

LIVELIHOOD DYNAMICS OF HILL DALITS
A CASE STUDY OF DALIT COMMUNITY OF KERUNGA VDC

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LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

This dissertation entitled “**Livelihood Dynamics of Hill Dalits: A Case study of the Dalit Community of Kerunga VDC**” by Mrs. Mamata Kharel is prepared under my supervision for the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Sociology.

I, therefore, recommend it for evaluation to the dissertation committee.

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LETTER OF APPROVAL

This thesis entitled “**Livelihood Dynamics of Hill Dalits: A Case Study of the Dalit Community of Kerunga VDC**” by Mrs. Mamata Kharel has been accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Masters of Arts in Sociology.

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CHAPTER - ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As an academic and development discourse livelihood has become a buzzword throughout the world in recent years. A number of studies have been made to examine the changing livelihoods of people in relation to the changing social, economic and political context. In the literal sense, livelihood is the means of earning a living. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living (Chambers & Conway, 1992, cited in Ellis, 2000). Making modification to this definition Ellis mentions that a livelihood comprises the assets (natural, physical, human, financial and social capital), the activities, and the access to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual or household. Ellis points out that such type of definition of livelihood fails to convey change over time and adaptation to evolving circumstances, and further makes clear that livelihood strategies are dynamic; they respond to changing pressures and opportunities and they adapt accordingly (Ellis, 2000).

Livelihood approach seeks to gain an accurate and realistic understanding of people's strengths (assets or capital endowments) and how they endeavor to convert into positive livelihood outcomes (DFID, 2002). Blaikie et al. (1994) have defined livelihood as "the command an individual, family, or other social group has over an income and/ or bundles of resources that can be used or exchanged to satisfy its needs". Most rural households rely on multiple income sources and adopt a range of livelihood strategies. Various activities like occupation, investments, productive strategies and others that individuals/ households undertake constitute the livelihood strategies. Livelihood strategies enable individuals/ households to obtain the means of their survival. Individuals/households develop livelihood strategies according to the environmental contexts. Some continue their traditional strategies while others modify them for meeting the basic requirements of their existence. Several factors impinge upon livelihood strategies that operate from individual/household levels, i.e., internal

to regional/nationals/ global level, i.e., external. Hence living of any human population is the output of the dynamic livelihood strategies.

Changes in the livelihood strategies in many cases are the responses to the changing livelihood platforms induced by development practices as envisioned by political regime/politics, the overall nature of economy and the associated environmental changes. The introduction of communication and transportation; commodity circulation and access to market to the rural areas have altered the people's livelihoods in various ways. Environmental changes and developments are likely to dispel some groups of people away from such sites of development activities while attracts others towards their centers (Chhetri, 2006). It is worth noting that subsistence agriculture, wage labour and labour migration out of the country are the ways of earning livelihood for the *Dalits* under this study. These livelihood strategies are the results of responses to the environmental changes brought by the development processes over time. These strategies are developed to adapt to the changing circumstances. The changes in the livelihood strategies of *Dalits* are also due to the activities of non-*Dalits* too. Hence, *Dalits'* perception of the environment is closer to Barth as he states that for any ethnic group, the environment is not only defined by natural conditions, but also by the presence and activities of other ethnic groups on which it depends (Barth, 1981, cited in Chhetri, 2006). The environment does not refer to only natural conditions but constitutes the social, political, cultural and economic conditions as well. Various factors, operating in macro- and micro-level, affect the environmental conditions. Market forces may create environmental ravages by stripping resources away from local communities. They may interfere with people's subsistence practices by forcing them to compete within the pressures of market activities. Human subsistence strategies are, thus historically shaped and reshaped by changes both in the internal needs of people and the external interests of market and politics (cited in Pandey, 2006).

This study is based on the context of interaction of changing socio-political and economic contexts and Dalit population. In Nepal, *Dalits* are addressed by different terms such as "*achoot*" (untouchables), "*tallo jat*" (low caste), "*Pani nachalne choi chito halnu parne jat*" (caste from whom water is not accepted and whose touch requires sprinkling of holy water for purification), and in recent years, by a soft term,

Dalit (oppressed group) (Dahal, 2010). *Dalits* are considered as the socially excluded, and economically and politically marginalized and underprivileged population in Nepal. They are socially and religiously stigmatized as untouchables and kept in lowest echelon of caste hierarchy in Nepal (Khadka, 2007). In Nepalese society *Dalits* are in last position from the economic sense and more exploited and vulnerable from the political and socio-cultural point of view (Ahuti, 2004). In a nutshell *Dalits* are socially oppressed, economically hard pressed, politically silent, educationally illiterate and religiously hated group of people (Koirala, 1996). Under such identities how the *Dalits* have been sustaining their livelihood? This is the fundamental question to be addressed in this study. However, the social, political and economic situation of *Dalits* at present is not same as it was in the past.

Dalits under this study comprise three groups – Kami, Damai and Sarki. Though, traditionally they were allocated to pursue different occupations, their settlement is within the common territorial area and possess similar mode of living. To the greater extent their socio-cultural and politico-economic situation is similar. Amidst the fast moving currents of change that have taking place in rural areas of Nepal, these *Dalits* too have been experiencing several upheavals in their livelihood. So, this study is primarily focused on examining why and how *Dalits* have been doing what they have been doing.

Situational Analysis of *Dalits* in Nepal (2002) states that, ‘the caste based occupation was the major means of livelihood for the *Dalits* population until a couple of years ago but it has been gradually disappearing over the years primarily due to three reasons: i) they themselves think that their occupation has lower social prestige and demeaning socially; ii) many young educated *Dalits* boys and girls do not like to follow their father’s footsteps, and iii) they are finding difficulty in competing with the open market which supplies various types of similar goods, depending upon the needs of the customers. In such situations this study tries to unravel how *Dalits* have been making the modifications in their economic behaviours and activities to sustain their lives amidst the various opportunities and constraints that have been continuously evolving over time.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Social and economic inequality between *Dalits* and non-*Dalits* still occupies an important place in Nepalese society. Socio-economic status and condition of *Dalits* seems to be low compared to other caste and ethnic groups. The social opportunities, offered to the citizens by the state, are confined to the privileged sections of society. The deprived and disadvantaged groups like *Dalits* have been still exposing to the experiences of cumulative inequality. These marginalized groups have yet to experience fully the so-called fruits of modern development. In the past *Dalits*'s livelihood was bounded within the feudal and closed village economy that was characterized by patron-client relationships between upper castes and them. By large, they used to derive their means of subsistence from their traditional caste based occupations and laboring for upper castes. But, at the present capitalist relations have been developing rapidly in the village and economy has opened up. The village population including *Dalits* need to comply with the emerging situations so as to making a living. However, *Dalits*, as many empirical studies show, have been facing several hardships despite of their diversification of occupations. *Dalit* households have lower land endowment, which also has lower productivity due to its marginality, and poorer access to skilled off-farm employment opportunities; they are more likely to concentrate their labour in farming and other low profile menial works within the village and also wherever they have moved for earning a livelihood.

The livelihood strategies of *Dalit* households seem to be changing depending upon the new opportunities and constraints that have been emerging from local to national and global level. Economic change, education system, modernization, urbanization and globalization, in single phrase, development processes play a decisive role in changing the structure of a society, a community or a group. *Dalits* are no exception to such changes. The development process involves growing availabilities of modern technology - instruments and materials, and knowledge. However, these could not encourage most of the *Dalits* of the study area to modernize their traditional artisan productions. They could have involved much of their human capital to bring more output from their artisan production but they have not done so. Rather the shift of manpower from artisan production to some other alternative fields such as foreign employment, wage laboring, etc, has been increasing. Basically, traditional artisan

production and contractual labour were the most common profession but in course of time the new generation of the *Dalit* individuals became passive in the traditional profession. The multiple causes behind this trend and what has led their livelihood pattern to be shifted are to be explored. It is assumed that livelihood change is not uni-causal. Various factors ranging from political-economic to socio-cultural to environmental are responsible for producing and developing changes in livelihood.

This study examines livelihood diversification as a survival strategy of *Dalit* households in Arghakhanchi district, particularly in Kerunga VDC. It shows changes in livelihood strategies along with persistence which have come about historically. Particular attention is paid to the shifts in the economy during the past few decades, particularly with the onset of new development discourse and practice since 1990s. It attempts to describe and explain how a *Dalit* community has made modifications in its ways of life to changing context and how their livelihood strategies have evolved and are evolving. It also deals with the natural, socio- economic and cultural constraints as well as opportunities that have influences on their livelihoods. The study integrates the household and village economy with the regional, national and global systems. It highlights the trends of Dalits' involvement in diverse fields of earning such as wage laboring in the nearby areas, labour migration for seeking employments beyond the country, remittance entering into the *Dalit* households, their traditional artisan production system and modification if any, and how these have shaped and reshaped the *Dalits'* economy. Analysis of dynamics of livelihood of *Dalits* is oriented towards the understanding of persistence and change over time. The study attempts to deal with the following questions.

-) How has the *Dalit* community been adapting to the changing environmental context and development processes?
-) What were the livelihood strategies of *Dalits* in the past and what are they at present?
-) How have the development processes altered the socio-economic life of *Dalits*? and

-) What are the socio-economic constraints and opportunities that have been existing over time?

1.3 Objectives

The general objective of the study is to account the changes that have occurred in *Dalits'* livelihoods along with the processes involved in such changes. Particularly, the study will hold the following specific objectives:

- i) To describe the socio- cultural and economic background of the Dalits;
- ii) To examine the changes in the livelihood strategies of *Dalits* during the last decade; and
- iii) To identify the constraints and opportunities shaping *Dalits'* livelihood strategies at present.

1.4 Rationale

Much of the pertinent works and literatures on hill *Dalits* have emphasized on accounting their livelihoods. In tune with these, this research will explore the dynamics of livelihood strategies of *Dalits* in a specific environmental context through the logic of political-economic analysis. It tries to uncover, through sociological tools and techniques of data collection and analysis, the persistence and change in the livelihood strategies along with the environmental changes. The rationality of research will remain academic and obviously be basic and pure in nature. The findings of this study may be the subject matters for the further in-depth sociological research.

1.5 Organization of the Study

The study has been divided into six chapters. Chapter one introduces the background, statement of the problem, objectives and rationale of the study. Chapter two discusses the literatures that are relevant to the present study. Several books and articles have been reviewed thoroughly which have guided the description and analysis in order to meet the objectives of this study. Chapter three presents the methodology adopted for the study in which methods of data collection and analysis have been described.

Chapter four discusses the social and demographic aspects of the *Dalits* under study that are closely tied with the analysis of research problems. Chapter five presents the research findings, interpretation and analysis of livelihood dynamics of *Dalits* so as to meet the objectives of the study. Finally, chapter six presents the conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER-TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Review of the existing literature relevant to the issue raised is the most integral part of any sociological research/study. It is closely linked to the idea of discovering new areas of study and the research gaps. It provides the conceptual, theoretical, empirical and methodological guidelines to sail the research smoothly in order to fulfill the objectives. In other words, literature review enables to contextualize, compare and generalize the findings of the research. The concepts and methods derived from the literature can be a source for making comparisons in data that are collected from the field. In a nut shell, review of the literature enables to grasp the social reality through the formulation of specific research questions and proper analysis of the data and facts.

There have been some significant works carried out regarding the livelihoods of various caste/ ethnic groups of Nepal. How do the change in natural and socio-economic environment have resulted in different strategies of livelihood are adequately addressed by different scholars in their research based works. Many literatures reveal that people often diversify their livelihood options in the face of livelihood crises. In rural areas, crisis associated with stagnant production has led to a deepening struggle for the fulfillment of basic needs, causing people to diversify their livelihoods options (Uprety et al., 2012). In the case of tailors, blacksmiths and goldsmiths, the new generation is not following traditional occupation mainly because of low income and marketing opportunities, but also because of the lack of social respect these occupations hold (Adhikari, 2008; Nepali and Pyakuryal, 2011). The changing livelihood patterns of different caste/ethnic groups is due to changes in social traditions, market systems and other economic systems (Timilsina 2003). In the articles compiled in the book “*Changing Livelihoods*”, Jagannath Adhikari (2008) shows that the traditional relationships are changing fast due to the greater integration of village economies with the outside world, increased awareness because of literacy and education, and new political agency of the deprived and disadvantaged groups. The new relationships that are developing are based on the mutual benefits resulting from the self-interested pursuit of best livelihood strategies appropriate for each person’s resources. As a result, the bargaining power of the disadvantaged groups has

also been increasing. The preliminary assumption about the *Dalits* under this study is parallel to this idea.

In Nepal there are differences between *Dalits* (low-caste) and non-*Dalits* (high-caste) with regard to income, land holding, participation in markets and social life. The incidence of income poverty is about 46 percent for *Dalits* whereas it is only 18 percent in the case of high-caste people (World Bank, 2006). Caste-based untouchability and division of labor, illiteracy, landlessness, semi feudal system etc. are responsible for perpetuation of discriminatory labor practices such as *Bista*, *Balighare*, *Haliya* etc. In *Bista* and *Balighre* practices, each *Dalit* household has a non-*Dalit* patron and provides their labor throughout the year, and get rewards in kind once in a year during the harvesting time (IIDS, 2008). Through the specific bonded systems of *haliya*, *kamaiya*, *haruwa*, and other caste-based occupations, many of the poorer households relied on their landlords or those with a wealthier economic status for their livelihoods. *Haliya* system as was prevalent in mid-western and far-western Nepal, in the form of bonded labour, had not existed in the place of present study.

In the face of increasing availability and also competition from relatively cheap and fancy or finely finished mass manufactured products like clothes, metal wares, leather products, etc imported from foreign land artisan production of most of the *Dalit* households have suffered a major decline. For some households their traditional artisan production became the activity of past and almost declined to the point of total elimination. In a case study of *Sarki* people from Naubise VDC of Dhading district, Rai (2009) finds that *Sarki* people have almost given up their traditional occupation of leather work. Those who are involved in leather work are working in different private companies owned by non-*Sarki* or other people in Kathmandu and other places. It indicates that they are only the employed labourers in the factories. Except farming, other occupations have recently emerged as easily accessible occupations. Rai further notes that the *Dalit* people like *Sarkis*, have used two alternatives; either to increase their access to land resources or to increase their access to other income generating activities to make their living in substitution of their traditional occupation. The *Dalits* of elsewhere of Nepal have the similar tendency of choosing the different alternatives for their livelihood.

In a comparative study of *Dalits* of Hill and Terai, Khadka (2007) finds that in case of Palpali *Dalit*, though they are affluent in skill and knowledge, they have to rely on multiple economic sources. But most of Dhanushali *Dalits* are relying on single occupation i.e. single economic source as wage labours. Though traditional occupations are the basis of *Dalits*' identity, they are hesitant to express it in the society. Khadka notes that traditional occupations of hill *Dalits* such as blacksmith, sewing and shoe making do not support their livelihood, as they should. So, their traditional occupations do not hold of primary source of livelihood. She observes that the economic system of *Dalit* society of Palpa district is strongly associated with the social structure where one group is depended upon others for their specialized services. She finds that in terms of wage rates, there is no difference between the *Dalits* and non-*Dalits* in Palpa district. The case is similar in case of the *Dalits* of study area.

Knowledge and practice on traditional skill technology played an important role in the livelihood of *Dalits* in the past. Parajuli (2012), in his study of 'Knowledge and Practice of Traditional Skill Technology among Hill Dalits of Kaski', finds that majority of the *Dalit* households have no member who knows the traditional occupation. Some household members have skills in their traditional occupations but they have not utilized for livelihood and most importantly to transfer it to new generation. He further notes that among *Dalits*, *Pariyars* have knowledge on traditional skill technology while in the case of *Nepali* and *Bishowkarma*, traditional skill technology is getting eroded or not being transformed. The study made by Parajuli clearly indicates that younger generations from *Dalits* groups are no longer interested in learning the traditional skill technologies. Encroachment of market and changing value about traditional occupations are responsible for the reluctance in transferring and learning the TST related knowledge. Indeed, at present, most of the *Dalit* households under this study do not possess traditionally allocated occupation; rather have broadened their occupation in tune with the changing circumstances.

Blaikie et al (1980) pointed out that one of the most significant changes at present occurring within the peasant economy is that affecting the relationship between agricultural producers and members of occupational groups: tailors, blacksmiths, and leatherworker – or to give them the caste labels to which the occupations supposedly

relate, *Damai*, *Kami*, and *Sarki*. Certainly, the *bista* system, in the form of patron-client relationship, that existed for centuries became of less significance as the higher caste people attracted toward the imported goods instead of the products of occupational caste.

Most of the population of the lower castes, the *Dalits*, is worse off in every sphere of economic and social life. According to Nepal National *Dalit* Social Welfare Organization (NNDSWO), the *Dalits* lag far behind in their income (the lowest PCI), education (the lowest rate of literacy and enrolment) and other human development indicators (the lowest HDI). NNDSWO argues that in recent years, due to the disregard of their arts and skills, many *Dalits* are giving up their occupation which has also worsened their livelihoods. In addition, lack of modernization and limited access to markets has put these occupations in danger. Obviously the occupations of *Dalits* are threatened by the process of modernization and globalization but their livelihoods have not become so much worse in all the cases, rather through the diversification of their livelihoods they have exploited the new opportunities.

Caplan (1972) remarked that economic change is most likely to take place when the village is not a self-sufficient unit. She further noted that where people are unable to earn sufficient grain and cash to make up their deficits locally, they frequently turn to migration as a solution. In the village under study this could be true as many *Dalit* youths have temporarily migrated to India and gulf countries for earning. This trend of temporary migration seems to have tremendously increased the economic status of *Dalit* households. But the close observation of *Dalits*' economic activities under this study area raises a question on what Caplan saw before four decades: many studies of economic change in South Asia revealed that development has led only to a worsening of the position of the lower castes. The same situation may not be applicable always and everywhere in case of lower castes. Development opens up new frontiers of economic activities that the lower castes also may harness better off earnings. She argued that when the local job market expands, they cannot obtain work, possibly because of caste discrimination or because they are unskilled and illiterate. Certainly, because of their illiteracy *Dalits* are lagging far behind on the education influenced job sectors, but in the local labour market they are dominant and seem to get privileged.

Pokharel and Chhetri, in their study of changing livelihood strategies of *Dalits* of Pokhara valley (2006) have written that *Damai*, *Kami* and *Sarki* have traditionally played significant roles in the rural agriculture all over Nepal by providing different craft services as well as agricultural labour. However, the traditional occupations of these *Dalits* are gradually disappearing from many Nepali villages. Today, very few *Dalits* depend for their livelihood on their traditional craft skills such as metalworking, cobbling, tanning, tailoring and music playing. The downfall of traditional agriculture and local peoples' access to the market center of Pokhara pushed the traditional livelihood strategies of the local *Dalits* to the margin. The *Dalits* of Pachbhaiya revealed that their traditional occupations and skills as outdated and incompatible with the new situation called as 'development'. Pokharel and Chhetri have concluded that *Dalits* have been the losers in the new situation. Their poverty and deprivation have not been reduced due to the new economic and environmental changes which have certainly created opportunities for others. They add, in fact, many of the *Dalits* who were landless and socially discriminated have become further marginalized economically after their traditional occupations were rendered obsolete by the changes in the environment and society around them. But, in the case of *Dalits* under this study, the situation seems to be different. There is no poverty and deprivation in *Dalit* community at present as existed before two or three decades. *Dalits* also have become able to adopt the new opportunities and also their bargaining power has increased.

Nepali (2008) states that lack of modernization in caste based technology of the *Dalits* and a failure to orient into the market is responsible for their continuing backwardness. The traditional products of *Dalits* are unable to compete with the product of the multinational companies, and, hence, they can provide them little more than subsidiary source of livelihoods. He asserts on that landlessness, marginal and small landholdings and a chronic food deficiency of more than six months in a year are some of the features of the *Dalit* economy. Historically, *Dalits* have been practicing their traditional caste occupation and selling their products to their clients to make a living. Besides these, the main economic activity that supports for majority of *Dalits* is wage laboring. So, Nepali observes, *Dalits* have adopted multiple resource trapping strategies for their survival these days.

In Nepal, caste discrimination is observed in the labor market such that a high-caste individual is paid higher than a *Dalit* (Hatlebakk, 2002). Low-caste households have lower opportunity cost of labor due to discrimination in non-agricultural labor markets, especially in regular off-farm employment. Thus, they concentrate their labor in farming and in the seasonal agricultural labor market where they have an ‘advantage’ because high-caste households consider some of these works to be below their dignity. To some extent, government’s inability to provide the subsidy and sufficient attention to modernize *Dalit’s* indigenous/ artisan production and to incorporate their production system in mainstream national economy also perpetuated their poverty. Aryal and Holden (2011) argue that the less land endowment of low-caste households contributes to their labor supply in the agricultural labor market and low wage rates there. They further write that as low-caste households have lower land endowment and poorer access to skilled off-farm employment, they are more likely to concentrate their labor in farming. The wage rates regardless the nature of work and also the gender does not seem discriminatory in the *Dalit* community under this study. This could be because of the short supply of labour force since the so called upper caste people have the greater tendency to migrate permanently or temporarily out of village. Or could it be because of the less interest or no necessity of other caste people to be indulged in local labour market.

This review of literatures helps to understand the research problems raised in this study and the ideas generated from these literatures will be proceeded with the research procedures. This study is primarily concerned on how the *Dalits* have earned their living and what factors have been affecting their economic life over time. So, review of literature provides insights to look upon *Dalits’* livelihood from multiple angles covering the multiple dynamics. The existing literatures are found primarily concerned in depicting the impacts of recent developments on *Dalits’* artisan production and how they have been further marginalized. But, they have not sufficiently elaborated what multiple strategies they have been adopting for coping in the changing situations and consequently what is their present livelihood characterized by. So, this study attempts to fulfill such gap in the existing literatures and opens up the issues to be dealt with.

CHAPTER - THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is a way through which the research problem is solved systematically. It consists of the various steps that are followed in studying the research problem along with their logics. In fact, it covers the overall process of research that comprises not only the research methods or techniques but also the ways of data presentation and interpretation. Research methodology addresses the questions of what, why and how of the research.

3.1 The Study Area and Reasons for the Selection of Study Area

The fieldwork for this research has been carried out in *Dalit* village of Kerunga V. D. C. of Arghakhanchi district in west Nepal. These *Dalits* are the least studied distinct caste groups. The area in and around *Dalit* village has witnessed a number of significant and influential social, political, cultural and economic changes particularly during the past few decades which I have been witnessing as being the habitant of same place. I got fascinated on seeing the rapidly changing ways of life of *Dalits* which motivated me to uncover the process of such changes. In such context, this study is concerned to obtain a better picture on the *Dalits'* livelihood strategies; more specifically on persistence and changes and the factors operating in shaping their livelihood strategies at present.

3.2 Research Design

The orientation of this study is descriptive and analytical since it depicts and describes the characteristics of a situation of *Dalits'* livelihood and analyzes the facts related to research problems. The study is built on survey method including comparative and correlational methods. Likewise, it has used the facts and data for making the analysis to reach to the general conclusion. The research design incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection and analysis keeping in mind that such a mix method would allow to obtain a reality of *Dalits'* livelihood.

3.3 Nature and Sources of Data

The data used in the study are of both quantitative and qualitative nature. Quantitative data and information indeed supplement and complement qualitative data and information. The data required for the analysis of *Dalits'* livelihood dynamics are derived from the fieldwork hence will be primary data. Primary data collection procedure accumulates various aspects of livelihood sources. Secondary data are also be used as per the availability and relevancy. Data are collected at multiple levels - individual, household and village level.

3.4 The Universe and Sample

The universe of the study comprises 26 households, i.e., all the *Dalit* households that form a cluster which is segregated from the non-*Dalit* settlement. All the households of *Dalits* have been taken as the units of study, i.e., a complete enumeration of all the households have been made. Therefore, the census has been made rather than the sample study.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Integrative methods are used to collect the data needed to address the issue of persistence and change in the livelihood strategies of *Dalits*. That is to say, using different data collection methods or multiple sources of data and evidences, the better picture of study area can be derived. For this purpose, there is the need of triangulation, because it brings together the quantitative and qualitative data. In triangulation, the researcher gathers evidence from multiple sources to address the questions at hand from different points of view (Baker, 1999). Field data methods have included household surveys, livelihood survey questionnaire, unstructured key informant interview, and observation.

3.5.1 Household Survey

The data on demographic aspects like age and sex structure, household size and marital status; socio-economic aspects like educational status, occupational status and residential status are collected through household survey. In fact, household survey presents the real picture of the study site. These data are required for interpreting and

analyzing how the *Dalits* earn livelihood through the mobilization of their available human, social and economic capitals.

Household survey was administered in all the households of two densely clustered *Dalit* villages. The senior member(s) of every household were requested to provide the information about the aspects listed in survey table. Particularly, household survey table was used to obtain the information on demographic and socio-economic aspects.

3.5.2 Livelihood Survey Questionnaire

Structured questionnaires were administered through interviews with respondents to obtain the various economic activities of *Dalits*. The researcher was oriented to interview with household head and/ or senior member of the sample household to ensure the reliability of information. To some extent livelihood strategies of past were also collected through this method. This tool was employed to obtain the data on *Dalits'* livelihood dynamics/strategies of past and present for making a comparative study. Indeed, it enabled to obtain the data on persistence and change in livelihood of *Dalit* households.

3.5.3 Key Informant Interview

Through this method oral histories on settlement, past trend of the artisan production, labour allocation, *balighare(bista)* system were collected. Based on the information provided by elderly people and *Dalit* activists, the researcher reconstructed their history for chronological comparison of their livelihood. It is the most important method to achieve the data on past since there is the lack of written documents regarding these *Dalits*. Few individuals who have continued their traditional occupation and few individuals who have adopted the new occupation were interviewed. The experiences of traditional occupation holders and the reasons why individuals/households shift their occupation were asked. With the help of check list (Appendix III), interview with key informants was taken.

3.5.4 Observation

Non participatory observation method was used to obtain qualitative information on *Dalits'* overall environment and its influence on their livelihood. As the researcher

has very closely witnessed the recent changes in and around the *Dalit* village, many aspects of livelihood of *Dalits* are illustrated. Repeated visit in and around the *Dalit Basti* and the acquaintance with Dalits' day-to-day activities provided the insights and also factual data on what they do how they do.

3.6 Data Analysis and Presentation

The livelihood strategies of *Dalits* are examined at various levels- individual level, household level, community level and by sex and age. The qualitative data based on observation and key informant interviews are used to substantiate the quantitative analyses. Ungrouped data are interpreted where necessary. The facts and figures are utilized in the justification of the points being made.

3.7 Limitation

As far as possible, every effort has been made to obtain reliable facts and figures. But, the possibility of errors on accumulating these cannot be denied. The study is heavily dependent on the facts and figures provided by respondents and the researcher's personal observation. The study has not incorporated the interaction of *Dalits* and non-*Dalits* minutely. It has been dealing the economic aspect of *Dalits*' life in asserting that this is the aspect that concerns their very survival, and, as such, governs the nature of life in other aspects too.

CHAPTER – FOUR

SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS OF DALITS

4.1 The Social Setting

The *Dalit* community, the focal village of this study is located in Kerunga VDC, eastern part of Arghakhanchi district. It consists of a densely populated cluster, where ward no. 7 and 9 intersect. This cluster is surrounded by the motorable road that connects Sandhikharka, district's headquarter with Tamghas, headquarter of Gulmi. However, *Dalits* are the inhabitants of every ward of Kerunga VDC in varying numbers. A pseudo name *Dalit Basti* is given for the study area. *Dalit Basti* is located in a slightly slope area. The houses display considerable similarity in design and technique of construction. Most of the houses are two storied with the mud plastered stone walls and steeply pitched roofs of tin and slate. The *Goths* (animals' sheds) are separately constructed near the houses. The village boundaries are clearly demarcated from non-*Dalits'* settlement. *Dalit Basti* is surrounded by *Newar* and *Brahmin* communities.

Vishwakarmas, generally known as *Kamis*, *Darjis* or *Pariyars*, generally known as *Damais* and *Sarkis*, generally known as *Nepalis* are the only *Dalit* castes inhabiting in the area of study. These people are treated as untouchable caste group by non-*Dalits*. Practice of caste-based untouchability has been existed in day to day affairs, mostly concentrated in religious and socio-cultural aspects. This includes denial of inter-caste marriages between non-*Dalits* and *Dalits* and high and low caste *Dalits*, entry into the Hindu temples as well as the houses of non-*Dalits*, and eating food together in festivals and other ritual parties. Within *Dalits* also there is the stratification of high and low socio-cultural rank. *Kamis* and *Sarkis* regard themselves as of high status than *Damais*. The *Dalits* have limited social and ritual relationship with other high-caste people. However, they have been playing important roles in the ritual practices as well as agricultural sphere of non-*Dalits*, especially of *Brahmins*, *Chhetris* and *Newars*, and also in various local cultural and ritual practices. *Damais* and *Kamis* have special roles and functions to perform in local Kalika temple, *Kot*. *Damais* are the musicians in the temple. They play the musical instruments collectively specially in Navaratra or Dashain. *Damais* also play their musical instruments in the ritual

ceremonies like birth, bratabandha (initiation ceremony) and marriage of non-*Dalits* in a hired basis. *Kamis* sharpen the weapons like knives and swords that are used to sacrifice animals like goats and buffaloes in the temple.

At present both the *Dalits* and non-*Dalits* have perceived that the rigidity of caste system that existed earlier has been waning gradually. In other words, it can be said, on observing the interactions and relations between *Dalits* and non-*Dalits* that caste has been transforming. The practice of untouchability has been flexible in certain aspects than in the past. Yet, *Dalits* have been segregated in certain rituals and social ceremonies. *Dalits* now do not feel their degraded socio-economic status as the concept of inclusion, right, participation, etc have entered into the village's social life. *Dalits* are free to choose their occupation rather than their traditional caste based occupation. It might have become possible because of political and social awareness on one hand and the impact of neo-liberalism on the village economy on the other. It is revealed that economic situation of *Dalits* have been rapidly changing than that of their socio-cultural situation.

4.2. Demographic Profile

The total number of *Dalit* households in *Dalit Basti* are 26 consisting of total population 162 at the time of field survey (September-2016). Out of 26 households, 13 households are of Damai, 10 households of Kami and 3 households of Sarki. These *Dalit* households have been intermingled despite the fact that Damai are in the lowest strata in the caste hierarchy. The average *Dalit* household size is 6.75 persons which is larger than the national average household size- 4.88. More or less the population pattern of these *Dalits* seems to be similar to that of non-*Dalits*. Table 1 shows the distribution of households and population by size of households.

Table 1: Distribution of Households and Population by Size of Households, 2016

Household Size	No. of Households	Total Individuals in Hhs.
3	3 (11.5)	9 (5.6)
4	6 (23.1)	24 (14.8)
5	4 (15.4)	20 (12.4)
6	1 (3.8)	6 (3.7)
7	4 (15.4)	28 (17.3)
8	3(11.5)	24(14.8)
9	3(11.5)	27 (16.6)
12	2 (7.7)	24 (14.8)
Total	26 (100)	162 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2016.

The household size ranges from three to twelve. 50% of the households have 3-5 individuals whereas another 50% of the households constitute 6-12 individuals. Most of the households reflect their single or nuclear type. The residential status of some persons of the household is somewhere else (out from the house) for different purposes. If there is more than one son in family, they are separated from the main household when they become financially independent. Since household has little property, especially the land, to be partitioned, individual *Dalit* members manage to purchase land or take in lease, locally known as *kut* as far as practicable. The *Dalits* prefer to live in nuclear family in the recent years. They say that it becomes easy to manage the resources for the fulfillment of the requirements of family members in a nuclear family.

Table 2: Age and Sex Structure of the Dalit Population under Study, 2016.

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
0- 4	2 (1.2)	8 (4.9)	10 (6.1)
5- 9	6 (3.7)	6 (3.7)	12 (7.4)
10- 14	6 (3.7)	14 (8.6)	20 (12.3)
15- 19	11 (6.8)	7 (4.3)	18 (11.1)
20- 24	9 (5.5)	4 (2.5)	13 (8.0)
25- 29	9 (5.5)	12 (7.4)	21 (12.9)
30- 34	16 (9.9)	5 (3.0)	21 (12.9)
35- 39	2 (1.2)	3 (1.8)	5 (3.0)
40- 44	3 (1.8)	1 (0.6)	4 (2.4)
45- 49	3 (1.8)	8 (4.9)	11 (6.7)
50- 54	3 (1.8)	7 (4.3)	10 (6.1)
55- 59	4 (2.4)	1 (0.6)	5 (3.0)
60- 64	2 (1.2)	4 (2.4)	6 (3.6)
65+	4 (2.4)	2 (1.2)	6 (3.6)
Total	80 (48.9)	82 (50.1)	162 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2016.

As per the data on age structure, it is evident that the majority of the *Dalit* population (i.e. 56% of the total) was between twenty and sixty years of age at the time of field survey. The larger proportion of the population belongs to the age group 25 - 34 years comprising of 25.8 %.The population of females exceeds by 1.2% with slightly more than half of the total population. The overall sex ratio is 97.5, i.e. about 98 males per 100 females. But the sex ratio fluctuates in different age groups. The elderly population of *Dalits* of age 60 and above is 7.2% and the children population below the age of 15 is 25.8 %. This indicates that one third of the Dalit population is dependent population.

Marriage is almost alike a universal phenomena in *Dalit Basti*. Marriage of *Dalit* follows some rituals and ceremonies of their own which seem quite different from Hindu rituals. Generally endogamy is practiced among *Dalits*. No case of exogamous marriage neither in the past nor at present is recorded in *Dalit Basti* since there is

strict rule of marital segregation based on Hindu concept of purity and pollution. So, *Dalit* individuals prefer to marry with the individuals of opposite sex within their own sub-caste category. However, in some cases marital relationship can be established between two different sub-castes within the *Dalit* category. One exceptional case of inter-caste marriage, remarriage of both, was reported - one male individual was found married with *Magar* woman. *Magar* is an ethnic category.

Table 3 : Marital Status by Sex and Age group for Dalits under Study, 2016

Age Group	Never Married		Currently Married		Widowed	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
15- 19	11	5	-	2	-	-
20- 24	7	-	2	4	-	-
25- 29	4	-	5	12	-	-
30- 34	1	-	15	5	-	-
35- 39	-	-	2	3	-	-
40+	-	-	18	16	1	7
Total	23	5	42	42	1	7

Source: Field Survey, 2016.

The data on Table 3 show that there were a total of 84 currently married couples on 26 households under study. In the age group 15- 19 only 2 females were reported to be currently married while the corresponding figure for males was none. In the same age group the number of never married males and females were 11 and 5. It indicates that early marriage is not practiced in *Dalit Basti*. However, this is not because of their education and awareness, but may be because of the influence of non-Dalits or anything else. It is seen that marriage of girls occurs earlier than boys. Usually most of the marriages occur after crossing the age of 20. Liberty is allowed for boys and girls to marry who have reached the age of puberty. Yet, families directly involve in the management of marital ceremonies. Earlier there used to be vast age gap between married couple. But in the later years there does not seem long age gap. The number of widowed females is more than males above 40 years. Remarriage is not often practiced. Nor any case of polygamy is reported in the study area under the surveyed households.

4.3 Educational Conditions

In *Dalit Basti* illiteracy is rampant and very few have received higher education. As a result, their economic and social progress is hampered. One of the most important factors which deprived and marginalized the *Dalits* from being employed in government services and other forms of employment is the low level of the educational attainment. Many *Dalit* children who enroll in the primary level do not complete the secondary level. There is the higher trend of drop out of students in the school education. In the past, the reasons behind the low enrollment and drop out of the *Dalits* included caste-based discrimination, socio-economic problems and prejudice against them. However, at present such a condition does not exist that deprives them from getting education. Yet, *Dalits* are not so much interested toward education in social, political and economic liberal conditions. It might be because of their lack of confidence on competence in getting and finding jobs through education. So, *Dalit* parents do not force or encourage their children to complete their school level or higher level education. Even the *Dalits* who have improved their economic condition in the recent years with the involvement in foreign employment are found reluctant in getting education.

Table 4: Educational Status by Age- group and Sex among Dalits under Study, 2016

Age group	Illiterate		Literate		Primary		Lower Secondary		Secondary		Higher Level		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
5- 14	-	-	-	-	11	14	1	6	-	-	-	-	12	20
15- 29	-	-	12	14	-	4	5	3	10	2	2	-	29	23
30- 44	-	-	12	6	4	2	2	1	2	-	1	-	21	9
45+	7	18	3	4	3	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	16	22
Total	7	18	27	24	18	20	9	10	14	2	3	-	78	74

Source: Field Survey, 2016.

The data in the table 4 reveals the educational status of *Dalits* under study. The *Dalits* above the age of 45 years are mostly illiterate. The incidence of illiteracy is higher in females as compared to males. In case of females, females below 30 years are better

educated than the rest. This is the evidence for that the females' access to school education opened up widely since the last three decades. However, it cannot be related to the growing awareness in *Dalits* regarding the importance of education in public sphere as most of them do not complete their school level education. The greater incidence of female illiteracy is seen above the age of 45 years. It reveals that there is wider gap in the educational attainment among males and females.

The educational status according to the different age group implies that the trend of joining the school in the recent years has considerably increased than in the past. But low enrolment and subsequent high dropout rates are the main reasons for lower rates of educational attainment in the secondary and higher levels. The most significant reason for this, the *Dalits* regard, is poor economic condition. The total number of *Dalits* who have passed SLC is 16, of which 14 are males and 2 are females. Most of them have passed SLC in the recent years. 10 males and 2 females who have passed SLC are below the age of 30 years. Only 3 males have got/ are getting the higher education. No females have got the access on the higher education. The involvement of *Dalits* in government jobs/ services is negligible. Only one individual is reported to be involved in government service, Nepal Army.

Table 5: Distribution of Economically Active Population by Age, Sex and Residential Status, 2016

Age Group	Residential Status			
	Home		Away	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
15- 29	12 (11.4)	20 (19.1)	15(14.3)	3 (2.9)
30- 44	3(2.9)	8(7.6)	17(16.2)	1(0.9)
45- 59	6 (5.7)	16(15.2)	4(3.8)	0
Total	21 (20.0)	44 (41.9)	36(34.3)	4(3.8)

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Figures in the brackets are percentages.

The economically active population of *Dalitis* found to be dispersed for earning livelihood. The data on above table show that there is an overwhelming proportion of economically active population living and working away from home. Of the total of

105 economically active population, 61.9% is at home- of which 20% men and 41.9% women, and 38.1% is away from home- of which 34.3% men and 3.8% women. The women living away from home are not free and independent migrants. Rather, they are living away, particularly in India with their husband.

The mobility of men is higher as compared to women. In *Dalit* society, men have main responsibilities for the maintenance of their family, while women also support significantly economically. The percentage of women living at home implies that they are more involved in agriculture, domestic works and other cash income generating economic activities, mainly wage labouring. Not all the economically active population is involved in income earning activities. In few instances the population below 15 years of age is also involved in economic activities while the population above 60 years of age engaged in economic activities is significant.

CHAPTER FIVE

DALITS' LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

Livelihood strategies of people rely on the context or environment in which households work to make a livelihood. As the context or environment is dynamic, the strategies a household adopts cannot remain static. Extension and development of road transport network, expansion of markets and availability of goods and commodities, introduction of communication facilities, and other infrastructural developments in the rural areas, i.e. penetration of capitalist economy or the forces of globalization based on neoliberalism have led *Dalits* to change their livelihood strategies. Traditional economic activities started to lose their strength as the means of livelihood. The traditional artisan production became outdated and incompatible with the new market situation. When a change has been perceived in the economic structures, the households have reacted and adjusted to the new context.

Diversification is the creation of diversity as an ongoing social and economic process, reflecting factors of both pressure and opportunities that cause families to adopt increasingly intricate and diverse livelihood strategies (Ellis, 2000). Various forces to village economy have generated changes in livelihood patterns. These forces are demographic features of household including family size, age and sex, and economic structures including land ownership, access to resources and services, market interaction and development activities. The relations among these forces have set the boundaries of possible income generating activities in which a household has engaged. Engagement of household members in diverse portfolio of income generating activities is in response to financial vulnerability.

The connection of rural areas to markets and cities through roads and communication has brought alternative sources of livelihood for rural populations. The increase in access to markets has created opportunities for new sources of wage labor and other opportunities in non-farm sectors. Population growth, subsequent land fragmentation, decreased availability of arable land, availability of work outside the village, availability of consumer goods in the local market and the need for cash income are bringing changes in the nature of rural livelihoods of *Dalits* along with other caste people as well. These changes have had direct impact in *Dalits'* livelihoods, creating

more diversified livelihood sources. In the past, *Dalits* relied mainly on agricultural labour and traditional caste based occupations for subsistence with some income from outside in the form of remittances. However more recently, many of the *Dalit* households could hardly rely on agriculture or the caste based occupation for their subsistence. At the same time, the sources of subsistence are not limited to a single source. Many *Dalit* households of the study area depended on two, or more than two, sources for livelihood.

Table 6: Distribution of Households by Livelihood Strategies, 2016

Livelihood Strategies	No. of Households
Artisan Production + Wage Labour + Agriculture	5(19.3)
Artisan production + Wage Labour + Foreign Employment	3 (11.5)
Foreign Employment	3(11.5)
Foreign Employment + Wage Labour	6 (23.1)
Artisan Production + Foreign Employment	3(11.5)
Others	6 (23.1)
Total	26(100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Figures in the brackets are Percentages.

Table 6 displays the livelihood portfolio of *Dalit* households. Proportions of income generated from the different components of livelihood are not available to compare their contribution for sustenance of household. But, it is evident that for majority of the households, income from multiple sources has intermingled. Putting it differently, most of the *Dalit* households have allocated their labour in multiple occupations of multiple fields of income. It is appropriate to mention here that agriculture for most of the households is of less importance. It is because of the lack of ownership of sufficient cultivable land in one hand and the reluctance of new generations of *Dalits*, like other upper castes, in engaging agricultural practices and searching income beyond farm activities on the other. Hence, non-farm income which is generated either from wage laboring or from foreign employment is significant for household sustenance. In other words, it can be said that remittances and income from wage laboring accounted for a substantial proportion of household income. However, it is

interesting that despite of seeking wage labour in off-farm activities, still *Dalits* have been involved largely in agricultural wage laboring. The households with comparatively large size are found to allocate human power in multiple income sources. Except the *Dalit* individuals involved in foreign employment, most of other individuals who live at home are found to be engaged in different works. For example, a same individual can be a wage labourer in agriculture, in construction work, in artisan production as well. It implies that with the seasonal demand of labour, a same individual mobilizes his/her labour for earning.

For about 19% of the households, artisan production combined with agriculture and wage labour comprises the main source for the sustenance of household livelihood whereas for about 12% of the households a remittance obtained from foreign employment is the primary source of livelihood. About 12% of the households are involved in artisan production, wage labour and foreign employment. About 23 % of the households' livelihood has relied on foreign employment and wage labour. In these households male member(s) is found to be involved in foreign employment and usually female member(s) is engaged in wage laboring. The others category consists of the occupations such as shop keeping, government service in Nepal army, vehicle driving and professional singing. Two individuals from one household and one individual from other household are involved in shop keeping. These households belong to *Sarki*. Two individuals from same household have a mobile phone shop in district headquarter, Sandhikharka. Other individual from another household occasionally involves in trading of buffaloes and also has a shoe shop where he sells readymade shoes and also repairs leather shoes.

The major livelihood dynamics of Dalits of the study area are interpreted here.

5.1 Agriculture

Undoubtedly agriculture is the predominant economic activity in most of the rural areas of Nepal. In other words agriculture is the most important source of livelihood for the rural population. But because of the lack of the ownership of the sufficient cultivable land, most of the *Dalit* households are not engaged in sufficient food production. A majority of the *Dalit* households have food deficiency. Agriculture has never fulfilled the undisputed role of being the primary economic activity not only for

Dalit households but also for the majority of the households of other castes as well in the study area. *Damai*, *Kami* and *Sarki* have traditionally played significant roles in the rural agriculture all over Nepal by providing different craft services as well as agricultural labourer (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2006). These castes were, and still are, the major labour forces in farming and harvesting of agricultural productions. In fact most of the *Dalits* of the study area are not agriculturalists themselves rather they were and are the employees of agricultural practices of non-*Dalits*. There was and still there is to some extent the farmer – labourer relationship between non-*Dalits* and *Dalits*. Earlier there used to be a yearly or longer contract between the two parties in accomplishing agricultural practices. But in the present such a trend has declined almost completely.

Table 7: Distribution of Households by Size and Type of land holding, 2016

Landholding Size(Ropani)	Households by Land Type		
	<i>Khet</i>	<i>Bari</i>	<i>Pakho</i>
0	20 (76.9)	-	-
0.1- 4.9	5 (19.2)	21 (80.8)	16 (61.5)
5- 9.9	1 (3.9)	3 (11.5)	10 (38.5)
10+	-	2 (7.7)	-

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Figures in brackets are percentages.

Land is one of the measuring parameters of socioeconomic status of the population in agrarian rural societies. It is the principal source earning for livelihood for much rural population. But, because of nearly landlessness of majority of the *Dalit* households, their livelihood seems to be miserable. Despite of non-ownership of the land, Dalits used to depend in the past to a greater extent and low lesser extent on land for their livelihood as suppliers of agricultural tools and labour. *Dalits* are marginal cultivators due to their smaller land holdings (Adhikari, 2006). From Table 7, it is obvious that most *Dalit* households have small holdings that are not suitable for agricultural production sufficient for more than six months in a year.

The land can be categorized as *Khet* (irrigated fields), *Bari* (terraced, sloped and non-irrigated fields) and *Pakho* (Steep fields not appropriate for cultivation and used for

producing fodder and forage for livestock), like elsewhere in Nepal. In the *Dalit Basti* 76.9% of the households do not own any *Khet*, and hence away from paddy production which is considered as the main food grain. 80.8% of the households have *Bari* less than 5 *ropani*. The disparity in the land distribution reflects that there is the disparity in the grain production.

It is difficult for the landless *Dalits*, they believe, to make a living on a share cropping (locally called *adhiyan* and *kut*) basis because fertilizers and pesticides are needed for better production which requires cash and they always have shortage of cash. Further, wage rate is also getting higher every year and above all if weather does not become favourable, then there will be the loss of investment and it would be difficult for the household to cover the loss. There is also a strong perception amongst young *Dalit* that there is no benefit in doing agriculture. So, laboring *Dalit* households are looking for alternatives for their subsistence. Only three households are reported to be involved in share cropping (locally called *kut*) in the study area.

Livestock raising is also considered as one of the integral elements of agricultural practice. But the *Dalit* households under this study are found not so much interested in it. The reason why most of the *Dalit* households do not involve in livestock raising can be attributed to the shortage of the ownership of sufficient land as animals are to be feed with grass and fodder grown in the land. There is also the lack of usable public forest that supports livestock raising. In the recent years livestock raising needs more investment for feeding them manufactured nutritious food, for preventing and curing the diseases and also for managing breeds. So, many *Dalit* households do not find easy this occupation as they have shortage of cash. They also do not have access to the dairy to sell the surplus cow and buffalo milk since they are considered as polluting caste by other castes. None of the households own large number of animals to form a herd traditionally and also presently.

Table 8: Distribution of households by Number and Type of Livestock owned, 2016

No of Livestocks	Households by livestock type		
	Buffaloes	Cows/ Oxen	Goats
1	17	-	6
2	2	6	3
3	1	-	3
Total	20	6	12

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The data in the table show the status of the livestock raising activities in *Dalit Basti*. It reveals that *Dalits* are indeed not pastoralists. Out of 26 households, 20 households have buffaloes among which 17 households own only a single buffalo. 6 households each own a couple of oxen which they employ for ploughing the field in agricultural season in the wage basis. Only 12 households own goats varying the number between one to three. Almost all the *Dalit* households are found to keep chicken ranging from two to two dozen.

Dalit households are the consumers of buffalo meat and chicken. Consumption of buffalo meat may be because of the cheaper cost than that of goat meat. However, they do not raise buffaloes in significant number. They depend on upper caste people for the supply of their meat requirements. They purchase the male buffaloes and infertile she buffaloes for slaughtering in some occasions. *Dalit* households prefer to grow local chickens but not so much in a commercial manner. In the recent years high caste people, *Brahmins* and *Chhetris* also consume chicken. So, *Dalit* households sell the chicken for others and also consume themselves. Since the last decade some *Dalit* households who are involved in ploughing the field of other castes tend to have bullocks. In the season of cultivation of paddy, wheat and maize, *Dalit* ploughman with their bullocks are hired in the cash basis. This trend is getting popularity in present as upper caste people left to keep cows and oxen. Ploughman with his bullock gets 1000 to 1200 rupees per day.

5.2 Artisan Production/ Traditional Caste Based Occupation

According to the traditional allocation of caste based occupations, *Shudras* lying at the lowest strata of socio-cultural hierarchy and now popularly known as *Dalits* are the artisan producers and service providers for the upper caste people. There has existed the patron-client relationship between so called upper caste people and lower caste people in various forms. *Damais* involve in stitching and repairing of clothes, and play the traditional musical instruments, called *panche baja*, during important festivals and different cultural and ritual ceremonies. *Kamis* involve in the manufacturing and repairing of metal utensils including household implements such as knives, pots, pans, etc and agricultural implements such as spades, plough blades, etc. The *Sarkis* are the manufacturer and repairer of leather goods such as *Nara* (in some places it is also called *halludo*) used while ploughing the field, musical instruments like madal, damah, etc and shoes.

People who continued their caste based occupations were also using cash in exchange for their services rather than *bali*. *Dalits* who continued to work in the traditional occupation of sewing in still get grains every year for their tailoring work although they increasingly prefer cash. Few *Dalits* who work in the iron workshop (*aran*), are getting grain (*bali*) for their metal working but now they prefer to be paid in cash. In the past, a *Dalit* household used to get at least three *pathi* of grain – paddy or maize or wheat – from the *bista* household. In addition to this, *Dalits* used to get other food items and cloths as well in certain rituals and festivals. However, there used to be a variation in giving and receiving of *bali* between *non-Dalit* and *Dalit* households beyond the minimum contract.

At the time of field survey, out of 26 households, only 13 households – 7 *Damai* and 5 *Kami* households and one *Sarki* household - are found to be involved in the traditional caste based occupation or artisan production but not entirely in traditional forms. Eight households had left their traditional occupation in the last one and half decade. Since the last decade, those households involved in traditional occupation have accommodated their occupation with the changing context of market. With the increasing flow of readymade goods, such as clothes, metal utensils, shoes etc in the rural areas, traditional occupation of *Dalits* have been declining to a greater extent. They could not compete successfully with the imported factory made goods which

compel them either to leave or to modify/ make commercialize their occupation. Massive entry of readymade clothes reduced the tailors' work to a large extent. However, two *Damai* households have established their tailoring shop in local market and stitch the new clothes and repair the old one in cash basis. Yet, they have not completely abandoned the getting of payment in kind.

Both men and women involve in tailoring works. Tailoring households have at least one sewing machine. Four *Damai* households in the study area have two sewing machines. Five households perform their tailoring work in their own house, while two households have established their shop in Amarai, a local bazaar. In some cases, if their clients request them to stitch and repair the clothes in their house, they carry the sewing machine in their clients' house and perform their work. In the naming ceremony of children, rice feeding ceremony, marriage and death rituals, *Damais* are invited to stitch the clothes in upper castes' houses. In case of the birth of son, his naming ceremony, rice feeding ceremony and marriage, *balighare Damai* household has an obligation and right to participate. In such ceremonies a *Damah* is played in the concerned house. Sometimes, *Damais* in a group are also hired for playing their traditional musical instruments and for singing and dancing. However, this trend has become very rare in the recent days. *Balighare Damai* also claim to get new clothes, cash or any other things in kind from their *bista* in some festivals like *Dashain*, *Tihar*, etc and other ceremonies. During the Hindu festivals, such as *Teej*, *Dashain* and *Tihar* the tailors become very busy in stitching new clothes. August to November is their months of tailoring season during which they tend to earn comparatively more cash. During these months major Hindu festivals and marriage ceremonies fall.

The *Kami* households involved in artisan production have their *aran*, iron smithy factory in their own premises. Their work needs more physical force. So, male members of the family are found to be involved in iron smithy. Women support for heating the iron till becoming red in the fire. They also help for making the coal from wood in the forest area of their *bista*. *Kamis* do not purchase the coal from market; rather they make coal themselves, especially in the winter season. They purchase iron in the form of slab from market. In some cases their clients also bring iron to make *hasiya*, curved knives and *kodali*, spade, etc. *Kamis* become very busy prior to the onset of agricultural season, particularly prior to the monsoon to make the new iron

implements, agricultural implements and also to sharpen the old one. They sell new iron implements in cash but do not charge any cash for their *bista* in case of sharpening of the weapons. Like *Damais, balighare Kamis* also have some obligations and rights to participate in the various ceremonies of their *bistas*. They also get cash or payment in kind in such ceremonies. The role of *kamis* as the maker and repairer of metal goods and kitchen equipments in the village has been reduced drastically during the last couple of decades.

The *Sarkis*, not only of the study area but also of neighboring area are found to be involved in leather processing and refining works. In the study area, out of three *Sarki* households, only one household, better to say only one individual is found to be involved in shoe making and repairing. This household does not have any *bista*. So, shoe making and repairing is completely in cash basis. Since, readymade factory made shoe are available in the villages, locally made shoes have not so much demands. The *Sarki* individual has a shoe shop where he repairs the shoes rather than giving priority for making new shoes. In the recent years with the availability of plastic fiber/rope made *halludo*, leather *halludo* have been completely displaced. This is the reason why *Sarki* households might have given up making raw leather *halludo*.

Still, in some respects *Dalits* and *non-Dalits* have maintained traditional *bali pratha*. The households from where the *Dalits* get *bali* are popularly known as *bista*. Actually, the term *bista* is used to call the individual members of *bali* providing household. In exchange for *Dalit* products and services, high-caste landowner patrons, *bista* used to provide harvest shares, *bali* and were expected to meet many other subsistence needs of their respective *Dalit* dependents. At the heart of such patron-client relationships there existed a sense of mutual moral and economic obligation and right from both sides. On the one hand *bista* had a right to give *Dalits* some works or receive some services from them while on the other *Dalits* had right to ask food or cash or other items by fulfilling their obligation and loyalty. In the past such a trend reflected economic interdependency between high- and low caste families.

Table 9: Distribution of Dalit households having Bista, 2016

S.N	No. of Bista	No. of households
1	Less than 25	1
2	25 – 50	6
3	51 – 75	3
4	Above 75	1

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The relations between *bista* and *Dalits* as existed before two decades have been changed significantly. It is obvious that upper caste households, the *bista* of *Dalit* households in the present have less relied on the traditional works of *Dalits* with the penetration of market products in the villages and also their giving up of agricultural practices. So, the give and take relation, reciprocity has been replaced with cash exchange if it is required for *bista* to utilize *Dalits*' products and services. In the past, such patron – client relationship or contractual labour system between *non-Dalits* and *Dalits* was very important for the economy of both. Out of 26 households from the *Dalit basti*, 11 households still get *bali* in return of their services provided – repairing of iron utensils in case of *Kami* and repairing of clothes in case of *Darji* - from their patrons. These households have varying number of *bista*(table 9). The *Dalit* households who gave up their traditional occupation and hence involvement in *bista* system report that the income, both in the form of grains or cash, declined considerably and forced them to seek other sources. Obviously, the arrival of finished goods that earlier used to be produced locally through the provision of roads appears to have accelerated the disintegration of *bista* system, which could be called the reciprocal exchange involving customary payments in kind in favour of a relationship closer to a market relationship in which cash payment is made for work done.

5.3 Local Wage Labour

With the breakdown of *bista* system and declining artisan production that could not provide sufficient means to livelihood, many *Dalit* individuals turned to be wage labourers. However, the local market for wage labour has not broadened i.e. the *Dalits* as well as others willing or forced to sale their labour have very limited options.

Despite of several developments, no substantial employment opportunities are created in the villages.

The practice of agricultural wage labour has always been one of the indispensable components of the livelihood of most of the *Dalit* households in the *Dalit basti*. Both men and women have been involved in wage laboring since the time immemorial. In the peak agricultural season, especially during paddy transplanting and maize and wheat sowing and harvesting, men and women of *Dalit* households become busy in providing the cash paid services to the other caste households. Most of the *Dalit* individuals engage in wage laboring as unskilled labourer. Some *Dalit* individuals, usually men equipped with skills are also involved in construction works as *mistris* whereas other men and women work as helper. Two head *mistris* were reported from the *Dalit Basti*, one each specialized in wood work, carpentry and wall making, *Dakarmi*. The *mistris* are paid with higher wages as compared to others. Sometimes, the *mistris* also become contractor, *thekedar* for construction works, particularly construction of house, *goths*, toilets, etc and employ others including their own family members.

Out of 26 households in the study area 11 households are found to be involved in wage laboring along with other sources of livelihood. A total of 21 individuals consisting of 10 men and 11 women have been involved in wage labour. Some men engaged in artisan work also prefer to work as a wage labourer as it generates cash immediately. Locally, wage laborers are known as *khetala*. Earlier *Dalit khetala* were paid in grains but in the recent years they are paid almost in cash. The working duration in a day for ploughman, *hali* is nearly 10 hours whereas for other *khetala*, it is nearly 8 hours. *Hali* is fed at least two times, but other *khetala* are fed at least one time. However, this trend varies with the nature of work. Now a days, almost all the *Dalit* wage laborers have their own mobile sets. So it has become easy to hire them. In the *Dalit Basti* there are few men as well as women who take the informal leadership in providing laboring works. So, anyone who needs laborers makes a contact with such leading individual and demands the laborer in required numbers.

Long-term contracts for wage labour are hardly found and daily arrangements seem to be common. Some individuals, mostly males are involved in self-employment of producing bamboo mats and baskets (*doko*) during the leisure time and sale them in

the village. Five male individuals are reported to be involved in making bamboo mats and baskets. Sometimes they are hired by upper caste people to make such things in their home as wage labourer. Women are not found to be involved in such occupation.

There is a clear demarcation of works according to sex in the rural area. Usually men involve in the works that need more physical force as compared to women. The price for wage labor for both male and female has increased significantly in the last decade. The average wages for the labour of male is around Rs 500-800 rupees per day, whereas for female is around 250 rupees per day. As labour force becomes scarce in the villages due to increased migration of working population out of the villages, there has been an increasing demand for labour in agricultural and domestic works and hence an increase in wage rates.

There have been considerable shifts in the labour practices of *Dalit* households in the last two to three decades. Many *Dalit* men, who used to work as *hali* (land tiller) for high-caste landlord in the past, have stopped such work. In the past, *Dalits* used to get loans from patron and used to till the land until the loan was repaid. Some *Dalit* households since the long time, since many generations worked as *hali* to *non-Dalit* households. But now no evidence of such a case is found in the study area. Yet few men prefer to work as a *hali* for landed upper caste people in contract basis but not as that of past. They believe in that having a relationship with the landlord (*bista*), it becomes easy to ask for monetary and other sorts of help in the times of need. Some are working in the construction works.

The majority of *Dalit* households do not produce sufficient grain to meet their annual food needs. They produce less than half of their requirements. At present, majority of the households have been keeping agriculture aside in the pursuit of non-farm activities. This is not a question of *Dalit* households moving from farm activities to non-farm activities rather, it is a dynamic and inevitable process in which they combine activities to meet their various needs over time. This trend is manifested by the living and working of different members of the household in different places for long time.

5.4 Foreign Employment

It is the household that mobilizes human resource for migration and in turn is the recipient of the remittances. The mobility of *Dalit* population has crucial role for sustenance of family mainly because of limited resources and economic opportunities in the villages. Hence, the mobility of population for supporting and earning livelihood is of prime concern at present which was also a feature of past economy but to a lesser degree. The *Dalits'* mobility for earning livelihood includes foreign labour migration.

The political turmoil that grew out nationwide since 1996 with the armed conflict in the country enforced both *Dalit* and *non-Dalit* youths to become foreign labour migrants. They felt insecure in the villages and adopted foreign employment as an easy way to become secure and earn survival. The considerable economic well-being of the *non-Dalits* of the neighbouring settlements also has strong influence in their desire/ hope to become labour migrant for present livelihood and future prosperity. Limited opportunities of facilities and jobs/ services are available from local to national level. However, the capabilities of exploiting the limited opportunities are predetermined by the factors like education and financial conditions. The educational attainment of *Dalits* is very poor due to poor economic condition. Because of this, they lack the knowledge, skills and dexterity which do not permit them working in good posts and higher salary paying jobs. They are not specialized in any activities. There remain no alternatives for them besides unskilled wage labour. They know very well that selling labour within the country generates less income while in the international labour market similar labour generates more. Hence, foreign labour migration, the *Dalits* conceived, is an effort to spread household labour and thus to enhance the family survival.

The growing incidence of labour migration out of the country is primarily in response to the shortage of cash for meeting the basic requirements. The basic reason is that very little cash or not at all is generated from the local economy, i.e. agriculture and traditional caste based occupation. The growing availability of various imported consumer goods in the village has increased the trend of consumerism which in turn have resulted the high family expenses. Less interest of the younger generation towards artisan production and agriculture in one hand and the increasing demands

and desires of the *Dalit* households on the other have become the stimulant for labour migration.

Migration of *Dalit* individuals to engage in non-farm activities out of the country is substantial. The trend of going India for earning has been a tradition from a long past. In the recent years, particularly since the 1990s, migrating temporarily to the Gulf countries and Malaysia has become a new trend. The migrants maintain a flow of remittances to their families, although the proportion of income sent and its frequency display variation across individual migrants. Remittances have brought some structural changes in the *Dalit* households. They have used the money to construct new house similar to other higher castes, purchase the goods such as furniture, televisions, mobile phones, etc. The remittances coming to the *Dalit* households, some believe, have uplifted living standard and economic status. This has shifted their sense of degraded pride or status too.

Table 10: Distribution of Dalit Individuals in Foreign Employment by Countries, 2016

Country	No. of Individuals
India	25
Gulf Countries	3
Malaysia	4
Total	32

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Most of the *Dalit* individuals involved in foreign employment from the study area are found in India. They have chosen India as their destination because of the requirement of less investment, no need of special skills, easily understandable Hindi language, easy entry and exit process, i.e., no requirement of passport and visa, and no official restriction on access to employment. Few individuals have chosen Gulf countries and Malaysia for working because of the higher income available there than India. One interesting pattern to be noted is that females are not involved in foreign employment. It seems that their cultural attitude is restrictive for females' independent mobility, especially in foreign employment. Females are also deprived of the ownership of the property, decision making and involving in the public sphere. They are bound to carry

out only the domestic activities. However, in case of nuclear family if male is a labour migrant, his wife needs to manage the household economy thereby mobilizing the available resources and the money in her own decision. Yet, now she may call her husband presenting the situation and asking the proper advice. So, it becomes merely exaggeration to say that migrant's wife becomes the decision maker or leader of the family since with the help of communication facility she depends on her husband's involvement in decision making.

Table 11: Number of Dalit Individuals in Foreign Employment by Households, 2016

No. of Individuals	No. of Households	Total Individuals
1	3	3
2	6	12
3	3	9
4	3	12
Total	15	36

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Most often, it is men who appear to be making this transition with women still working in caste based attached labor and/or agricultural labor. At the same time, increased out-migration of men has meant that it is women who are left behind who work in the caste based attached forms of labor in agriculture. Not all have shifted from agriculture to non-agriculture. Some have continued working in agriculture, as it provides them with security in times of need. Many laboring households have nevertheless started to look for different sources of income other than or in addition to agriculture. The study shows that there have been some significant changes in the laboring practices of poorer households as they look for new ways to sustain and survive. The shift has been that many have adopted new opportunities for work, however relying on agriculture to some extent. Overall, wage laboring in agriculture along with construction work and dependence on remittances remain the key feature of livelihoods among the *Dalit* population.

The remittance income has brought few structural changes in few households besides the fulfillment of consumption needs and debt repayment. For instance, it is invested

in housing, land purchasing and others. But most part of the remittance income, most of the *Dalit* households spend in fulfilling basic requirements like food, cloths, medicines, and so on as well as unproductive luxury goods like Television, Mobile phones and other commodities. Though remittances play a vital role in leading the *Dalits'* economy, foreign employment cannot be regarded as a sustainable livelihood strategy. Yet, it has enabled the labour migrant households for uplifting the economic status and living standard.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Field study was carried out in *Dait Basti* with the goal of describing and explaining the persistence and change in livelihood strategies of *Dalits* during the past two decades. The facts and data obtained from field that are presented and analyzed in the preceding chapters reveal that various developments in and around the *Dalit Basti* have dominant role in evolving and shaping their strategies over time.

A gradual transformation of socio-economic conditions of the people is taking place in rural Nepal. While the drivers of change are diverse, and include the opening-up of rural areas through a complex mix of political conflict and change, spread of education and communication, road transport network, etc, it is clear that the old system based on caste and the reproduction of feudal labor relationships is being replaced by an emerging capitalist system based on the commodification of land, labor and cash. The incorporation of rural areas into globalized socioeconomic flows has also influenced not only the lifestyle of *Dalits* but non-*Dalits* as well.

The emerging survival strategies of these *Dalits* amid the special constraints and opportunities brought about by development is the testimony to the *Dalits'* ability to adjust to the changing contexts. Diverse factors have been involved to bring about transformation in the livelihood of *Dalits*. The developments/ changes which are going on can be seen to relate to the three principal catalysts which have been introduced in the rural areas since the last two decades. These are the extension and development of road transport network, accessibility of modern goods and commodities which are not produced locally and declining traditional artisan production.

There is the lack of dynamism in agriculture as well as other non-farm/ off-farm work opportunities within or near the village. Subsistence oriented agriculture from earlier has been continued. In reality development occurring in and around the village did not profoundly change farming systems and promote a significant expansion of local agri-business. The *Dalit* households are far from self-sufficiency in food production. They try to meet the pervasive and substantial deficit in food production through the purchase of food grains from the market and to some extent through the *bali pratha*.

There is a remarkable lack of human and financial capital investment in agriculture as it is constrained by the size and quality of land the households hold. Another reason for this is little relative returns from agriculture as compared to other alternative economic activities.

Market dependency or consumerism is growing in *Dalit Basti* at present. This has increased the household expenditure. The economic linkage between *Dalit Basti* and market is characterized by the inflow of goods and commodities from markets to *Basti* and outflow of cash (generated from outside income) from *Basti* to the market. Such a linkage has forced *Dalit* individuals to be involved in more income generating activities. Several factors: both internal and external, have been operating in shaping the livelihoods of *Dalits*. Little access to local resources, financial vulnerability, low educational status, lack of skills and dexterity in productive works, and penetration of globalization/ capitalist economy in the rural areas are the principal factors, amongst others.

Labor mobility is increasingly an important part of people's livelihoods amongst the poorer households. As productivity of agriculture diminishes with land fragmentation, and availability of products from the market, those depending on agriculture have to look for alternative sources of livelihoods. Those living in traditional caste based occupations have also been affected by market penetration in rural areas. Migrating to the plains or nearby towns and cities from interior rural areas has been very common among those looking for new opportunities for employment. Migrating to work in India, on the other hand, has been continuing over the years from both the hills and the plains, and improved roads and connections have made it easier for rural households to continue working in their fields on a seasonal basis. More recently, the trend of migrating towards the Gulf has provided rural households, especially those who can afford it, new opportunities of labor.

Over the course of many generations these Dalits have devised and refined a set of different livelihood strategies attuned to the opportunities and constraints of environmental, economic and political conditions., i.e., to accommodate new situations. Dalits are not strictly farmers and artisan producers having retained control over their primary productive resources; they are wage laborers and foreign labour migrants as their livelihood has been poised at the threshold of various developments.

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ANNEX-I

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

Social and Demographic Profile

Respondent- Male/ Female

Address:

Household Number

Lease provide some information on individuals who belong to this household (begin with the oldest person)

Individual ID (Full Name)	Relation to Respondent	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Occupations			Education	Residential Status		
					I	II	III		Full time	Part time	Away

Notes:

Relations: R = Respondent, Hu = Husband, Wi = Wife Br = Brother Si = Sister, Fa= Father, Mo= Mother So = Son, Da= Daughter (Use combinations of these for other relations)

Marital Status: NM= Never married, CM= Currently married, Wid= Widowed Se= Separated, Div = Divorced

Education: Specify as Illiterate, Literate (for these who can read and write only) and Class/Level/Degree (If applicable).

Occupations: Agriculture= Ag, artisan Production =AP, Service =Sv, Wage labour = WL Foreign Employee = Fe, Others (specify)

ANNEX – II

LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are the means of livelihood for your family? (Rank the following in terms of their importance)

a. Agriculture } b. Artisan Production} c. foreign employment } d. Wage Labour
e. Others } (If others, specify)

2. If any member of your family is/are involved in foreign employment, give the following details:

Name of family member(s)	Name of the country

3. Since when, has/have your family member(s) adopted foreign employment?

4. For what purpose does your family use income from various sources? (Rank the following in terms of importance.

a. Basic consumption needs } b. Luxury goods } c. Land purchase }
d. Investment in others } (If others, specify)

5. What were the means of livelihood for your family before the past two decades?
(Rank the following

a. Agriculture } b. Artisan Production}
c. Wage Labor} d. Others } (If others, specify)

6. Is your family involved in *bali Pratha*? Yes No

i) If yes, how many *bista* households do you have?

ii) What things do you get (Payment in Kind or cash)?

iii) If no, Since when you left to be involved in *bali pratha*?

iv) Why did you leave?

7. Are you involved in traditional occupation/ artisan production? Yes No

i) If yes, does it fulfill your livelihood requirements?

ii) If no, since when and why did you leave artisan production?

Land, Agriculture and Livestock raising.

1. Give information about your land holding.

Type of land	Land Size (Ropani)
Khet	
Bari	
Kharyan/ Butyan	

2. How do you manage the food deficit?

3. Are you involved in *adhiya* or *kut* (share or rent cropping)?

4. Give details of the type and number of livestock your family has raised.

Livestock	Total no.
Buffaloes	
Cows	
Oxen	
Goats	

5. Does your family sell livestock or livestock products? a) Yes } b) No }

6. If yes, give detail

ANNEX-III

CHECKLIST FOR KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

1. Changes in traditional occupation/artisan production over time
2. Causes of changes in traditional occupations
3. Economic constraints and opportunities for Dalits over time
4. Causes for the emergence of foreign employment
5. Effects of various developments in Dalits' livelihood.
6. Causes for change in *balighare pratha*
7. Interaction with non-Dalits