

## The Dalit Women Movement in Nepal: A Study from the Intersectional Perspective

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### Abstract

*The issue of the Dalit women's movement in Nepal has been an important debate in the sociopolitical and academic arena from the initial phase of the sixtieth decade. Caste-based discrimination, economic exploitation, and social exclusion against Dalit women and Dalits, as well as harsh untouchability-related laws enforced by the Varna-based caste system and Hindu rulers, were the main causes of the Dalit women's movement in Nepal. Dalit women have been compelled to live in the face of many caste-based injustices and atrocities for centuries, in which they are consistently deprived access to the state's many opportunities. In Nepal, the Dalit women's movement has been instrumental in changing many facets of traditional society, promoting gender equality, ending caste-based discrimination and untouchability, and obtaining rights for Dalit women alongside other marginalized women. This study investigates how the Dalit women's movement is perceived and how the caste system affects the lives and careers of Dalit women in Nepal by means of the author's auto-ethnography and in-depth interviews taken with Dalit women. The study not only discloses how the caste system controls the power regime and state mechanisms, it also exposes how it influences the sociocultural and political structures. Indeed, the initial phases of the Dalit women's movement and the Badi women's movement were effective in creating pressure to bring about sociopolitical empowerment, reducing caste-based discrimination, and strengthening leadership in public domains, despite certain controversies of the Dalit women-led non-governmental organizations that were activated in the name of the Dalit women's struggle after the democratic era began in 2046. In order to free themselves from centuries of severe repression and many forms of discrimination as so-called lower-caste, lowest-class, and highly marginalized women, this paper suggests the unification among Dalit women and the conduction of their strong and result-oriented struggle in Nepal.*

**Key words:** Dalit women, feminist movement, Dalit women movement, Badi women, multi-faceted discrimination, lower-upper caste, gender

### Introduction

For centuries, the subject matter of social discrimination, economic inequality, and the dream of liberty from multi-dimensional exploitation, especially regarding Dalit women in South Asia, in both Nepal and India, recognized as Hindu-majority countries, has been staying in the shadow because of patriarchy and Hindu ideology-based social structures. Women are a backward community even among the Dalit community (Tiwari, 2014). In the context of Nepal, Dalit women are excluded, deprived, and backward in their rights to property ownership, access to education, achieving of health services, opportunities in governmental jobs, and many other sectors. Feminism incorporates various social, cultural, and political movements, theories, and moral philosophies dedicated to addressing gender inequalities and advocating for women's equal rights (Pandey, 2018). Although the mainstream women's movement in Nepal has not raised the agendas of Dalit women, which clearly portrays the prejudicial activities of upper-caste women. In Nepal, numerous unwritten grievance narratives of Dalit women, the unscientific caste system, and biased patriarchal behavior have not been acknowledged by the state as severe issues of Hindu society yet, which has constrained the making of the equal, prosperous, and

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unified nation. "The hill caste Hindus, Brahmin, Chhetri, and Newar (an urban ethnic group), with their combined strength of 35 percent in total population, have long been in a dominant position in the power structure of the country" (Hachhethu, 2008, p. 139). Millions of Dalit women are falling into the trap of patriarchal Hindu societies, where they are compelled to face acute oppression and exploitation at every moment in society and state because of the feudal-dominant, ineffective service delivery of the democratic-republican polity system and upper-caste elite women in national politics.

The identity of the 'Dalit women' is related to both the terms of 'women' and the 'Dalit', which are constructed from the coordination of two different terms: 'Dalit' and 'women.' In this context, issues of discrimination, struggle, and liberation of the Dalit women are directly connected to both caste and gender movements. According to the decision of the National Dalit Commission (NDC, 2080), which is mentioned on the list of castes and surnames of the Dalit community, 'the term "Dalits" applies to those untouchable communities whose water is unacceptable based on traditional religious superstition, caste-based discrimination, and untouchability; are the most backward in social, economic, educational, political, and religious fields; and contributed to state building through their labor, skill, and arts' (NDC, 2080). There are 27 castes listed under the Dalits, and they occupy 13.44 percent of the total population of Nepal (CBS, 2021). Among them, around 51 percent of Dalit women are in the total Dalit population.

Dalit women have been denied access to opportunities and advantages at both the governmental and non-governmental levels, as well as being subjected to multifaceted discrimination. Only 11.8% of Dalit women have access to higher education, compared to 54.5% of Nepal's female population. They are victims of severe violence, as about 49.1% of Dalit women encounter violence, and only 4.4% of the incidents are reported to the police (FEDO, 2013). Among them, 80% live below the poverty line (Nepal Living Standard Survey, 2011). Extreme disparity of this kind undoubtedly contributes to the emotional division between genders and caste discrimination in society.

The Nepalese feminist movement plays a crucial role in heightening feminist consciousness and urging them to claim their rights, broaden the scope of women's rights issues, and foster unity among women through groups and alliances to contribute to policy changes in the country (Acharya, 2012). Although, the Dalit women's movement in Nepal basically raises up issues like elite Dalit women who live in cities, reservation policy, and political representation. The goals of Madhesi, impoverished rural, and uneducated Dalit women in Nepal cannot be adequately represented by the Dalit women's movement. Acharya (2012) also agreed that mainstream feminist movements are unable to raise the issues of marginalized women. The national index of empowerment and inclusion reveals the Dalit women to be the most marginalized, much worse off than Dalit men. As women, they have no control over resources such as land, housing, or money.

Dalit women's concerns are about such as economic strengthening, social dignity, ensuring access to quality education for their children, and opportunities for employment in their livelihood etc. The feminist movement has long been advocating for women's rights and empowerment, such as women's education, political involvement, addressing violence against women, and promoting women's economic empowerment (Mishra, 2018). Unfortunately, the Nepali women's movement did not attempt to raise the various important issues of Dalit women. Especially, the issues of vulnerability to sexual exploitation and victimization of trafficking and forced sexual labor are not focused on by the women's movement yet. Badi women are largely looked down upon as sex workers. The Dalit girls in general are trafficked to Indian brothels in increasing numbers and forced to work as prostitutes. Indeed, the discrimination and violence they face on a daily basis prevent them from living with dignity. It is justified that the Dalit women's movement of Nepal is standing between opportunities and challenging conditions now, based on the above-mentioned various facts.

## Literature Review

### A Brief Review: Historical Feminist Movement in World and India

The world feminist movement carries the long history which was started at the end of 15th and initial of 16th century in the western countries. At 17th century, they were raised the issue of socio-political liberation at English revolution fight against the monarchy and favor of democracy. Mainly, three schools of feminist thoughts, liberal, radical, and socialist/Marxist feminism are in existence in the world women movement history. Inspired by the socialist feminist ideology, especially in French revolution, the working class women were played significant role. The poor women of Paris organized historical demonstration and marched with demand for cheaper bread in 1789 (Woods, 2001). First wave feminist movement was started at the end of sixtieth decade in nineteenth century which aimed to end all forms of patriarchal oppression by seeking equality between men and women. Mill (1869) presented the bill in parliament regarding women's rights in 1866, together with 1,500 signature, was a significant task in the world history of feminist movement.

In modern world history of feminist movement, the second wave of feminism was rose with the demand of equality in all spheres of life in 1960 after the one century of first wave feminist movement with the demand of equal opportunity, rights of suffrage, equal remuneration, end of patriarchal structure and violence on women. Third wave feminist movement was started at 1990s decade with the purpose of diverse in unity but achieving to equality. It wave was strongly believed that patriarchy is main barrier to the achievement of gender equality which is inevitable to change. "Our-body, our-selves rights" was one of the leading slogan. According to third wave feminism, male and female should jointly fight to transform class based patriarchal society into egalitarian one (Nijsten, 2011). Indeed, the modern feminist movement has gradually developing and expanding between many turns and twists all over the world from fifteenth century to twenty first century.

Latest Indian women's movement history, begun from approximately 1975 as dominant form, has played significant role in bringing gender issues to the mainstream of politics, development forum and as a national issue. Entire history of feminism in India can be divided into three phases: the first phase, beginning in the mid-19th century, initiated when reformists began to speak in favor of women's rights by making reforms in education and customs involving women (Chaudhari, 2005; Gangoli, 2007) the second phase, from 1915 to Indian independence, when Gandhi incorporated women's movements into the Quit India movement and independent women's organizations began to emerge (Kumar, 1998); and finally, the third phase, post-independence, which has focused on fair treatment of women at home after marriage as well as the work force, and their right to political parity (ibid). It is assumed that Indian feminist movement was not only strongly raised the women friendly agendas, it was contributed also to the nation building process through women power.

### The History of Feminist Movement in Nepal: A Short Analysis

The history of organized feminist's movements in Nepal started in the Rana period; however, numerous women had played significant roles before and after the process of building modern Nepal. Under the leadership of Yogmaya Neupane, a Brahmin widow, a movement was conducted in 1917 in the Bhojpur district that focused on injustices of overall socio-cultural and political issues; however, the movement's major agenda was centered against the patriarchy based on Hindu religious practices. She conducted the religious campaigns with the collective effort to start the process of ending non-scientific socio-cultural behaviors. She ultimately gave her life in the Arun River alongside her 67 followers, an event that is regarded as a historic and noteworthy demonstration by Nepali women against the patriarchal state regime.

The agendas of the Nepali feminist's movement had gradually entered into the rights-based issues after the end of the socio-cultural campaign for the improvement led by Yogmaya Neupane. Approximately all established national-level NGOs and wing organizations of all major political parties are led by so-called upper-caste women, whereas Dalit, Madeshi, and indigenous women have been excluded from decision-making levels. The mainstream feminist movement is led by Khas/Arya and some Newar elite women in Nepal (Yadav, 2024). The feminist movement in Nepal was able to achieve great things during the period of more than hundreds of years. As a result, marginalized women do not significantly benefit from such feminist movements in Nepal (Tamang, 2009). Unfortunately, contemporary mainstream feminist's movements have been totally neglecting marginalized agendas and inclusive representation of Dalit women.

The feminist's movement in Nepal has been continuing to conduct and forward various forms of non-governmental, political party-affiliated organizations and artisans with the support of international donor agencies, political parties, and civil societies. Yadav (2024) also acknowledged that 'the mainstream feminist movement treated women as a homogeneous group and overlooked their agendas'; she further stated that 'the mainstream feminist movements' agendas are dominated by donors rather than women's issues. It is a bitter truth that especially upper-caste, elite-class, and urban-centered privileged women got high opportunities from the contemporary feminist movement in Nepal.

With the adoption of the 2015 Constitution of Nepal, which guarantees women at least 33% proportionate participation in all governmental mechanisms, the women's movement in Nepal achieved a historic milestone. According to Adhikari (2022), despite making up 53.91% of the nation's population, Nepalese women hold 33.09% of seats in the federal parliament and 36.36% of seats in the province assemblies, out of the 275 members of the House of Representatives (HoR) and 550 members of the seven province assemblies (PA). Only 14 female candidates won out of 330 PA seats in all seven provinces under the First Past the Post (FPTP) system. Unfortunately, Dalit women's agendas and grievances are not ready to address upper-caste political leaders by mainstreaming the feminist's movement in Nepal till now; ultimately, the movement cannot help to make an egalitarian, inclusive, and prosperous country.

#### **A Brief Analysis: The struggle against the multi-faceted discrimination of Dalit women in Nepal**

The Dalit women are regarded as a 'socially isolated' group of people in every household, society, and Hindu religion-dominant South Asian country. They are compelled to face exclusion, oppression, and discrimination not only from people belonging to so-called upper castes but also from their own community's males. Classic Hindu legal texts, such as the Laws of Manu, are considered anti-Dalit and anti-women because they are based on the principle of inequality and assume that women are not fit to be either free or independent of men (Biswakarma, 2006). The Dalit women's struggle has carried its history for more than seven decades. In 1955 Mithai Devi Bishwakarma organized Dalit women under Pariganit Nari Sangh (Association for Scheduled Caste Women), which was the first Dalit women's organization of Nepal (ibid). After the establishment of Pariganit Nari Sangh, there are many political party-affiliated and non-governmental organizations that have been opening for the purpose of achieving Dalit women's rights in Nepal.

Dalit women were especially active in anti-caste and anti-untouchability movements in 1920s India, and they were also involved in the non-Brahman movement in the 1930s, which made resolutions against issues such as child marriage, dowry, and enforced widowhood. In accordance with Sutradar (2014), the Dalit women's movement, a social revolution aimed at social change, replacing the age-old hierarchical Indian society based on the democratic ideals of liberty, equality, and social justice, began much earlier, became intense in the 1970s, and began to decline at present. Although the Indian Dalit women's movement has been steadily advancing as an organized entity, there hasn't been enough pressure to

begin addressing their goals. Indian Dalit women are still struggling against the horrors of caste-based discrimination and multidimensional discrimination in the face of this.

Crenshaw (1991) used the word 'intersectionality' to describe Black women's experiences as different from Black men's and white women's experiences of racism and sexism, respectively. The Dalit women of Nepal also have to be analyzed from the intersectional perspective because they have been suffering and exploited due to causes of caste, gender, and class. Sob (2011) states that a common theme across writings on Nepali Dalit women and activism is that Dalit women face the triple exploitation of gender (as women), caste (as Dalit), and class (as poor). The history of the Dalit women's movement in Nepal has also carried its own different specific importance, where the issue of its inception, development, and expansion should be analyzed from the historical perspective of intersectionality (caste, gender, and class). It is already stated above that the Dalit women's movement in Nepal is strongly connected to mainly Hindu religious ideology because gender- and caste-based discriminations are the byproducts of Hinduism. Thapa (2015) states that the caste system is closely associated with Hinduism in South Asia, (Pyakurel, 2007) which is considered the oldest surviving social hierarchy in the world, with a 2,000-year-old history. Indeed, Hindu rulers were forcefully expanded the Varna system and Hindu philosophy with the support of Hindu priests and Hindu religious documents for the purpose of continuing the conduct of their reign without fear and complexities.

Dalit, or untouchable, peoples under the Shudra Varna: millions of women have been suffering from the patriarchal socio-religious practices in South Asia with the back support of Hindu philosophy for hundreds of years. Crenshaw (1991) calls attention to the fact that existing theorization deals with either race or gender and is therefore incapable of dealing with Black women's experiences where both combine and the experiences of racism differ from those of men of color, and she experiences sexism from white women. Even in Nepal, there is a social hierarchy among Dalits, with some Dalits being higher in the social categories than others. Dalit women are regarded as under the so-called untouchable in the Hindu philosophy-based caste system, who are compelled to face multi-discrimination, exploitation, and deprivation in sociocultural, political, economic, and educational status, and they fall at the bottom of society.

Dalit women of South Asian countries have been facing shared problems, where the issues of Nepali Dalit women are not also vast differences. Dalit women of Nepal were activated for the empowerment of women, the end of violence, and against multi-dimensional discrimination after the restoration of democracy in 1990. The issue of Nepali Dalit women has not been embraced as significantly by the political parties and state mechanism. The agendas of Dalit women has also been ignored by the feminists, academicians, politicians, and human rights activists in Nepal. A study by FEDO (2013) found that 50.6% of Dalit women were compelled to face daily forms of violence, including physical and sexual abuse. In traditional Nepali society, socio-cultural practices such as witchcraft, dowry, child marriage, Kamlari, Chhaupadi, etc., are pushed to a highly vulnerable condition, especially for socio-economically lower-status families. Accusing women of being witches and tormenting them mentally and physically is a very common practice in Nepali society. Especially Dalit women have been suffering from various violence comparatively more than upper-caste women.

At last, the sexual violence of Dalit women is highly found compared to other caste groups due to their lower socioeconomic status, powerlessness, and negligence of governmental agencies. To a great extent, Dalit women victims of violence often do not know about the legal rights. Women in the Dalit community have been compelled to live in the worst conditions as oppressed beings (Yami, 1995). Unfortunately, sexual violence against Dalit women is considered a general issue. Landlessness and their low-caste status do not permit them to start other businesses, as customers ostracize their establishments when they try to do so (Cox, 1990; Kafle, 2011; Magnier, 2011; UN RCHCO, 2012). Dalit sexuality was taken as a right of upper-caste men due to their lower-caste status before the promulgation of the liberation of Badi women

from their prostitution profession in Nepal. After the promulgation of the constitution of Nepal, 2015, it ensured that the Dalit community had some political and administrative rights as reservations where constitutional provisions have prioritized the Dalit women over men for political representation, but millions of Dalit women have been deprived of achieving these opportunities. The issue of improvement for the vulnerable, illiterate, and poor Dalit women has made an important agenda of the Nepali Dalit women's struggle now.

### Research Gap

There has been significant research about the feminist movement in Nepal especially after the restoration of democracy, 1990. Although there has not been sufficient research regarding the contribution of Dalit women movement in Nepal. Almost all available women studies of the feminist movement and other socio-political movements in Nepal have predominantly been conducted from the perspective of upper-caste, high or medium-class, urban-centered elites and indigenous women. This study is focused on the Dalit women, which has been done from the intersectional perspective. With an emphasis on elucidating the roles and contributions of Dalit women in the struggle for obtaining their rights in Nepal, this study aims to capture the perspectives and understanding of Dalit women leaders and activists at the local level on the caste system.

### Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to analyze how the Dalit women's movement is perceived and how the caste system impacts the lives and careers of Dalit women in Nepal in this contemporary era.

#### Specific objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the ways in how the caste system affects political and social systems and governs the state and power structures from the perspective of Dalit women.
2. To investigate the problems in employment sectors for Dalit women in Nepal in the current situation.
3. To analyze the challenges of the contemporary Dalit women's movement in Nepal.

### Research Methodology

Research methodology plays a vital role in the research study. The method ensures reliable and valid results in every research project. Methodology incorporates many tools and techniques, which have been discussed as follows:

#### Research Method

This research was conducted in the Kathmandu Valley's three districts: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur in March, April and May, 2023. Purposive sampling was applied in this research. Dalit female politicians, Dalit women's rights activists, Dalit women employees, academicians, and household women were respondents of this study. The methodology used for this research is key informant interviews (KII). This study examined a variety of publications, magazines, and newspapers about the national and international struggles of feminists, Dalit women's, Madheshi feminists, and Dalits.

A total of 50 in-depth interviews were conducted with the Dalit women political leaders, Dalit women employees, Dalit women's rights activists, and household women. Fifty respondents participated in KII, and five feminist rights activists from the upper caste were also involved. However, all these interviewees are not reflected here. The interviews were conducted over three months. Interviews and audio recordings were transcribed and translated by the researcher.

The qualitative design was applied in this study. The purpose of this research was to explore the understanding of Dalit women regarding the how caste system affects political and social systems and governs the state and power structures from the perspective of Dalit women. Like this, research attempts to investigate the problems in employment sectors for Dalit women in Nepal in the current situation. On the other hand, study analyzes the challenges of the contemporary Dalit women's movement in Nepal. Participants of the research were represented from the higher caste to the lower caste. They were also from various ages and classes, and research has been analyzed through the intersectional perspective. Descriptive analysis is used for this research. Reliability and validity are ensured by cross-checking, verification, and qualitative triangulation of data from various sources and methods for its acceptability and generalization. The ethical responsibility of the researcher is ensured in this research study.

### Field of the Study

This sociological research was conducted in Madhyapur Thimi of Bhaktapur District, Kathmandu Metropolitan City of Kathmandu District, and Lalitpur Metropolitan City of Lalitpur District under the Kathmandu Valley. The core urban area of the Kathmandu Valley is assumed to be influenced by modernity, and citizens are considered highly educated, civilized, and enriched. However, some educated people have been practicing the traditional untouchability and caste-based discrimination in this era of science and technology. It is considered that citizens of the Kathmandu Valley are living in high development and modernity. Especially business, politics, judicial, public administration, and governmental jobs are their priorities. Some people have gone abroad to search for jobs and quality education opportunities.

The study area, the core of the Kathmandu Valley, is claimed to have been significantly influenced by modern capitalism. Conversely, local traditions, mutually beneficial social connections, and socio-religious values and beliefs have all played a significant role in people's daily life. Within Kathmandu Metropolitan City, the research study area consists of 32 wards, with Madhyapur Thimi having nine wards and Lalitpur Metropolitan City having 29 wards. The study was conducted in nine of these wards: Madhyapur Thimi municipality's two wards, 6 and 9; Lalitpur metropolitan city's wards 7, 18, and 27; and Kathmandu metropolitan city's wards 9, 14, 17, and 29. These 9 wards are recognized as having a higher density of Dalit communities comparatively than others. Especially Hill Dalits like the Kami, Sarki, Deula (Newari Dalit), and Damai castes have been available there. Research is attempted to ensure equal representation of all four Dalit caste groups. These nine wards were selected from the simple random sampling method.

### Sampling

A non-probability sampling design was applied, where purposive sampling was employed to select the district, municipality, and settlements having a higher concentration of all castes of the Dalit population. Stratified sample procedures were used in probability sampling, taking into account women and all suggested caste groupings or strata, including Kami, Sarki, Deula, and Damai. Additionally, in order to minimize biases and sample error, homes in each stratum were chosen using purposive sampling. Information was gathered using the bare minimum of respondents in this study, with five respondents chosen from each ward (total sample size 50) as key informants. Due to time and resource constraints, only forty-five Dalit families (by household size)/respondents were included in the research. Equal representation of Dalit women from each ward as sample respondents was attempted to be guaranteed in this study.

### Data collection, analysis, and presentation

Under this research, qualitative data collection techniques were employed to gather household surveys. Household survey employ was used to gather factual and qualitative information. Descriptive analysis was used for this research. In particular, household (as the property ownership, employment, output, physical and mental abuses, and education unit), settlement (untouchability and caste-based discrimination at the community level), and individual by gender were taken as units of analysis. Ultimately, data were presented and documented basis on the narratives of respondents. Reliability and validity were ensured by cross-checking, verification, and qualitative triangulation of data from various sources and methods for its acceptability and generalization.

### Study design

This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. Purposive random sampling was used to collect qualitative data in order to comprehend the difficulties faced by the Dalit women's movement in Nepal, the ways in which the caste system impacts political and social systems, and how it governs the state and power structures from the viewpoint of Dalit women. Fifty numbers of respondents in all were purposefully chosen based on their status as educated or uneducated, housewife or employee, politician or Dalit rights activist, and Dalit women were present throughout the survey session.

### Discussions

#### Narratives of Dalit women regarding caste system and Dalit women's movement

In the context of the contemporary governance system in Nepal, local government holds a significant role. By safeguarding the interest and by providing services to the people, local governance plays a significant role as a foundation for the democracy. Thousands of Dalit women have gotten the opportunity to be Dalit representatives in local governments through the constitutional provisions. A Dalit woman representative of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, who is one of the Dalit women leaders from Kathmandu, shared her experiences in her own words:

*I represent the Biswakarma caste of the Dalit community. I can only generally read and write. I am not a proper resident of Kathmandu. We migrated to Kathmandu from out of the Kathmandu Valley. I got the joining opportunity in local politics inspired by my father-in-law and husband due to their engagement with political party for a few years. Fortunately, I won as a ward member through the Dalit women quota. However, sometimes I felt unentertained by my so-called upper-caste colleagues and sometimes treated with caste-based discrimination by upper-caste residents (service takers) as a symbolic form. She further states,*

*In my opinion, caste-based prejudice and patriarchy systems are the foremost constraints on making an egalitarian society. So-called upper-caste people are neither accepted as politicians/representatives nor treated as dignified human beings. On the other side, so-called upper-caste ward representatives don't wish to be in discussion about the development and many other issues for the ward, and they do not want to provide the rights for the decision-making level for Dalit representatives. In this context, it is not easy to do politics for Dalit women because they are suffering from both gender and caste-based discrimination. (Interview, March 2023)*

Indeed, Dalit women have been suffering from caste-based discrimination, stigmatization, and exploitation for many centuries. Sabharwal and Saonalkar (2015) focused on the condition of various states of society due to caste and gender-based discrimination. These non-socialized activities of so-called upper castes are portrayed as the condition of the entire Nepali Hindu society.

Legal provisions prohibit discrimination on the ground of caste and institutional exclusion, and discrimination against Dalits is widespread. Employment is one of the most important areas of



discrimination perceived by the Dalits themselves. A factory worker, Dalit women share experiences of labor exploitation by her owner in her own words:

*I am a woman representing the Sarki caste as an old resident of Lalitpur. We are a comparatively poor family due to insufficient physical property. We owned a modest shoe store close to our home, but it has since sold out due to the coronavirus. Two years ago, my spouse left for a scaffolding job in the Gulf nation of Qatar. Our children (one son and two daughters) are studying at school/college in Lalitpur. I am also a job holder in a private shoe company, although I am not a trained or skillful worker. Anyway, I have a low salary compared to my other colleagues' lack of experience, skill, and training. I did not get training before joining the job factory. I have to do hard labor, but my salary is low. (Interview, April 2023).*

Indeed, prejudice against Dalit women based on their gender and caste has denied them several chances throughout their lifetimes. Dalit women are paid less than Dalit males; they are also unable to obtain employment in new sectors or market training due to a lack of financial resources and current technological capabilities (FEDO, 2002). In this situation, owners take advantage of Dalit women as unskilled and inexperienced workers.

Dalit women suffer from access to justice, and there is widespread impunity in cases where the perpetrator is a member of a dominant caste, above the Dalits in the caste system. Therefore, Dalit women are considered easy targets for sexual violence and other crimes, because it is almost impossible for perpetrators to come into the legal process. As an interviewee, she shared her grievances in her own words:

*As a traditional caste system, we are represented for the Pariyar (Damai) caste from Bhaktapur District. We legally migrated from the eastern Hill district here for around 20 years. We have established our own tailoring shop in Thimi Chock, which is handled by my husband. We have three children; among them, the senior son is married, but another junior son and a daughter are unmarried now. The unmarried son and daughter are both engaged in higher study. My daughter, a nineteen-year-old, is also going to college now. She further states,*

*After graduating from college, she worked in education consultancy as a receptionist for around six months. My daughter's co-worker at work mistreated her. She left her job after six months because of gender violence. There were two other ladies on staff; however, only my daughter was compelled to face gender violence. After this incident, she felt mentally disturbed for three/four months. I think that it was the result of our powerlessness and social status as Dalit beings. But we did not apply to the police because the boy's family was from an upper caste and had prestigious and economically strong conditions. In that situation, it was not possible to get justice from the state. (Interview, May 2023)*

Verbal abuse often accompanies physical assault perpetrated against women. Where the male perpetrator has some social or economic hold over the woman, such as her employer, or simply belongs to a dominant caste, then this violence sometimes also develops into regular, coerced, or induced sexual encounters. Dalit women are victimized threefold: first, for being women; second, for being Dalit; and third, for being Dalit women (Khanal et al., 2012). Actually, Dalit women have been living in vulnerable conditions, especially because of their lower social ranks in the Hindu caste system.

The national index of empowerment and inclusion reveals Dalit women to be the most marginalized, in much worse condition than Dalit men. As women, they have no control over physical property such as land, housing, or money. As a result, almost all Dalit women have to be dependent on their husbands or their sons. As a respondent, she mentioned her perceptions:

*I am a politician. I represent the Dalit community. I read at the intermediate level. I think that my society also trusts me; however, I don't have any physical property under my control. As the head of the household, my spouse has legal control over all property rights. Without my husband's approval, I am unable to make any decisions. Given that he pushed his choice with force, I believe that I am an interior squatter. Actually, because Hindu society is patriarchal, I am unable to use my property rights. (Interview, 2023 May).*

Almost all Dalit women are living in vulnerable conditions from the perspective of ownership of property. A study by NNDSWO (2006) shows that Dalit women's landownership is limited to 4-5 percent, and Madhesi Dalits' landownership is approximately nil. The data reveals that the Dalit women have been deprived of their economic rights.

### Findings of the Study

Not only Dalit women; their movement is also found as an isolated and discriminated condition in Nepal now. Their agendas and grievances are not prioritized by almost all political parties, feminist movement and states. The researcher was discussing with an academican Dalit woman about the current challenges of Dalit women's struggle against multi-faceted discrimination. Her views are mentioned briefly below:

*Dalit women are unable to fight for their existence in Nepal current situation. Actually, a group of educated, urban, and elite Dalit women have been working to internationalize the Dalit women's agendas with the assistance of foreign funding organizations. But generally speaking, Dalit women in both rural and urban regions are unaware of their campaigns, rights-based issues, or objectives. The Dalit women's campaign is unaware of the millions of Dalit women who have experienced sexual assault, rape, torture, and crude treatment. It couldn't be taken that the campaigns of NGOs count as a Dalit feminist's movement (Interview, March 2023).*

Another Indigenous woman, who activated the women's rights movement in Nepal as a politician, states the challenges of the Dalit women's struggle in Nepal. Her perceptions are given as follows:

*Dalit women's struggles are unable to raise the issues of the end of poverty, the rights to property, access to education, ensuring health treatment, nutrition, and food, and other various issues that are directly related to these Dalit women who are living at the bottom of society after the restoration of democracy. Dalit women-led NGOs are limited to raising the agendas of proportional representation and are involved in obtaining funds through foreign donor agencies, with the exception of the early stages of the Dalit women's struggle and the Badi women's movement. Their major challenges are how to conduct a real Dalit women's struggle and how to maintain an impartial or shared organization where there might be equal ownership as its own forum. Rather than that, the Badi women's movement of Nepal succeeded in taking a height as Dalit women struggle in Nepal. Without the Badi women's movement and initial stages of Dalit women struggle, Dalit women are unable to carry their own existence as a Dalit women's movement in Nepal. (Interview, April 2023)*

Indeed, there has been continuous criticism about their working style and the role of Dalit women's NGOs because, in the name of victimized Dalit women, they engaged in obtaining the dollar; however, they are claiming to do their regular tasks as part of the Dalit women's struggle. For instance, Tamang (2009) states, 'Accusing feminists and activists of being elitist and taking money in the name of "Nepali women" but doing nothing for them, Badi women were severely critical of the lack of support they received from Kathmandu-based feminists and activists. On the other hand, in the name of Dalit women's struggle, hundreds of NGOs' owners are settling in attractive countries. These critics maintain that donors and Nepali power holders freely float money and claim various successes, but that the activities have been carried out in name only and are basically only a means to "harvest dollars" (Biswakarma, 1999). In this context, the Dalit women's struggle has fallen into deep crisis.

### Conclusion

The initial phase of the Dalit women's struggle and the Badi movement in Nepal had supported getting some significant achievements not only for the Dalit women but also for the entire Dalit community in Nepal. For example, the Pariganit Nari Sangh was established in 1955 by Mithai Devi Biswakarma to raise awareness among Dalit women and encourage their involvement in the Dalit caste liberation movement (Koirala, 1996). The Pashupatinath temple entry struggle is a historical incident that was conducted under

the command of Siddhi Bahadur Khadgi, where Mithai Devi Biswakarma, a Dalit women leader, also actively led the Dalit protagonists at the Pashupati temple entry struggle in 1954.

Similarly, in August 2007, the Badi movement, under the leadership of Uma Devi Badi, was able to get some significant achievements, such as birth registration and citizenship for Badi children, access to land, and employment opportunities. The Badi Development Board, a structural agency of the state, was also a result of the Badi movement. Apart from those two struggles, the Dalit women's movement in Nepal has fallen into profound crisis.

Finally, similar to what the participants indicated above, the caste system is responsible for Dalit women's discrimination based on caste, lack of access to employment sectors, being forced to bear injustice, lack of property, etc. The Hindu Varna-based caste system has been highly influential to the sociopolitical and economic structures and has been controlling the entire state and power centers for many centuries. In this context, the cohesive, potent, and successful movement in Nepal for the liberation of Dalit women is essential.

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