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Rituals and Power: A Performative Reading of Nepali Dalit Movements

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Letter of Recommendation

This is to certify that Mr. Rudra Bahadur Charmakar has completed this thesis entitled, “Rituals and Power: A Performative Reading of Nepali Dalit Movements” under my supervision. He carried out his research from September 2016 to February 2017. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

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## Abstract

This thesis analyses how Dalit Movements in Nepal have used rituals as part of their strategies and how ritual practices make impacts in the movements. As, Nepali society is based on four fold *varna* system- *Brahman*, *Kshetri*, *Bhaishya*, and *Shudra*; which has been practicing from 3500 years ago. In course of time, State enacted the legislations, rules and regulations on the basis of misinterpretations of *Vedas*, *Puranas*, and Hindu religious books and imposed discriminatory social hierarchy in the society.

According to *varna* system, *Shudras* are supposed to have come at the bottom of the hierarchy; and, they have to bear the discrimination, suppression, oppression, boycott, exclusion, hatred, and negligence from the society. They have been discriminated more in ritual and cultural sectors. Consequently, Dalit movements from the inception adopted the cultural and ritual practices as methods such as chanting the *mantras* and *richas*, from religious books; reciting the *mandal*, and *suktas* from *Vedas* and *Puranas*; performing the ritual and cultural activities in the temples and sacred places; placing the *tulsi-moth* and temple nearby homes etc. The movements raised the issues for equality, dignity and social liberation in 1940s; however, it got a new height after 1990.

It is believed that the ritual and cultural practices have power to overcome the problems. So, Dalit also thought that they have received the power and inspiration from Gods and Goddesses by performing ritual and religious activities. After the political changes of 1990, Dalit movements have amended some agenda and demands; and changed the procedures as well. As a result, they gained some historical achievements within few decades. Hence, by looking at the scenario of Dalit movements from ritual and performative perspectives; there is power, enthusiasm and inspiration in ritual practices which give success, happiness and satisfaction to the performers.

## Lists of abbreviations

- AD : Anno Domini (After Death of Christ)
- BC : Before Christ
- BS : Bikram Sambat
- CA : Constituent Assembly
- CBD : Caste Based Discrimination
- DNF : Dalit NGO Federation
- DWA : Dalit Welfare Association
- DWO : Dalit Welfare Organization
- FEDO : Feminist Dalit Organization
- INGO : International Non-governmental Organization
- JUP : Jana Utthan Pratisthan
- NDC : National Dalits' Commission
- NGO : Non-governmental Organization
- NHRC : National Human Rights Commission
- NNDSWO: Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization
- PM : Member of Parliament
- PDRC : Professional Development and Research Center
- UML : United Marxist and Leninist

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## Chapter I:

### Varna System, Dalits and Rise of Social Movement in Nepal

#### 1.1 Background

Nepali Dalits have been suffering from casteism and untouchability since centuries. Due to casteism, untouchability and social hierarchy, they have been facing discrimination, oppression, suppression, negligence, boycott, demarcation, and replacement in the society. That is why Dalit movements and protests raised in 1940s. With time span, the movements and protests have been going through many ups and downs and streams; however, the key goal of the movement is to establish equity-based just society. Dalit movements have focused on rights, equality, dignity, and social justice. For achieving these things, movements have been adopting various strategies and policies. By overviewing the movements, it is supposed to note that there are three main-streams in Dalit movements: (1) initiated and supported by political organizations; (2) initiated by NGOs and civil society; and (3) initiated individually by the intellectuals and activists.

First stream is focused to political organizations and their initiations and strategies for socio-economic and political rights, inclusion and sustainable development of the Dalit community. Nepali major political parties such as Nepali Congress (NC), Nepal Communist Party (UML), and Nepal Communist Party (Maoist Center) have declared equality and non-discrimination in their manifestos. They have already adopted reservation and inclusion policy and strategies in their party-lives through their constitutions and manifestos. The parties and their Dalit wings have been advocating for equal access and rights of Dalits in private and public spheres.



Similarly, another stream is centered on Dalit NGOs and Dalit civil society. After the political change of 1990, there are hundreds of Dalit NGOs established in the society; and, they have been upholding for rights, equality, inclusion and Dalits dignified lives by adopting the sensitizing and awareness raising, empowerment and right-based- approach, strategies and programmes for Dalit cause. They, sometimes, adopt cultural practices for social and cultural reformation as well. Some Dalit organizations such as NNDSWO, FEDO, DNF, DWO, JUP, JMC, PDRC, DWA, SAMATA foundation etc. have been rigorously working in various sectors of Dalit community from national to local level for decades.

Likewise, there is also strong force or third stream- that is individual initiations by intellectuals and activists from Dalits and pro-Dalits. They have been working for ritual and cultural reformation through their initiations. They try to maintain neutrality more; however, they take the support from political parties, NGOs and civil society as per their need. They want Dalits' access in ritual and public places. They uphold for freedom, inclusion, participation, and dignified social status. They raise the issue of re-writing the history and re-positioning the status for social and cultural reformation by challenging the state and Brahminic society through ritual and cultural practices.

Therefore, in this thesis, I have also looked how the practices of discrimination based on caste and occupations took place in society; how Dalit movements, leaders and initiators have used rituals and cultural activities to address the existing problems of Nepali Dalits; and what are the major achievements of seven-decade-long movements and protests. Moreover, cultural and ritual dimensions are focused more while analyzing the Dalits' movements and protests.

## 1.2. Varna System in South Asia

There are not any literatures available about the arrival of Aryans in the plains of South Asia. But, the historians agree that “Aryans entered India before 3000BC, or about 6000 years ago, and started to intervene in the socio-political lives of the pre-Aryan people” (Aahuti 71). The Rigveda is considered to be composed by those Aryans around 1500BC. It is collections of the views on Aryans of at least five thousand years since their arrival. As Aahuti claims “the *richas* handed over orally from one generation to next, were collected and revised between 1500BC and 1000BC. This is believed to be done by *Vyas* sage, so it was named *Vedavyas*” (Ibid). In the earlier part or *mandal* of *Rigveda*, there is not mention of untouchability but only the tenth *mandal* mentions about the birth of people from Brahma’s different parts. When Aryans attacked the rulers and took over the regime, the Aryan chauvanism is supposed to have started.

It is believed that the establishment of Aryan rule also gave continuity to the slavery. The war, the Aryans defeated, made the non-Aryans slaves. This led to four *varna*: *Brahman*, *Kshetri*, *Bhaisya* and *Shudra*. Aahuti, in this context, writes:

[...] those who functioned as priests and earned knowledge and education were categorized as *Brahman*, those who worked in military and administration as *Kshetriya*, those involved in agriculture and trade as *Vaisya*, and those who worked in non-skilled and skilled occupation and serve other as *Shudra*. In this way, the Brahman- ruled Aryan state began to link this division of labour with religion, and this gave four varnas and four ashrams of life. (72)

All slaves were *Shudras*, but not all *Shudras* were slaves. Slaves could be treated like talking animals that could be bought, sold, and killed, but *Shudras* could only be used to provide a fixed labour service. The position of *Shudras* was quantitatively higher than that of slaves. For a long time, the term *Shudra* was the common name for all those working class that provided skilled labour and service to the three higher *varnas*. Aahuti further argues “By the pre-Maurya Era (about 600-300BC), the relatively loose varna system was fully rigidified, mainly to make the division of labour for the low-status *Shudra* inviolable” (73). Thereafter, all *Shudras* began to be considered and treated as slaves, although until that time only a group of *Shudras* were slaves.

Initially a portion of *Shudra* was made untouchable, but later on who had blood relations with untouchables, those working in occupations considered polluting and those who were degraded from their caste as a punishment were further downgraded to the status of untouchables and this process continued. With the expansion of Hindu state, the untouchability also expanded throughout. In this way, the varna system, casteism and untouchability spread throughout South Indian continent. The varna system with untouchability was supposed, imposed to divide *Shudras* among themselves as well.

### 1.3 Varna System and Dalits in Nepal

The Varna system was supposed to begin in Nepal with the entry of Hindu rulers and their subjects from different directions and at the different times, along with their feudal form and tradition based on varna system with untouchability that had reached at the climax by then. “The Mallas intensified the mission of Hinduizing that the Lichhavi rulers had started and extended it to the whole society” (Aahuti 79). King Jayasthiti Malla summoned extremist Brahmins to the Bagmati valley and divided the Nepali society into

“four varna and sixty four castes and also rigidly imposed untouchability” (Budhathoki 29). It is not difficult to understand that the varna system, originated in India; gradually, spread outwards along with the expansion of the Hindu Kingdoms and migration of the defeated rules and their subjects.

It is assumed that the *varna* system spread to the present-day Nepal from three directions. In this regards, Aahuti claims:

First, it was implemented by the Lichhavi kings in the Bagmati valley of the then Nepal, and by 600, untouchability was also put in place.

Thereafter, the Malla King Jayasthiti Malla rigidified it in the Bagmati valley. Second, the Hindu Vedic Aryans who had entered Nepal in the 12<sup>th</sup> century formed unity with the Aryan Khas rulers and spread the rule from western Nepal to the Gandaki region, and in this process king Ram Shah of Gorkha divided his subjects into 36 castes and four varna. Third, varna system spread among the Maithili-and-Avadhi-speaking Madhesi community of Nepali Tarai from its origin in India. (81)

Conqueror of modern Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah declared Nepal as good *Hindustan* and Hindu varna system became the official religion of all rulers. He also provisioned four-varna- 36- caste-society in Nepal after conquering Kathmandu valley. Yam Bahadur Kisan argues, “Dalit communities were further divided by making upper and lower within and made further strong, severe and extreme in the society” (8). By taking support of religion and religious practices, Junga Bahadur Rana made untouchability and casteism more severe by enacting the National Code in 1854 AD.

After the National Code, people were punished if anybody touched or done the prohibited things. Orthodox Hindu religious interpreters prohibited untouchable communities to enter into temples, sacred places or any prohibited places. “By establishing the social and cultural norms with casteism and untouchability, Hindu Dalits were prohibited even to listen the preaching of Hindu Holy and religious books and to get entry into temples. It was made legal as per National Code” (Maharjan and Kisan 16). It was inhumane praxis in the human society.

#### 1.4 Dalit: Meanings and Status

As per four fold *varna* system, *Shudras* were at the bottom of the hierarchy. The *Shudras* were converted as Dalits with the time span and state’s monopoly. They were further stratified with division. The word ‘*Dalit*’ comes from the Sanskrit root ‘dal’ which means “to shatter”, “to break into pieces” and “to step on”. The term is a product of 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian social movement. According to Yam Bahadur Kisan, “the literal meanings of the word ‘Dalit’, are ‘shattered’, ‘over- burdened’, ‘suppressed’, ‘squeezed’, ‘stepped upon’, ‘kneaded’, ‘ground down’, “shamed by being required to bow to someone else's feet”; or “silenced through suppression”” (6). In the past, the word ‘Dalit’ was used to refer to all of those groups who were oppressed; but in contemporary Nepali parlance, it is used to refer only to those officially categorized within the untouchable castes.

The term ‘*Dalit*’, for the first time was “used in India in the 1960s in relation with Dr. Ambedkar's thought and with reference to Simon commission's report (1927), meaning as the group of further stratified *Shudras* who were considered as untouchable” (NHRC 5). The term ‘*Dalit*’ is a joint designation referring to a number of different caste

groups. Dalit is not a caste group per se but a politically coined word used to refer to a socially backward community in Nepal.

After the political change of 1950, some reliefs brought in the urban areas but no any fundamental steps toward liberation of Dalits were taken place. “King Tribhuvan dismissed the issues of untouchability and discrimination in 1951 saying that “the issue cannot be raised until the formation of constitutional council” but constitutional council never came into existence” (Devkota 35). New National Code, 1963 AD prohibited caste discrimination and untouchability but could not come into practical lives.

Though, casteism and untouchability was illegal according to national law; Dalits’ socio-cultural status could not improve in the society. They have always been victimized in the daily lives in the social spheres. They have been suppressed, oppressed, discriminated, ignored, boycotted, prohibited, excluded hatred and marginalized from centuries. Consequently, Dalit movements and protests raised from different social spheres in the 1940s onward.

### 1.5 Need of Protests and Movements against Varna System and Casteism

Where is suppression, oppression, discrimination and domination; there is also be conflict, struggle and protest. “There is conflict, conciliation and transformation in society between positive and negative aspects of conceptions, opinions and thoughts” (Maharjan & Kisan 15). So as Hindu *varna* system not only practiced the casteism but also introduced social protest in the society. “Buddha, first time in the history; raised voice against untouchability and casteism in 600BC” (16). It was a formal protest against *varna* system. During the regime of Prithvi Narayan Shah, *Josmani* religious community initiated religious and intellectual campaign for equality. *Santa* (Sage) Shashidhar was

against casteism and Hindu varna system. He also convinced to King, Rana Bahadur Shah, so that “he converted himself into *Swami Nirgunananda* and became anti-casteism and social reformer” (Ibid). There were many social reformers who raised voices against varna system, old national code and untouchability. Sage Gyandil Das from Kathmandu campaigned against untouchability in national and international arena.

Similarly, the follower of *Josmani*, Yogmaya (Neupane) and her 54 followers committed mass-suicidal against social evils and Hindu Varna system by plunging into Arun River (*Jalsamadhi*) in Bhojpur in 1930s. “Bajhage King, Jaya Prithvi Bahadur Singh, son-in-law of Chandra Shamsheer also campaigned for equality and humanity. He sympathized the socially victimized people and initiated the upliftment activities in the society” (Maharjan and Kisan 17). He had sent Damai, Kami and Sarki youths to foreign countries for the training to make them familiar with modern technologies to run their own occupations in a new way. Moreover, “Madhavraj Joshi also established an Aryan Samaji Group against casteism and untouchability in 1953BS” (18). He advocated for equality that *Shudras* and women could read the religious holy books.

Shukraraj Shastri and his company also attached with public rights movement with religious and social changes in 1930s- 40s. They campaigned for Hindu social change and anti-Brahminic movement. But the organized-movement against casteism and untouchability from Dalits’ side was not initiated for long time. Maharjan and Kisan further write, “Only few social reformers and intellectuals raised voices against social discrimination and untouchability” (19). Balaguru Shadananda (Bhojpur), Kirant Religious leader Falgunanda Linden, Devi Prasad Upreti (Terhathum), Imansingh

Chemjong (Panchthar), Padam Bahadur Dewan (Illam), Naradmuni Thulung (Bhojpur) and so on played a vital role for equality and social reformation.

However, Dalits' formal social protests and movements began in 1940s in Baglung in an organized manner. The cultural and ritual protests at the beginning by Dalits were suppressed by Brahminic society and state. Dalits believed that the varna system based on Hindu cultural practices could be eliminated or washed out through cultural and ritual practices; so, they studied *vedas*, *puranas*, and other holy books; and tried to perform religious and ritual practices in their daily lives.

#### 1.6 Nature and Methods of Dalit Movements

Dalit movements for the socio-cultural reformation were thought from different perspectives. The effectiveness of the Nepali Dalit Movements depends upon the clear visions and methods of struggles. Struggle can be carried out on political or social arena; and they can be peaceful or violent. There seems to be general agreement within the Dalit Movement whereby a vast majority of Dalits prefer to carry out peaceful and legal struggles.

However, some of the Marxist ideology guided political organizations were in favour of ending the caste-based-discrimination through radical changes in the state system. Yam Bahadur Kisan writes, "*Dalit Mukti Samaj* has stated that the existing Nepali state system is a casteism which is based on caste system of Hindu religion. Dalit liberation movement wants to maintain correlation with the political liberation movement in fact" (Kisan 138). That means that the movement should be linked with the movement of radical change and cultural movement.



*Jatiya Samata Samaj* has said that their struggle is aimed toward Brahminic culture and tendencies. It wants peaceful and legal struggle. *Nepal Dalit Mukti Morcha* has said that the “present multi-party parliamentary state power protects the interest of the so-called Hindu high caste feudalist classes and the bureaucratic capitalistic classes” (Kisan 139). They maintain that their present activities involve publicity and broadcasting which are legal struggle for raising awareness. *Nepal Dalit Shramik Morcha* says the form of struggle should be one which would awaken cultural consciousness and marshal self-respect and moral knowledge. Similarly, “*Mukti Samaj* has emphasized peace, stressing the need for long term social reforms” (Ibid). Most of the leftist political parties and their sister and wing organizations are in favour of class struggle, cultural practices and social reforms. Rightist wings prefer long term awareness and empowerment programmes for social changes.

Similarly, social organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) prefer to perform cultural and ritual programmes, awareness and empowerment programmes, and legal struggles. Likewise, Dalit intellectuals prefer to combat with varna system and orthodox society with cultural and ritual practices and legal process. Moreover, they strongly advocate for the struggles equipping with knowledge, capacities and competencies.

In this context, in 1950s, backward and marginalized communities were united into groups and initiated social movements for the rights, equality, dignity and liberation in the Nepali society. In the movements, many Dalit leaders were united into organized forms. Some Dalit pioneering leaders like Bhagat Sarbajit Bishwakarma, Padmasingh Bishwakarma, Hikmat Singh Bishwakarma (Baglung), and T.R. Bishwakarma (Sunsari)

initiated to form the Dalit organizations. They were well-educated people from Dalit community who had studied Sanskrit and *Vedic* education in India.

At the beginning, the processes and methods of protests were based on Hindu ritual practices such as worshipping the Gods and Goddesses by entering into temples, organizing Hindu ritual activities in birth, death and marriage, organizing *Mahayagya* and *Kotihom* etc. In this regard, Catherine Bell's argument is remarkable here that "ritual has generally been thought to express beliefs in symbolic ways for the purpose of their continual reaffirmation and inculcation" (182). Dalit leaders also expressed their beliefs in symbolic ways as protest against society.

In this research, I have tried to analyze the cultural and ritual performances as movements and protests conducted by Nepali Dalit Movements based on two (auto)-biographical texts of *Bhagat Sarbajit Vishwakarma (Baglung)* and *Padma Singh Vishwakarma* and a book- *Dalan Biruddha Pratirodh* (Protest Against Suppression). The two biographies give the life history, major social protests and activities for Dalit liberation. Similarly, the thesis also deals with major cultural and ritual protests accomplished by the then leadership and Dalit movements. For analyzing the text, ritual and performance theories have been used as theoretical tools.

## Chapter II:

## Ritual and Cultural Performances in Nepali Dalit Movements

## 2.1 Ritual and Power of Performance: A Brief Concept

The type of social control thought to be wielded by ritual has been envisaged in a variety of ways. For some, it is a matter of mental indoctrination or behavioral conditioning, either through repetitive drills or the effective states induced by group enthusiasm. Some have also emphasized the cognitive influence of ‘modeled’ and ‘idealized’ relations. The emphasis is sometimes on the effect of communal ritual on individual psychology, at other times on ritual’s role in structuring interactive relationships. Ritual practices as Bell argues can “serve both social control and social change” (169). Ritualization is very much concerned with power. The objectification legitimization of an ordering of power as an assumption of the ways things really are, ritualization is a strategic arena for the embodiment of the power relations. The relationship of ritualization and social control might have concerned with ritual activities.

Durkheim’s model of ritual underlies four influential theses concerning ritual as a means of social control: 1. the social solidarity thesis, 2. the channeling of conflict thesis, 3. the repression thesis, and 4. the definition of reality thesis. Regarding Durkheim’s idea, Catherine Bell remarks:

[...] saw ritual as dramatizing collective representations and endowing them with a mystical ethos that in the course of the communal experience did not merely promote acceptance of those representations but also inculcated deep-seated affective responses to them. (171)

Various attempts have also been made to see how a dependence on ritualized activities for social cohesion and control correlates with modes of social organization. The relation is particularly prominent in theories of ritual as a form of social control. The notion of ritual is considered as an idolizing mechanism for transforming ideas into sentiments of significance of nature of belief and its relationship.

While talking about religious beliefs, that have been understood in a variety of ways as pseudoscientific explanations, rationalization of customary behavior, personal or communal ideologies, or highly structured doctrinal formulations whose content have little impact on behavior. The traditional association of belief and ritual is also challenged by growing evidence that most symbolic action, even the basic symbols of a community's ritual life, can be very unclear to participants or interpreted by them in very dissimilar ways. Bell remarks, "evidence for the diversity of interpretations and beliefs among members of small ritual communities is also supported by the findings of Jordan in a Taiwanese village and Peter Stromberg in a small Swedish Church" (184). As with ritual, most attempts to analyze how symbols do what they do also assume that the purpose of symbolism is socio-cultural solidarity by means of naturalization of political and ideological values.

David Cannadine argues, "Distinctions between power as implicit social control and power as explicit acts of political coercion frequently generate an opposition between so-called symbolic power associated with ritual and ideology and so called secular power, associated with agencies and institutions of forces" (9). Whether it is formulated as influence or coercion, symbols or weapons, power has consistently been seen as something one possesses or not, and something that gives one some form of control over

other. Power correlates with the tendency to see ideology as a totalistic worldview or a tool of the dominant classes. In this regard, Michel Foucault remarks about power that:

A relationship of power as a mode of action that does not intend to act directly on persons or things, which is what violence does, but indirectly on action. The exercise of power is always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. It is a matter, therefore, of directing the activity of others, “guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome.” To govern, as an example of the exercise of power, is “to structure the possible field of action of other”. (120)

So, a whole structure of actions brought to bear on other actions, power is constituted by a cluster of relations and it simultaneously produces in turn “a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations” (Foucault 198). Bell referring to Foucault, argues that “relations of power are not simply engendered from the top down, but from the bottom up as well” (200). On both micro and macro levels, there are always “movements in the opposite directions, whereby strategies which coordinated relations of power produce new effects and advance into hitherto unaffected domains” (Foucault 199). Although, there are tops and bottoms, since micro-power relations are always unequal, there can be no movement down from the top without a conduit from below.

Ritualization involves the differentiation and privilege of particular activities. Theoretically, these activities may differentiate themselves by a variety of features; in practice, some general tendencies are obvious. The evocation of ritualizing strategies by activities that do not wish to be considered religious ritual is a very common feature

particularly in the secularism of any society. The deployment of ritualization, consciously or unconsciously, is the deployment of a particular construction of power relationships, a particular relationship of domination, consent, and resistance. As a strategy of power, ritualization has both positive and effective aspects as well as specific limits to what it can do and how far it can extend. While it may be an effective way of acting in certain places at certain time, under other conditions it may be useless or counterproductive. “It is necessary to explore the relationships of power constituted through ritualization and the circumstances in which these relationships are effective or ineffective forms of social interaction” (Bell 206). A strategy for the constitution of power relations that appears to be ‘instinctive’ to the socialized agent, ritualization involves two basic dimension- social body and construction of power.

Ritualization both implies and demonstrates a relatively unified corporate body, often leading participants to assume that there is more consensus than there actually is. It leads all to mistake the minimal consent of its participants for an underlying consensus or lack of conflict, even when some conflict is objectified to mistake the groups’ reformulation of itself as a straight forward communication and performance of its most traditional values. The misrecognitions of ritualization affect both those who dominate and those who are dominated. Moreover, the misrecognition that makes ritualization so effective for the creation and maintenance of certain power relations simultaneously set the limits of ritualization’s social efficacy. These limits are rooted in several interrelated features such as illusion of consensus among participants, necessity of encouraging or inducing consent.

How ritualization empowers those who control or regulate ritual practices is probably the most documented aspect of the study of ritual. Bourdieu reflects “a consensus of sorts to those who control ritualization are in command of a particularly powerful form of objectification, especially in cultures where there are relatively few other institutionalized structures to rival it” (41). Bloch also views ritualization as a more or less institutionalized medium of objectification, one that constitutes traditional forms of authority through techniques of formalization that render this authority relatively invulnerable to casual challenge. The ritual construction of authority is a stabilization of power and therein a specific augmentation of power. For it, power is demonstrated “as bestowed on the proper person by external sources, such as ancestors or deities that power comes to be seen as vast, legitimate and accessible only to those in the inappropriate offices” (Bell 211). Geertz is also in favor of the political empowerment for ritual and ritualization.

If the ritual construction of power on the higher levels of social organization builds on the micro-relations of power that shape daily life on the lower level of society, changes in the latter level can precipitate a crisis in which the demands of ritual to conform to traditional models clash with the ability of those rites to resonate with the real experience of social body. Bloch and others have drawn attention to the way in which ritualization catches people up in its own terms, asking little more than a mere consent to the forms while relegating anything but the most concerted challenge to the non-threat of rudeness.

It is important to demonstrate that the efficacy of ritualization as a power strategy not only in the domination it affords, but in the resistance as well. Ritual mastery, that

sense of ritual which is at least a basic social mastery of the schemes and strategies of ritualization, means not only that ritualization is the appropriation of a social body but that the social body in turn is able to appropriate a field of action structured in great measure by others. Bell also argues “Ritual mastery is itself a capacity for the relationship of relative domination” (215). It does not merely socialize the body with schemes that structure and reproduce parts of the social order, nor does it merely construct the social person with versions of these schemes as the order of its subjectivity and consciousness.

For Durkheim, “the believer who has communicated with his god is not merely a man who sees new truths of which the unbeliever is ignorant; he is a man who is stronger. He feels within him a force either to endure the trials of existence or to conquer them” (qtd. by Wuthnow 268). His perception has been analyzed for too long only in terms of the so-called illusions generated by affective states of social enthusiasm.

In *The Anthropology of Performance* Victor Turner defines rituals as “connection established” by Schechner between social drama and theatre, and the use made of “the theatrical paradigm” by Goffman and myself” (05). In the research conducted by Turner, he reached to conclusion that “the dramaturgical phase begins when crises arise in the daily flow of social interaction” (Ibid). Therefore, daily living is a kind of theatre; social drama is a kind of meta-theatre, that is, a dramaturgical language about the language of ordinary role-playing and status-maintenance which constitutes communication in the quotidian social process. People adopted practices from generation to generation and established it as ritual. Our daily practices and activities are connected with rituals and ritual performances.



According to Victor Turner, performance is subjunctive. He has used the term liminality and phenomenon of liminality extensively in his discussion of ritual and performance. “Liminal stages dissolve all the factual and commonsense systems into their components and ‘play’ with them in ways never found in nature or in custom, at least at the level of direct perception” (Turner 25). He finds performances in every society: primordial or modern, civilized or uncivilized. He uses the term “social drama” to which he finds performative in qualities. He analyzes such social dramas using theatrical elements.

Victor Turner’s cultural processualism in explorations of manifold cultural performances are still continued and inspired with the research conducted with Edith Turner on the rituals of many tribal societies. To point out the contrast between the ‘state’ and ‘transition’, Turner argues “state to include all other terms. It is a more inclusive concept than ‘status’ or ‘office’, and refer to any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized” (94). Similarly, transitions are marked with three phases: separation, margin and aggression. The separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or groups either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions or from them. In margin or liminal state, the characteristics of the ritual subject are ambiguous, who passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past coming state. In the last stage, aggression or reincorporation is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations.

The complex relationship between the self-referential and canonical streams of ritual’s messages is best approached through further exploration of the relationship

between saying and doing. After a preliminary discussion of general principles of efficacy, it can be got a crucial indexical message, intrinsic to ritual's very form.

Rappaport writes "many liturgies are performative, where some sort of performative act is the main point of the performance, transforming war into peace, restoring purity to that which has been polluted, joining men and women in wedlock, performativeness is not confined to ritual" (115). Performatives are not confined to ritual, but there is a special relationship between ritual and performativeness.

The formal characteristics of ritual enhance the chances of success of the performatives. Like any other acts; performatives can fail. The faulty performatives are of ritual performatives and ritual performatives, can misfire. The ludicrous nature of these instances suggests, however, that they are less likely to do so than are other non-ritualized performatives because the formality of liturgical orders helps to insure that whatever performatives they incorporate are performed by authorized people with respect to eligible persons or entities under proper circumstances in accordance with proper procedures.

According to Rappaport, there are two closely related reasons for considering the performativeness of ritual. Rappaport further claims:

[...] the association of sacred and occult with performativeness in magical and religious rituals may mystify their conventional nature and this may enhance their chances of success. To take the state affairs established by a king's enthronement to derive from the sacramental virtues of crown and chrism may be more effective with respect to the maintenance of the social order over which the king reigns than would be the recognitions of

enthronement as a naked performatives mere conventional act, the effects of which could, for instance, in response to the short-run displeasures of his subjects, easily be reversed. (116-117)

The facts, events or situations to which a statement refers presumably exists independent of and previous to the statement referring to them, and a statement is assessed true if it accords in some sufficient degree to those previously existing and independent states of affairs.

Since performatives bring about the facts, events, situation etc. with which they are concerned, these fact are subsequent to and contingent. Performatives, and most unambiguous factives are self-fulfilling that they make themselves true in the sense of standing in a relationship of conformity to the state of affairs with which they are concerned. Rappaport also borrowed some idea from Searle that “Ritual words do, after all, bring conventional states of affairs or “institutional facts” into being and having been brought into being they are as real as “brute facts”” (Ibid). He further claims that it might be “... “magical power” is attributed to other words by extension of the principle of factiveness beyond the domain of the meaningful, in which it is clearly effective, into the physical...”(Ibid). The illocutionary force may be augmented by perlocutionary force. The effectiveness of persuasion, threat, cajolery, inspiration and ecstasy may well thrust beyond the purely conventional, and beyond discursive consciousness into the organic, as in the cures of healing rituals.

Subordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged classes take for granted. Dwight

Conquergood has used the term “epistemic violence” (370) which is the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned and gestured, improvised, co-experienced, covert and all the more deeply meaningful because of refusal to be spelled out. In this regard, Conquergood referring to Michel Foucault states:

[...] the term “subjugated knowledges” to include all the local, regional, vernacular, naïve knowledges at the bottom of the hierarchy-the low Other, of science. These are the non-serious ways of knowing that dominant culture neglects, exclude, represses, or simply fails to recognize.  
(371)

Performance may be means to suppress the people because performance and dialectics are most importance part and means in both suppression and protest. It has power to impress the people or to create a pressure in the society.

Victor Turner states “social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. The passage from lower to higher status is through limbo of statelessness (91). He focuses the power of dialectical and *communitas* form. Similarly, Edith Turner says “Liminality, marginality and inferiority frequently generate sacred accounts, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems and works of art” (98). Turner’s concept in this regards, is applicable to socially marginalized and powerless people. So, symbolic and ritual performances may be tool for social changes.

Regarding power of ritual Catherine Bell claims, “[...] projection and embodiment of the schemes in ritualization is more effectively viewed as a ‘mastering’ of relationships with power relation within arena that affords a negotiated appropriation of

the dominant values embedded in the symbolic schemes” (182). Ritual performances have become the means for survival of life at present. Hence, the every performance has connection with cultural, ritual and social phenomena.

## 2.2 Introduction to Dalit Social Movements

In Hindu societies, there have been taken various forms of struggles such as conflicts between Aryan and non-Aryans, between twice born castes and *Shudras*, between atheists and theists and between rulers and ruled. In this context, anti-caste movement was focused on the struggle between twice born and *Shudras*. Anti-caste movements in India and Nepal were instigated by religious leaders, humanists and other great intellectuals, poets, writers, litterateurs, and social reformers.

There were numerous conflicts, struggles, protests and movements in the various stages against casteism and untouchability imposed to Dalits based on religious and cultural practices. Some non-Dalits and pro-Dalits also raised voices against discrimination. In this regards, Gautam Buddha was the pioneering radical social reformer in the history of casteism and he was succeeded to establish the state as per his vision. However, it could not last long. Some religious progressive preachers, leaders and activists also led the reformative movement. *Josmani* religious practices were conducted for social and cultural equality.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Nepali Dalits were inspired by the Indian independence movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian Dalit liberation movement led by Dr. Ambedkar. Yam Bahadur Kisan writes, “Sarbjit Bishwakarma and Saharshanath Kapali both returned to Nepal from India with such inspirations” (89). The organized social movements emerged in Nepal in the late 1940s, though, there were

numerous individual acts opposing caste discrimination were already taken places. The initiators of Dalit social movements practiced cultural, religious and ritual activities against casteism and untouchability. Some of the leaders from primary phase and major cultural and ritual protests and movements are minutely discussed from ritual and performative perspectives in this chapter.

### 2.3 Ritual Initiations and Contribution of *Bhagat Sarbajit Bishwakarma*

Culture, ritual and religious practices have close connection with society. Ritual and religious practices and performances have strong power and enthusiasm for social reformation as well. Main reason behind varna system in Indian continent especially in Nepal and India is religious practices based on *Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads* and other Hindu religious holy books. Cultural and ritual practices are imposed to Dalit community and led them towards the abyss of discrimination, exclusion and non-presentation. So that, pioneering Dalit leaders also performed religious, cultural and ritual practices.

Talking about cultural and ritual practices, Bell writes:

[...] ritual as a ‘window’ on the cultural dynamics by which people make and remake their worlds...single terms have been more fundamental in defining the issues basic to culture, society and religion...ritual has become a topic of interest in its right, not merely a tool for understanding more embracing social phenomena (03).

Ritual is a form for social control. The problem of ritual is, of course, just such an organizational fiction. However, Bell writes, “ritual and beliefs are intertwined and yet separable, since is conceivable” (19). But, ritual is differentiated from mental categories as readily as action is differentiated from thought. So, they adopted the ritual

performances such as- entering into temples, organizing different religious, cultural and ritual practices and programmes. They think that root-cause of discrimination and suppression is Hindu religious cultural practices, so that, liberation is also possible through ritual and cultural practices as protests and movements because it is considered that these practices have power to solve the differentiations and problems.

In the history of Dalit social movement, formally, “organized movement began in 1940s in the initiation and leadership of *Bhagat Sarbajit Bishwakarma*, who claimed that every human being is religiously equal and he constructed temple in Gairagaun and started worshipping” (Maharjan and Kisan 19). In 1945, about 73 Dalit gathered aiming to request the then Prime Minister, Mohan Shamsher to end the varna system, and they also asked for the permission to listen the *Bhagawat*, Holy stories, and *Puranas*; and, to perform religious and ritual activities. They expressed their wish to wear the sacred thread (*Janai*) as well. Dalit movement, at the beginning, raised the issues of equality in religious and ritual sectors by arguing that there was not any discriminatory message in the holy books, so that, there should be the end of casteism and untouchability in religious places.

Sarbajit Bishwakarma, from his early age, felt the discrimination in his village. In the book, *Sarbajit Bishwakarmako Jewani* (2063 BS) by Ranendra Baraly, the writer, has included a lot of information about Bhagat Sarbajit Bishwakarma. Sarbajit’s father, Gothe Sunar, had good relation (social hierarchical relation) with so-called high castes and Brahmans. One of them was *purohit* (priest) of the Galkote King. “Sarbajit would listen the *purohit* carefully who would recite the stories from *Puranas*, *vedas*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, so that, he wished to study *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. But, those,

Brahmans insulted him seeing his interest in religious books” (Baraly 04). They declared that “one should be Brahman to study religious books” (Ibid). Sarbajit requested to the teacher of the village to teach him the religious books but he also insulted, scolded and abused him badly. But he had heard the news about Dr. Ambedkar of India, who had studied well instead of extreme poverty. So, he also planned to prove the knowledge and capacity that Dalits were also equal, qualified and bonafied. “He studied old religious books, *Vedas’ richas, Puranas, Mahabharat, Ramayan, Nirnayasandhi, Manusmriti, Shreemadbhagwat, Krishna Charitra* etc. and returned home with heavy load of knowledge from India” (Baraly 6-7). Sarbajit began reciting the lines, *mandal, sukta* and *richas* from *Vedas, Puranas Mahabharata* and other holy books.



An Imaginary portrait of Bhagat Sarbajit Bishwakarma (Photo courtesy: JUP)



Sarbajit started disseminating his enhanced knowledge in the village. It was his cultural, religious and ritual movement in Nepal. He would argue with *Pundits*, “Everyone is born as *Shudra*; but he could be Brahman by his knowledge and conduct” (Baraly, 07). He would think that “*Vedas* preachers are Brahmans but knowledge makes a person *pundit*” (Ibid); he disseminated this motto in the society. He established the *tulsi-moth* and constructed *Kalanki* temple to perform *Puja-path* and *Aaradhana* every morning. “Religious symbols formulate as basis congruence between a particular style of life and a specific metaphysic” (Geertz 90). It was his cultural and ritual dashing against *Brahman* and *Kshetris*. People were surprised because of this activities but he would perform *puja* and prayer in the temples placed in front of his house.

Sarbajit was in his liminal state because he was already upward because of his knowledge but downward because of this caste. In this regard, Victor Turner argues:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the position assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial...their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. (89)

Liminal entities in the initiation or puberty rites may be presented as possessing nothing. Sarbajit gathered Dalit people from 13 villages and taught them about *Vedas* and religious books. He also made aware to Dalits about the rights and responsibility. They claimed “equality”, (Baraly 08) that they were not lower castes but evil social structures made them lower and subordinate. Sarbajit announced to all, “Let’s walk together; let’s live with single voice; let’s understand that everybody has same feeling and emotion”

(Ibid). People from ancient time would live, walk, and be together. There was not any discrimination. He would attract the people by chanting the main motto and *mantras* of *Vedas*.

In 1944, Sarbajit organized “name giving program” to his son according to Hindu procedures. “He managed the program by ringing *shankha-ghanta* (Bell) and by chanting the *Vedic mantras* in front of his house where he had placed Kalanki temple,” (Baraly 09). It was great cultural performance by Dalits. Geertz argues “religious symbols and symbol systems are concerned with inter-transpossibility...the endurance, courage, independence, perseverance and passionate willfulness in which the vision quest practices” (94). The non-Dalits from Gairagaun appeared there with anger and blamed him of destroying the social, cultural and religious norms and values of the village. Immediately, they attacked to his family and destroyed *mandap* and other things which were used while performing. It was “out of secular social structure... generalized social bond...simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties” (Turner 90). Sarbajit strongly defended in the debate regarding religious issues. Local *Pundit*, Saraswati Datta spoke, “You are from lower caste! Your ancestors had never performed these ritual practices! What a hell do you demonstrate by performing the ritual practices?” (Baraly 09). It was insult and attack against his dignity.

Victor Turner also argues, “Something of the sacredness of that transient humility and modeless-ness goes over” (90). Everybody abused him; scolded him; and harassed him in the gathering. Sarbajit also defended by reciting the lines from holy book, “*Pundit guru!* Cannot a Hindu perform Hindu procedural activities?” (Baraly 10). He continuously gave religious preaching for hours. In this context, Rappaport’s claim is

notable here that, “the association of sacred and occult with performativeness in magical and religious rituals may mystify their conventional nature and this may enhance their chances of success” (116). These are connected with power and success. But those Brahmans and attendees were confused or upset. Sarbajit further claimed, “The creator is Bishwakarma. And, Bishwakarma is *Brahma*. How can the creator be lower caste? Brahmans who use the iron materials during the cultural performances are made by Bishwakarma” (Ibid). He protested through religious knowledge; so, as soon as, Brahmans and other high caste people ran away from there.



This is Bangalamukhi Temple of Patan premises of Lalitpur, where Kusule community, a Newari Dalit works as *PUJARI* (Priest). It was possible after the declaration of King Surendra Shah for making Dalit Priest.

Sarbajit had known better that cultural and ritual practices made the occupational castes lower; so that, solution was also possible through ritual, cultural and religious practices. However, the protest was not possible without formal organization. Realizing

the need of unity and organization, Sarbajit initiated to establish “*Bishwa Sarbajan Sangha*” in 2003BS by reciting the slogan of equality and dignity.



A Dalit boy, expressing his happiness in *brata-bandha* program in Dharan (Photo courtesy: L.B. B.K.)

The Old National Code, 1854 had provision of caste hierarchies. Though, national law was based on misinterpretation of Hindu religious books, *Vedas*, *Puranas* and ancient law (i.e. *Manusmriti*); Sarbajit thought to interpret the religious lines properly. He continuously recited the lines; interpreted them with references. So, due to religious and ritual attack to *Pundits* Saraswati Datta and Haigirip could not stay there anymore; so they started making conspiracy against Sarbajit and his friends. They attacked to the Dalit leaders when they were sitting in a meeting. They destroyed the minute-register, posters and flyers. And, they also registered complaints against Dalit leaders including Sarbajit and police arrested them from the village. “Sarbajit, stood in front of authority (the then *Badahakim*) holding *Geeta* without any hesitation” (Baraly 13). The authority was

completely lunatic (*Pagal*) because of high-voltage anger. He spoke loudly with derogatory words, “Are you the same Kami who destroyed the social norms and values by going against it? ...Shouldn’t you follow the procedure of Hindus, Kami?” (Baraly 14). Sarbajit also debated with logics and arguments. He further recited the lines from *Geeta* regarding upper and lower hierarchy. But, the authority severely tortured him.

*Pundit*, Haigirip and other seven Brahmans reported to the authority by blaming to Sarbajit and Dalit leaders that “*Bishwa Sarbajan Sangha*” was established against the then government. They blamed them as rebels or the then “Nepali Congress”. At that time, Nepali Congress was anti-Ranaism, so that, Rana regime had blamed Nepali Congress as revolutionary. Again, Police arrested to Sarbajit and other Dalit leaders by accusing them involving in conspiracy against government. Later on, he was released from prison. After his release, “he was not only anti-Brahmanic but also became anti-government. He started gathering the Dalit youths for the strong protest for rights and equality” (Baraly 15). Abhi Subedi, in this context, remarks, “the greatest contradiction and the hypocritical foundation of the Brahminic religio-aesthetic construct can be seen in the role of performance assigned to the social classes...” (119). He pictures the social realistic concept. The concept could be seen and felt in the then society as well. He further writes, “Dalit performance art does bring the community together, creates a *mélange* of various socio-cultural practices, brings the deities and human and future hopes and present reality together” (Ibid).

Sarbajit Bishwakarma was sure that so-called high castes’ people dominated or insulted Dalits due to their personality and behavior; so that, he suggested to all the members to improve the personality, attitude, and behavior. He said, “We, Bishwakarma

are not lower; and will never be lower in future as well” (Baraly 16). Dalit leaders disseminated messages for the rights, equality, and dignity; and also requested the community to be gentle and well-disciplined. Geertz’s conception that “the world of everyday life, itself, of course, a cultural product for it is framed...” (111). Dalits’ personality is linked with everyday social life. They also held the regular conference of “*Bishwa Sarbajan Sangha*” and “elected Bhagat Sarbajit as president of the organization” (Baraly 16). They disseminated flyers and pamphlets publishing from Gorakhpur. They expanded the organization in different parts of Baglung and Myagdi and later on in Palpa district as well.



Common *Brata-bandha* organized by Dalits in Dharan (Photo courtesy: L.B. B.K.)

There was a big confrontation between *Brahmans/Kshetris* and Dalit community in the society. Dalit leaders were badly beaten; that is why Sarbajit and his company changed the strategies of the movement. Baraly writes, “they began the non-violence and dis-obedience movements by not providing the services to *Brahmans* and *Kshetris*. By

breaking the *Khalati* (it is used in Bishwakarma's workshop to pump the fire) and stopping to sew the clothes were some forms of dis-obedience movement" (17). The movement itself was a form of performance. And, the social movement raised by Dalit was strong performance for the social reformation. Performances are done to deliver the messages or wish for getting something in future.

The then government arrested Sarbajit, Laxminarayan, Manbir Bishwakarma and others and made an investigation in jail for a week. Other Dalit leaders were released from jail after a week. But, Sarbajit and Laxminarayan were sent to Tansen Jail. The organization was expanded to Palpa and other district as well. Non-obedience movement continued in other districts, too. Riplal Bishwakarma, another Dalit leader, was also arrested and kept with Sarbajit in Tansen Jail. Authorities severely tortured to Sarbajit and other Dalits in Jail. After two months, Police released to Laxminarayan and Riplal but Sarbajit was kept in Jail. He recited the lines, *mandal*, *sukta* and *richas* of *Vedas*, *Puranas* and Holy books even in jail to prove that "Bishwakarma and Sunar are not lower castes rather they are Barma and Sharma respectively" (Baraly 18). He strongly defended with authority; as a result, he was punished more severely. Authority hit with shoes, boxing, fists, sticks etc. Authority broke and fell the teeth of Sarbajit but he did not realize that he was mistaken. Because "ritualistic or mythic symbolization of the underlying social values" (Geertz 142) are not mistaken and wrong. They are weapons for protests.

Sarbajit was asked to accept the accusation; so that, he could be released but he did not. Rather, he requested to authority to defeat him with *Vedic* and philosophical debate. He declared, "if anyone can show me the evidences of discrimination and higher-

lower hierarchies in *Vedas*; I can be back from my stand; otherwise, I am ready to accept any severe, brute and grave torture. But I cannot ask for pardon anymore” (Baraly 19). It was his great stand. Authority could not able to bow him down. So, they asked all the *Pundits* and interpreters of holy books in the jail and there was *vedic* interaction and debate between Sarbajit and *Pundits*. They asked to Sarbajit to interpret the *mandal, sukta* and stanzas bringing from different holy books. He easily interpreted them and he also proved that there was not any provision of casteism and discrimination mentioned in the books. Everyone was surprised looking at the mastery, perfection, competency and knowledge of Sarbajit. *Pundits* were exhausted listening his interpretations. They accepted the defeat and ran away from there. Administration also realized the defeat and said “You are not lower, but keep quiet, do not speak any more” (Ibid) and he was released from jail after 17 months. But, he did not stop his campaign and movement.

Authority of Tansen declared that Dalits were not lower; however, the traditional and conservative society did not accept their existence as equal as high caste. Sarbajit made a plan to approve the decision of authority that from Prime minister of Nepal, so that, they could easily make their existence in the society. Ritual and cultural performances are means for social reformation. Bell argues in this regard, “ritual by formulating the universal qualities of an autonomous phenomenon...it has certain distinctive features” (69). Sarbajit and his company met Mohan Shamsheer, the Rana Prime minister of Nepal, and asked for the “permission to wear sacred thread (*Janai*) and let them to write their surname or caste as *Khadka Kshetri*. Mohan Shamsheer gave permission and he also allowed them to use the coal-wood without tax” (Baraly 21). They got these things in written form (with Lalmohar).



Bishwakarma people began wearing *janai* (sacred thread). It is concerned with purification, as Geertz claims “the purification rites involve forced sweating...” (105). Furthermore, they also established primary school in Hilepaani of Baglung. But, conspirator pundits misinterpreted their social works to the administration. Sarbajit was again arrested from the village and kept in jail for two months. They also destroyed the school building. However, Sarbajit and company did not kill their hope. Hikmat Singh Bishwakarma, who had passed Matric from India, was also freedom fighter, taught in the school for five years without salary. The conspirator *Pundits* and supporters registered the fake complaints against Dalits in administration; they also requested to cut off the facilities given to Dalits by prime minister; as a result, the facilities given to Dalits dismissed. They had to struggle a lot for their rights, equality and existence.

Sarbajit made a plan to change the surname of Dalit and disseminated the messages in Dalit communities. But, so-called high caste people could not tolerate all these things anymore. And, they made a conspiracy to “divide and rule” policy. They convinced to Sarki and Damai communities to go against Kami. And, Sarki and Damai communities did not support in the campaign of Sarbajit. But, he was still optimistic for social liberation and equality in the society. At last, Sarbajit was tired, and also became sad. The hypocrite society blamed him as lunatic (mentally retarded). So, he eloped to India with his son in 2055AD, and after few months, news of his death was heard in the village. His son also never returned to home. It was panic ending of first or primary phase of Dalit social movement for equality, dignity and humanity. Ritual and cultural performances were expected the power for social reformation, but he could not get it in his life time.

#### 2.4 Organized Dalit Movements and Contribution of *Padmasingh Bishwakarma*

*Vishwa Sarvajjan Sangha* is considered the first formal Dalit organization established in Baglung by Sarbajit Bishwakarma and his company. The organization had published *Ghosana Abhyas* (Declaration Attempt) in 1946. After the death of Sarbajit Bishwakarma, the first phase of social liberation movement ends with the death of Sarbajit Bishwakarma; and, revived the movement again by second generation since 1955AD. However, “Saharsanath Kapali had already established *Tailor Union* in Kathmandu in 1947AD. This organization stood against the practices of untouchability against *Kusule* (Kapali) caste and raised voices for welfare of their traditional occupation of tailoring” (Aahuti 95). Jadubir Bishwakarma of Dharan in eastern Nepal also established *Nepal Samaj Sudhar Sangha*. “These organizations advocated for rights of specific castes and this was their main weakness; although, these organization could not bring any major outcomes; they raised awareness at the local level to a great extent” (Ibid). The primary or first phase of Dalit social movement could not achieve its goal.

*Nepal Harijan Sanga*, established in Tanahun, declared *Bhadra Abagya Aandolan* (dis-obedience movement) from 1950-1957 against Rana regime but could not do any significant activities, thereafter. Performing activities might be the way to create the pressure to be addressed the agendas. After the fall of Ranaism, Dalit organizations multiplied within few years. In 1958, *Vishwa Sarbajan Sangha* was revived in the leadership of Manbir Bishwakarma of Baglung. In the 55-member committee, young Padmasingh Bishwakarma also joined as a member. In the second generation of social movement, Padmasingh Bishwakarma was energetic and goal-oriented young leader at that time. *Pundits* and social elites had controlled the then society. Saroj Dillu writes, “...

“to be educated, one should be Brahman” which touched the heart of Padmasingh” (7).

Due to caste and birth, Dalits have been insulted, discriminated and oppressed in the society. The Brahmanic society insulted to Padmasingh and his family many times in his home town. His sister-in-law was discriminated by *Brahmans/Kshetri* accusing to go nearby tape.



Padmasingh Bishwakarma, in his 70s, expired in 2016 (*Photo courtesy: JUP*)

Padmasingh realized that the root-cause of discrimination was varna system imposed by society and state by taking support of Hindu religion, and religious and holy books. So, his passion to study and holy books increased day by day. He went to Gonda, India with his father. Dillu writes, “After SLC, he joined in Dayananda Mahabidhyalaya, where he studied *Sanskrit* and *Vedic* Education and completed up to *Uttarmaddhyama*

(Intermediate Level)” (08). He enhanced knowledge on *Vedas, Puranas, Ramayan, Manusmriti* and other holy books. He returned home with those holy books instead of money. Because of his laborious nature, passion and determination, he became an intellectual politician and cultural expert in his early age.

He had to lead the *Nepal Bishwakarma Sangha* and *Bishwa Sarbajan Sangha* jointly with Manbir Bishwakarma from 1958BS. He actively worked for the social liberation but in the early period of Panchyat Era, he had to stay in India due to life-security according to his party’s suggestion. Later on he returned to Nepal and worked as a teacher for 16 years. From 1972 BS, he worked jointly with T.R. Bishwakarma and Hiralal Bishwakarma of Dharan in the social liberation movement. Padmasingh received the membership of *Nepal Rastriya Dalit Janabikash parishad* led by T.R. Bishwakarma as well. Then, he rigorously involved in interactions and programmes related to Dalit and marginalized communities. Sarjo Dillu argues, “Padmasingh had mastery in Sanskrit and religious interpretation. Once, there was debate of using “*Dalit*” word for backward communities or not. In his interpretation, ‘*Dalit*’ word does not refer to caste groups per se it shows the status and recognition to entire oppressed groups” (13). He participated in many interaction programmes and seminars and delivered his views regarding Dalit liberation, rights and equality.

Padmasingh defines, “*Dalit* means economically exploited; socially oppressed or discriminated; politically excluded; educationally backward; culturally hatred or boycotted; and the community neglected or ignored (also displaced) from the mainstream of the State” (Dillu 13). The definition captures the current picture of Dalit community, too. The status of Dalits has not changed yet. It may take many decades to overcome the

problems and to come out from the current status. Sarbajit, Padmasingh Bishwakarma and Hikmat Singh Bishwakarma studied Sanskrit and *Vedic* education from India. And, they had good command and mastery on *Vedic* education. That is why they could debate in *Vedic* interaction.



T.R. Bishwakarma, addressing the mass-demonstration in Kathmandu in 1990

Padmasingh was a follower of Sarbajit Bishwakarma. He had looked at the activities and characteristics of Rana administration very closely. The administration was discriminatory and bias. His young hot-blood burnt by looking all these things; so, he supported to every activities of Sarbajit from his early age. Sarbajit also trust him. When, Sarbajit was in Tansen Jail, he requested to Dalit leaders to leave Padmasingh alone with him. Saroj Dillu writes, “The incomplete campaign initiated by Sarbajit was completed by Padmasingh, Manbir and Laxminarayan” (18). Padmasingh was entangled with political movement; however, he had contributed a lot to the Dalit social movement of

Nepal. In his initiation, *Nepal Dalit Sangha*, a wing organization of Nepali Congress, was established in 2048BS, and he served as vice-chairperson.

By evaluating his contribution and rigorous activeness in party-life; he was appointed as the first Chairperson of National Dalits' Commission, 2002 and contributed for social reformation. Dillu states, "In every programme, he would attend with simple dress-up but he would deliver a powerful and attractive speeches referring to the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Geeta* and other holy books. He would not only recite the *Vedic* lines and stanza but also interpreted the meanings and essence of the holy books" (38-39). In his leadership, Dalit and other social reformers entered the Shaileshwori Temple of Doti district. Turner argues in this context, "it is a more inclusive concept than 'status' or 'office', and refer to any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized" (Turner 94). Cultural recognition gives satisfaction to the performers. But Padmasingh and his team faced a lot of problems while organizing the *Kotihom Mahayagya* in Shaileshori Temple, Doti. "Any religious ritual, no matter how apparently automatic or conventional, involves the symbolic fusion of ethos" (Geertz 113).

All the ritual activities are for purification. In this context, Mary Douglas writes, "while eating a person is in the middle state of purity and if any accident he should touch the server's hand or spoon, the server becomes impure" (35). It is considered that pollution is transmitted by sitting in the same row during meal. *Brahman/Kshetris* consider it as issue of untouchability. But Padmasingh's personality and cleanliness was smarter than anyone. Dillu describes about his daily life that "rising up early morning; doing daily purification process; chanting the *mantras*, *richas* and lines from *Vedas* and *Geeta* were his daily works" (47). Because of his schooling from *Sanskrit* and *Vedic*

education, he would work as *Pundit* in the village, especially in the religious and ritual activities. Hindu procedures, cultural and ritual activities, no Brahman Pundit could defeat him. “By looking at his knowledge in Sanskrit, *Vedas* and holy books, the professional *pundits* and *Pujaris* would also be surprised” (Dillu 47). He had also organized common *Rakshabandhan* programme when he was in National Dalit Commission. He invited the *Brahman pundit* but he recited the *mantras* himself. Performing the ritual and religious procedures gives relief and satisfaction as he had expressed in an interview. He was also members and advisor of various religious organizations. “He is advisor of *Teendhara Sanskrit Bidhyala* and member of *Jayatu Sanskritam* and *Bishwa Hindu Mahasangha*” (Dillu 48).



Padmasingh Bishwakarma, at the front of the queue in *Kotihom Mahayagya*, Shaileshwori Temple, Doti (Photo courtesy: NDC)

Padmasingh would compare Dalits with common he-goat. “He-goats are offered to Gods and Goddesses while worshipping but none can offer Tiger. We, Dalit are made



like he-goats by exploiters and they have been using us to fulfill their desires and goals. So that, now we should be tiger but not he-goats” (Dillu 59). He also advocated for social unity; so that, the Dalit movements could achieve its goal of rights, equality, dignity and social liberation. Keeping all the personal egos and differences aside, unified Dalit movement should appear at the front until and unless it achieves the goal. Varna system is unfit in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Varna system and casteism is socially unjust; religiously sinful; and legally crime” (Dillu 60). He clearly spoke about varna system and casteism.

National Dalits’ Commission also performed various religious programmes for the purification of soul in his leadership. Even, *Kotihom Mahayagya* was performed in Shaileshwori Temple of Doti. The cultural, religious and ritual equality are for social liberation of oppressed communities. Padmasingh would believe that religion and ritual had power to control. Justice was also possible in the liberation, freedom and equality in his view.

Padmasingh, by organizing ritual and cultural programme tried to prove as David Cannadine argues, “Distinctions between power as implicit social control and power as explicit acts of political coercion frequently generate an opposition between so-called symbolic power associated with ritual and ideology and so called secular power, associated with agencies and institutions of forces” (9). Whether it is formulated as influence or coercion, symbols or weapons, power has consistently been seen as something one possesses or not, and something that gives one some form of control over other. Power correlates with the tendency to see ideology as a totalistic worldview or a tool of the dominant classes.



Padmasingh was a hub to link between primary phase and secondary phase of Dalit movement. His fall is the end of Dalit *Vedic* and cultural movement. Nepali Dalit Movement needs to change the methods and processes to achieve the goal in time.

## 2.5 Cultural and Ritual Performances in Dalit Movements

From the inception of Dalit social movement, the main slogan was to protest against untouchability, casteism and varna system, so as Dalit movement did. However, the movement was not only limit within casteism and untouchability but reached to the agenda of special/progressive/compensatory rights, reservation and proportional inclusion in state mechanism and Dalits' representation in decision and policy making level. Hindu varna system itself is the root-cause of discrimination in Nepali society where misinterpretation of religious holy books were means for further oppression based on caste. Dalits are more discriminated in cultural, religious and ritual aspects rather than other. Dalits are boycotted in the temples, sacred places and religious performances. Therefore, solutions are also there with cultural and ritual performances. Realizing the need of cultural and ritual performances, Dalits' first generation adopted the methods and same further adopted by second and third generation as well. In this regard, Bell remarks "non-instrumental nature of ritual activities as symbolic or expressive activity" (71) is the method in the movement. Ritual performance has strong power to overcome the problems.

Bhagat Sarbajit Bishwakarma, who was aware about *Vedic* education, was suffered from Brahmans and high-caste people and defended against them with ritual and religious performances such as performing *puja* placing *tulsi* and temple in front of the home and performing *puja* and reciting the *mantras* in the Baptism (name giving

programme) of his son and so on. “Sarbjit and his company asked for permission to put the sacred thread to the then Prime minister” (Maharjan & Kisan 19-20). He had studied *Vedas* and religious books in India, so that, he could defend with *Pundits* and *Brahmins* of the village. He was not allowed to perform the ritual activities in the Baptism of his son. But, he did because he argued that any Hindu could perform Hindu cultural and ritual practices. The *varna* system guided society suffered him many times by taking support of state authority.

Sarbjit and his company established an organization named *Bishwa Sarbajan Sangha*, a social organization, by including the people from different Dalit castes. It was first organized movement in the history of Dalit movement in Nepal. “They performed the non-violence and disobedience movement by not delivering the services to high-caste communities” (Baraly 40). In “Sarbjit Bishwakarma and Dalit Aandolan”, article Ranendra Baraly writes, “Because of his activeness in cultural and religious performances, Brahminic society accused him involving in anti-state activities” (41). His efforts for establishing the schools for Dalit children, making them educated and encouraging to enhancing *Vedic* education were remarkable and appreciable efforts.

Sarbjit was exhausted with movement and tortures from government and Brahminic society, so as he eloped to India with his son and died in 2055AD. His efforts of initiating organized and unified Dalit movement were continued by next generation. Hikman Singh Bishwakarma and Padmasingh Bishwakarma also studied *Vedic* education in India. It was strong point and method to combat with high castes. But, Sarbjit could not achieve the goal of equality, dignity and just lives in his life-time.

Similarly, talking about the cultural movement, J.B. Bishwakarma argues that “Pashupati temple entry struggle was against religious discrimination” (54). At the beginning, Dalit movement mainly raised to eliminate the caste-based-discrimination and untouchability for religious equality. Shukraraj Shastri also raised the issues against ill social practices that he claimed that had created the obstacles for development.

Durkheim’s model of ritual underlies four influential theses concerning ritual as a means of social control: the social solidarity thesis; the channeling of conflict thesis; the repression thesis; and the definition of reality thesis. Various attempts have also been made to see how a dependence on ritualized activities for social cohesion and control correlates with modes of social organization. The notion of ritual is considered as an idolizing mechanism for transforming ideas into sentiments of significance of nature of belief and its relationship. While talking about religious beliefs, that have been understood in a variety of ways as pseudoscientific explanations, rationalization of customary behavior, personal or communal ideologies, or highly structured doctrinal formulations whose content have little impact on behavior.

In this context, the entry struggle was supported by intellectuals of high class people, too. J.B. Bishwakarma further writes:

State’s oppression and suppression against Dalits’ 18-day movement; state was compelled to remove the signboard written on “no entry for untouchable” kept on the Pashupatinath temple premises. It was the strong and successful temple entry struggle performed by Nepali Dalits, which kept the long-term importance to the movement. (55)



Dalits, protesting for their entry in public and private places, in Kathmandu

Similarly, Shaileshwori Temple entry struggle is remarkable incident in the Dalit movement. The temple is very popular temple of Doti district where *Lakshyahom Yagya* is performed in every 12 years and *Kotihom Mahayagya* in every 144 years. “The *puja-aaja* procedures are performed when Damai and Parki caste play the *Damaha*, *Baja* and other musical instruments” (Kisan 71). The practice of untouchability and casteism is rampant in this district.

During the period of 2007 to 2017BS, many common meal programmes were organized between Dalit and non-Dalit. “Harpal Parki, a Dalit had played *Shankha* in the death ritual of his father in 2021BS and played musical instruments in his son’s marriage ceremony in 2025BS, which were protest against casteism and untouchability” (72). Social activists and leaders also organized the common meal (*Sahabhoj*) to spread the messages of democracy and equality in the village.

Victor Turner talks about ritual by taking reference of Goffman’s concept “...All the world’s stage, the world of social interaction anyway, and is full of ritual acts” (05).

People want to perform ritual activities for their satisfaction. So, people visit and perform *puja-aaaja* and pay homage in the temples like Shaileshori temple. In the progress of movement, Durga Sob, Dalit women activist, and Damannath Dungana, Human rights activist entered the temple and paid homage in 2057BS. They wanted to perform the common temple entry programme with hundreds of Dalits. But, the public and administration stood against the temple entry programme. Talking about the incident, Damannath Dungana remarks:

I did not know that the Dalits were prohibited to enter the temple. I and Durga Sob entered the temple and worshipped together in the morning. Nobody stopped us. But *Pujari* recognized and greeted me. When, we reached the temple premises with agitation in the day, the temple was guarded with security. I thought, those security were for us...But, *Pujari* quickly locked the door and ran away. I chased him to get the key but I could not find... Army and Police also stopped us...Tek Bahadur Amatya, a local shopkeeper declared “you will die within three months because you brought Dalits together”. People publicly announced “Durba Sob, a Dalit woman, will die within six months because she attempted to enter the temple”. (Kisan 75)

In 2059BS, too, the Dalit organizations made a plan to enter the temple during the *Kotihom*. But Shaileshwori Temple Management Committee declared that no Dalit would be allowed entering the temple. So, Dalit organizations organized interaction programmes in the presence of management committee, human rights activists, police, administration, political parties and media. They prepared a 5-point-demand after the interaction. But

temple management committee protested against Dalits. Dalits also demonstrated jointly against the prohibition in the temple in the presence of pro-Dalits. In this context, Kisan describes:

In the presence of chairperson and members of National Dalits' Commission, members of NGO federation, Dalit leaders, Purna Prakash Nepal "Yatri", a social expert and leader, Ramchandra Bhandari, Secretary of *Vedic Karmakanda*, Birendrakeshri Pokhrel, Human rights leader and hundreds of other participants appeared in a rally. They agitated with banners and placards with slogan. (79)

They demonstrated in front of the temple for ten minutes. The rally converted into corner-programme reaching to the hall of District Development Committee. "The leaders from central level declared to enter the temple but their declaration remained unfulfilled" (Ibid). Dalit activists made third attempt in 2062BS. But this attempt also got the failure. Non-Dalit people organized rally against Dalits' attempt. There was tussle between Dalit and non-Dalit and some of them got injuries. "About 20 Dalit leaders and activists were displaced to Dipayal and Dadeldhura due to life security" (Ibid). At last, their demands were addressed by concluding with a mutual understanding (agreement). Agitating force of Dalits and temple management committee reached to the conclusion to do *puja-aaja* together. Dalit movement took it as a historical achievement.

Likewise, Siddhakalt Temple Entry of Bhojpur has also marked with ritual protest. The entry protest took place in 2021BS on the occasion of first anniversary of the enactment of New National Code. Religio-Cultural discrimination was rampant in Bhojpur at that time. Dalits were not allowed to get entry into the temple. But New

National Code has already prohibited any types of discrimination based on caste and community in the public places like temple. The movement was led by Lal Kumari Bishwakarma (Thuli Kamini) and Padam Sundas. The temple entry programme was supported by Panchayat liberal Leader Naradmuni Thulung of Bhojpur, as well.



A Dalit is playing *damaha* (drum) while performing *puja* in the temple. He has to play the *damaha* every morning and evening but he is not allowed to go nearby or enter the temple.

The objective of the programme was to assess impact of New National Code, 2020BS at local level. Padam Sundas writes, “After the enactment of Muluki Ain (National Code), we decided to enter the temple to assess the level of discrimination against Dalits. It was prepared for Dashain; where, Naradmuni Thulung had also given suggestions. But, all the plans were kept secret” (Sundas 104). When Dalits’ group reached the temple premises, there was already a group of non-Dalit people appeared to create the obstacles. The issue was linked with purity and holiness as Mary Douglas’s claim “holiness was given an external physical expression in the wholeness of the body

seen as a perfect container” (53). That is why there was confrontation between two groups. The case was taken to District Police Office. Police facilitated the conflicting groups to reach to the conclusion.

In the confrontation, Dalit group claimed, “According to the new National Code (Muluki Ain), 2020BS everyone is equal; and as Hindu, we have to get permission to worship God by entering into the temple. You should allow us to do *puja-aaaja*” (Sundas 107). Naradmuni Thulung also spoke in Dalits’ favor. He said, “King Mahendra has already declared that every Nepali is equal. Dalits are also Hindus; so that, they can do *puja* (worship). If you stop them, it will be against law and king’s declaration. It will be the dis-obedience of king’s order and declaration. The government employee should understand it” (Ibid). Everybody kept quiet for a while and concluded that nobody would stop or create the obstacles to enter the temple. However, high castes’ people weren’t happy with king’s declaration. They had already made the Dalit leaders as their threat.

#### 2.6. Beliefs in Cultural and Ritual Practices

It is believed that Hinduism has established and fostered caste discrimination and untouchability in the society. Currently some Dalits think caste liberation needs conversing the religions, rituals and culture. Yam Bahadur Kisan mentions in his book *The Nepali Dalit Social Movement* writes, “Dr. Ambedkar also led a conversion of thousands of Dalits to Buddhism. Many Dalits continue to reject Hinduism and convert to a variety of other religions. In Nepal, thousands of Hindu Dalits converted into Christianity”(153). However, religious conversion has not become an explicit part of Nepali Dalit Social Movement. Rather, they want liberation, equality and mutual respect within Hinduism and Hindu religion. All Dalit organizations, activists and leaders have



reached to the conclusion that religious conversions are not the only solution to Dalit problems. Regarding the religion Geertz argues:

(1) a system of symbols which acts to; (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by; (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence; and, (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that; (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (90)

The religion lies in its capacity to serve, for an individual or for a group, as a source of general, yet distinctive, conceptions of the world, the self and the relation between them.

Hence, a struggle which took place in Chitwan district in 2055BS was an example of cultural struggle. There were already organized common meal programmes to give a message of equality in society. In the meantime, a grand *Kotihom* was also organized in Kotghar Temple but Dalits' entry was strictly prohibited in the programme. The local so-called high castes' people created obstacles to get entry into the temple and offer the *Prasad* and *Veti* but after a long confrontation between two parties; rigorous protests from Dalits in the support of political parties, Dalits got victory by making an agreement in their favor. Pat Stepanek borrowing Rappaport's concept argues, "certain meanings and effects can only be expressed or achieved through ritual, which means that these meanings and effects follow from ritual's universal form...ritual does not have equivalents or satisfactory alternatives" (104). Ritual satisfaction cannot be felt from other process and things. Therefore, Dalit social movement was focused on cultural and ritual activities.

In the *Kotihom* struggle, as Rajankumar Pariyar describes, “big agitating group of Dalits appeared in the temple premises during the *Kotihom*. So, non-Dalits were back from their stand. And, Dalits’ temple entry was succeeded peacefully” (116). Yogi Naraharinath had already declared that he would not make any discrimination based on gender and caste. That was the positive step from *pundit*. But, the society blamed him of destroying the religious and cultural values.

In the *Kotihom*, Yogi Naraharinath and other pundits spoke publicly that there would not be any discrimination to the Hindu religious people. After listening this, Dalits were excited to attend the *Kotihom* with offering materials (*Prasad, Ghiu, Dhup, Dhudh, Jal veti etc*) but management team of the *Kotihom* only accepted the solid materials but rejected the liquid one. As a result, Dalit people decided to protest. They submitted an application to the organizer. But the organizer did not respond positively regarding the application. So, Dalit activists and leaders further planned to protest in an organized form by attending with mass at *Kotihom*. They asked to *Pundit* to respond in a convincing manner. Yogi Naraharinath replies “*Vedas* are rules of Hindu religion. According to the interpretation of *Vedas*, there are four varnas: *Brahman, Kshetri, Baishya* and *Shudra*. There is one religion; none is lower and higher. All are born equal” (Pariyar 120). It was convincing response from his side; however, the organizer and management committee did not become flexible and liberal in the moment. They did not change their stand.

Dalit women pilgrims also demanded for equality in the *Kotihom*, and Yogi Naraharinath convinced them with references to *Vedas* and Hindu philosophy. Then, they entered into the *Kotihom* premises and temple and started offering the *Puja* materials. Seeing all these things, *Pujari* ran away from there. “Religion is a two-stage operation:

*first*, an analysis of the system of meanings embodied in the symbols which make up the religion proper, and *second*, the relating of these system to social-structural and psychological processes (Geertz 125). Non-Dalit youths and police could not control the situation. Pariyar further writes about the consequences of the protest:

*Janamorch*, a political party, played a coordinating role to settle the confrontation. Though, Dalits were not formally given permission to enter the *Kotihom* premises and temple; everything was settled tactfully. The *Kotihom* was postponed due to the confrontation and in the name of touching the materials and entering into the temple premises by Dalits.  
(125)

Yogi Naraharinath played a crucial role for Dalit rights and equality. However, management committee, *pujari* (Priest) and high castes' people or youths of the surrounding were against Dalits. Political parties, especially *Janamorch* (People's front) played a supporting role for Dalits. Dalits' protest was also in an organized and unified manner; so that, it was a successful attempt. But, they could not change the mentality of those people; rather, Yogi Naraharinath left the *Kotihom*; and organizers also postponed the programme.

The degree of discrimination has not lessened even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Dalits are being discriminated on the basis of caste; women on the basis of gender, and indigenous on the basis of their culture. Regarding the protest to *Kotihom*, Pariyar writes:

[...] Slogans of the protest were related to rights, dignity and equality: Do equal treatment in the public places! Go to hell for Hindu feudal system! Stop discrimination against Dalits! Long live Dalits' unity! Let to utilize

equal rights in religious places! Go to hell for Brahminism! Let to utilize the goods of public places! Go to hell for evil culture! (128)

The protest, movement, and struggle are the forms of performances. The cultural, ritual and religious practices are strong form of performances for equal and dignified lives. Nepali Dalit Social Movement always kept the dignified life and equal cultural practices at the central point; however, the discrimination and oppression based on cultural and rituals are still in practices in our society. Dalits believe in Hindu religion and religious practices but they are discriminated more in religious places. In this context, Pariyar writes, “Dalit movement from its inception has been advocating for equal right and access in religious arena and social activities including temples entry” (135). It’s really painful for Dalits. They are still fighting to be treated as humane.

In “Understanding Cultural Geography” article, Jon Anderson writes, “We live in a world of cultural places. We live in it, we survive it, and we contribute to it, every day and night” (01). There are hundreds of temples, sacred places and religious places for Hindu religious people. But, supposed, those are not for Dalits. Though, it is said that Nepal is the birth-land of Gods and Goddesses but *Shudras* or so-called lower castes, according to Hindu varna system, are not allowed to reach, touch, enter and pray in those places, though, they are Hindus. Hindu cultural and ritual practices stop the Dalits to have access in those places. Its misery that being Hindu, Dalits cannot access in them; so, most of the protests and movements are focused in those religious and cultural places.

In this context, Gorakhakali Temple Entry Struggle adds one more brick in the social movement of Dalit community. This temple is located in Gorkha district and Royal family would take the God of the temple as ancestor’s God (*Kuldevata*). Thought, Dalits

were restricted to enter into the temple; Manabhadur Bishwakarma, member of National Assembly, had paid homage (*Puja-aaaja*) by entering into the temple. So that, Dalits were excited to involve in the *Puja-aaaja* (worshipping) procedure as *Dalit Mukti Samaj* made a decision to offer he-goats, cock, *rota* and other *puja* materials in the temple. Though, symbolic actions such as ancestor worship, animal sacrifice, spirit worship, divination or initiation rite are as religious but as Geertz argues “symbolic action comparable in sophistication to that we now have for social and psychological action...will be able to cope effectively with those aspects of social and psychological life in which religion plays a determinant role” (125). The actions are for social and psychological lives.

Regarding the temple entry struggle, the authority of the district also spoke in Dalits’ favor. So, Dalits reached at the compound of the temple premises. *Pujari* and non-Dalit created obstacles to move ahead toward the temple. That is why tussle took place and reached to the Gorkha district administration. The then royal family member Ganesh Bikram Shah argues that the temple was royal family temple, so, nobody could enter the temple; and, administration also did not support to Dalits. Dalits’ second phase temple entry attempt was being prepared in the presence of human rights leader Shushil Pyakurel, central leader of *Mukti Samaj*, local leaders and member of national assembly; and District Committee coordinated with stakeholders widely. Large number of Dalits’ agitating group with banners, placards, pamphlets, leaflets etc. entered into the temple premises. But *pujari* and administration locked the gate and requested them to sit for the table talk. “Pilgrims were exhausted. The situation was out of control; and they moved ahead. Police could not control, so they supported and welcomed Dalits to enter into temple” (BK & Pariyar 161). The movement was succeeded peacefully.

Likewise, another important incident of Chitwan was Bainkatesh Temple Entry Struggle occurred in 2061BS. In the silver jubilee of *Laxminarayan Bainkatesh Temple*, *Ramanuj Baishnav* communities were performing *Akhanda Harikirtan puja-archana* for World peace and national peace. The musical team of *bhajan* (religious songs) didn't find *madal* player so, a Dalit youth was assigned for playing the *madal* by sitting in the separate side. Knowing about *bhajan*, some Dalit children went to listen there but Chair of Management Committee, Umanath Kandel misbehaved them.

“Management committee also prohibited and mistreated some Dalit girls to snap the photographs in the Temple premises” (BK 274). By forming the Dalit Struggle Committee, Dalits demanded the equality and dignity in the public places. Series of interaction programmes with stakeholders including rights activists, journalists, lawyers and political parties were organized and solidarity from political parties were also received by Dalit Struggle Committee. “Talk-programme with stakeholders was broadcast from local Radio”(276). However, the programmes and campaign did not change the mentality of non-Dalits. Finally, Struggle Committee planned to organize a demonstration. “Huge mass-demonstration in the presence of Krishna Pahadi, Human rights activist, former MPs, Khagendra Sangraula, the writer, Dalit leaders Padmalal Bishwakarma and other appeared with reciting the slogan of equality, dignity, rights and social respect” (279). But the huge mass was stopped outside the temple. Some Dalit youths were beaten by non-Dalits during the confrontation.

Police and state's vigilantes did *lathi-charge* and attacked in the mass-demonstration. Hundreds of heads were broken; women and girls got injuries; and children were severely beaten. Human right was gravely violated in the confrontation.

The agitating groups also defended against the police and non-Dalits. Coconuts and *puja* materials were thrown to Pujari's faces. The banners of *Mukti Sangathan* were hanged on the *puja mandap*. Police opened the gun-fire. Situation was already been out of control. Dalits' mass-demonstration took the *mandap* in its control. "They performed *puja*, thereafter. It was not victory over the temple or *yagya* but it was victory over the social, cultural and ritual discrimination" (BK 281). They destroyed the strong social wall of inequality. Mass moved around the city and converted into the corner-meeting.



Women, participating in *kalash-yatra* in *Mahayagya* organized by Dalits in Okhaldhunga (Photo courtesy: [dalitonline.com](http://dalitonline.com))

Most of the *Khas Dalits* are Aryans and they believe in Hinduism. By birth, they claim themselves as Hindu. So, they perform the cultural and ritual practices as high caste people do. However, they are discriminated during those cultural and ritual activities. Varna system as they understand is the main cause of discrimination. So, they want liberation from social and cultural discrimination. In search of the liberation, Dalits

perform cultural activities instead of attending the programmes organized by high castes' people. Recently, Dalits have organized *Mahayagya* and *Saptaha* in different places of Nepal such as in Dharan, Jhapa, Chitwan, and Okhaldhunga. The online news portal [www.dalitonline.com](http://www.dalitonline.com) publishes the news about *Mahayagya* organized in Okhaldhunga where there was not any *Brahmin Pundit*, but the programme was preached and inaugurated by Janajati leader. It was organized aiming with Dalits social and cultural liberation. Instead of talking about the ritual and religious stories in the *Mahayagya*, the guests actively participated in the talk programme for Dalits liberation.



Janajati leader, MP, Yagyaraj Sunuwar, inaugurating the *Mahayagya* organized by Dalits in Okhaldhunga (Photo courtesy: [dalitonline.com](http://dalitonline.com))

## 2.7 Social Movement for the Cultural Reformation

Dalits are culturally discriminated much in the social lives. The casteism and untouchability is the main problem for them. They hardly think that they are also humane. Hindu varna system has kept *Shudras* at the bottom of social hierarchy. *Shudras* or Dalits are socially, culturally and politically discriminated, oppressed, suppressed and



boycotted by orthodox people of the society. Untouchability has directly separated the Dalits from society. Therefore, the entire Dalit Social movements are focused on cultural reformation or change. In this regard, Udhiyachaur Dairy Acceptance Struggle in Syangja was directly connected with untouchability issue because the dairy produced by Dalits was not accepted by local dairy collection centers. Padam Bishwakarma argues, “Dalit would cast the votes collectively to those candidates who gave words to end the caste discrimination and untouchability” (139). But, the situation did not change. The Dairy Collection Center rejected the dairy produced by Dalit farmers. The leaders could not fulfill their words.

After rigorous struggle of Dalits in the support of human rights activists and pro-Dalits, the movement reached to the climax and concluded with agreement that of accepting the dairy produced by Dalits. The agreement also provisioned the Dalits’ representation in the Dairy management committee. Old Dairy Collection Center was closed which was run by orthodox Brahmans. Brahminic society claims impurity as Douglas argues:

Four kinds of social pollution seem worth distinguishing. The *First*, is danger pressing on external boundaries; the *second*, danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system; the *third*, danger in the margins of the lines and the *fourth*, danger is from internal contradiction.  
(123-124)

It is said that the lower castes are the most impure and it is they whose humble services enable the higher castes to be free of bodily impurities. They wash clothes, cut hair, dress corpses and so on. “The whole system represents a body in which by the division of

labour the head does the thinking and praying and most despised parts carry away waste matter” (Douglas 24). The most of the impurities and purities protests are based on castes and cleanliness. The goods such as water, dairy and cooked food touched by Dalits are rejected due to the issue of purity. Douglas further argues “the sad wit of pollution as it comments on bodily functions symbolizes descent in the caste structure by contact with faces, blood and corpses” (125). Similarly, Gaidakot Dairy struggle of Nawalparasi and Sisapokhare water struggles of Sindhupalchowk were burning issues regarding impurity and untouchability.

Untouchability is severe form of human rights violation. It is inhumane praxis imposed to Dalits. Specially, non-Dalits rarely take the liquid food, cooked food and water touched by Dalits. In most of rural areas, Dalits are not allowed to touch the water sources such as well, tape and water tank. It is related to purity and impurity. Nepali Social movement had made the agenda for equality and access in water sources as well. In this context, Douglas in “Purity and Danger” claims, “contact with a person in the middle state will cause a person in the highest state to become impure, and contact with anyone in an impure state will make either higher category” (33). To the positive view- that primitive ritual has nothing whatever in common with our ideas of cleanness. The highest state is only gained by a rite of bathing, Douglas further argues:

A daily bath is absolutely essential to a ‘Brahmin’, for without it he cannot perform daily worship to his gods. Ideally, Haviks say, they should take three baths a day, one before each meal. But few do this. In practice all Haviks whom I have known rigidly observe the custom of a daily bath, which is taken before the mail meal of the day and before the household

gods are worshipped...every attempt is made to finish work that is considered dirty or ritually defiling ... another bath should be taken when the man returns home... (34)

They recognized degrees of religious purity. The highest is necessary for performing an act of worship. And, some think about the state of impurity.

Dalits are given the food separately. They cannot sit together with non-Dalits. Gouglas further argues, “Uncooked foods may be received from or handled by members of any caste- a necessary rule from the practical point of view in a society where the division labor is correlated with degrees of inherited purity (34). The process of eating is potentially polluting, but the manner determines the amount of pollution. The pollution, impurity and touchability and untouchability are related to caste in Nepali context. The agenda of the Dalit movement was mainly focused on non-discrimination and equality. In this context, a common meal programme was organized in Udaypur to deliver the message of equality and dignity. Some of the high caste people attended in the common meal but most of the people remained apart from it.

Rajesh Bishwakarma writes, “The liberal upper castes’ people, who attended the programme, were boycotted by their own families and relatives. They were not allowed to touch even their parents’ corpses during the cremation. They were boycotted even to perform death ritual of their parents” (202). A case on untouchability was filed in the district court but court also could not deliver the justice to the victims.

At national level, a huge Dalit movement took place in 2057BS. All sister organizations of all political parties and all senior leader from Dalit communities formally and directly participated in *Singhdurbar Gherau and Bhadrakali Anasan*

programme. Padmalal Bishwakarma remarks, “Equality, rights, reservation, and Dalits’ representation in state mechanism were major agendas of the movement” (260). It was the greatest movement at national level in the history of Nepali Dalit Movement. No party and leader from Dalit community could remain apart from this movement. Dalit leaders from all parties actively participated and led the movement. The movement also ended with a historical agreement.



Dalits’ demonstration for Dalit-friendly in new constitution 2072, in Kathmandu

For the liberation, Dalit community actively participated even in the ten-year People’s war. This involvement of Dalits was for the social, cultural and radical change of the society; which was expected to solve all types of discriminations and differences imposed to Dalits. Tilak Pariyar writes about the contribution of Dalits in the people’s war that, “About 1,105 Dalits got martyrdom in the ten-year-long people’s war which was 12.6% of the total martyrs...Dalits contribution in people’s war remained invaluable. Without Dalit sacrifice, there would not be any possibility of victory”(323). If anybody

raises questions regarding Dalits contribution and sacrifice in nation building; it will be great fault, injustice and opportunistic expression.



Dalits' joint Movement in Kathmandu (*Photo courtesy: FEDO*)

Therefore, Nepali Dalit Movement has already completed for seven decades. At the inception, the agenda were related to equality, rights and end of casteism and untouchability. Now, the agendas have been amended with time span. After 1990s, end of caste-based-discrimination and untouchability, equal opportunity, equity, proportional representation and reservation in state's mechanism, political and economic empowerment and secularism became national issues and agendas of protests and movements. Ten year people's war had also made these agendas as major agendas. Aahuti argues, "The awareness of common people has risen significantly and also the Maoist war had developed considerably to address this discontent" (149). And, the Dalits' agendas should be addressed accordingly.

Dalits' representation in Parliament of Nepal has satisfactory. Dalit MPs could raise the strong agenda for Dalits liberation. Parliament is in the process of making the

Rules and Regulations to implement the New Constitution. Like Foucault's concept, power can change the history; Dalit members of parliaments can also do a lot in Parliament, if they want. They need to have will-power to practice their power when they are in authority. Aahuti gives some suggestions to the Dalit movement, "...joint actions by Dalit organizations, mutual cooperation between Dalit Political organization and civil society for combined Dalit efforts for rightful representation in state mechanism, and encourage stakeholders to start realizing the Dalit problem and the importance of equitable Dalits representation..."(159), may give way to achieve the expected result. Today's main agenda is proportional inclusion or reservation of Dalits in all spheres of state's mechanism. In the federal republican state, Dalits have a lot of opportunities if Dalits are well equipped to grasp the opportunities in time.



Dalits' Movement at climax in Kathmandu (*Photo courtesy:FEDO*)

## Chapter III:

## Significance of Ritual Performance in Dalit Movements

Nepali Dalit Social Movement from its inception adopted cultural and ritual performative practices. So that, the movement spread throughout Nepal with same procedures of entering into the temples, offering solid and liquid materials to Gods and Goddesses, chanting mantras, reciting lines, *richas* and stanzas from holy books, praying like Brahmans and adopting the appropriate practices while worshiping, organizing *Yagya*, *Mahayagya*, *Saptah*, following the procedures *Aaradhana* (meditation) etc. were some of the ritual practices adopted by Dalits, as Hindu religious people do.

The varna system has controlled the social and cultural practices in Nepal. The type of social controls thought to be wielded by ritual has been envisaged in a variety of ways. For some, it is a matter of mental indoctrination or behavioral conditioning, either through repetitive drills or the effective states induced by group enthusiasm. Some have also emphasized the cognitive influence of ‘modeled’ and ‘idealized’ relations. The emphasis is sometimes on the effect of communal ritual on individual psychology, at other times on ritual’s role in structuring interactive relationships. Ritualization is very much concerned with power. The objectification legitimation of an ordering of power as an assumption of the ways things really are, ritualization is a strategic arena for the embodiment of the power relations. The relationship of ritualization and social control might have concerned with ritual activities.

Distinctions between power as implicit social control and power as explicit acts of political coercion frequently generate an opposition between so-called symbolic power associated with ritual and ideology and so called secular power, associated with agencies and institutions of force. Whether it is formulated as influence or coercion, symbols or

weapons, power has consistently been seen as something one possesses or not, and something that gives one some form of control over other. Power correlates with the tendency to see ideology as a totalistic worldview or a tool of the dominant classes.

Ritual practice both implies and demonstrates a relatively unified corporate body, often leading participants to assume that there is more consensus than there actually is. If the ritual construction of power on the higher levels of social organization builds on the micro-relations of power that shape daily life on the lower level of society, changes in the latter level can precipitate a crisis in which the demands of ritual to conform to traditional models clash with the ability of those rites to resonate with the real experience of social body.

Performing ritual and cultural practices; perhaps, would be the better way for social reformation. However, Dalit Movements have not only adopted the ritual and cultural practices for social liberation now but they have also raised strong agenda for political and economic rights, equality and justice. After the seven-decade-long Dalit movements have gained significant historical achievements. The New Constitution, 2015 and many Dalit-friendly legislations and rules have been enacted as consequences of the Dalit movements and protests.

Regarding the problems of Dalits, in the *socio-cultural* field, there is a provision of not allowing discrimination “at any public place”, and such action has been considered as “serious social crime” in the constitution. The CBD and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2011 has provisioned it to eliminate the casteism and untouchability; and to guarantee the remedies from any types of discrimination and suppression. If anyone commits any discrimination based on caste and birth; s/he gets legal punishment as per the provisions of Act. In addition, in education, there is a provision of providing



free education with scholarship for Dalit students. The technical and vocational educations have become very supportive for Dalit.

In the *economic field*, there are specific provisions for providing land and shelter for landless Dalit. In modern occupations utilizing traditional skills, Dalits are given more priority. In government, semi-government and non-governmental industrial institutions, Dalits have been provided proportional employment opportunities in Public services, Nepal Police, Nepal Army, Nepal Armed Force, Universities and organized Corporations of Nepal.

In *political field*, the state has acknowledged the principle of compensation and additional 3 percent seats at the federal and 5 per cent seats at provincial level on proportional representation are allocated for Dalit. Dalit have been enjoying proportional representation in other institutions as well. Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2006 had also ensured the proportional representation of Dalit in CA. For instance, former CA had 50 (8.32 per cent) and recent CA (II) and/ or current Parliament have 40 (6.65 per cent) Dalits' representation.

Furthermore, the New Constitution of Nepal, 2015 has addressed various problems by ensuring them as fundamental rights such as Right to live with dignity (Article 16), Right to freedom (Article 17), Right to equality (Article 18), Right to Justice (Article 20), Right against untouchability and discrimination (Article 24), Right to Dalits (Article 40), Right to Social Justice (Article 42), and Right to social security (Article 43) as fundamental rights. Fundamental rights are considered as obligatory to state. So, if anyone feels violation of these rights, s/he can knock the door of Courts for legal remedies. Likewise, the New Constitution has provisioned National Dalits' Commission and National Inclusion Commission as constitutional bodies.

Similarly, Nepal has adopted secularism according to the new constitution. All the religious people feel equality in this adaptation because Hindu cultural domination and hegemony is formally ended with the declaration of secular state. In this situation, Dalits have been utilizing the freedom of cultural practices by organizing religious, cultural and ritual programmes such as *Mahayagya*, *Hom*, *Puranas* and other ritual activities (that to be done during the life-time from birth to death) without any social and administrative obstacles. Nobody creates any obstacles while organizing these types of programmes now; rather the social organizations, political parties and intellectuals encourage and promote these types of programmes in the society.

Both governmental and non-governmental agencies have been organizing awareness raising and sensitizing programmes to eliminate casteism and untouchability practically from the society. Donor agencies have invested huge amount of budget for these types of programmes from national to local level through governmental and non-governmental mechanisms. They have also encouraged livelihood, self-depend, empowerment and right based approaches for Dalits.

Therefore, state has recently enacted the Dalit-friendly constitution, national legislations, rules and regulations. Dalits' rights, access and representation in state mechanism and social dignity have been ensured through legal measures. In the same way, the mentality of so-called high castes' people is also being changed as per need and time span. The orthodox Hindu people have become liberal and flexible on the Dalit issues. By looking at the scenario of reformation, progress and achievements, it can be said that Nepali society is, supposed, heading towards equality-based just society which was expected by Dalit movement of Nepal.

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