

# Dalits, Deliberation and Local Governance of Nepal: An Instance

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## INTRODUCTION

Nepal retains its centuries-old caste system. Dalits suffer from the caste system for generations. Dalits are those communities who have been oppressed and marginalized in the worst forms for millenniums in the name of caste, the major practice of social stratification in the Hindu society in South Asia. They are termed as 'untouchables' by the radical enforcers of the extremely rigid caste system. There are twenty-three social sub-caste groups within Dalit communities; there are five sub-caste groups from the hills and mountains, fifteen from the plains and three from the Kathmandu valley<sup>i</sup>. Dalit communities are ecologically divided in Nepal and a practice of untouchability and caste discrimination has been expanded to all spheres of society despite the several political changes in the country.

Caste system has been entrenched in India, Nepal, Pakistan and other parts of South Asia. Social stratification prevails in society. It is the ordering of social differences with the help of a set of criteria which ties the differentiated strata into a system<sup>ii</sup>. The combination of roles and positions are stratified in the society in line with the strata prevailing. It is accompanied by endogamy, hereditary membership and traditional occupations in a hierarchical order. The caste system as a 'system of birth ascribed stratification, of socio-cultural pluralism, and of hierarchical interaction'. The caste system brings the stratification to the society which is created by the birth<sup>iii</sup>. It is sharply defined and in which the boundaries between the different layers of hierarchy are rigidly fixed.

The notion of caste is fundamentally based on the segmental division of society, hierarchy, restriction on feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections, restriction on marriage, and lack of unrestricted choice of occupation<sup>iv</sup>. It is convenient to conclude that the criteria such as endogamy, restriction on commensality between members of different castes, the hierarchical grading of castes (the best recognized position being that of Brahman at the top), the various kinds of contexts, especially those concerned with food, sex and ritual, a number of 'high' caste is liable to be 'polluted' by either direct or indirect contact with a number of 'low' caste, caste are very commonly associated with traditional occupations, and a man's caste is finally determined by the circumstances of his birth, unless he comes to be expelled from his caste for some ritual offence are pertained to the caste system.

Participatory and deliberative democracies are types of direct democracy that give citizens a role in the governance. Participatory democracy focuses on empowering the citizens to take actions and deliberative democracy focuses on consensus through discussion, deliberation and information. In both types of democracies, people are the main actors who have the power to let their voices be heard and weigh in on decision-making. As far as the concern of participatory governance is centered, it directly rooted in the actions of citizens who receive certain decision-making powers. A deliberative form of governance is rooted in the discussion, reasoning and public debate that precedes decision-making. The desirable criteria of direct democracy are participation, deliberation and equality. When a lot of people participate, deliberation becomes nearly impossible to organize that challenges equality and representation. Citizen engagement versus participation has the same goal to improve the collaboration between the government and the citizens, and to improve service delivery and policy programs. Both the concepts cannot be changed interchangeably. Citizen engagement requires an active and intentional dialogue with the public policy makers and the citizens whereas citizen participation comes from the citizens only. The first has its formal nature, and a top-down approach initiated by the government. Cities provides citizens with the necessary tools to get involved in decision-making. Its main challenges are to identify what is important for citizens, to convince them to engage, and offer them all the necessary information to make well-founded decisions. The participatory budgeting projects, city surveys and so on. The latter is a bottom-up approach and is initiated by the citizens. It has an informal nature and does not require official city rules. The main challenges aligned with it are to mobilize enough citizen support and target larger policy domains that require high levels of inclusiveness and awareness. The citizen initiatives, neighborhood networks, right to challenge and so on fall

on citizen participation. Informal mechanism mechanisms of interaction include venues for discussion for common issues, formation of informed opinion, political parties, political culture, media and openness in government operations. It is viewed that that local governance needs to happen when people live in a community and have sufficient close interaction to solve their problems they must work<sup>v</sup>.

Deliberation is ideally a process of communication in which people must address needs and perspectives quite different from their own. Those need and perspectives are conveyed through reasoned arguments that universal and generalizable drawing on basic understandings with which other participants can agree. Deliberation is not merely constructed by the aggression of individual deliberators; it subject to the dynamics of the interacting group<sup>vi</sup>.

In line with capability approach, deliberation has a significance from an opportunity aspect as well. The practice of deliberative participation tends to create procedures that provide real opportunity for participation irrespective of irrespective of people's actual choice to participate or not. In each case, only a part of the affected will exercise their rights, but the fact that they could join the discourse is actually valuable<sup>vii</sup>. However, it is reversed in the context of Nepal, the power was consolidated by interlinking it with the Hindu caste system. The social order was exclusionary since it classified all groups as distinct castes within the broad framework of Hindu caste system of four Varna based on the concept of ritual purity and pollution. The Hindu caste system traditionally categorized people into four groups such as Brahman (scholars and priests) at the top, Chhetri (warriors), just below, then the Vaishya (merchants and traders), and lastly Sudra (peasants/laborers)<sup>viii</sup>. It is evident that the Civil Code of 1854 legally formalized the highly rigid hierarchical caste system and brought Dalits to the lowest rung as untouchables<sup>ix</sup>. Based on the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, Dalits are socially and culturally excluding. Resultantly, the exclusion of Dalits in the socio-cultural processes of a society is directly or indirectly reflected in the Community based Organizations, political parties and local government institutions. Moreover, Dalits in are excluded in the capacity of executives local governments.

### **Caste System: A Prone to Marginalization**

Caste system oppresses lower-caste communities and gives powers to upper castes people. Historically, the system justified the subjugation of lower castes, allowing upper caste Nepali people to use their status to gain security and power. The huge population in South Asia is 'Dalits' or members of low castes, and are therefore treated as 'untouchable' by their social superiors. Dalits in Nepal face social, economic, cultural and political marginalization and routinely fall victim to both institutional and structural discrimination. Despite the legal provisions intended to eliminate caste discrimination in Nepal, the hates and crimes against Dalits are rampant. 'Caste' or 'Varna' is known as the basic foundation of Hindu society where different groups and individuals interact with each other in different ways. Likewise, the caste system is understood as a division of society on the ground of differences of wealth, inherited rank, privileged profession, occupation or race. Based on the argument, the caste system has inculcating a seed of stratification among different social groups. Dalits are denied from socio-cultural point of view in the society identifying themselves as the lowest rung in the society. The socio-cultural foundation of the Hindu society sidelines Dalits from the mainstream activities of the society.

The Hindu caste system includes a fourfold of caste divisions; 'Brahmans', the priests and scholars, '*Kshetriyas*', the warriors and administrators, '*Vaishayas*', the merchants, and '*Sudras*'(untouchables), and the servants and rubbish collectors. The Hindu religious scripture namely *Manusmriti* claims that the caste system is based on the differentiation of people following their works and professions. Resorting to the position mentioned, it is clear that the case system is belonged to the vertical division of the society establishing Dalits as the lowest caste. The legacy of making Dalits only the servants and rubbish collectors has not created vertical division of the society, but has also created a psychological division among the groups in the name of purity and impurity. Besides, the origin of caste system also follows many religious and biological views. The Hindu religious theory argues that the case system had originated from Rig- Veda. It further states that the primal man, *purush* (male), destroyed himself in order to create a human society and the different parts of his body created the four different Varna. The Brahman were from his head, the *Kshetriyas* from his hands, the *Vaishyas* from his thighs and the *Sudra* from his feet. The very theory has been outspoken revealing religious myths and unscientific affairs. It is in favor of the high caste people to discriminate Dalits in the socio-cultural processes. The disintegration of Dalits in socio-cultural processes creates a situation of exclusion at all levels.

No doubt the caste system is closely associated with Hinduism in South Asia. It is the oldest survival social hierarchy in the world. Nonetheless, it is mostly dominant in Nepal and India. It is supposed to be one of the rigid stratification systems without any possibility to change one's caste or move between the castes categories in indeed. The caste of person is determined by his/her into a particular social group. Similarly, the caste system is an inseparable aspect of Hindu society and maintains close nexus with Hindu philosophy, religious beliefs, customs and traditions. On top of the philosophy, the strata wise functions and obligations are imposed. The caste system has contributed to the determination

of stratification, differentiation and segmentation of Hindu society. With reference to Nepal, the institutionalized exploitations on Dalits date back to the medieval period in 13th century when King *JayasthitiMalla* introduced the caste system<sup>x</sup>. *JangaBahadurRana*, the then the Prime Minister of Nepal, further formalized the caste system through a Civil Code in 1854 with the caste hierarchy ahead; (1) Sacred thread wearing or twice- born, (2) Liquor drinking, (3) Touchable low castes, and (4) Untouchables<sup>xi</sup>. This way of caste division created a huge gap between Dalit and non-Dalit sections in Nepali society pushing Dalits towards a marginal space.

In Nepal, the caste system remains as a form of discrimination that considers Dalits as untouchables. Untouchability gives a picture of discrimination perpetuated on Dalit communities who are believed to be impure and polluted. Therefore, the so-called high castes sprinkle holy water if their house is visited by untouchables. Across the history of Nepal, Dalits are treated as low caste people and left behind in social, cultural and religious spheres and deprived from the human dignity and social justice due to caste based discrimination and untouchability.

Social exclusion and inclusion are multi-dimensional terms and their definitions, meanings and connotations are context dependent. Social exclusion as a concept has its origin in Europe, more specifically in France, and therefore, the issues addressed in the social exclusion context were specific to Europe. Subsequently, the concept was introduced in India where it has primarily focused on inequalities and exploitation based on membership of particular social groups and is seen in terms of exclusionary processes based on caste, gender, tribe and religious identities<sup>xii</sup>.

While concluding, social exclusion describes a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged as they are discriminated against on the basis of their caste, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, descent, gender and so on where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and development services, as well as social institutions like the household and the community.

It is conveniently argued that caste is one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of social stratification, and results in injustices based on ascribed role differentiation. Caste stratification, traditionally associated with the Hindu religion, is sustained by an ideology that legitimizes inequality according to the status of birth. Interactions between castes is restricted, and the differential privileges and burdens are accorded, according to one's position in the caste hierarchy. The so-called higher castes and more particularly Brahmans, have over time developed rules that helped ensured superior status for themselves in the overall social hierarchy; the British colonizers helped entrench this system.

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Historically, caste controls have been most violently enforced on those at the lowest rungs of the caste ladder, the so-called scheduled castes or Dalits. Through daily practices of humiliation and coercion, the ideology of Dalits as 'untouchables' and hence as the others and outsiders to the caste system, persisted. They were viewed as regressive, barbaric and irrational in contrast to those within the caste system. It is important to recognize that social exclusion is a dynamic and on-going process, reflecting 'the dynamic process of being shut out, partially or fully, from any or all of several systems which influence the economic and social integration of people into the society'<sup>xiv</sup>.

### **Political Parties and Community based Organizations: Dalit Marginalization**

Political parties are the key institution in democratic practice. Political parties are perceived as a group of people who have joined forces to pursue their common social and political goals. Parties have been formed in all societies and states where the population actively participates in the political process. Political parties serve as a primary link between the government and society. As such, they have a unique role in fostering democratic governance ensuring that is responsive to societal needs. If they fail in this role, true democracy has a little chance of surviving. It is further argued that political parties help turn citizen interests and demands into policies and law. However, if they fail in this mission, the whole democratic experiment can disintegrate<sup>xv</sup>. Despite the established theoretical insights on the political parties, Dalit exclusion reverses it. Parties aggregate diverse demands into coherent political programs. They then translate these programs into effective collective action through elections and legitimated control of political office. Yet they face a crisis of representation. The development of political parties into a bureaucratic organization clearly informs the information and decisions up and down. The hyper-bureaucratization becomes inclusionary and exclusionary at the same time. The inclusion and exclusion dynamic within the parties centralizes power in the hands of a small coterie of

the party apparatchiks in the control of organization. The centralization of power not only marginalizes the rank and file and support base of the party; it also breeds a personality cult whereby the party leader becomes synonymous with the party and vice-versa<sup>xvi</sup>. Many Dalits view the political parties are inaccessible and unresponsive to the concerns of the group. Parties pose specific challenges for Dalits who face both formal and informal barriers to participation –including opaque nomination procedures, sub-ordination and mono-inclusive cultures. Barriers to effective citizen participation hamper community decision-making processes. Unequal power relations are an unequal system or situation in which it gives more power or privileges to one person or group of people than to others. The caste system has created unequal power relations between Dalits and non-Dalits in the society. The exclusionary mechanism of caste system hardly provide a space for Dalits to choose and influence the agendas.

Civil society seeks to strengthen the consciousness and mobilization capacity of excluded groups, such that they will be willing and able to stand up for their rights and entitlements<sup>xvii</sup>. In the society, Dalits are compelled to live on humiliating power relations. The domination of leadership in the civil society is hailed from non-Dalits. As the society is divided on the caste lines. The civil society organizations directly and indirectly work for non-Dalits. Promotion of citizenship and social inclusion falls on the part of civil societies. This process can contribute to developing the potential for collective action and popular claims-making and strengthening a sense of citizenship and social inclusion<sup>xviii</sup>. The role to enhance the empowerment of marginalized groups making a sense of citizenship falls on the domain of civil society, however, the divided societies on the caste lines do not favor Dalits exclusively to get the stakeholders influenced on their demands and aspirations of development. This is because of a sense of realization on Dalits is lacked by the non-Dalit leadership in the organizations. It has been explored the degree to which CBOs serve as political actors or otherwise act as representatives of marginalized populations. The caste based society has made the CBOs and social organizations inherit the legacy of unequal power relations created by the caste system. The reflection of high castes people is observed in the organizations. The composition of high castes people leadership does not work for empowerment of the marginalized sections of society. It serves to the structural inequality of the social and political system. Democracy establishes a normative foundation for political equality. Yet the dominance of the elites over the masses, and the systematic exclusion of particular social and economic groups from the influence on, and outcomes of, important decisions, manifest in political inequality. Rulers are referred as elites that is, a majority of individuals who, due to the concentration of material and symbolic resources of power, and because of their privileged structural and political position, have the capacity to make important community and societal decisions or to influence those decisions. There is no deliberative democracy as the local level decision-making processes are well-captured by the local elites. Dalits are not in leadership positions in local governments. Only the elected members from Dalits cannot influence the decision-making. The first reason is that the norms of deliberative democracy are not followed at all steps of local level planning. Therefore, Dalits are deprived of the meetings and discussions. The second reason is that as Dalits are not in leading positions of local governments, non-Dalits having leading positions decide agendas and make decisions taking nominal suggestions of their coteries.

#### **Local Governance and Deliberation: Instances**

Deliberative decision-making is a process by which the political decisions are made collectively resorting to reasons, facts, date and evidences for common public good. It is known as a formal way of reaching a decision on the issues of common public good following the best interests of the citizens. The deliberative decision-making contrasts with decisions that are either taken by one person or by a small group of elites leaving sections of society. The deliberation in decision-making enhances collective accountability, lack of which undermines its legitimacy and further endangers the ownership and sustainability of such decisions in indeed.

Deliberative decision making follows particular procedures and formalities as a formal rules based process. The process needs to be chaired and sometimes facilitated with a pre-informed agenda, schedules, codes of conduct and rules for speaking/ minute-taking. The final decision-making procedures are agreed at the onset. The reason behind this is to ensure a situation of fairness in the decision-making process as well as to hold one accountable for one's opinions and actions during the meeting. That is why, deliberative decisions are legal and binding. Contrary to the ideals, certain sections of have access to the pre-informed agendas. Dalits are treated as subordinates in the meeting. The agendas prepared through a coterie of local elites influence the decision-making in the local governance process. Dalits are subaltern community. The term 'subaltern' refers to someone who is lower rank in military, class or caste system and always remains at the bottom of social, political and economic hierarchy. The voice of subaltern people is not heard in a society, therefore, they are almost like speechless fighting them with a model of oppressor<sup>xix</sup>.

The fair allocation of resources in the interest of all and leaving no-one behind is instrumental to democratic governance. This requires chairs or mayors to facilitate an enabling environment for all representatives hailed from different background and communities and holding different interest to participate in deliberation and be able to raise



their issues without fear or hesitation. They should feel that they have been able to effectively present their issues, a proper space has been given to them and are heard seriously regardless of their caste, gender, class, ethnicity, age creed and political belief. The element of inclusivity also builds upon the logic that those who are affected by a decision in any way, should have a say on it, thus, it is not limited to the elected representatives of the Executive alone. Local people and stakeholders having a stake on the issue should also be consulted and asked for opinion. Lack of inclusiveness in decision-making not only gives space for questioning its legitimacy but also takes away the sense of ownership from those who are excluded. It also creates ample spaces for misrepresentation or underrepresentation of one's problem, and perpetuates the culture of patronage and appropriation. Deliberative decisions have greater legitimacy as they involve those sections of society and stakeholders who have an interest on it. Nevertheless, these require meaningful inclusion, as there is no point in people being invited who are not listened to, or are unable to voice their opinions and concerns because of social and cultural barriers. Against the assumptions of inclusiveness, Dalits are not included in terms of contributing ideas, making decisions and taking responsibilities. A policy statement argues that social exclusion is a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged and discriminated on the basis of their caste, ethnicity, religion, region, descent, sexual orientation and so on. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system, education and social institutions like the households. Dalits remain as a subaltern group in the structures of Hindu society. Dalit is defined as a social group which is out of social, political and economic representation in a hegemonic power structure and reduced to the face jumble of discriminations based on class, ethnicity, race or caste<sup>xx</sup>.

The whims or assumptions do not have a space in deliberative decisions. These are based on reasons and evidences. Reasoning goes beyond negotiation or bargaining for a win. Reasoned arguments are based on facts, studies, data and evidences. It is important to note that citing a date or an evidence may not always make an argument reasoned. Reasoning anticipates the element of sensibility, reasonableness and logic in the argument that one should put the various facts, data and evidences together to understand both sides of an issue and its consequences so as to make a logical sense. By the use of reasoned and evidence-based arguments, deliberative decisions lead to a new collective understanding of the issues and brings forth the new ideas and new priorities. Contrary to the assumption, Dalits are dominated by the influences and unequal power relations. The term 'subaltern' suggests a group of people who are in the lower rank in a society and they become a subject to the hegemony of ruling class people and cannot build up their own history.

The constitution and laws have spoken Dalit participation in local governance in indeed. No doubt there are Dalits and non-Dalits in the elected and nominated offices of local governance. As the Dalit representatives included are underpowered and inadequate from capacity point of view, the elected or nominated Dalit leader cannot hold the Chairperson responsive to the demands and issues of Dalits. As the Dalits are included legally in the local governance, a tendency is being developed that the Dalit issues will be raised and voiced by the Dalit representatives holding their positions in the offices of local governance. Non-Dalit representatives suppose that there are Dalit representatives in the governance to speak of their sufferings. That is absolutely wrong. It clearly shows that there is a lack of progressive realization on Dalit issues on behalf of non-Dalits.

The elected officials seem to be self-centric in terms of fulfillment of their needs and hidden interests compromising the collective needs and aspirations. It is also applicable to the Dalits either elected or nominated. Outwardly, they pretend to raise the Dalit voices but outwardly they tend to fulfill their hidden interests. While selecting individuals either for election or nomination in local governance, the deliberations and discussions are not held among Dalits. Dalits do not deserve rights to select the leaders on the basis of the efforts and performances for Dalit group rights and concerns. They are only shouldered by the local power elites. That is why they are more accountable to local power holders rather than masses of Dalits.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Stakeholders do not share power over development activities, decisions and resources purposively that affect them. Citizen participation is as an opportunity for citizens to take part in the government decision making or planning processes. It is a way of communicating the interests of individuals and society about development plans, as these planning efforts affect the general public and other groups. Citizen participation depicts itself a process that incorporates public concerns, needs, and values into governmental and corporate decision making. It is of the opinion that the citizens should be actively and directly involved in decisions affecting their lives. Citizen participation bridges the gaps among the government, civil society, private sector and general citizens; creates shared thought of local situation, priorities and programs. Following the views expressed by the scholars, citizen participation can be conceptualized as a decision-making path and space where citizens are involved and engaged in planning and development process at all levels. Contrary to the assumptions, the composition of hymns of Rig-Veda classified caste

on the basis of Varna into four social groups namely Brahmans or priests, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisha* and *Sudra* or untouchables. Rig-Veda stated that the castes were created from *Purusha*, the creature, where Brahmans originated from his mouth, Kshatriya originated from his arms, *Vaisha* originated from his thighs and *Sudra* from his feet. It was the beginning of caste classification which later became more rigorous in stipulating exclusive functions of society. *Sudra* is the last social group in the graded caste system. Ambedkar in 1936 has also explained race theory of caste system, where people are divided on the basis of race. An inequality is inherited in caste system, which is called 'graded inequality'. Further another staunch opponent of caste system, *RammanoharLohia*, mentioned that ' caste restricts opportunity. Restricted opportunity constricts ability. Where caste prevails, opportunity and ability are restricted to ever narrowing the circles of people.

The first component of deliberative democracy focuses on a formal notification of agendas to the stakeholders prior to the meeting fixing time and venue. The meeting minute is necessary to be maintained. In a society entrenched by a reigning ideology of caste system, the power elites decide the agendas for deliberation. Dalit exclusion is clearly seen in terms of having an access to selection of agendas. In the second component of deliberative democracy, inclusion is need of the concern for deliberation. The socio-cultural power relations in the society is both equally responsible for inclusion and exclusion. An inclusion of Dalits is only to complete the formality of the meeting. In the third component of participation, Dalits are symbolically participated but constrained by unequal power relations to influence the decision-making through their concerns and voices. The fourth component of deliberative democracy emphasizes that deliberations and discussions should be accompanied by reason and evidence. In a society divided in a caste lines, the Dalit concerns are not progressively realized. The decisions are motivated by the bargaining and negotiation between the power holders. The fifth component of deliberative democracy adheres to the collective concerns and issues of society for deliberation. In a socio-cultural processes of caste based society, the extent of collectiveness is relatively determined and the domination of non-Dalits is clearly seen. The democracy also focuses on the capabilities of oppressed and marginalized groups to make a decision-making more fruitful. In the humiliating power relations, the capability is relative and Dalits cannot influence as a caste line setting remains in the society. The core of the deliberative democracy is firstly to develop a situation of consensual atmosphere for decisions through deliberations and secondly to decide through voting despite a lack of consensus. The limitation of deliberative democracy is that the consensus among the stakeholders is not free from a caste line polarization on the one hand and Dalit concerns are sidelined by voting through a majority of non-Dalits on the other hand.

There is an immense influence of the exclusionary caste mechanism in the socio-cultural structures of the society. The entrenched ideology of caste system pushes Dalits to the lowest rung. The age-old feudalistic belief and mindset perceive Dalits as sub-ordinates to the higher strata in the society. Due to the inclusive policies and contributions, Dalits have been either nominated or elected in the posts of local politics. However, their position in decision-making is subordinate to the coterie of local powered and privileged sections of the society.

As Dalits are less capacitated and underpowered for group rights, the elected and nominated Dalit representatives in the local government are hardly sensitive towards articulation and decision of Dalit agenda in local development. The Dalit elected and nominated representatives are subordinates to the local elites. A few so-called empowered Dalit representatives pivot around the locally affluent and power holders for the vested interests. It means they are out of the conscience of group rights.

Dalits are in the local party committees as the constitutions of the parties have spoken of Dalit inclusion in membership. Even a few Dalits are in leading positions in the political parties. The decision-making process of the parties is based on top-down approach, however, the tons of tall talks of power devolution and democratization is echoed. It is obviously that is a link between the parties and the governments. The local party committees do not create discourse and discussions in their meetings on local needs and demands of Dalits while channelizing the issues of development to the local governments. Only the issues and concerns fine-tuned by elites and a coterie are lobbied and influenced. Most of the decisions in political parties are taken based on a caste line. The philosophy of caste line ignores Dalits either in theory or practice.

The reflection of exclusionary mechanism of caste system is also in the endeavors of civil society organizations directly and indirectly. The pre-eminence of high caste people is located on the leadership of the locally active civil society organizations. Dalits have a membership position only. A coterie of civil society organizations performs and lobbies based on the hidden interests of the local elites while making plans and budgets by the local governments. There is a nexus between the leaders of civil societies and the elected and non-elected elites of the locality.



Dalits have come to the local powers through election and nomination in local politics. Notwithstanding the recent changes in the local governments in terms of representation, the elected Dalits are still stereotyped that they can do nothing for local development as they are deprived of capacities and low caste people. This is the status-quo entrenched in the society and still working in the name of caste system for generations. The capacity is relative term and the reigning ideology of caste ignores collaboration with Dalits.

After the democratic change of 1990 in Nepal, the local-self-governance act enacted in 1999 had emphasized on participatory planning processes developing fourteen steps of planning. The existence of representative democracy contradicted with the participatory planning processes and the elected officials and bureaucrats were all in all in the planning. As of today, the ideal of participatory planning process is well-captured by local elites. As Dalits have a subordination position in the society, how can we ensure that they are well participated in the decision-making.

Elites have access to power and resources and are familiar with the ways of fulfilling the needs and concerns. Common people have hand to mouth problems and do not have an access to opportunities. Elites and so-called high caste people access to the opportunities. Dalits are internally colonized by the adverse effects of caste discrimination and untouchability for centuries. The reigning ideology of caste system makes the inferiority complex stay with Dalits whereas the superiority complex stays with non-Dalits. Only the formalities are carried out in the settlement meetings. A few local elites and their followers attend the meetings and make a list of demands on their interests. There is no citizen participation in the meetings. Speaking ahead, Dalits are completely ignored in inviting to the meetings. The participation of Dalits seems exceptionally.

The orientation of caste system has treated Dalits as the subordinated section of society to the higher sections of people and it does not accept the capabilities and possibilities of Dalits in terms of collaboration and joint political undertakings in the society. Following the meetings held in the wards and defined structures of Rural Municipality before the endorsement of the plans and budgets, the languages of majority and minority are seen in terms of deciding. Regardless of commonalities ideologically and territorially, Dalits and non-Dalits are polarized ignoring the common identities of their politics to target resources. Among the elected officials, elected and nominated Dalits fall on the minority while deciding and Dalits concerns of development and programs are ignored. Dalits and non-Dalits only confess common efforts only voting to the own political parties.

There are two assemblies annually in the Rural Municipality. One is assembly for budget and the other is assembly for review budget, policies and program of the local government. As the plans and programs are framed on the basis of guided lines and tactical moves enacted by the elites, no hectic discussions and deliberations are held in the assembly. The proposed plans and budgets are passed as they are. There is not a space for amendment of the plans and programs representing the needs of the needy sections. While reviewing budget, policies and programs, the meeting deserves right to expiate budget fully or partly, review the situation of implementation and the projection of programs for the upcoming year. This process is also captured by a coterie of elected and non-elected elites.

The budget allocation towards the plans pertaining to the physical structures development is also exclusionary from Dalit point of view. Basically the acts of construction of buildings, roads, and the buildings of wards and institutions. The allocation of budget is mainly determined by the local elites based on their interests.

The acts of construction of new schemes and the reforms of the old ones are included from budget allocation point of view under drinking water. Dalit settlements are deprived of drinking water schemes. Nevertheless, the budget was allocated on the schemes entertaining the non-Dalit settlements.

The target programs demand the allocation of budget for Dalit, women, youths, janajatis and socially deprived sections. The allocation of budget has been accepted as a ritual to fulfill the demands of local elites. While allocating budgets on target programs, the target and most deprived communities are not invited to the meetings. It lacks the deliberations and discussions among the Dalits and deprived sections. Looking to the interests of local elites, the budget is allocated and later is manipulated based on their interests.

Looking to the allocation of budgets on institutional development, the cooperatives and community based organizations led by non-Dalits have a dominant access to the opportunities of institutional development. The groups led by Dalits did not have an access to the budget of capacity building.

Paying an attention to the economic development, the budget is allocated to boost up the activities like income generation trainings, agricultural trainings, occupational loan without interest, capacity building and occupational

subsidies towards goat raising, poultry farming, and dairy and so on. Those resources are rarely targeted to Dalits and the predominance of an access by non-Dalits is practically seen. Dalits, deliberation and local governance are not in equal footing to strengthen democracy enthusiastically.

## NOTES

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International Labor Organization (2005) mentions that Dalits are discriminated socially and culturally in Nepali society. The all spheres of the society keep them in isolation. The hill and mountain Dalits include Kami, Damai, Sarki, Gaine and Badi whereas the Terai Dalits include the sub-caste groups such as Chamar, Musahar, Dusadh, Tatma, Khatwe, Dhobi, Batar, Chidimar, Mali, Dom, Halkhor, Patharkatta, Pangadiya, Bhahat, and Newar Dalits from Kathmandu valley include Poda, Chyame, and Halahulu.

- [1]. <sup>ii</sup>Dipankar Gupta, Hierarchy and Difference: An Introduction. In Dipankar Gupta (Ed.), *Social Stratification* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- [2]. <sup>iii</sup>Gerald Duane Berreman, Stratification, Pluralism and Interaction: A Comparative Analysis of Caste. In R., A., and J.K. (Eds.), *Caste and Race*. (London: J and A. Churchill Ltd., 1967).
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