities (Ferguson, 2017). The common point of these theories is that gender as a social construct by highlighting how gender is socially constructed, shaped by cultural norms and expectations that vary across societies and time periods (MacKinnon, 1989). Feminist theory recognizes that individuals hold multiple social identities (such as race, class, sexuality, and caste), which intersect to shape their experiences of discrimination and privilege (Ferguson, 2017).

Central to feminist theory is the critique of patriarchy (mainly from radical feminist), a system of power that perpetuates male dominance and enforces traditional gender roles. Feminists analyze how patriarchy impacts institutions, relationships, and societal norms (Beasley, 1999). Similarly, feminist theory examines historical contexts to understand how women's roles and rights have evolved over time. It

exposes how women have been excluded from positions of power and denied access to resources (Ferguson, 2017).

Feminist theory addresses a range of gender inequalities, including unequal pay, limited representation in leadership roles, violence against women, and reproductive rights (Ferguson, 2017). It questions why these disparities exist and proposes strategies for change. Feminist theory celebrates women's agency and strives to empower individuals to challenge discrimination and advocate for their rights (MacKinnon, 1989). It recognizes that women are active agents in shaping their lives and society.

Dalit feminism is a movement that aims to address the intersectional oppression faced by Dalit women in India. It recognizes the multiple deprivations of Dalit women based on caste, class, and gender. The feminist discourse in India has often neglected the caste question, which has led to the subjugation of Dalit women. Dalit feminist theory highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding the experiences of Dalit women representatives (Koli, 2023). The theory is vital in this study because the study also aim to explore the challenges, experience and problem face by Dalit women in politics because caste system is socially constructed just like gender.

### **2.1.2 Intersectionality Theory**

Intersectionality theory is a framework that recognizes how various social identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and more, intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. This theory was developed to address the limitations of single-axis approaches, which often fail to capture the complexity of people's lives. The theory argue that intersectionality acknowledges that individuals hold multiple identities, and these identities interact to shape their experiences. Thus, the theory

highlights how individuals can experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. Thus, according to the theory discrimination is not isolated; it compounds when identities intersect and is not one-size-fits-all. Intersectionality recognizes that individuals with similar identities may have vastly different experiences based on additional factors. The theory explains how some identities can lead to privilege while others result in marginalization.

Intersectionality theory states that discrimination occurs within complex systems of power and privilege. Intersectionality helps uncover how these systems operate in interconnected ways, influencing access to resources, opportunities, and rights.

Intersectionality draws attention to the gaps in understanding that arise from focusing solely on single identities. It encourages a more inclusive analysis that captures the nuances of lived experiences and challenges activists, researchers, and policymakers to consider the broader context in which discrimination occurs. It promotes more holistic approaches to achieving social justice.

In relation to discrimination, intersectionality theory allows for a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of how different forms of discrimination intersect and impact individuals. It encourages us to move beyond a simplified view of identity and discrimination, enabling us to address inequalities more effectively by considering the complexity of people's lives. Theory is appropriate in this study due to multiple phase challenges by society and political party to the Dalit women politician.

### **2.1.3 WID, WAD and GAD**

WID (Women in Development), WAD (Women and Development), and GAD (Gender and Development) are different approaches that have been used to analyze and address gender-related issues and empowerment of women in society. Each

approach has its own perspective on how development affects gender roles, relationships, and discrimination.

The WID approach emerged in the 1970s and focused on integrating women into existing development processes. It aimed to address the disparities between men and women by providing women with equal access to resources, education, and opportunities. WID recognized the need to eliminate gender-based discrimination by emphasizing women's participation in economic activities and development projects. WID addresses discrimination by focusing on providing equal opportunities and resources for women to participate in development. It aims to reduce economic disparities and promote women's inclusion. This approach is also applicable in politics for the participation of Dalit women and their empowerment.

The WAD approach emerged as a critique of the WID approach in the 1980s. It argued that the WID approach failed to challenge the underlying structural inequalities and power dynamics that perpetuate gender discrimination. WAD emphasized the need to address the root causes of gender-based discrimination and questioned the broader development models that often reinforced these inequalities. WAD critiques discrimination by highlighting how existing development models often reinforce unequal power dynamics. It challenges the underlying assumptions that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and advocates for structural change.

The GAD approach evolved in the 1990s as a response to the limitations of both WID and WAD. GAD recognizes that development can have different impacts on individuals based on their gender identities. It aims to analyze how gender roles, norms, and relations intersect with development processes. GAD seeks to transform unequal power dynamics and challenge discriminatory practices through policy

changes, institutional reforms, and community participation. GAD addresses discrimination by emphasizing the importance of understanding how gender roles and relations intersect with development. It seeks to challenge discriminatory norms and practices and transform institutions and policies to promote gender equality.

## **2.2 Conceptual Review**

In this part, the Dalit, Dalit women and political participation, challenges face by of Dalit women in politics, barrier for meaningful participation in election are present.

### **2.2.1 Dalit Women Participation in Politics**

'Dalit' is a term derived from the Sanskrit language meaning broken or scattered. In Nepal and India, Dalit is a term used for the people who belong to the lower-caste community within the four-fold varna system of Hinduism according to the caste system such as Brahmin, Chattriya, Baisya, and Sudra (Teltumbde, 2020). Falling under the fourth caste system in the hierarchy as 'Sudra', Dalits are historically oppressed, neglected, considered the lowest and deprived of basic human rights and opportunities. Despite the legal announcement against caste-based discrimination, discrimination is still in practice especially in the rural and urban areas of Nepal. Dalits are viewed as unimportant, socially discriminated against, politically underrepresented and excluded, and treated as untouchables.

The literacy rate of Dalits is low compared to Brahmins (Sharma, 2014). The most inferior and unequal status of Dalits in society directly affects their political representation compared to other higher-caste people (Bishwakarma, 2017). The above data explains that Dalit community has got lowest status in the society of Nepal. In addition to the caste system, gender discrimination is also one of the crucial factors that creates inequality between the people of Nepal.

The patriarchal structure of the society along with the lack of education, knowledge and skill amongst women has resulted in violence and discrimination in the lives of women. Also, families and societies do not offer any psychological or economic support to women (Gurung, 2018). Though the constitution of Nepal 2015 included 'right to equality' in Article 18, this has not been significantly implemented. However, the introduction of affirmative action in 2007 elevated the representation of women in the decision-making process of those who hold the power of politics. The reservation of 33% of seats allocated in the constitutional Assembly, and interparliamentary women's caucus form a critical mass in the parliament (Lotter, 2017). Since 2016, Nepal has developed and set an example within South Asian countries by electing women to positions such as president, chief justice, and parliamentary speaker. Even then women are imperiled in functional as well as nonfunctional manifestations of patriarchy. However, this change assimilates into the life of every woman differently (Walby, 1989). For instance, discrimination, suppression, and violence as well as political favoritism are encountered differently by women from upper caste as compared to the women from low castes (Dalits) or marginalized group in Hindu societies (Lotter, 2017).

Dalit women in Nepal bear oppression, discrimination, and violence more than other women because they are economically, socially, and politically weak. Dalit women constitute approximately 10% of the total population of Nepal (Sob, 2012). They usually suffer from gender and domestic violence. Dalit women have constantly become the victims of severe violence. Due to the lack of power and ignorance about the rights, out of 49.1% cases of violence against Dalit women, only 4.4 cases were registered. In addition, 80% of Dalit women live below the poverty line (FEDO, 2015). Since the political change in 2007, the situation of Dalit women has gradually

improved. The Nepalese government had a provision of 25 seats for women in the first Constituent Assembly, but later this was decreased to 22 in the second Constitution Assembly (FEDO, 2015). However, Dalit women have been excluded from state mechanisms, governing structures, and the political sphere for decades.

### **2.2.2 Dalit Women in Election**

In the 2017 local-level elections, 40.95 percent of the total elected representatives were women and it was slightly increase to 41.21 percent in 2022 election. The target of 50% representation is not meet in both elections, in addition, to fulfill the legal provisions political parties ended up fielding a large number of women as candidates for Deputy positions in 2017. In contrast, in 2022, due to the political parties forming coalitions, only one candidate was fielded by one political party in mayor/ chief and deputy positions which could be either of the genders. Because of this, the tickets went largely to male candidates while drastically decreasing the number of female candidates. The nominations reflect this – while 3593 women were nominated as deputy chiefs in 2017, 3077 women were nominated as deputy chiefs in 2022 (Data from Election Commission). Furthermore, while it is mandatory for all ward levels to have one Dalit women member, 176 units and 123 units in 2017 and in 2022, respectively, did not field Dalit women candidates

### **2.2.3 Challenges and Problems of Dalit Women in Politics**

In India, the largest group that is discriminated against are the Dalits, also known as scheduled castes. Their prejudice is founded first on their ancestry or birth into particular "untouchable" castes, and then on their customary "polluting" work. As a result, despite the Dalit group making up approximately one in five Indians, half of whom are women, Dalit political engagement in India is still disproportionately low. With regard to Dalit women especially, there are now only 12 Dalit women MPs in

the Indian Lower House of Parliament, or just 2.2% of lawmakers. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination underlined their concern regarding the underrepresentation of Dalits in all levels of government in its review of the Government of India's report in 2007. Since many Dalits are not listed on electoral rolls or otherwise denied the right to vote, Dalit candidates, particularly women, are frequently forced to withdraw from running for office or, if elected, to refuse to exercise their power in village councils or other elected bodies (Second forum on minority, 2009).

Upreti, Upreti & Ghale (2020) Nepal, a landlocked country and currently a Federal Democratic Republic, is sandwiched between two Asian giants, India and China, with its rough terrain and topography of towering mountains in the north and rich flat plains in the Terai along the southern slopes. Women's low involvement in Parliament is a recurring topic in government. According to Khakurel et al. (2011), only 27 out of 197 women had previous parliamentary experience, while the remaining 170 women legislators were starting from scratch. Similarly, 17.9 percent of female CA members had no formal education and could hardly read and write (Kanel, 2014). As a result, the majority of female legislators have difficulty understanding complex legal issues and hence find it difficult to participate effectively in political discourse. Additionally, some of the women in political roles belonged to higher castes and classes or were related to male politicians closely, and they were generally under the authority of the men (Kanel, 2014). Women's influence in the constitution-writing and decision-making procedures has been shown to be restricted, even with the requirement that they make up 33% of the CA. In conversations and debates on general topics, men frequently fail to acknowledge their participation (Rai, 2015). As a result, it is still difficult for impoverished and marginalized women from remote rural areas to obtain

political positions, and patriarchal societal norms continue to be present in political contacts. Despite favorable legal and regulatory frameworks, women continue to be underrepresented in the executive, judicial, and bureaucracy (Upreti et al., 2018).

#### **2.2.4 Multiple Discrimination**

Dalit women frequently find themselves in oppressive patriarchal societies. They are routinely denied options and freedoms in all areas of life due to the extreme discrimination they experience for being both a Dalit and a woman. Extremely unbalanced social, economic, and political power equations are the cause of this pervasive junction of gender and caste prejudice. Dalit women face severe barriers to justice, and there is widespread impunity in cases where the perpetrator is a member of a dominant caste, above the Dalits in the caste system. As a result, Dalit women are considered easy targets for sexual violence and other crimes, because perpetrators almost always get away with it. For example, studies in India show that the conviction rate for rapes against Dalit women is less than 2%, compared to a conviction rate for rapes against men (IDSN, 2022).

Dalits are still forbidden from participating in community activities such as worshipping at the same temples as Nepalis of higher castes. The higher castes do not eat anything touched by members of the Dalit community, nor do they drink from the same community tap that Dalits use. Women are disproportionately affected. "Dalit women are at the bottom of the caste and gender hierarchy in Nepal," said Bhakta Bishwokarma, president of the Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization (NNDSWO), an organization that strives to remove caste prejudice in Nepal (Aryal, 2023).

Dalit women experience a variety of atrocities, including being labeled as witches and being tortured with various sorts of domestic violence. These women's sociocultural, political, economic, and educational standing is at the bottom of all metrics. Lower-level Dalit women, for example, have a literacy rate of 17.4% and just 5.5% access to toilets, whereas others have 42%. Similarly, malnutrition affects 35.9% of Dalit children. Dalit women and children have been living in insecure situations for a long time and continue to experience injustice. Another issue that is wreaking havoc on the lives of Dalit women and children is early pregnancy and child marriage. For example, the proportion of Dalit girls who marry before the age of 15 is as high as 62% (Pokharel, 2022).

### **2.2.5 Denied Justice, Access to Education, Health and Other Services**

The culprits' sanctioned impunity is a major issue. Police frequently ignore or deny Dalit women their right to seek legal and judicial assistance. The judiciary frequently fails to implement rules that protect Dalit women from discrimination. Discrimination based on caste and gender in the delivery of education, health care, water, sanitation, and other essential amenities is also a major barrier for Dalit women, negatively influencing their welfare and chances. This prejudice has been documented numerous times by UN agencies and significant international human rights and development non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (IDSN, 2022).

Another widespread issue is widespread illiteracy and poverty, which prevents Dalit women from enrolling in school. Teachers and non-Dalit students discriminate against and discourage Dalit students. As a result, affirmative action programs are required.

Ms. Moolan Bai, a Dalit woman from Mithi town, urges her government to take action, saying, "The fate of my community would be changed through education and learning new skills if the government pays attention to their development. "Dalits

have the worst health outcomes of any group, according to health indices. Access to basic health care is frequently obstructed by health workers who refuse to treat patients or refuse to touch their bodies. Although the Pakistani Constitution outlaw's caste discrimination, successive governments have taken little or very little action to remove caste discrimination. In fact, in recent years, the status of Dalits and other religious minorities has deteriorated (IDSN, 2022).

According to studies, persons from high castes have more freedom and status, whereas people from lower castes are barred from visiting schools, temples, and courthouses. Furthermore, they are banned from trading commodities and labor, and they have been stigmatized as a result of the practice of untouchability. Inequity based on caste also has an impact on employment, confining Dalits to low-status industries such as producing brooms, baskets, ropes, sex workers, and domestic laborers. Dalits are also connected with jobs such as scavengers, sweepers, rag pickers, and coolies, which are regarded unclean, insignificant, and unsanitary, and hence associated with religious ideals of purity-pollution. Dalits have also been barred from forming equal relationships with individuals from upper castes in social, educational, political, and economic areas. Because of the caste system's concept of untouchability, Dalits are especially vulnerable and isolated. Caste differences interact with patriarchy and, as a result, play a crucial part in further segregating Dalit women, often known as the "Dalit among Dalits." As a result, Dalit women face double prejudice because of their caste identity and gender. They are largely overlooked and face prejudice, which leads to health disparity, particularly in maternal health services. Caste and gender frequently make Dalit women and girls particularly vulnerable to exclusion from school, resulting in literacy obstacles. There is few research in Nepal on the health perspectives of women, particularly Dalit and disabled women who receive and use

maternity health services. Women from these cultures are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation as a result of social and religious customs.

Similarly, Dalit women face barriers to social, economic, civic, and political rights and entitlements as a result of caste prejudice. Poor health, poor education, economic deprivation due to limited employment prospects, reduced public service and political engagement, violence and atrocities, prostitution, and gender inequality are among the major difficulties they face. We hope to comprehend gender dimensions of caste in this review by discussing obstacles that Dalit women encounter. Due to their social standing, a substantial number of Dalits in rural India are denied or denied access to health care. The Nepalese government sought to combat caste prejudice by enacting affirmative regulation and policies (health policies, nutrition health policies, and federal structure policies). Nonetheless, despite laws in Nepal prohibiting the caste system since 1962, discrimination in obtaining health services persists due to a shortage of state-run services, as well as denial and discrimination in the provision of health care to Dalits who seek health care. Common discriminatory attitudes include refusing to enter Dalits' homes or allowing them to enter yours, sharing food and water, seating areas, transportation, and generally refusing to touch. A significant proportion of Dalits in rural India are denied or denied access to health treatment due to their social standing. To counteract caste prejudice, the Nepalese government enacted affirmative regulation and policies (health policies, nutrition health policies, and federal structure policies). Nonetheless, despite Nepalese legislation outlawing the caste system since 1962, discrimination in receiving health services persists due to a lack of state-run services, as well as denial and discrimination in the provision of health care to Dalits who seek health care. Refusing to enter Dalits' houses or allowing them to enter yours, sharing food and water,

seating locations, transportation, and generally refusing to touch are all examples of discriminatory attitudes (Thapa et al, 2022).

### **2.2.6 Multiple Discrimination on Dalits**

Discrimination against Dalits is a deeply rooted social issue that has persisted for centuries. Dalits, formerly known as "Untouchables," face multiple forms of discrimination based on their caste, class, and gender. Caste-based discrimination is the most prominent form of bias faced by Dalits where caste system categorizes people into hierarchical groups, with Dalits traditionally occupying the lowest rung. This discrimination often manifests in the denial of access to education, employment opportunities, and religious spaces. They are subjected to untouchability practices, where physical contact with Dalits is seen as polluting, leading to their exclusion from many aspects of social life (Aryal, 2023).

Dalits are disproportionately concentrated in low-income occupations such as manual scavenging, agricultural labor, and sanitation work. Economic discrimination is perpetuated through unequal pay, lack of job security, and limited access to land and resources. The cycle of poverty continues as they are denied opportunities for upward mobility, trapping them in a cycle of economic deprivation (Thirupathi, 2021).

Dalit women face intersectional discrimination due to their caste and gender. They are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking. The intersection of caste and gender discrimination often limits their access to education and healthcare, perpetuating their marginalized status in society (Upadhyay, 2023). Similarly, access to quality education remains a significant challenge for Dalit children. Discrimination in schools takes various forms, including social segregation,

verbal abuse, and biased treatment by teachers. This hinders their educational development and limits their future prospects (Teltumbde 2020).

The study also found that Dalits often receive inadequate healthcare, leading to disparities in health outcomes. They face discrimination in healthcare facilities, which results in delayed or substandard treatment. Poor access to sanitation and clean water also contributes to health problems in Dalit communities (Upadhyay, 2023).

Discrimination against Dalits is multifaceted, encompassing caste, class, and gender-based biases. Despite legal safeguards and affirmative action measures, Dalits continue to experience systemic discrimination in various aspects of their lives (Pariyar & Lovett, 2016). Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that tackles social norms, improves access to education and healthcare, and promotes economic empowerment. Only through such efforts can India work towards a more equitable society where all its citizens, regardless of their caste, can live with dignity and opportunity.

### **2.2.7 Participation, Challenges and Experience**

Dalit being the lower caste in Nepal have to face social and political challenges in the politics. Laxmi Badi, a Dalit woman leader from Nepal, is at the forefront of the struggle for equal rights. Laxmi Badi, aged 40, has been a member of the Ward Committee and Judicial Committee of Dipayal Silgadhi Municipality in far western Nepal since 2017 (UN Women, 2021, March 10). The study is also match Junah's life present by Pressfield in novel "Authentic Swing" where he is living in disillusioned golfer and later set the canvas for transformation and become actual gulf player (Pressfield, 2013). Laxmi Badi's journey involves challenging norms and advocating for the rights of Dalit women. Her courage to confront discrimination, even within

religious spaces, exemplifies her commitment to justice. She joined the Feminist Dalit Organization, supporting Dalit women in economic empowerment through cattle rearing. Despite obstacles, she remains steadfast in her fight for equality and inclusion.

In South Asia, individuals from the Dalit community find themselves at the bottom of the archaic "caste system," facing generations of discrimination and segregation based on their descent. Globally, ethnic minorities, women migrants, rural women, women with disabilities, and indigenous women continue to face discrimination and exclusion from public life. Gender equality and good governance require the inclusion of women and girls in all their diversity. Gender quotas play a crucial role in increasing women's participation in legislatures and other sectors when effectively implemented.

### **2.3 Empirical Review**

Bishwakarma (2017) had conducted a study entitled "Democratic politics in Nepal: Dalit political inequality and representation" to explore the dalit practices, representation and inequality for Dalit community for entering politics. The study used descriptive research design considering the secondary as well as primary data collection source for data gathering and thematic analysis is used for qualitative data. The key informant interview method was employed to explore the experiences of Dalit on the current political inequality, identity debates, and representation. The study found that deeply rooted caste hierarchy and discrimination practices are underlying detrimental factors for the depleted socio-economic, educational, and political status of Dalit in Nepal. The conception of Dalit as a common identity, although contested among Dalit, is only a short-term strategy to unite them against all forms of injustice including caste-based discrimination, and to achieve equality. It can

be concluded that special political representation measures, such as proportional representation (PR), are one of the major institutional reforms for achieving social justice for Dalit in Nepal. The study's finding is vital but still did not specifically focus on Dalit women participation in decision making.

Thirupathi (2021), have conducted a student entitled "From reservation to participation: issues and challenges of Dalit representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions" with the objectives to evaluate the reservation policy and the problems which are associated with ineffective implantation of provisions of reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The study followed the descriptive research design and use secondary data for analysis. The study found that million Dalit representatives have been elected at the village, block and district levels, following the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, in proportion of their population to the total population in the Panchayat area. The process of decentralization has provided representation but representation does not necessarily lead to participation. The study also found that feudal values continue to rule the roost, inadequate education, the reluctance of state-level politicians, corruption in administrative quarters, complex legal formalities and it also reflects on the reasons behind. Enhanced Atrocities and violence against Dalit representative in panchayats and no-confidence motion against Dalit women, Misuse of No confidence motion, Problems of mandatory rotation of reserved seats and discrimination against elected Dalit panchayat presidents reveals how entrenched caste-based hate and bias at the grassroots level democratic institutions. The study conclusion provides valuable information for the study but fail to address the problems and challenges face by elected Dalit women.

Mohtey (2021) have study entitled "Analyzing Meaningful Representation of Elected Dalit Women at Local Level of Nepal in 2017 Election" to interprets the construction

from the narratives that come through one-to-one interviews with 19 Dalit women in Biratnagar Metropolitan City as the research participants on the status, opportunities and challenges of their political representation at the local level. After gathering the narratives, the data is discussed to reach the conclusion that political representation can be a gateway to enhance the leadership potential of Dalit women. The study reveals that political representation is taken as a crucial tool for enhancement of their competency and it can support the empowerment of the community one represents, though there are some issues to be addressed with due time and efforts. Most of the time, a contextual need overcame a Dalit woman's absence of political awareness to enter politics. Lack of prior experience not only constrained their political mobility and advancement but also, in situations, their male colleagues and the ward chairman intimidated them due to their politically inexperienced" background. For some others, their own community too was not excited with their election process or their roles at the local government. Higher levels of political socialization and leadership training would be more goal-oriented. This study highlight some of the issues that create barrier for participation of Dalit in politics due do not focus on the Dalit women participation in political decision making.

Sarvesh, Shanker Singh, & Alam (2021) have conducted a study entitled "Dalit Women in History: Struggles, Voices, and Counter publics" focusing on projection of Dalit communities' realities from the historian's lens and parameters. The study followed the historical research design using secondary data related to Dalit movement and social belief. The study argue that Dalit community was marginalized within the Indian economic, social, and political historiography. Gradually, with the rise of Dalit consciousness, men—the better-positioned gender of the community—tried to express their vulnerabilities from a masculinist perspective. The literature

written also projected women only as extensions of male protagonists. Though the traumas Dalit women have faced due to intersectional realities are separate from that of men, they could not find a place in early literature as complete entities, entitled to be acknowledged as such. The trade union movements also sidelined the issues of Dalit women laborers. To date, issues of Dalit women's property rights, longevity, education, and empowerment are largely androcentric, as the state's schemes and policies are majorly heteronormative and male-centric.

Sahni & Jagroop (2022) had conducted a study entitled "Political Participation of Dalits in Punjab of the Twenty-first Century" focusing on pattern and direction with which Dalit politics moves in Punjab. The study used descriptive research design using secondary data collection source. The study found that an attempt is made to understand political participation as well as voting behaviour of Dalits in Punjab, which is quite different when compared with political behaviour of Dalits in the rest of India. In this study, political participation and political gains of Dalits in Punjab are studied under three phases as well as economic and social factors that have reshaped and redefined the role of Dalits in Punjab politics. Ever since Punjab's first Assembly election held in 1951 till the 13 Punjab state Assembly election held in 2017, there is no major change in the pattern of Dalit leadership as there is no Dalit leader who commands the whole of Dalit strata in Punjab. On the basis of historical and analytical studies, this article argues that possibilities are quite remote for the emergence of strong leadership having a support of entire Dalit community in Punjab in the upcoming state Assembly elections of 2022.

Mahananda, (2023) published a study entitled "Emergence of Dalit-Bahujan Students' Movement" with the objectives of highlighting the Dalit movement. The study has followed the qualitative approach and used the phenomenological technique to

understand the lived experiences of the Dalit-Bahujan students located on three university campuses in western Odisha. The present study has demonstrated clearly how the hardships, struggles and measures taken by the Dalit-Bahujan student movements on the university campuses. Finally, it clearly outlined the different elements that motivated the Dalit-Bahujan students to join the movement and helped them to recognize their own responsibility for passing on this legacy to future generations. The study highlights the vital element of movement but ignore the discrimination and challenges face by Dalit women coming to main stream.

Upadhyay, (2023) published the article “Dalit women’s political participation at the local level perspectives of the elected women representatives in Biratnagar” which the objectives of examine the Dalit and Dalit women participation in election and perspectives on local level. The study used descriptive research design using qualitative method. The interprets the construction from the narratives that come through one-to-one interviews with 19 Dalit women in Biratnagar Metropolitan City as the research participants on the status, opportunities and challenges of their political representation at the local level. After gathering the narratives, the data is discussed to reach the conclusion that political representation can be a gateway to enhance the leadership potential of Dalit women. The study argue that political representation is taken as a crucial tool for enhancement of their competency and it can support the empowerment of the community one represents, though there are some issues to be addressed with due time and efforts. Lack of prior experience not only constrained their political mobility and advancement but also, in situations, their male colleagues and the ward chairman intimidated them due to their „politically inexperienced background. For some others, their own community too was not

excited with their election process or their roles at the local government. Higher levels of political socialization and leadership training would be more goal-oriented.

#### **2.4 Concluding Remarks and Research Gap**

The objectives of the study are to explore the problems and challenges face by the Dalit women who are the representative or are in different committee of political parties. The study conducted by different scholar are focusing on the Dalit movement and Dalit-Bahun movement which is different from the research objectives. The articles and journal published by different scholar also focus on Dalit representation in politics and election which is only a part of the objective of my study. one study by Upadhyay, (2023) focuses on Dalit women but only consider representation of Dalit women in local politics and their perspective on local level but my study focuses on challenges face by Dalit woman representatives for decision making. Thus, after reviewing the articles and journals by different scholar I found there is significant research gap and provide rationale to conduct the study.

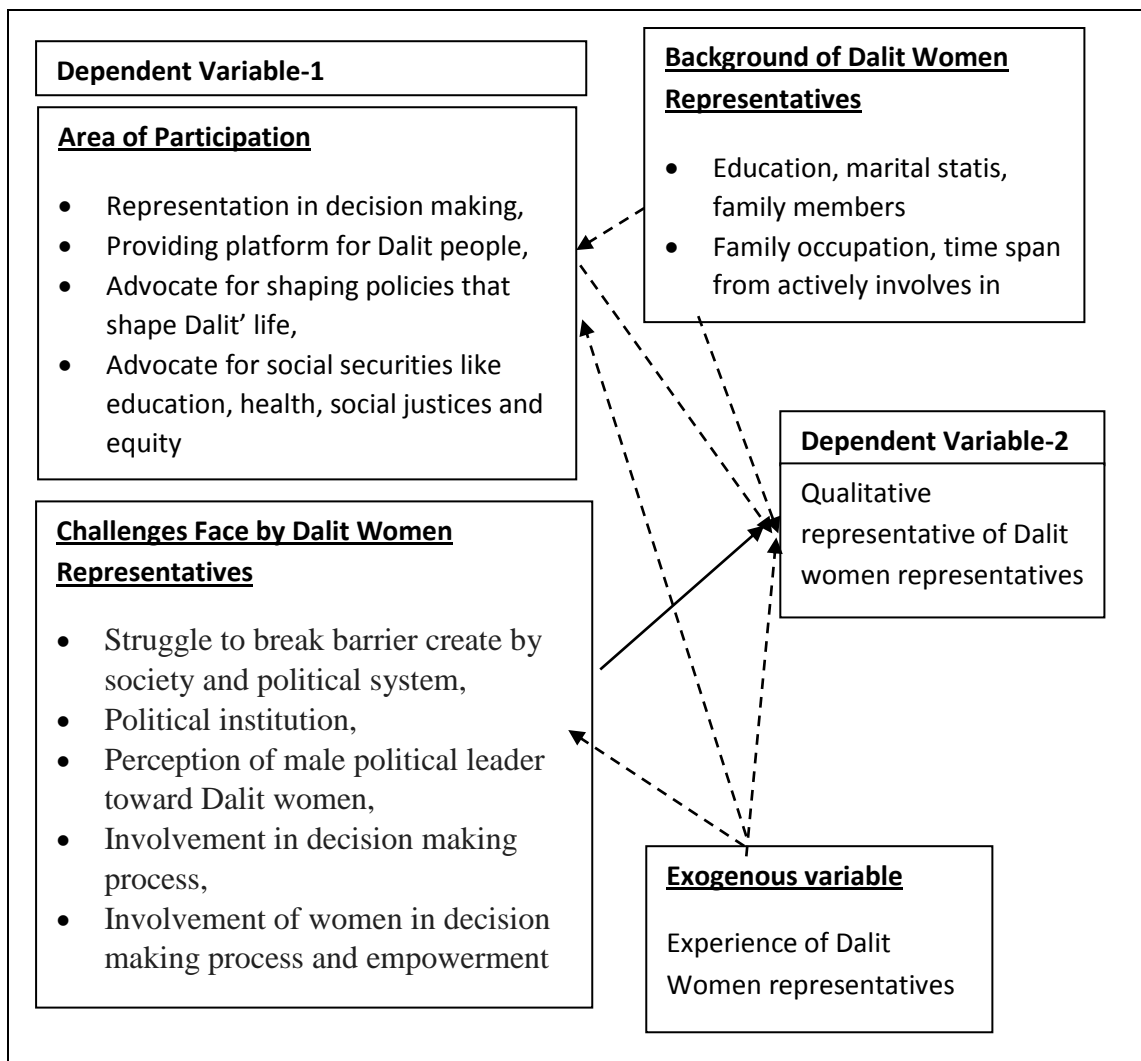
#### **2.5 Conceptual Framework of Study**

The study is conducted to examine the area of participation of Dalit women political representatives and the challenges face by Dalit women political representative. Thus, area of participation of Dalit woman is the dependent variable of the study where in the study representation in decision making, rising voice and issues faced by Dalit women and Dalit community, advocate for providing the platform that shape the lives of their community, advocate for policies that address the challenges face by the Dalit community, focus on the social capital like education, health, social justice equity for Dalit community and advocate for breaking traditional power structure that provide barrier for Dalit community. Similarly, struggle to break barrier create by society and

political system, political institution, perception of male political leader toward Dalit women, decision making process, involvement of women in decision making process and empowerment are the challenges face by Dalit women and in the study the level of involvement on decision making , inequality and equity practice, level of social justice experience by Dalit women are analysis so challenges face by Dalit women representative is the independent variable of the study. Involvement in decision making and other issues, challenges face by the Dalit political representative reflect the qualitative representative of Dalit women leader which is consider as dependent variable of the study. The background of the women Dalit representative like education, family types, marital status, age group, family members and time span in political parties are the vital factors that determine area of participants and quality of Dalit women representatives so these variables are independent variable in the study. The relation between this independent and dependent variable is present in following figure 1:

### **Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework of the Study*



Source: Researcher, 2023

The conceptual framework shows the dependent and independent variables of the study and their relationship. The dependent variables of the study include Dalit women's involvement in decision-making, advocacy for community issues, and addressing challenges. Similarly, independent variables encompass background factors shaping participation quality, such as education, family, and political experience.

## 2.6 Summary of Literature Review

In the 2017 and 2022 local elections in Nepal, women's representation slightly increased from 40.95% to 41.21%. However, the 50% target was unmet in both

elections. In 2017, parties fielded numerous women for deputy positions to comply with legal provisions, but in 2022, coalition politics resulted in fewer candidates overall, disproportionately favoring men. This shift is evident in the reduced nominations for female deputy chiefs, and in some units, the mandatory inclusion of Dalit women members was not adhered to.

Dalit women in Nepal grapple with entrenched patriarchal oppression, facing discrimination at the intersection of gender and caste. This results in limited options and freedoms, exacerbated by imbalanced social, economic, and political power dynamics. They encounter barriers to justice, with perpetrators often enjoying impunity, especially if they belong to dominant castes. Dalit women are disproportionately targeted for sexual violence, with a conviction rate below 2%. Social segregation persists, restricting Dalits from participating in communal activities and facing food and water discrimination. Widespread atrocities, including branding as witches and domestic violence, contribute to their marginalized socio-cultural, political, economic, and educational status. High rates of illiteracy, malnutrition, child marriage, and early pregnancy further compound the challenges faced by Dalit women and children, perpetuating a cycle of injustice.

Dalits in Nepal endure severe caste-based discrimination, facing restrictions from education, employment, and societal interactions. They are relegated to low-status occupations, reflecting religious notions of purity-pollution. Dalit women, doubly marginalized due to both caste and gender, experience heightened prejudice, impacting their health and educational opportunities. Limited research in Nepal highlights the vulnerability of Dalit and disabled women, emphasizing the urgent need to address these intersecting inequalities in maternal health services and protect them from social and religious exploitation.

Bishwakarma's 2017 study reveal entrenched caste hierarchy and discriminatory practices as key obstacles, it underscores the need for a common Dalit identity to combat injustice. However, the study lacks a specific focus on Dalit women's participation in decision-making, leaving a gap in understanding their unique challenges within the broader context of Dalit empowerment. Similarly, Thirupathi (2021) reveals that post the Dalit representation increased in local governance. However, challenges persist, including inadequate education, corruption, and violence against Dalit representatives. Likewise, Mohtey's (2021) study underscores the significance of political representation for Dalit empowerment, acknowledging contextual needs as a driving force for Dalit women entering politics. However, lack of experience and intimidation from male colleagues pose barriers. The study suggests enhancing political socialization and leadership training, but fails to specifically address the challenges faced by Dalit women in political decision-making.

Upadhyay (2023) emphasizes political representation as vital for enhancing competency and community empowerment. However, lack of experience hinders political progress for Dalit women, leading to intimidation by male colleagues and community disapproval. The study suggests targeted political socialization and leadership training for improvement.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this section, the methodology used for the study are written which include the rationale of selecting the study area, research design, universe and sample, source and nature of data, techniques and tools of data collection, method of data analysis and ethical consideration while conducting study. In this section the reason for selected the research area, research design and methods used for conducting the study are including similarly the universe of the study, sampling process and sampling method is present. Likewise, nature of data used in the study and its collection methods and tools are also present in detail. After collecting the data, the data analysis techniques and ethics followed whiling conducting study is also included in the chapter.

#### **3.1 Rationale of Selecting the Study Area**

For the study, women local level representatives who are elected from Lalitpur Metropolitan City is selected from the study. One of the main reason for selecting Lalitpur Metropolitan City is to analysis the discrimination faces by Dalit women in most literate urban area of Lalitpur districts. Another rationale of selecting the study area is to explore the challenges and problems face by Dalit women representative in urban area and finding out the struggle face even in highly educated society and urban social structure. The study also focuses on explore the perception of towards Dalit women representative by male local political representatives of urban area. Beside this, the researcher is also living in study area and found many discriminations practice toward Dalit in study area.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The study focus on the area of participation and the challenge face by Dalit women representative which demand the descriptive research design. Under descriptive research design the study used qualitative research method. The rationale of selecting descriptive research design is that in the study the data related to experiences, feeling of discrimination, challenges faced due to being Dalit women, problems face by Dalit women representatives, role in decision making process, political participation and advocacy for empowerment by Dalit local representatives are used to describe the area of participation and challenges face by Dalit women local representatives. In the study, primary data collection source is used and in-depth interview with participation is conducted for data collection. For the analysis of collected data, thematic and narrative data analysis techniques are used.

### **3.3 Nature and Source of Data**

In the study all the data related to area of participation of Dalit women Representatives, advocacy related to policy reform and awareness related to improvement of livelihood of Dalit people, experience of Dalit women politician and representative, participation in decision making process in ward and in politics, problems and challenges face by them are qualitative in nature and collected in open ended questions. In the study, the primary data collection source was the main data collection source where in-depth interviews and focus group discussion are used for the data collection.

### **3.4 Universe, Sampling Procedure and Sample size**

All the Dalit women local representatives who were elected in local election of 2079 in Lalitpur Metropolitan City of Lalitpur district of Nepal is the universe of the study.

There are 29 wards in Lalitpur Metropolitan City and according to the provision of constitution of Nepal there must be at least one Dalit women representative in each ward. According to data provided by Lalitpur Metropolitan City there are only one Dalit women local representative in each in 19 wards but due to absent of Dalit population in remaining wards there are no local Dalit women representatives in these wards. In the study, 19 Dalit women representative are the target population of the study. For the study, all 19 Dalit woman local representatives are selected considering individual Dalit women representative as sample unit and study used census method rather than sampling method for selection of respondents.

### **3.5 Techniques and Tools of Data Collection**

In the study, data is collected from primary sources. Under primary data collection source in-depth interview and focus group discussion are conducted for the collection of qualitative data. The details are presented under the following sub-headings:

#### **3.5.1 In-depth Interviews**

In the study, in-depth interview is used as the main techniques of data collection. For interview at first checklist is developed as a tool of data collection. In the study, in-depth interview is semi-structure so checklist contain basic question that is only necessary to asked to the respondents. The checklist main contains question related to activities carried by Dalit women representative, involvement in decision making process of local body (wards), roles related to advocacy, empowerment and awareness level of Dalit people, problems and challenges face by Dalit women. After the checklist is developed researchers visited the ward office and contact participants for approval and their time for interview. After getting approval for interview, researcher

asked for the time for interview and phone the respondents for data collection.

Checklist for in-depth interview is attached in annex i.

### **3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion**

The study also used focus group discussion related to the issues of challenges face by Dalit people, their empowerment, role of Dalit women for empowerment of their community, advocacy role for policy recommendation and social capital building for Dalit People. For focus group discussion 6 participants are selected from different ward and discussion is conducted online using Google Meet. For FGD at first checklist is developed and circulated it to the participant through mail two days before conducting FGD. During FGD at first the participates are introduced and guidelines and instructions are given related to the norms and purposed of FGD. In second phase issues for the discussion is given and discussion is conducted and researcher coordinate with participants as facilitators. After discussion is finished researcher thank all the participants and complete FGD.

### **3.6 Data Analysis Methods**

For the analysis of data from key informant interviews, thematic analysis techniques are applied for question related to working area, advocacy and problem and challenges faced by Dalit women local representatives using Nvivo software. For thematic analysis, at first, all the recording of respondents is transcribed in English. After transcribing the data researcher read two to three time to explore the code and code is given to data. By careful analysis of code, categories are developed according to similarities and objectives of the study. Appropriate name is given to category and then theme is developed. From the derived theme description of the theme is written on the basis of code and catagory. The narrative story of Dalit woman representative

related to challenges and problem face by them is analysis using narrative analysis method where code is identified from story and theme is developed for description.

### **3.7 Ethical Consideration**

Different literature illustrates that vital ethical issues are informed consent. Hence, the study avoided actions that might harm people physically and emotionally of Dalit women local representatives of study area. In the study, the photos and personal detail of the participants are hid and original name of the participants are changed following research ethics. All participants are informed about the objective and purpose of the research before in-depth interviews. They were encouraged to share the information as completely as possible but do not force for data. They are given a choice to pull out anytime if they feel uncomfortable and unwilling, as the topic we are discussing is a contextually sensitive one. I am calm towards the whole data collection process and did not influence the participant to acquire information. Participants themselves willingly shared valuable and hidden information after being clear about the purpose of the study. Whenever I got the chance, I greeted, conversed, and talked about the dropout issues with the participant's family members. All participants are treated equally and with respect. And the information collected is strictly used for study purposes only.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PARTICIPATION OF DALIT WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES AT LOCAL LEVEL**

In this chapter, at first the description of the area is present where the total population of the area, wards, male female ratio, literacy ratio are present. In second part, the data related to activities carried out by the Dalit women representatives in their elected area are present which is the data related to objective one. In their chapter, their journey related to entering political party and their selection in local election are present. In the same chapter, the challenges and problems face by the Dalit women representative are present.

#### **4.1 Setting of Study Area**

The study area of the study is Lalitpur metropolitan city in Lalitpur District of Bagmati province. Lalitpur districts covers an area of 396.92 km<sup>2</sup> (153.25 sq mi) and has a population (2001) of 337,785. It is one of the three districts in the Kathmandu Valley, along with Kathmandu and Bhaktapur. There are six municipalities in Lalitpur District, including three Rural Municipalities and one Metropolitan city. Lalitpur metropolitan city is only the Metropolitan city of Lalitpur district.

Lalitpur metropolitan city is the largest municipalities of the Lalitpur district having the population of 294, 094 Nand among them 50.1% are female and 49.9% are male. Thus, sex ratio is 99.57% male per 100 females. In Lalitpur metropolitan city, 90% of the people are literate. In the city there are 29 wards and among them, 19 wards have women Dalit representative from the local election 2079. During Local election 11 women Dalit women did not have to fight in election due to the

application of single candidate in reservation site. In city, there are no other Dalit candidate elected beside in women Dalit member reservation seats. It is also observed that there is no application of Dalit people for Mayor, deputy mayor, ward president, women member and other member so electing from women Dalit member seats only reflect the benefit of reservation in local election.

#### **4.2 Demographic Information of the Respondents**

All the Dalit candidates are elected only from women Dalit member which is the reservation seat from Dalit women thus, all respondents of the study are female who are elected in local election 2079. During interview with the respondents, it is found that their age is range from 24 years to 47 years where 24 years is the minimum age and 47 years is the maximum age of the Dalit local members. All the respondents are now living in nuclear family types. Nuclear family type is the family types where only primary kinship is present and only two generation people are living. For the data it is also observed that majority of the respondents' family main occupation is service (job) followed by tradition occupation. It is not found that single family members' main family occupation is business. Since the participants are living in nuclear family there are maximum 2 male members found in family and in case of female members, 3 members is the maximum number.

All the women Dalit members are educated but their study level is diversified. Some candidate study under SLC/SEE but majority of the respondent's study SLC/SEE and above where 47.37% pass the bachelor level and 5.26% (1 respondent) study master level. Among the participants, majority of the respondents (73.68%) are married and 15.79% of participants are unmarried. Among the married participants,

15.79% of participants have 1 child and 2 is the maximum number of children found in the family.

### **4.3 Activities Carried Out by the Women Dalit Representatives**

The specific activities and priorities of Dalit women local representatives are defined in constitution of Nepal and respected municipality and are vary depending on their individual constituencies, local government structures, and political affiliations.

Women Dalit representatives said that after the election, going to the ward office and give services to the people who are in need are their daily activities. They normally perform activities like helping the people who cannot write the letters, filling out the forms, and giving the correct information about related topics. They argue that there are no similar activities every day. Few participants said that they have to participate in discussions, debates, and decision-making processes related to local governance, budget allocation, and development projects. Fewer participants also argue that they also have to visit the field as well.

“Normally, after electing as Dalit local representative, I regularly go to ward office and help people who cannot write letters and fill forms. I assist an elderly people who visit ward office for different purposed and need helps.”

“As a Dalit Ward member, my days are often filled with discussions, debates, and decision-making processes related to local governance, budget allocation, and development projects. Today, our council gathers to address a crucial matter—allocating funds for improving the local school infrastructure. I engage in a passionate debate, advocating for the allocation of resources to ensure better educational opportunities for our children. Beyond the council chambers, I also recognize the importance of visiting the field. I take the

initiative to visit the school, where I can witness firsthand the conditions that need improvement. It's not just about participating in discussions; it's about taking action and being a voice for our community.”

“In my role as a Dalit local representative, every day brings a unique set of tasks and challenges. Today, I start by providing accurate information to a group of enthusiastic students who are researching a complex topic for their school project. I also assist a local charity organization by meticulously filling out forms, ensuring that they have the necessary details to serve our community effectively. I also help individuals who come to ward but do not know how to present the documents and other necessary information’s need. Sometime I also have to take participation for discussion program due to bust schedule of the ward chairperson.”

These are some of the narration collected during the interview with Dalit local representatives. The content of the narrations has similarities so only \* narratives are present in the study.

#### **4.3.1 Engagement in Community Groups**

Women Dalit local representatives often focus on engaging with their communities to understand their needs and concerns. They may hold regular meetings and discussions with constituents to gather feedback and address local issues. The women Dalit local representative may involve in local club, women groups, mother groups. They may run the groups, present for discussion and recommendation, actively involved in these groups. From the interview with Dalit women representative of different wards of Lalitpur metropolitan city 17 women Dalit women representative is engaged in at least one groups. Majority of Dalit local representative are engaged in Cooperative

after electing in local election 2079. Some of the women representatives (4 participants) are also engaged on mother groups before and after elected in local election. They are the active members of these groups. After elected as Dalit women representatives, majority of the respondents said that they are personally invited in different program organized by local clubs, mother groups and co-operative society. In another hand, many time the invitation is send to ward office and they are told to attained the program organize by different clubs and groups as a representative of ward office. During the interview, Dalit women local members (14 Dalit women representatives) said that they are mostly engaged in the group mostly found by Dalit people. They get invitation from the other group also but in this invitation, they are normally being the first-choice guest by the organizer because if ward present or other members have busy schedule that they got the chance.

From the interview with 2 local Dalit women representative said that they normally do not engage in activities organized by their local clubs and groups and did not like to engaged in these activities. They further said that they have to engaged on these activities if ward want them to do so. They think that these activities did not uplift the livelihood of Dalit people and do not increase the skill and ability of themselves.

Some of the narratives are present below:

“Yes, I am involved in mother's groups and other women's groups in my area. Many invitations are sent to the ward office and ward chairperson normally participate in these program. When the program is organized by mother groups or women group than they normally give invitation to women local representative and to me”

“After local election and I was elected as Dalit women local representatives, my days are frequently occupied by active participation in Dalit-centric groups, where we address the pressing issues faced by our community.

However, I've noticed a trend that extends beyond our own circles. I regularly receive invitations from non-Dalit groups, and I am often their first-choice guest. When ward representatives or other members have busy schedules, I'm entrusted with the responsibility of representing our community. It's an honor to be the voice for our people, even outside our immediate community.”

“No, not involved in any groups because I have never been involved in such groups as well and I am not interested to be part of.”

#### **4.3.2 Engage in Programs and Discussions Organized by Local Clubs and Groups**

There has been a growing discourse on the participation of Dalit women representatives in discuss programs organized by various organizations and NGOs. These programs often serve as platforms for dialogue, advocacy, and awareness-raising on critical issues and also empowered Dalit women. They also get chance to raise the issues, challenges and problems face by Dalit community. Thus, in the study open ended question related to engagement of Dalit women local representative in the program organization by local groups and clubs is asked. Through a thematic analysis of their experiences, it becomes evident that their involvement in such initiatives is often contingent on the schedules of their ward chairmen, leading to disparities in participation.

Some of the narratives from the interview with respondents are

“Yes, I wholeheartedly support the initiatives organized by local clubs and groups in our community. I'm always ready to contribute and participate.

However, it's a common occurrence that I only get the chance to join these programs when the ward chairman and other local representatives have busy schedules. While I appreciate the opportunities that come my way, I hope to see more inclusivity and equal participation in the future, allowing me and other Dalit women representatives to actively engage in a wider range of community activities.

“No, I am not engaged in programs and discussions organized by any local clubs or schools, because we ward members have our different parts of work divided by our ward chief. This is looked after by our female ward member.”

“I am always eager to contribute to the programs organized by local clubs and groups. However, it often feels like I'm on standby, waiting for a chance to participate. This opportunity usually arises when the ward chairman and other local representatives have busy schedules and are unable to attend. Equal participation and recognition of our contributions as Dalit women representatives are crucial for our community's progress and unity.”

“I am not informed in this subject by any ward members, so I am not engaged in any programs.”

On the basis of these narratives the themes are generated which are explaining below:

**Limited Opportunities:** Many Dalit women representatives have highlighted that their participation in these programs is heavily reliant on the availability and willingness of their ward chairmen. This dependency creates a barrier for those whose ward chairmen have busy schedules or lack interest in such initiatives. Some women Dalit representative even did not get chance for the participation because they are not

directly invited in such a program and ward chairperson did not send them to these programs.

**Exclusionary Practices:** It is concerning that some Dalit women representatives have never had the chance to participate in these programs due to the exclusivity of the selection process. This exclusion raises questions about the fairness and inclusivity of these initiatives, which are supposed to empower marginalized voices. According to them they are not directly invited for the discussion program organized by clubs and groups.

**Lack of Aspiration:** Another recurring theme in the experiences of Dalit women representatives is the lack of aspiration to participate in these programs. Many cite a belief that they would not be given the opportunity, which can be attributed to a history of exclusion and discrimination. This self-perceived limitation hinders their active engagement in such discussions.

**Empowerment vs. Dependency:** The situation highlights a complex interplay between empowerment and dependency. On one hand, these programs aim to empower marginalized voices, but on the other, the dependency on ward chairmen's availability undermines their agency and independence. The participation of Dalit women local representatives is fully depended on the program and schedule of ward chairperson and Dalit women did not get invitation personally. So, they argue that there is the dependency on ward chairperson for participation of program. Thus, it found that door to low participation of discussion program organized by local clubs and groups loss the change of empowerment of Dalit women representatives and Dalit community.

**Call for Inclusivity:** Dalit women representatives, through their experiences, emphasize the need for more inclusive selection processes and proactive efforts to encourage their participation. Their voices are crucial in shaping discussions on issues that directly affect their communities. They argue that due to reservation seat they only got change for election and their role is minimized for the discussion and participation in the program organized by clubs and different groups.

In short, some Dalit women local representatives gain access through the availability of ward chairmen, others remain excluded, often due to a lack of aspiration. Addressing these disparities requires a concerted effort to promote inclusivity and empower Dalit women to actively engage in these vital discussions, ensuring their voices are heard and respected.

#### **4.3.3 Dalit Women Are Invited from Financial Institutions**

Dalit women local representative engaged in program organized by financial institutions empower the Dalit women and Dalit community as well. The thematic analysis based on statements made by Dalit women local representatives shed light on a pervasive issue concerning their access to financial institutions and cooperatives. The involvement of Dalit women local representative on the program organized by financial institution are explain in following themes:

**Exclusionary Invitation Practices:** The predominant theme in these statements is the exclusionary invitation practices employed by financial institutions and cooperatives. These organizations consistently send invitations exclusively to the ward chairperson, sidelining the Dalit women local representatives. This practice reflects a systemic bias that limits their participation in crucial events and discussions. There is the practice of sending indentation to the ward and most of the invitation

come to chairperson directly. So, all the Dalit women representative did not invite to the program directly.

**Gender Disparity:** A gender disparity becomes evident as the Dalit women representatives note that not only are they excluded, but invitations are also extended primarily to male members. This double exclusion based on both gender and caste accentuates the marginalization experienced by Dalit women. Some of the Dalit representative argue that most of these organization mainly invited male member and they are ignoring due to being women as well as from Dalit community.

**Lack of Opportunities:** The argument of women Dalit representative emphasizes the lack of opportunities for Dalit women representatives to engage with financial institutions and cooperatives. Without formal invitations, they are denied the chance to access resources, knowledge, and networking opportunities that could empower them and their communities. The argument of the women Dalit representative highlights a dependency on intermediaries, particularly the ward chairperson. The system's reliance on this hierarchical structure perpetuates inequities and restricts the agency of Dalit women representatives, reinforcing a cycle of exclusion.

**Advocacy for Inclusivity:** Implicitly, these statements call for a more inclusive approach in which financial institutions and cooperatives directly engage with a broader audience, including Dalit women representatives. Such inclusivity would foster diversity, gender equity, and social justice.

**Empowerment Through Inclusivity:** By providing Dalit women representatives with opportunities to participate in discussions and programs, financial institutions and cooperatives can play a pivotal role in their empowerment but they do

not get opportunity even electing as representative for their wards. Their unique perspectives and experiences are invaluable in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Dalit communities.

In summary, the arguments underscore the pressing need for reforms in invitation practices within financial institutions and cooperatives. The exclusion of Dalit women representatives, compounded by gender disparities, hinders their access to resources and opportunities. Advocating for inclusivity and promoting equitable engagement can break down these barriers and contribute to the empowerment of Dalit women and their communities. It is imperative that financial institutions and cooperatives recognize and rectify these issues to ensure a more just and inclusive society.

All these themes are generated on the basis of narration from interviews and some of the narration is present below:

“I have not been invited yet by any cooperatives; rather, they invite the ward chief and sometimes male members. The invitation is send to ward office and ward chairman normally attain the program. If he does not have time he sends other local representatives. I never had change to take participation in the program organized by financial institutions of my ward.”

“No, I have not gotten any invitations from any organizations or cooperatives yet. I think these organizations only approach to ward chairman and ignore other members. I also think there is gender bias created by these organizations because invitation is send to male members either ward chairperson or government officer working in ward not to women representatives.”

#### 4.3.4 Participation in Decision-Making Related to Development Activities

The question of whether Dalit women representative participate in the decision-making process related to development activities in wards and metropolitan cities elicits diverse responses is asked to the participants and based on their argument three theme is developed. Some of the narratives are

“Yes, I do participate in the decision-making process related to different development activities both in ward and metropolitan city, but I do not make my own decisions but rather support others'. I feel like they are right, and I do not need to say anything.”

“No, I do not participate in the decision-making process related to development activities because I do not feel comfortable in front of them, and if I speak also no one is going to listen and respect my decisions.”

“I don't get the chance to participate in metropolitan city but sometimes in ward.”

On the basis of narratives following themes was developed and explain:

**Supportive Participation:** Fewer participants (4 women Dalit representatives) argue that they are actively in the decision-making process by offering support to others rather than taking the lead. They express a sense of trust in the decisions made by others, indicating a collaborative and team-oriented approach to development activities.

**Hesitation and Lack of Confidence:** Majority of the Dalit women representative (10 women representatives) argue that they are hesitant to participate in decision-making due to feelings of discomfort and a perceived lack of influence. They

express concerns about not being heard or respected, suggesting potential barriers to inclusive and participatory decision-making processes.

**Limited Opportunities for Participation:** majority of the Dalit women representative argument reflect disparity in opportunities for participation between the metropolitan city and the ward. It suggests that individuals may have more access or willingness to engage in decision-making at the local ward level, while their participation in metropolitan city affairs may be more limited or less accessible.

Overall, the responses reveal varying levels of engagement and confidence in participating in decision-making processes related to development activities. While some individuals actively contribute by supporting others, others feel excluded due to discomfort or a perceived lack of influence. The differences in opportunities for participation between the ward and metropolitan city contexts further underscore the complex nature of decision-making in urban development activities. Efforts to promote inclusivity, respect for diverse perspectives, and opportunities for participation are essential to ensure equitable and effective decision-making processes in both local and metropolitan settings.

#### **4.3.5 Actively involved in Party Committee and Decision Making**

When Dalit women representatives actively take participation in party committee and decision making, they are empowered and gain the capacity to take decision making. Some of the narratives are

“I am not actively involved in the party committee because am very new to politics and I am in the learning stage. So, I believe the party committee members also do not invite me most of the time. But talking about my

involvement in the political decision-making, I do make some decisions according to the meetings they have conducted.”

“Yes, I am actively involved in the party committee but, not that active in decision-making. I rarely make decisions in the party committee.”

“I am not actively involved in my party committee, but I do go to the meetings when they call and follow whatever they say.”

The response provided by a Dalit woman representative sheds light on her involvement in party committees and participation in the political decision-making process. Majority of the respondents said that they have lack of active participation in the party committee due to their relative newness to politics, their engagement in the political decision-making process within her party is noteworthy.

Women Dalit women also argue that they do not have any particular role in party committee. Majority of the participants argue that they are only the members of committee and but do not have any role in party committee. Some participants said that they got change to established their agenda in the party but not other role they got in party.

**Newness to Politics:** in the interview respondents acknowledges being new to the political arena, which indicates a learning curve and an initial phase of adapting to the political environment. So, they lack of experience and confidence, which can affect her involvement in the party committee.

**Limited Invitation and Inclusivity:** majority of respondents mentions that party committee members do not actively invite them which decrease their involvement, indicating a potential lack of inclusivity or recognition within the party structure. It highlights the challenges faced by Dalit women in gaining access and

recognition within political party committees. Similarly, some participants acknowledge that their role in decision-making is minimal, stating that they rarely make decisions within the party committee which emphasizes the limited agency and influence that they currently have in shaping political decisions.

**Willingness to Learn:** many participants said that despite their limited involvement, they have desire to learn and improve her political understanding. Thus, the participant's commitment to personal development and suggests that they are open to becoming a more active participant in the future. Even Dalit women did not get actively involved in committee discussions, the respondent states that they attend meetings and follows the decisions made which focus on the willingness of Dalit women representatives to align with party decisions and their recognition of the importance of collective decision-making.

**Barriers to Active Participation:** during interview, majority of the respondents indirectly highlights the potential barriers and challenges faced by Dalit women in gaining active roles in party committees, such as exclusion and limited opportunities for engagement. Fewer (3 participants) Dalit women representatives argue that despite the reluctance to speak and perceived voicelessness, the respondent claims to be actively involved in the party committee. They argue that party underscores their commitment to being part of the party structure, even if they involvement is not predominantly characterized by active decision-making.

**Gender and Caste Dynamics:** some of the respondents also highlight the gender and caste system found in society as challenge for Dalit women representatives for participation in party's activities. The participant's identification as a Dalit woman representative implies that she may be navigating the intersection of gender and caste dynamics within her party. According to respondents it plays a

significant role in determining her level of involvement and recognition within the political landscape.

**Perception of Voicelessness:** Majority of Dalit women participants expresses a sense of voicelessness, indicating that her input or opinions are not valued or heard within the party committee giving focus on patriarchy society and social structure. It is the potential barriers to meaningful participation faced by Dalit women, such as marginalization or exclusion from decision-making discussions. Some participants argue that it's better not to speak, suggesting a reluctance to engage in discussions within the party committee. This reluctance may stem from the belief that speaking up might not yield any meaningful influence or change, contributing to the perception of voicelessness.

#### **4.3.6 Active Involvement in Community Decision-Making**

This response presents a distinct perspective compared to the previous ones, highlighting a more active role in community meetings and decision-making. One of the narratives by the participants are

“My involvement is neutral; sometimes I do participate in community meetings and sometimes I do not. It depends upon what type of meeting that is. My role in decision-making is, most of the time, to listen to them and if needed to I encourage and push them.”

“Yes, I did get the chance to get involved in community meetings, but my role in decision-making is not that active because I just listen.”

“Yes, I get chance to be actively involved in community meetings. Most of the time, I raise my voice for the community development.”

On the basis of these narrative following themes are developed:

**Assertive Participation:** It is found that the respondents used proactive and assertive approach to community meetings, where they actively raise their voice related to community development. Many participants actively seek opportunities to advocate for community development and engage in decision-making discussions when they are invited in the program related to community development. Some participants argue they had not had the chance to participate due to a lack of invitations which highlights a significant barrier to her involvement in community decision-making.

**Advocate for Community Development:** Majority (17 Participants) argue that their role is characterized by speaking up and voicing concerns or ideas that contribute to the betterment of the community. Similarly, they raise their voice for community development, the respondent aligns with the empowerment of their community which emphasizes their role in representing the interests of their community and working towards its growth and improvement.

**Commitment to Change:** Participants argue that their role is underscores for their commitment to bringing about positive changes and improvements in the community. It highlights their dedication to addressing community needs and challenges through active participation. Some participants argue about lack of invitations may point to structural barriers or biases within the community or its decision-making mechanisms.

**Inequality and Representation:** during interview participants indirectly highlights issues of inequality and underrepresentation, as the respondent's exclusion reflects broader disparities in participation. Thus, participants are focusing on the

underscores the importance of addressing systemic inequalities in decision-making processes.

**Potential Challenges and Opposition:** The participants paint a picture of active involvement; it may also imply potential challenges or opposition they might face from within the community or other stakeholders. They got fewer chances of for the participation in the program related to community development but when they got the change, they advocate for the empowerment of Dalit community.

#### **4.3.7 Engagement of Women Dalit Local Representatives in Advocacy for the Dalit Community**

Some of the narratives of Dalit representatives are

“Yes, I am engaged in advocacy for the Dalit community at the local level, and that is mostly in the discussion between husband and wife. In my community, most of the male members are drunkards, and due to that reason, I am heavily involved in this case. There is always a quarrel between the husband and the wife. So, I do have to go to their houses and counsel them.”

“Yes, I am engaged in advocacy, not only for the Dalit community but also for the non-Dalit community. There are random cases like argument between neighbors, husband and wife, and, quarrels between contractors and the public in the construction process. So, there is no particular case that I am heavily involved in.”

For the interview with the respondents following three distinct themes are identified:

**Personal Engagement in Domestic Conflict Resolution:** The some of the respondents highlighted their active role in addressing domestic conflicts within their community. They emphasized that many male members in their community had

issues with alcoholism, leading to frequent quarrels between husbands and wives. So, they provide counseling and support to these families. This theme underscores the unique role that women Dalit local representatives play in mediating and resolving domestic disputes within their communities. This grassroots advocacy contributes to maintaining social harmony and well-being at the local level. All the participants also argue that they are actively participation on decision making related to the Dalit community due to the reason that they are elected from the Dalit quota and also got chance to involve in decision making related to Dalit community.

**Advocacy Beyond the Dalit Community:** The majority of participants indicated a broader scope of advocacy work, not limited to the Dalit community. They are involved on addressing various conflicts, including disputes between neighbors, marital conflicts, and issues related to public construction projects. It highlights the versatility of women Dalit local representatives, as they engage in advocacy work that goes beyond the boundaries of their own community. Their involvement in addressing diverse issues demonstrates their commitment to promoting social cohesion and conflict resolution at the local level.

**Delegation of Advocacy Responsibilities:** Fewer participants expressed a different perspective, stating that they were not engaged in any advocacy work for the Dalit community, as these responsibilities were primarily handled by their ward chief. Some participants said that there is no Dalit community in their wards. This theme underscores the diversity of roles and responsibilities among women Dalit local representatives.

#### **4.4 Experience about the Journey in Politics**

In this part the data related to engagement in political party, experience of discrimination faces while join political party, getting chances to take active

participation in party's decision-making process, getting chance to lead different committee in your party before election, getting tickets for election and experience from party member to elected local representative in your election area are included.

#### **4.4.1 Reason for Joining Political Parties and Main Motivation Factors**

The responses reveal a complex interplay of factors that influence their political engagement, including the quota system, personal activism, significant political events, community leaders, and familial support.

“Before I was not in any political party. There is need of Dalit women to fulfill the quota. So, was randomly selected for just to fulfill the quota system. My uncle is a politician, he is connected to political party so, he encourages me to join the political party.”

“I used to be very active in rallies and also, I used to go for the protests back in the days. And there were some brothers who asked me to join the political party, and after I joined. Those were the brothers who encouraged me to join the political party.”

“Our ward chief came to visit me with the proposal to join the political party before the election, and that is how I joined the political party. My husband's family members encouraged me to join the political party.”

On the basis of these narratives following themes are developed and explain:

**Quota System:** The quota system emerged as a prominent theme, emphasizing the significance of representation and equal participation in politics. Majority of respondents argue that Dalit women initially not affiliated with any political party were often randomly selected to fulfill the quota system, demonstrating the system's compelling force in their political involvement. Similarly, Respondents

perceived the quota system as a means to achieve representation in politics, addressing the underrepresentation of Dalit women and promoting diversity in the political landscape.

**Family Influence:** The influence of family members, particularly those already involved in politics, played a pivotal role in motivating Dalit women to join political parties. Some of the respondents come to politics influence by their father or uncle who are in politics. Family connections provided these women with insights into the political arena and actively encouraged them to join political parties. Similarly, for some Dalit women representative's family ties to politics created a sense of belonging and familiarity within the political landscape, serving as a bridge for these women to enter politics with guidance from their relatives. The encouragement and support of relatives, particularly from husbands' families, provided these women with the confidence and validation needed to take on formal political roles. Family members endorsed their decisions, recognizing their potential and value in political participation, thus reinforcing their choices.

**Personal Activism:** for minor (3 participants) personal activism played a crucial role in motivating Dalit women to engage in politics. They argue that they actively involvement in rallies and protests demonstrated a pre-existing interest in socio-political issues, which eventually led them to formal political engagement. According to them the motivation for these women to join political parties was largely self-driven, stemming from their personal convictions and experiences.

**Community and Political Events:** for some of the Dalit women representatives (2 participants) significant political events and community leaders played a crucial role in motivating to join political parties. They argue that specific events, like the death of prominent leaders, triggered interest and participation in

politics, showcasing the power of major political events to mobilize individuals. Similarly, community leaders, such as local ward chiefs, recognized the potential of these women and proposed their involvement, especially before elections, indicating the importance of community recognition and political opportunities.

These thematic analyses highlight the multifaceted nature of the factors that influence Dalit women's entry into political parties. The quota system, family influence, personal activism, community leaders, and familial support collectively shape their political engagement. It underscores the complexity and diversity of motivations, emphasizing the importance of representation, personal agency, community recognition, and family endorsements in the political journey of Dalit women.

#### **4.4.2 Facing Discrimination in Political Party**

Dalit women may face a complex and multifaceted web of discrimination based on their caste and gender identity.

“While joining the party, I did not face any discrimination because they were the people who came to me for the selection; this might be the reasons, or else they would have discriminated in that place as well, because I have suffered that. But on random days, just being a Dalit woman, I did face a lot of discrimination in different places and by many people.”

“Yes, just being a Dalit woman, I have faced so much discrimination. They do not eat the food I cook, and they do not respect me. People greet other ward members, but not me.”

On the basis of the respondents following themes is developed:

**Absence of Discrimination in Party:** The majority of participants (17 respondents) provided insights into the intersection of caste and gender identities in political settings. The thematic theme of "Favorable Treatment" emerged from the

respondent's surprise that they did not face any discrimination in political parties. They attributed this absence of discrimination to the proactive approach of party members who sought her out for selection. Respondents highlights the possibility of favorable treatment in specific contexts, possibly driven by the party's desire for diversity. However, it also implied that her acceptance might be conditional, emphasizing that discrimination remains a persistent concern.

**Random Instances of Discrimination:** few participants (2 participants) uncovered the pervasive discrimination faced by Dalit women in their political parties so "social isolation" emerged as the respondent described their social exclusion and the lack of respect and greetings from her political parties. Additionally, "Food Discrimination" highlighted the refusal of her culinary offerings, reflecting deep-seated caste-based prejudices. Importantly, the respondent identified as a "Dalit woman," emphasizing the theme of "Intersectionality," highlighting how their discrimination was compounded due to both their caste and gender identity.

#### **4.4.3 Active participation in Party's Decision-making Process**

This thematic analysis explores the experiences and perspectives of Dalit women representatives in political parties regarding their active participation in decision-making processes.

“Not actively, but sometimes I do get chances to make decisions in a party, but I have never spoken. I am very new to this party and do not know much about the related topics, and I also do not feel comfortable or like speaking over there.”

“Yes, I do get the chance to make decisions in a party, but what to speak of? There, we only have to follow the leaders and listen to them.”

Four distinct themes emerged from the responses of the Dalit women representatives:

**Limited Opportunities for Participation:** Majority of participants expressed that while they occasionally get the chance to participate in decision-making, they have never spoken. They cited their newness to the party and a lack of knowledge as reasons for their reticence. Some participants acknowledged being given opportunities but felt that actual decision-making was reserved for party leaders, leaving them with little room for meaningful input.

**Silenced Voices and Hierarchical Structures:** Majority of participants reported not being allowed to speak, primarily due to perceived illiteracy. This suggests a hierarchical structure within the party that marginalizes individuals based on educational backgrounds. Some also highlighted a lack of autonomy, emphasizing that they are expected to conform to decisions made by party leaders, further underscoring the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of party dynamics.

**Gender and Caste Discrimination:** The respondents' experiences collectively point to gender and caste-based discrimination within political parties. Dalit women representatives face unique challenges arising from the intersection of gender and caste, leading to limited agency in decision-making.

#### **4.4.4 Get Tickets for the Election**

This thematic analysis explores the process through which Dalit women in Lalitpur, Nepal, secure election tickets to represent their communities in local elections.

“Each ward has one party committee. In that committee, the leaders discuss on the very topic of to whom they should give the tickets. After the discussion,

they will choose the person who has the quality of a being political leader, and then they will provide the tickets to the candidate. Likewise, I got the ticket for the election.”

“I was so active in my party. I used to follow them and listen to them. So, the party leader chose me as the Dalit representative and provided me with the ticket for the election.”

The study relies on the responses from Dalit women representatives, shedding light on the selection criteria and factors contributing to their candidacy.

**Party Committee Decisions:** Majority of participants argue that role of party committees is central to the selection process. They deliberate on candidate qualities and make informed decisions regarding ticket allocation, reflecting a structured approach to candidate selection.

**Active Participation:** Some (4 participants) Dalit women participants Actively engaging with the party and closely following its activities appears to be a common pathway for Dalit women to secure election tickets. This suggests that dedication and involvement within the party are valued attributes.

**Party Leader's Authority:** 7 of the participants said that they are selected by ward Chairperson for the election. So, Party leaders, particularly committee leaders, play a crucial role in choosing candidates. Their decision-making power in allocating election tickets underscores their influence in candidate selection and reservation quota.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CHANGES FACE BY DALIT REPRESENTATIVES**

In this part the challenges face by the Dalit women local representatives are present.

In this part the discrimination faces by Dalit women representative in party decision making process, participation, discrimination face due to being Dalit and women, discrimination on education, health and other services being Dalit and political representatives as tools empowerment for Dalit people or community are included.

#### **5.1 Major Challenges Faced by Dalit Women Representative**

In this part the barrier faces by the Dalit women representatives, challenges face by them and problems they experience is present.

##### **5.1.1 Barriers Preventing Dalit Women Participation**

The responses from the respondents provide valuable insights into the barriers and support systems experienced by Dalit women representatives in Lalitpur Metropolitan City concerning their participation in politics.

“Yes, nowadays my in-laws are barriers to my active participation in politics. They are coming to me every day to quarrel about different issues. At first, they were the people who encouraged me to join politics, and now they are forcing me to leave politics.”

“No, there are no any barriers in my participation in politics. Everything is going well, till now. Everyone are supporting and encouraging me in this political field.”

“No, there are literally no barriers preventing my participation. Rather, I am getting support from everyone. And, I feel happy about that.”

On the basis of narrative of respondents following themes are developed:

**Family Dynamics as Barriers:** some participants highlight family dynamics as a significant barrier to her active participation in politics. Initially, their in-laws encouraged them to join politics, but their attitudes have now changed, and they are actively discouraging her by saying leave politics. This theme indicates that familial expectations and conflicts within the household can act as hindrances to Dalit women's political engagement.

**Mixed Perceptions on Family Support:** many participants arguing on contrasting view, arguing that there are no barriers in their participation in politics, and everyone is supportive. Some Dalit women may receive encouragement and support from their families, while others face opposition. Many Dalit women representatives argue that now they are facing discouragement in politics.

**Positive Supportive Environment:** Many participants portray an overall positive environment where they perceive no barriers for their participation in politics. They arguing that receiving support from everyone, indicating that there are instances where Dalit women enjoy a favorable social and familial atmosphere for their political aspirations.

### **5.1.2 Dalit Women Perceive Dalit Women Representative Contributions to Decision-making**

The responses from the participants shed light on how Dalit women perceive the contributions of Dalit women representatives to decision-making. Following are some narrative given by participants:

“Both Dalit men and women perceive my contribution to decision-making very well. They show their positive attitude towards my decisions, and also

talk positively, and are supporting my decisions, which makes me feel very proud and makes me do my best for them next time.”

“They are very happy, and are also supporting me in my every decision. They praise me and my decisions every time.”

Following are the theme of the narratives observed from participants:

**Positive Perception of Representation:** All the participants express a highly positive perception of Dalit women representatives' contributions to decision-making. They argue that the Dalit women are not only happy with their representatives but also actively support them in their decisions. Moreover, majority of participants mentions that they praise both the representatives and their decisions consistently.

**Supportive Dalit Community:** all the participants' response also highlights the presence of a supportive community. Dalit women representatives are not only contributing to decision-making but are also receiving support and admiration from the Dalit women they represent. This suggests a strong sense of solidarity and appreciation within the Dalit community for their representatives. Majority of the participants argue that representatives have the autonomy to make decisions that are supported by their constituents. This suggests that Dalit women representatives are not just figureheads but active decision-makers who have earned the trust and respect of their community.

### **5.1.3 Discrimination by People Due to being a Dalit Woman**

The responses provided by the three respondents collectively reveal a stark portrayal of the discrimination experienced by Dalit women due to their social identity.

Following are some narratives generated from participants:

“Just being a Dalit woman, not only I, but we all Dalit women, do have to face so much discrimination and dominance in society. Sharing my experience, I do not dare to go to the houses of higher castes. Because I have seen how my parents were discriminated against and treated while they entered their houses. I do not go to my friend's house because their parents warned them not to take me there. Likewise, there are so many incidents that have happened to me.”

“There are countless discriminations that I have faced due to being a Dalit woman. Sometimes I feel like we are not humans, but rather some creatures who do not exist in this world. Being Dalit means suffering. Wherever I go, people act like I do not belong there. They do not allow Dalits to touch their stuff, especially water and cooked food.”

“I have faced so much discrimination just for being a Dalit woman. People just make us feel like an animal. Actually worse than animals. At least they keep dogs and cats inside their house and give them love and care, but we being humans, are also so discriminated that people do not eat and drink the food we touch.”

On the basis of narratives following theme are generated:

**Pervasive Discrimination:** All participants emphasize the widespread and deeply ingrained nature of discrimination faced by Dalit women. Discrimination is not confined to isolated incidents but is an enduring aspect of their daily lives.

**Dehumanization and Exclusion:** Majority of the participants highlight a profound sense of dehumanization, where Dalit women are made to feel like inferior

beings. They experience exclusion from social spaces and even denial of basic human needs, such as access to food and water without discrimination.

**Avoidance of Higher-Caste Spaces:** Many (12 participants) experience the avoidance of visiting houses of higher-caste individuals due to witnessing discrimination against their parents. This theme illustrates the apprehension and anxiety that Dalit women may feel when navigating spaces dominated by higher-caste individuals.

**Emotional and Psychological Impact:** All three responses hint at the emotional and psychological toll that discrimination takes on Dalit women. They describe feelings of hopelessness, despair, and alienation as a result of the discrimination they endure.

#### **5.1.4 Discrimination and Problems Faced by Dalit Women Representatives Before and After Election**

The responses provided by Dalit women representatives shed light on the multifaceted nature of discrimination they face both before and after being elected as local representatives.

“Yes, I did face discrimination or bias from the local people before and after the election. Before the election, people used to show this in action by not letting us touch their food or water and not letting us inside their houses. And after the election, their behavior showed, but not in action. Like, when they are with us, they maintain distance with us and show dominance attitude.”

“No, not only I, but also my parents had faced any discrimination. We used to go to everyone's house; we used to play and work together. So, never have I felt the bias or discrimination in my life.”

“Yes, before the election, people used to dominate me and my family just for water, and now it is still running but they do not speak but show in behavior.”

Through a thematic analysis of these responses, several key themes emerge:

**Prevalence of Discrimination:** The majority of respondents acknowledge the existence of discrimination either before or after their election, indicating its persistent presence in their communities. They argue that there is change in behaviour to treat them and their family before and after election. Some respondents recount explicit discriminatory actions before their election, such as being denied food, water, and access to homes, highlighting the overt bias they encountered. Many respondents argue that they are told to stay away from politics and also told not to speak in party meeting before election.

**Shift in Discriminatory Behavior After Election:** After being elected, majority of participants note a shift in discrimination from overt actions to subtle behavior, such as maintaining distance and displaying dominance. This suggests that while overt discrimination may decrease, underlying biases continue. After being elected they have to face problems because of being of Dalit women.

**Varied Experiences:** Fewer participants claim not to have experienced discrimination, emphasizing the variability of experiences within the same community to them and their family but they highlight the ignorance in politics during decision making process. This highlights that factors such as personal relationships and community dynamics play a role in discrimination experiences.

## 5.2 Discrimination on Accessing Health, Education, and Other Services

The responses of feeling of discrimination on accessing health, education and other services provided offer insights into the experiences of discrimination while accessing essential services such as health and education.

“No, I have not faced any discrimination while accessing health, education, or other services these days. But used to face discrimination while going to government offices. There, the staff used to treat us so badly and used to backbite us. But is was long ago.”

“No, I have not faced any discrimination while accessing health, education, or other services. Neither back in day, nor these days.”

**Absence of Discrimination:** all the participants argue that they have not faced discrimination while accessing health, education, or other services. This suggests a positive change in recent times, at least as reported by the respondents. Majority of the participants emphasize the consistent absence of discrimination in accessing services which indicates that for these respondents, discriminatory practices have not been a significant barrier in their recent experiences.

**Historical Discrimination in Government Offices:** Few participants stand out as the respondent mentions past experiences of discrimination specifically when dealing with government offices. The mistreatment and backbiting by staff members point to historical systemic issues in government institutions.

### 5.3 Primary Challenges Dalit People Encounter while Participating in Local Activities

The responses provided by the participants present a diverse range of perspectives regarding the challenges faced by Dalit people in Lalitpur metropolitan city while participating in local activities.

“The primary challenges we encounter while we participate in local activities are that when we are there to participate in local activities, the so-called higher caste people do not want to join in, only because we are there. This was the major issue. They did not value us, nor did we exist there for them. We also faced dominance behavior a lot of the time.”

“People still show their behaviors of discrimination, dominance, and disrespectfulness. And this is very challenging for us to work with them.”

On the basis of narratives derived from participants following are the theme generated:

**Caste-Based Discrimination:** While fewer participants reported a lack of discrimination in recent local activities, the fewer participants emphasized a historical issue of caste-based exclusion, dominance behavior, and disrespect which suggests that caste-based discrimination remains a significant challenge in some cases, but it may vary over time and across individuals.

**Dominance Behavior:** majority of the participants highlight the persistence of dominance behavior from higher caste individuals, highlighting the power dynamics that Dalit people may confront during local activities.

**Variability of Experiences:** some participants provide a different perspective, suggesting that some individuals within the Dalit community have not recently encountered challenges during local activities. This indicates that experiences vary among Dalit people, possibly influenced by factors such as location, community dynamics, and personal relationships.

**Positive Outlook:** Fewer participants present a more positive outlook, emphasizing the absence of challenges in recent experiences. These responses suggest that, for some, there may be progress or a shift towards more inclusive local activities.

#### **5.4 Social and Cultural Factors Limiting Dalit Women's Engagement**

The response of the participants offers valuable insights into the social and cultural factors that restrict the participation of Dalit women, and Dalits in general, in politics and other institutions. Majority of the participants did not give the response of the question and only fewer participants express their opinion.

“Yes, there are several social or cultural factors limiting mine and other Dalit people's engagement in politics and other institutions because Dalits have historically been socially ostracized, excluded from various community and religious activities, and denied access to public spaces and resources. This isolation can limit their opportunities to engage in politics and institutions.”

“No, I do not think so. Because politics means learning, and learning something is good. So, in my opinion, there are no any social or cultural factors limiting my and other Dalits engagement in politics.”

**Historical Social Ostracizing:** The response underscores the historical context of social ostracizing faced by Dalits. It highlights that this ostracizing has

been deeply rooted in the societal fabric for generations. This historical discrimination has had a lasting impact on their access to opportunities, including political engagement.

**Exclusion from Community and Religious Activities:** some participants also focus on exclusion of Dalits from various community and religious activities. This exclusion has not only limited their social interactions but has also contributed to their marginalization within the broader society. It further reinforces the systemic nature of the challenges faced by Dalits.

**Impact on Opportunities:** The overarching theme in this response is how these historical and ongoing forms of exclusion and discrimination directly limit the opportunities available to Dalit women and the broader Dalit community. Their isolation, stemming from these factors, acts as a barrier to their meaningful engagement in politics and institutions which is reserved by law and constitutions.

### **5.5 Empowerment through Participation in Politics**

All responses positively regarding the empowerment of Dalit women through political participation. Some of the narratives of the participants:

“Yes, of course, Dalit women are empowered through my participation in politics because, as they themselves say, "after you are elected, it has been so easy for us to work on anything." And also, feel free to talk with the ward chief to ask for any programs.”

“Yes, because they were so back ward, they were unaware of so many facilities we can get through government, and they were not able to raise their

voices for themselves as well. But now they feel so safe and sheltered after I was elected.”

“Yes, Dalit women feel so empowered after I participated in politics. Because they feel secure and aware of their rights and facilities.”

On the basis of narratives following themes are derived:

**Awareness and Information Dissemination:** Across the responses, there is a consistent theme of empowerment through increased awareness and information dissemination. They argue that Dalit women were previously unaware of government facilities, resources, and their rights, but through political participation, they have gained knowledge. So, empowerment is associated with access to information, which allows them to make informed decisions, access government programs, and advocate effectively.

**Voice and Advocacy:** the participants argue that political parties underscore the importance of political participation in empowering Dalit women to raise their voices and advocate for their needs. Being represented by someone in politics provides a platform for articulating their concerns and influencing decision-making. Similarly, they argue that empowerment is linked to the ability to participate in the democratic process and engage in advocacy.

**Sense of Security and Well-being:** some participants focus on the improvement in the sense of security and well-being among Dalit women after political participation. Thus, they link the empowerment with feeling safe and sheltered, which can have a profound impact on individuals' overall quality of life and engagement in community activities.

**Leadership and Role Modeling:** The respondents describe themselves as strong leaders who serve as role models for Dalit women. They argue that leadership is seen as a source of inspiration, encouragement, and support. Empowerment is connected to having leaders who champion the interests of the community and motivate others to be active in civic life. They view political participation is consistently recognized as a catalyst for empowerment where elected representatives are viewed as essential in bridging gaps, advocating for the community's interests, and facilitating access to resources.

**Collective and Community Empowerment:** the participants view empowerment is portrayed as a collective effort, with political participants working alongside Dalit women which not just about individual empowerment but also about community empowerment, with positive changes occurring at the community level. Empowerment is seen as a shared goal that benefits the entire community.

**Transformation of Perceptions:** There is an indication of changing perceptions regarding the backwardness of Dalit women. Empowerment involves challenging stereotypes and promoting a positive image of marginalized communities.

## **5.6 Dalit People Able to Take on Leadership Roles**

This thematic analysis examines the complex dynamics surrounding the involvement of Dalit individuals in leadership roles, drawing insights from four diverse responses. While each response reflects distinct viewpoints, they collectively shed light on the multifaceted nature of Dalit leadership experiences.

“Nepal has a history of discrimination and social inequality based on caste, with Dalits historically being marginalized and excluded from leadership positions. However, the country has also seen a push for social justice and

greater inclusion of Dalits in leadership roles in recent years so I think we Dalit people have been able to take on leadership roles.”

“In this case, I would say no. I have heard so many times that they have been talking about leadership. But that is just talk. This might happen because they are well and have no need of any leaderships, so they are being that lazy.”

“Yes. After this election, all Dalit women are aware of so many things like budgeting, rights, and equality. So, we have been able to take on leadership roles.”

Following are the theme derived from narratives:

**Historical Oppression and Contemporary Challenges:** Majority of participants (14 participants) responses together highlight the enduring impact of historical oppression on Dalits. They underscore the historical marginalization of Dalits in Nepal, setting the stage for understanding their current challenges. Some participants introduce skepticism regarding Dalits' ability to take on leadership roles, possibly influenced by the historical backdrop.

**Empowerment through Awareness and Political Processes:** The fewer participants present a contrasting viewpoint, emphasizing how awareness, particularly following an election, empowers Dalit women to assume leadership roles which illuminates the transformative power of education and political participation as catalysts for Dalit leadership. It underscores the potential for awareness and electoral processes to counteract historical oppression and enable Dalit individuals to engage in leadership roles.

**Barriers to Leadership and the Need for Support:** The few participants accentuate the significant barriers Dalits face, particularly feelings of unsafety and a lack of support which highlights the critical role that societal and institutional factors play in inhibiting Dalits from pursuing leadership positions. It underscores the importance of creating a supportive and secure environment to foster Dalit leadership.

**Intersectionality and Gender in Dalit Leadership:** An implicit theme that emerges from the third response is the intersectionality of gender and caste in Dalit leadership. It underscores the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Dalit women, emphasizing their pivotal role in leadership. This theme highlights the need for nuanced approaches to address gender-specific dimensions of Dalit leadership.

### **5.7 Positive Changes in Dalits Community**

The thematic analysis of the responses reveals several interrelated themes that collectively emphasize the transformative effects of an individual's political participation and victory in a local election on Dalit lives and marginalized communities at large.

**Social Transformation and Empowerment:** Majority of the participants (18 Participates) view that political participation results in social transformation, shifting attitudes towards Dalits and marginalized communities. It empowers individuals through effective representation, addresses community concerns, and fosters psychological and social empowerment.

**Personal Development and Skills Enhancement:** Many participants argue that engaging in politics leads to personal growth and the acquisition of practical life skills and knowledge, which contribute to self-improvement and community development.

**Improved Access to Resources:** participants also view that political involvement enhances access to essential resources such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, thereby elevating the overall quality of life within the community of Dalit people.

**Commitment to Inclusive Change:** Fewer participants argue that beyond immediate impact, individuals demonstrate a commitment to inclusive societal change, exemplified by budget allocation for education and a dedication to future positive transformations which improve the livelihood of Dalit community.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 6.1 Summary

In Nepal, Dalits, considered lower-caste individuals, have endured centuries of social, economic, and political discrimination, occupying the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy, facing severe social bias and exclusion. Dalit women, experiencing discrimination due to both their gender and caste identities, struggle with political participation. Organizations like FEDO have advocated for equal political representation, but challenges persist, with discrimination and untouchability affecting elected Dalit women's participation and budgeting in their communities. In this regards the study is conducted aim to examine the areas of participation, problems and challenges face by Dalit women local representative referencing to experiences with the specific objectives of exploring the areas of Dalit women ward members of Lalitpur Metropolitan city, describing their experiences during the journey of their politics and identify and analyze major challenges faced by Dalit women representative from general public being elected Dalit women.

The study focuses on the participation and challenges faced by Dalit women representatives, employing a descriptive research design with a qualitative approach. This design was chosen because it allows for the exploration of experiences, discrimination, and obstacles encountered by Dalit women in their roles as local representatives. It encompasses their involvement in decision-making, political engagement, and advocacy for empowerment. The study's scope encompasses all Dalit women local representatives elected in the 2079 local elections in Lalitpur Metropolitan City, Nepal. According to data from Lalitpur Metropolitan City, there is one Dalit woman representative in each of the 19 wards, while the remaining wards

lack Dalit representation due to a sparse Dalit population. All 19 Dalit woman representatives were selected as individual sample units using a census approach. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews, participation observations, and focus group discussions. The collected data is predominantly qualitative, with the exception of respondents' ages, which were subjected to thematic and narrative data analysis techniques for analysis.

Participants' ages span from 24 to 47 years, with 24 being the minimum and 47 the maximum age among Dalit local members. All respondents currently reside in nuclear families. Most of their families are primarily engaged in service-based occupations, with no single participant reporting a business as their family's main occupation. Due to their nuclear family structure, most households have a maximum of two male members, while for female members, the maximum is three.

The study discovered that Dalit women representatives, after being elected, usually go to the ward office to help people in need. Their daily tasks include assisting those who can't write letters, filling out forms, and providing information on various topics. However, not every day is the same for them. Some mentioned they have to take part in discussions, debates, and decisions concerning local governance, budgets, and development projects, but most said they only get involved when the ward chairman is busy or unavailable because the invitation is sent to ward office and they are told to attend the program organized by different clubs and groups as a representative of ward office. A few also mentioned they have to visit the field as part of their duties.

Similarly, many Dalit women representatives have highlighted that their participation in programs organized by clubs and groups is heavily reliant on the

availability and willingness of their ward chairmen. Many cite a belief that they would not be given the opportunity, which can be attributed to a history of exclusion and discrimination. Thus, some Dalit women local representatives gain access through the availability of ward chairmen, others remain excluded, often due to a lack of aspiration.

The study uncovers a variety of factors influencing participants' political engagement, including the quota system, personal activism, significant political events, community leaders, and family support. Many respondents highlighted the quota system's powerful sway, noting that Dalit women initially unaffiliated with political parties often got selected randomly to meet quota requirements, underlining its significant role in propelling their political involvement. Family members, particularly those already involved in politics, played a substantial role in motivating Dalit women to join political parties. Some participants indicated their prior activism in rallies and protests as evidence of their pre-existing interest in social and political issues, which gradually led them into formal political engagement.

For a subset of Dalit women representatives, pivotal political events and influential community leaders played a crucial role in inspiring their entry into political parties. Community leaders recognized their potential and advocated for their involvement, particularly before elections, underscoring the importance of community recognition and political opportunities. The study also delved into the intersection of caste and gender identities in political settings. Respondents attributed the absence of discrimination to proactive party members who actively sought out Dalit women for selection. However, a minority of participants shared distressing experiences of enduring discrimination within their political parties, manifesting as social isolation

and food-related biases, reflective of deeply ingrained caste-based prejudices. Furthermore, the majority of participants expressed frustration at their limited opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making processes, often silenced due to perceived illiteracy. These narratives collectively depict a concerning picture of gender and caste-based discrimination persisting within the realm of political parties.

The study also found that family dynamics as a significant barrier to her active participation in politics because their in-laws encouraged them to join politics, but their attitudes have now changed, and they are actively discouraging her by saying leave politics. Many participants arguing on contrasting view, arguing that there are no barriers in their participation in politics, and everyone is supportive. Similarly, many participants portray an overall positive environment where they perceive no barriers for their participation in politics. Likewise, all the participants express a highly positive perception of Dalit women representatives' contributions to decision-making. They also highlight the presence of a supportive community arguing that Dalit women representatives are not only contributing to decision-making but are also receiving support and admiration from the Dalit women they represent. All participants emphasize the widespread and deeply ingrained nature of discrimination faced by Dalit women but majority of the participants highlight a profound sense of dehumanization, where Dalit women are made to feel like inferior beings. Many participants experience the avoidance of visiting houses of higher-caste individuals due to witnessing discrimination against their parents.

The majority of respondents acknowledge the existence of discrimination either before or after their election, indicating its persistent presence in their

communities. After being elected, majority of participants note a shift in discrimination from overt actions to subtle behavior, such as maintaining distance and displaying dominance. Fewer participants claim not to have experienced discrimination, emphasizing the variability of experiences within the same community to them and their family but they highlight the ignorance in politics during decision making process.

All the participants argue that they have not faced discrimination while accessing health, education, or other services and majority of the participants emphasize the consistent absence of discrimination in accessing services which indicates that for these respondents, discriminatory practices have not been a significant barrier in their recent experiences. While fewer participants reported a lack of discrimination in recent local activities, the fewer participants emphasized a historical issue of caste-based exclusion, dominance behavior, and disrespect which suggests that caste-based discrimination remains a significant challenge in some cases, but it may vary over time and across individuals. Some participants provide a different perspective, suggesting that some individuals within the Dalit community have not recently encountered challenges during local activities. The participants underscore the historical context of social ostracizing faced by Dalits by highlights that ostracizing has been deeply rooted in the societal fabric for generations. Some participants also focus on exclusion of Dalits from various community and religious activities.

Across the responses, Dalit women were previously unaware of government facilities, resources, and their rights, but through political participation, they have gained knowledge. The participants argue that political parties underscore the

importance of political participation in empowering Dalit women to raise their voices and advocate for their needs. The respondents describe themselves as strong leaders who serve as role models for Dalit women arguing that leadership is seen as a source of inspiration, encouragement, and support. The participants view empowerment is portrayed as a collective effort, with political participants working alongside Dalit women which not just about individual empowerment but also about community empowerment, with positive changes occurring at the community level.

Empowerment is seen as a shared goal that benefits the entire community. Majority of participants highlight the enduring impact of historical oppression on Dalits. Majority of the participants' view that political participation results in social transformation, shifting attitudes towards Dalits and marginalized communities and also argue that engaging in politics leads to personal growth and the acquisition of practical life skills and knowledge, which contribute to self-improvement and community development.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

The study focus on the areas of participation, challenges, and the unique experiences faced by Dalit women. The findings reveal that Dalit women representatives are actively engaged in addressing the immediate needs of their constituents, such as helping with letter writing, form filling, and providing essential information.

However, their involvement in the broader governance process varies. While some are actively participating in discussions, debates, and decision-making related to local governance, budgets, and development projects, most Dalit women representatives only become involved when the ward chairman is unavailable or busy. Thus, the area of involvement is still limit for Dalit women representatives.

Majority of the Dalit women are engaged in party before election and they are normally motivated by reservation quota, family influence (mostly, father in laws and uncle influence) but some enter in politics after their active involvement in activism they were enter in political parties but they are told not to enter in politics. So, family, reservation quota are the main reasons for entering Dalit women in politics. After entering in the political party some Dalit women face discrimination and are dominated by other political leader. Ward chairperson normally selected them for the election.

The study reveals a complex and nuanced picture of the experiences of Dalit women local representatives in their communities. Discrimination takes on different forms and degrees, ranging from overt actions to subtler behaviors which is the main problem and challenge face by Dalit people. While some participants have not personally encountered discrimination in accessing services which is the positive side for Dalit community but a historical undercurrent of caste-based exclusion remains in certain cases. One notable finding is the transformative power of political participation. Dalit women who once lacked awareness of government resources and their rights have become informed and empowered through their political engagement. They see themselves as strong leaders and role models, advocating not only for their individual empowerment but also for the upliftment of their entire community. Participants believe that politics not only changes attitudes towards marginalized communities but also equips individuals with valuable life skills and knowledge. Ultimately, the journey of Dalit women local representatives is one of resilience, empowerment, and a commitment to community development. Their experiences exemplify the power of political participation as a catalyst for positive change, both on a personal and societal level.

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7. Are you getting the chance to be actively involved in community meetings or decision-making processes? What roles do you usually take up in decision making?
8. What is your role and responsibility in your party committee? Do you get change to take decision and established your agenda in party?
9. Do you also engage in advocacy for the Dalit community at the local level? If yes, in which part you are heavily involved?
10. Do you get the change to take decisions related to the Dalit community at the ward office?
11. What are the activities in which you are involved for the improvement of the livelihood of Dalit people?

### **Experience of Journey**

1. How did you join political party? Who encourage you to join political party?
2. Did you face discrimination while join your party? Being women? Being Dalit?
3. Do you get chances to take active participation in party's decision-making process?
4. Do you get change to lead different committee in your party before election?
5. How do you get tickets for election?
6. Express your experience from party member to elected local representative in your election area?
7. Are there any barriers preventing your participation? If yes, what are these barriers?
8. How do Dalit women perceive your contributions to decision-making?

9. Share your experience of discrimination by people due to being a Dalit woman?

### **Challenges Face by Dalit Women Local Representatives**

1. Have you faced any discrimination or bias from the local people before and after the election?
2. What are the problems and challenges you face before, during, and after the election?
3. Do you face any discrimination while accessing health, education, and other services these days?
4. What are the primary challenges you and other Dalit people encounter while participating in local activities?
5. Are there any social or cultural factors limiting your and other Dalit people's engagement in politics and other institutions?
6. Do you think that Dalit women are empowered through your participation in politics? Why?
7. Do you think that you and other Dalit people have been able to take on leadership roles? If not, why?
8. In your opinion, have there been any positive changes in your and other Dalits lives due to your participation and winning the local election?
9. In your opinion, are there any instances where Dalit involvement has led to community improvements?
10. In your opinion, what are the Dalit women's aspirations for their community's development?

## **Annex II: Check List for FDG**

- What are the activities Dalit women performing before and after elected as local representatives?
- Does Dalit women face take actively participation on Dalit people livelihood advocacy?
- What are the activities carried out by Dalit women local representative for improvement of livelihood of Dalit people?
- What are the role Dalit women local representative play for allocating budget for upliftment of livelihood of Dalit community?
- What ate the activities Dalit women local representative play for the development of local area (their ward)?

### Experience of journey

- How have Dalit women experienced discrimination based on their caste? Past and present
- How you join political parties? Who motivate you to join?
- What is your experience about the decision about selecting you as candidate for local election?
- What is your experience after electing in local election and involved in different sectors and meet people of different ethnicity in your area?

### Challenges faced

- What challenges do you think Dalit women face in accessing education, health care and other services?

- Do you find any disparities in healthcare access and treatment for Dalit women? If yes, what are these discriminations and disparities from healthcare providers?
- Are Dalit people able to access equal job opportunities and fair wages? What are your experiences and observations regarding job opportunities and equal wages?
- Do you think that Dalit women have equal access to land ownership and property rights? What trends and practices have you observed regarding women's ownership?
- What is the situation of Dalit women and Dalit people in terms of equality and opportunities? In politics, in society, and within the Dalit community.
- Based on your experiences, what policy changes or interventions do they suggest to address these challenges?