# The Exclusion of Dalits in Local Governance

**Upendra Bahadur BK**
Assistant Professor
Department of International Relations and Diplomacy
Formerly Program Director at Mid-West University, School of Law
Email:upendrabk@gmail.com

## Abstract

In order to guarantee citizen participation in the decision-making stages of governance, the federal system of governance in Nepal distributes state authorities across the national and sub-national levels. From an equity perspective, local governance becomes even more fundamental when oppressed and marginalized people participate in decision-making. Examining the degree of Dalit subordination in local government decision-making is the article's goal. In addition to critically analyzing relevant material pertaining to the research issue, the researcher employed a narrative approach to gather lived experiences of Dalits in local politics. It was discovered that Dalits are silenced at the local government decision-making levels. The elites (thulabada) in the settlements effectively explain and capture the needs of local developments, but Dalits remain unheard. The elected elites conduct the executive and topic committee meetings and consultations. Dalit elected members continue to yield to decisions that are supported by non-Dalits. Dalits are positioned at the bottom of the caste system by the dominant ideology that has permeated the community. As a result, Dalits are purposefully ignored by society, socioculturally disintegrated, and weak in politics. Dalits' views are excluded from local government decisions and resources since they are not represented in executive positions within the local government. The community is divided along caste lines by the deeply ingrained psychology of the caste system.

*Keywords:* Dalits, local politics, participation, power relations, sub-ordination.

## Introduction

Governance is more than just the state-centric processes of decision-making that force stakeholders in society to submit to it. A paradigm shift has now occurred. underlined that the new paradigm of governance necessitates a methodical transition from a regime focused on the state to one focused on society. In the new order, governance is a cohesive framework of institutions, norms, and regulations that gives national actors the information, skills, and abilities they need to create coordinated policies and carry out the objectives of the constitution. In situations where possible conflict threatens to undermine or disrupt opportunities to achieve shared objectives, governance steps in to establish order(Williamson, 2001). In order to determine the path forward, governance is a decision-making process in which multiple stakeholders are involved. It was observed that while governance involves the state, it also encompasses the private sphere and civil society. For human development to continue, all of these are essential. The government establishes favorable political and legal conditions. Jobs and money are produced by the private sector. Additionally, civil society encourages social and political exchanges and mobilizes organizations to engage in economic, social, and political activities. In the 1980s, governance was described as existing outside of government, involving members of civil society, and being primarily concerned with network management for the provision of services (Mehata, 1998).

The traditional idea of national government steering was said to be ingrained in the previous top-down system of governance. The new governance is more concerned with the center's interactions with society and whether networks are becoming more self-steering (Kjaer, 2004). Provided a perceptive analysis and contended that, in order to accomplish desired results, governance entails both government and more informal methods of influencing and bargaining with both public and private sector organizations. A governance approach promotes cooperation to accomplish shared objectives amongst the public, private, and nonprofit sectors (Hambleton, 2004).

he argument went on to say that while the political elites still hold a lot of power, citizens who are engaged in society and willing to participate in politics can help to check their influence and hold them more accountable (Bresser-Pereira, 2004). Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is cited as saying, "We have gotten rather into the habit of thinking democracy at the top, not so much below. Local self-government is and must be the basis of any true system of democracy." If the foundation of democracy is not built from below, democracy at the top might not succeed Shrestha(1996). Though all district level line agencies were put under the umbrella of respective District Panchayat for intensification of resources under Decentralization Act 1982 as well as Regulation 1984, there was a less orientation on fiscal decentralization and local governance. Even the VDC Act, Municipal Act and DDC Act introduced in 1992 to strengthen political process involving people in

local governance system lacked adequate decision-making power, accountability and resources. Nepal has been embarking on a federal system of governance for self and shared rule. The article is based on empirical research carried out at Barahatal Rural Municipality in SurkhetDistrict of Karnali Province, Nepal. It is a qualitative research pursued in the context of local governance system and practice locating a focus on Dalit participation in local governance planning process of Chaukune Rural Municipality Surkhet.

Deliberation is a process of thoughtfully weighing opinions and concerns of stakeholders. It emphasizes the use of logic and reason as opposed to power struggle in decision-making. Group decisions are generally made after deliberation through a vote or consensus of those involved in the process. It was posited that deliberative democracy is a process in which free and equal citizens justify decisions giving one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible with an aim of reaching conclusions that are binding on all citizens but open to challenge in future (Guttmann & Thompson, 2004).

The state of exclusion of Dalits in local governance planning processes contradicts with the established principles and positions of deliberative democracy. pointed out that the Civil Code of 1854 legally formalized the highly rigid hierarchical caste system and brought Dalits to the lowest rung as untouchables (Hofer, 2004). It was stated that at initial period, everyone were recognized in terms of their relative ritual purity into the four broad varna of the classical Hindu caste system: the Brahman priests, the Kshatriya kings and warriors, the Vaishya traders and businessmen and the Sudra peasants and laborers-with an additional group technically outside the caste system because of their ritually defining (Bennett & Govindasamy 2008). As there is contradiction between deliberative democracy and Dalit deliberation in local governance decision-making processes. the politics of inclusion has been adopted by the constitution of Nepal. The preamble to the constitution adheres to the end of socio-cultural discriminations. The right against untouchability and caste discrimination and rights of Dalits have been envisaged as the fundamental rights. The state powers are divided among the center, the province and the local level to deliver governance at the doorsteps of the people. All organs of the state include Dalits based on laws and policies. However, the existing provisions of the laws and policies do not focus on the autonomy of Dalits for decision making. Thus, it needs to further explore how and why are Dalits ignored in the discussions of local governance planning processes.

Study gaps are associated with the statements ahead. Despite the political change, the pre-eminence of a caste line has not been extensively studied in terms of excluding and ignoring Dalits in allocation and resources and budget. There is no inclusion of Dalits in executives of local governments legally that results marginalization of Dalits in decision-making. The symbolic participation of Dalits in political parties and Community based Organizations have lacked group awareness to influence the processes of

decision-making. The caste system is well entrenched in Nepali society. In spite of the election a few Dalits to the local governments in the changed context, there is not a context to ensure that Dalits are equally participated in deliberations and discussions of local governance planning. The study attempts to address the aforesaid gaps. In this regard, objectives of this study are set as to explore evidences of Dalit marginalization in local governance decision-making and interpret the reasons of Dalit non-participation in local governance resources and opportunities.

Here are the justifications for a research problem. This study explains the negative consequences of the dominant ideology of the caste system. The study identifies the limitations in local governance's inclusion of Dalits. It is essential to assist local legislators in creating legislation and initiatives that promote Dalit inclusion.

## Literature Review

Local democracy, it was argued, offers people more than only the ability to have an impact on decisions that directly impact their social and economic circumstances. Because local democracy is the main setting where the majority of people engage in political activity, it also fosters and strengthens ideas of participatory citizenship. Local autonomy and local democracy are frequently used interchangeably since communities are unlikely to develop democratic norms without some latitude in using their judgment. The level of participation from citizens determines how far the state's political system can progress(Prachhet, 2004) In democracy, the people from different walks are right holders and driver for a system. According to the writers, citizens' participation is necessary for the state's ruling structure to flourish and become more solidified. Democracy's efficacy is gauged by the degree of public participation in the order's decision-making process. Political modernity is characterized by the expansion of political involvement, which explains the cause (Huntington & Nelson,1976). Democracy is a form of government by the people based on equality rights and collective identity. exercising political authority for these rights locally, engaging citizens in an organized manner, influencing the way public policies are carried out and implemented, and bringing about temporary changes in the lives of individuals from various backgrounds. A participatory democracy's advancement needs to be gauged by the level of advancement Dalits have achieved. Dalits are destroyed by the dominant caste system ideology. Therefore, the expression of Dalits and other marginalized groups within society validates the core of Flyvbjerg's (1998) observation that democracy is not something that a society "gets"; rather, democracy needs to be fought for on a daily basis, even after it has been established in a society for a considerable amount of time. The idea that lower levels of elective office might serve as a platform for the development and recruitment of new political leaders—including women and young people who have not traditionally participated in politics—was made very

evident (Diamond 2004).

Dalit marginalization in governance processes and activities has been exacerbated by their exclusion from both official and informal institutions, the segmentation of society based on hierarchy, and majoritarian politics. said that the dominance of the high hill caste groups in the political leadership at the local and national levels is a reflection of their dominance in the nation's social, economic, administrative, and political institutions(Nepali, 2018).  The broader implication of Nepali politics was discovered to be exclusionary. Nepali politics is situated in the exclusive majoritarian corner. Even the individual institutions lack inclusivity because the main political parties are dominated by Hindu upper castes from the hill regions, and a large portion of this power is held by men. It excludes groups from sharing power (Lawoti, 2005).

It was illustrated that the issue with local governance is not just that local administrations are incompetent, but also that communities lack critical consciousness and organizational skills. Opportunities for direct self-governance are not guaranteed to be embraced by all citizens, nor does it guarantee that they will do so; some may not be aware of them, while others may be aware yet choose not to participate(Fung 2004). The cornerstone for local leadership development and the institutionalization of democracy is public involvement. The constitution's devolution of authority has given local residents more influence over the plans and programs that are chosen in accordance with the directives issued by the federal government. The community development committees gather the needs from the target audience, compile a lengthy list, and then prioritize it. The Ward Chairman presides over the ward meeting, which is when all of the chosen ideas are discussed. Mentioned ahead is only the ideals. Dalits are not heard at all. Both the elected and non-elected Dalits are not perceived as leaders, but only perceived as sub-ordinates to others in the society(R.B. Shahi,  personal communication, June 25, 2023). The  Rural Municipality assembly receives the chosen plans and projects following extensive input and discussion. A single sectoral plan is created by combining the many. Even in this, process Dalit concerns are not addressed and included( T.R. Kami, personal communication, December 23, 2023). The adverse effects of caste system has crated a division in socio-cultural processes of the  Nepali society that reflects its domination in decision-making processes of local politics( R.N. Kami, personal communication, December 20, 2023).

Having reviewed the literatures, the researcher raised the questions; how are Dalits trated in the meetings of local governance? and why are Dalits unheard and ignored in agendas of decision-making in local governance? to address the gaps. Thus, the paper builds in and around searching answers to these questions. The subsequent sections deal with each question accordingly.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study focused on the theory of casye system in 1936's The Annihilation of Caste, by Ambedkar. It was argued that caste systems involve more than just labor division. It is a division of laborers as well. Clearly, division of labor is necessary in a civilized society. However, this artificial separation of workers into airtight compartments does not accompany the division of labor in any civilized society (BAWS, Volume 1, original emphasis). It was also mentioned that the concept of caste was essentially founded on the hierarchical structure within society, the division of society into segments, limitations on food and social interactions, the rights and privileges accorded to various social and religious groups, prohibitions on marriage, and the absence of unrestricted employment. It served the upper class Brahmans in society's political objectives(Ghurey, 1964). In 1854, the then-prime minister of Nepal, Janga Bahadur Rana, institutionalized the caste system further with a Civil Code. The caste hierarchy was as follows: (1) Those who wear sacred threads or are twice-born; (2) those who consume alcohol; (3) those in touchable low castes; and (4) those who are untouchables. Dalits in Nepali society were pushed into a peripheral area by this kind of caste segregation, which caused a significant gulf between them and non-Dalit sectors(Hiffer, 2004). It is evident that the Shudra varna is the only group that is subject to the caste system. He claimed that society's elites are constantly seeking to maintain the varna system.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual freamework*
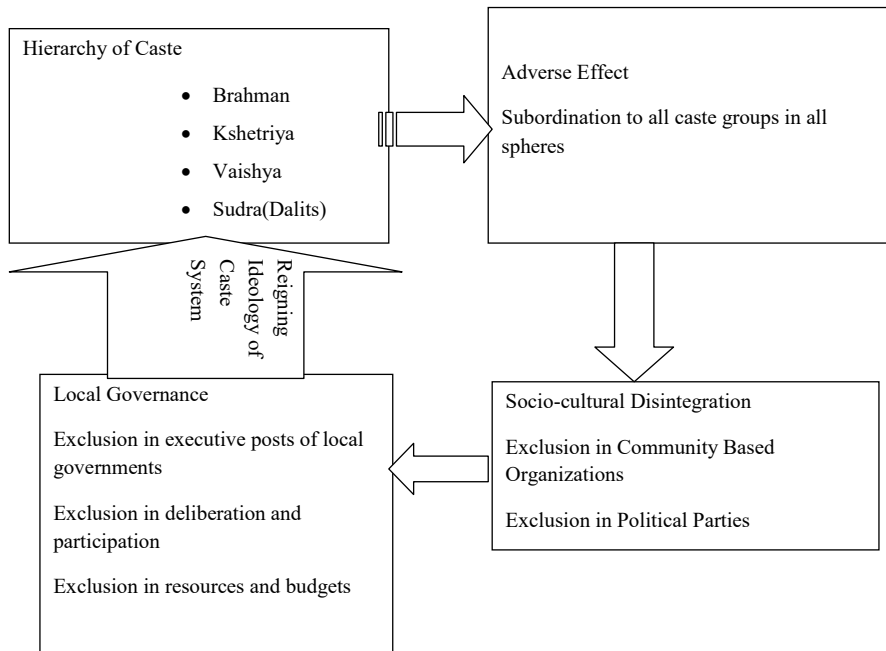
He further contends that the guardians of society do not mind if members of the lower castes change their status or line of work; however, if they attempt to adopt the higher castes' occupations in an attempt to rise in society, this is problematic and is met with fierce opposition from the upper castes(Lohia, 1964). Having discussed on the theoretical framework, the conceptual framework of the study is given in figure 1.

## Research Methodology

The research has followed a qualitative research design. Marshal & Rossman (1999) opined that qualitative research is abroad approach to the study of social phenomena, its genres are naturalistic and interpretive and they draw on multiple methods of inquiry in qualitative method, the researchers are intrigued with complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings, the participants themselves attribute to those interactions. The researcher employed a narrative approach that collected the narratives from Dalit individuals that tells their experiences. A critical review of the pertinent literatures was undertaken to interpret the context.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

#### *Participatory Democracy: A Global Reality*

Elections became the focal point of politics, making it impossible for representative democracy to satisfy the inflated expectations of various segments of the populace. Elections were viewed as secondary to the empowerment of the people. Local governance is becoming recognized as a significant issue thanks to the democratic process. The global political system faced new difficulties as a result of the third democratic wave, including widespread public participation in decision-making. People's lives are impacted by fair access to and control over decision-making. People began to notice the location of power and how it was used in the 1980s as a result of the growth of information technology and slow political change(Huntington, 1975).

He further maintained that political engagement is the process by which institutions and practices gain significance and stability, and that every political system's degree of institutionalization may be determined by its flexibility, intricacy, coherence, and independence. When representative democracy failed to serve as an intermediary between the centralized state and the people, particularly to boost the latter's participation in the process of overall growth, people of all backgrounds started to question the legitimacy of the system. The mono-institutional attitude of the central governmental actors, who thought they alone had the answers to developmental difficulties and were always right, has been replaced by the growing ability and desire of the local people to engage in the governing process. Participatory rural assessment is a people-centered development approach that includes communities in the process of identifying issues, coming up with solutions, and

assessing the results in an effort to empower them (Allam & Newman 2018).

After the Second World War, democratic governance spread around the globe. Before long, social and internal difficulties were the norm. It was embraced by many nations worldwide, either as a counter to the Soviet Model of communism or to quell the revolutionary fervor of the recently independent nations. They were unable to satisfy public expectations of the democratic system or to stay distant from the former USSR as internal tensions arose. Aside from this, the industrialized countries continued to advance rapidly in their industrialization and economic expansion, making the Third World countries unable of competing with them. They lacked democratic enabling conditions as well as acute facilities for political modernization and development. As a result, democratic experiments were short-lived and included a temporary loss of power(Khanal, 2006).  It was further argued that the first emerging in the mid-1970s, the Third Wave placed greater emphasis on strengthening the nation-state structure than on empowering citizens to participate in grassroots governance. International organizations and development agencies entrusted state governments with this responsibility since they were thought to be the primary agents in reforming society and other areas. Their abilities to handle development projects around the globe were reinforced. They continued to be opposed to changes in politics, the economy, and society culture, though.

The current era of the Third Wave of democracy began to take shape in the late 1980s, following a unique set of principles that included transparency and a commitment to democratic values. The stance adopted was that the state is not the most effective means of addressing issues related to poverty, inequality, underemployment, and underdevelopment. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 made this even more clear. The Third World, with all of its issues, came to understand that local community involvement might accelerate local development while maintaining the state's role. It was decided to prioritize people's involvement in development initiatives based on the assumption. People's engagement is essential to guaranteeing efficacy, efficiency, and sustainability, it was discovered(Khanal, 2006). A challenge to Third World development attempts is emerging from the rising globalization of political economy. In addition to weakening the state's position as a supplier of goods and services, it has forced it to contend with market forces. The economies of the Third World nations might not be able to compete in the current global market. However, since the globalization movement has ensnared them, it is impossible to ignore. The emerging nations are about to take a middle road between the globalized market process and the indigenous political process with more social control and meaningful engagement in order to confront the problems posed by globalization.

Nepal has 753 local councils. The councils are divided into three categories: metropolitan, sub-metropolitan, and municipal (rural and urban) councils, depending on their location, density, degree of infrastructural development, and internal income. The

executive board, which is presided over by the mayor, chairpersons, and ward committee members make up a typical municipal council. The number of elected representatives, the demographic variety in terms of minority communities, and the municipal organization all influence the size of the council. Apart from the political parties represented in the council, additional social groups represented by council members include the Dalit community, gender-related concerns, and other minority groups belonging to different social, linguistic, and religious communities (Bhusal & Breen, 2021).Theoretically, participatory planning produces power and rationality by restricting the executive head of local bodies' discretionary authority. If elected officials behave with respect for the decisions made by all parties involved, then it is assumed that they are eager and open-minded about planning in a collaborative manner. If not, as long as local stakeholders and political leaders do not honor the genuine spirit of the properly structured bottom-up planning process, it remains a wishful thought. Enhancing the institutionalization of participatory planning is therefore a critical goal under the current local representative democratic framework. Participation is therefore in conflict with the representative form of democracy.  It was additionally opined:

> Instead of the institutions, elite officials are the ones with power. In decision-making, personal cliques serve as middlemen. The party and government leaders have a great deal of flexibility in deciding on strategy and tactics because of this individualized kind of authority. Only decisions taken by a specific clique are formalized by institutions (Borre, Pandey & Tiwari, 1994).

### The Caste System: A Prone to Subordination

One argument put out was that Hinduism is inextricably linked to the historical example of caste oppression. It is difficult to pinpoint the precise beginnings of caste-based discrimination. Caste hierarchy is said to have originated from the purushsukta of the eleventh mandala of the Rig Veda, which was compiled between 1000 and 700 B.C. according to Hindu holy texts. Between 300 and 200 B.C., Manusmiriti imposed the Verna system on the community, which was composed of Brahman, Kshtriya, Vaishya, and Sudra Sharma(2005). Sudrawere was kept out of authority, as was Vaishya. Vaishyas were instructed to pursue business and agriculture, and Sudras were instructed to work for the upper caste. Then, in order to preserve social order, this system was determined at birth. Over time, the situation of Sudras declined to the point that they were in worse shape than animals. In Manusmiriti, it was stated that killing a dog, cat, or bird is more sinful than killing a Sudra. Sudra was not allowed to possess a home or farm land (Paswan, 1999).

The political system in Nepal has remained extremely divided since the country's unification, with a few number of families primarily belonging to the Brahman and Ch-

hetri castes dominating the pyramidal structure, much like the social system. This statement is generally accurate, given that the likelihood of social mobility for ethnic groups outside than the three castes that dominate society—Brahmans, Chhetris, and Newars— has remained low even after 1951. Consequently, one of the key factors determining the political culture is the social hierarchy. For decades, people in Nepal have been divided along the lines of castes, sub-castes, regions, race, and ethnicity. Though individuals from many ethnic groups may or may not be members of the Hindu caste system, the system is essentially based in Hinduism. Undoubtedly, throughout history, the Hindu caste system has been so pervasive in the political process that it has kept out many ethnic groups and the poorer parts of society (Joshi & Rose1966).

It was revealed that Nepal's caste system was first imposed in the latter part of the eighteenth century as a result of Hinduization. It is a riff on the Hindu Indian model that was brought to Nepal by caste Hindus who worked in customary caste-based jobs. Before then, chiefdoms and principalities—independent but flexible governmental entities—were made up of a variety of ethnic groups, each with its own language, culture, and religion. Nepal was united in 1768 under Prithivi Narayan Shah and again in 1846–1851 during the Rana Regime. Specifically, the MulukiAin of 1854 divided Nepali society into five main groups: the impure but touchable castes (which included Europeans and Muslims), the namasinematwali (unenslavable liquor drinkers), the masinematwali (enslavable liquor drinkers), and the tagadhari (the twice born thread wearing high castes( Pfaff-Czarnecka, Gellner &Whelptoon1997).It was claimed that being politically correct included having an inclusive mindset as well as equality in terms of decision-making. Everyone must have the same freedom to voice their concerns and interests, as well as the ability to challenge one another and provide comments and views on the ideas and arguments put out by others. All of this, nevertheless, is impossible to do until there is unrestricted free expression(Young, 2000). Rushing to the conclusion that organizations in the civil society can also serve as channels for target poor people to participate in development initiatives and gain empowerment. With planning that is couched in terms of "stakeholders" and "local governance," this strategy has somewhat undermined the centralization of the top-down state (World Bank,1997).

The intricate caste system, which divides people into social classes, is ingrained in societal culture. It is a historic social division based on family ancestry and occupation. Five distinct classes make up the Indian caste system. The warrior class, known as the Kshatriyas, is the next highest class in Indian civilization, after the priests and instructors, or Brahmins. The Vaishyas, who belong to the farmer and merchant class, are rated third. The Shudras, who are ranked fourth, are laborers ("The Caste System in Hinduism"). The Dalits were viewed as the fifth category, deserving of no caste classification because they were so lowly. In Indian culture, they were frequently referred to as the untouchables(De-

sai and Kulkarni, 2008).

Social isolation is a multifaceted, intricate process. It includes the denial or lack of access to resources, rights, products, and services, as well as the incapacity to engage in the typical interactions and pursuits that the majority of members of a society are afforded, whether in the context of the political, social, cultural, or economic spheres. It has an impact on societal cohesiveness and equity in addition to the individual's quality of life(Levitas et al. 2007).

The concerns of social inclusion are largely unaddressed by the Sustainable Development Goals. Due to the diversity of global conditions, only a few number of global goal-setting agendas are able to adequately handle the various aspects of exclusion or effectively promote inclusion. As previously stated, social inclusion is a process that guarantees individuals who are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion the chance and means to fully engage in economic, social, political, and cultural life and to live at a standard of living that is deemed normal in their community. It guarantees that individuals have increased access to their fundamental rights and involvement in decisions that impact their life (Commission of the European Communities, 2003).

Norms are notions that relate to fundamental beliefs, organizational conceptions, or specified practices with different levels of abstraction and detail (Wiener, 2009). Global norms take on new meanings when applied to different home settings. Some lose significance while others gain it. Every culture experiences some degree of exclusion, thus consensus on what defines an appropriate amount of inclusion or exclusion is necessary( Zwingel 2011) .

### *Local Governance: The Tendency of Power to Exclude Dalits*

In 1992 and 1997, Nepal had two local elections. Merely 79 VDC chairpersons and 132 vice-chairpersons were elected in relation to the representation of Dalits in both elections. Dalits were chosen to lead their wards in 1648. Dalits made up 9847 of the ward members elected. Members elected were 197 Dalit women (Jha, 2004). Given that the Local Self-Governance Act mandated that women from Wards be elected, over 60,000 women were elected in the second election, demonstrating the grassroots level of political participation (Khanal, 2006). In the 2017 local elections, 6,567 Dalit women were elected to represent 7,53 local levels in 6,743 wards. Vice-chairs were chosen from among eight Dalit women. In 6,743 wards, there was not a single Dalit woman chosen as a ward chair. There were only six male Dalit mayors among the 293 total. Just 197 Dalit men were elected to the 6,743 ward chairs (B.K., 2006).

A caste group's ability to remain cohesive is crucial to its ability to exercise political influence. It is possible to reconstruct the current power structures when people band together and organize around causes that they share. It was discovered that Dalits

are neither socially or politically organized to the extent that they are powerless to alter the established power structures that are supported by the ancient Varna system ideology. For example, the small group of Dalits has expressed concerns about funding Dalit empowerment and awareness in 2022 and before. Neither the ward nor the thematic nor subjective committees gave our request any consideration. ( D. N. Sarki, personal communication, December 15, 2023). Power brokers in the area take pleasure in dividing Dalits. Regarding the degree to which Dalits hold stakeholders responsible for their issues, it was indicated that a larger segment of society still views Dalits as servants. Not even non-Dalit-led networks, NGOs, CBOs, or political parties are exempt from it (B.K., 2020). Regarding engagement, countless Dalits attend and participate at various levels of meetings and rallies. Budgets for human resource development and caste prejudice were specifically mentioned as concerns. Resources are not typically allocated in accordance with community priorities or desires. The budget is roughly allocated in the names of marginalized groups in accordance with fairly inclusive provisions for the allocation of targeted resources. After that, on the advice of the local elites, it is redirected toward the construction of infrastructure. Is this not illustrative enough of how Dalits are being alienated from local powers by the predominance of local elites? Dalit empowerment and advocacy received funding from the relevant (chosen) Rural Municipality Assembly in the most recent fiscal year (2022–2023). While the original purpose of the funding was community empowerment and temporary livelihood recovery, later uses included power line expansion, school building renovations, and rural road upgrades( V. B. Sarki, personal communication, December 12, 2023).

The interviewees methodically conveyed their hardships and subjugations when questioned about the amount of Dalit participation in local decision-making processes. Even though the act places a strong emphasis on using the participatory planning process to debate plans and prioritize actions, inclusive provisions are hardly ever found. Dalits and other marginalized groups have gained access to local resources thanks to the current laws governing the distribution of resources to them and other disadvantaged groups in society. Since they cannot alter the current power dynamics, they are insufficient for Dalits. For activists, leaders, development professionals, and government officials, "Dalit inclusion" has become a catchphrase. Dalits are blatantly disregarded when resources are allocated for community members( U.M. Badi, personal communication, November 12, 2023). Local administration in Nepal has, to a lesser degree, created a favorable atmosphere for practicing democracy at the local level through the expression of interests and their incorporation into potential policy options. We should really consider if it has made it possible for Dalits and women to prioritize activities and expenses and to discuss requirements. The answer to the question is simple: no. Decision-making processes are only accessible to and controlled by communities that belong to so-called upper caste and

ethnic groups(S. Nepali, personal communication, December 15, 2023). The process of making decisions is known as local governance. In these processes, Dalits play neither a direct nor an indirect role. Dalits are not fairly represented in local budgets or resources, to put it briefly. Despite their multitude of artisan skills and capacities, the Dalit people continue to be excluded from nearly all chances in society(B. N. Damai, personal communication, October 13, 2023).

The exclusion of Dalits from requirement assessment and planning is supported by a large variety of factors. People who are elected or not are indifferent to the clumsy inclusive programs and policies of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Politics reflects the underlying tendencies of a system founded on caste. Due to their lack of access to knowledge, Dalits have a unique opportunity to join public forums and places and decide their own destiny(K. Nepali, personal communication, December 23, 2023).

The issue of Dalits' widespread participation persists in local planning, from village level meetings to Rural Municipality Assembly sessions. Dalits' concerns about livelihoods and development are disregarded. To combat marginalization, some Dalits try to allocate funds. Non-Dalits are the ones who limit it. In the assemblies, voices are not heard. The majority of Dalits, it was said, are not aware of local level gatherings that discuss issues and priorities specific to the area and the resources at hand. Due to a combination of factors, including a lack of information transmission and a need to solve immediate problems by working long hours in order to make ends meet, very few Dalits attend assemblies and forums. Not all members of the community still hold the group right view, which looks to the local elites to meet their needs. Fewer people who have become more aware of the issues participate in local forums and try to voice their wants and sufferings. They are not given any attention. Regarding our efforts to sway stakeholders, we were informed that we had spoken out during the meeting concerning funding for gender sensitization training, untouchability awareness, and incentives for the poorest Dalit students. They sought to pull a ruse by claiming resource limitations, but they did not explicitly refute it. The budget that was set aside for us has never been seen. The budget is allotted in accordance with needs and preferences(A. L. Nepali, personal communication, December 11, 2023).

Dalits are largely ignorant and only partially aware of local politics. They have limited ability to influence local power brokers because they experience sociocultural discrimination. Dalits who are well-educated and economically secure and who are involved in political parties and issue-based networks are aware of cross-cutting problems such as local politics, empowerment, and inclusion. They are not sufficient to alter the power dynamics. The vast majority of the community lacks knowledge and possibilities. Political parties and social organizations are regarded as essential for community mobilization and public affairs engagement in local democracy. With the exception of national

elections, there is no evidence of cooperation between Dalits and political parties or civil society organizations on relevant problems(J. Nepali, personal communication, December 20, 2023). The inner circle of kin, devoted followers, and local leaders encapsulates the process of integrating and articulating demands. They are the root cause of both political parties and civil society organizations. A small shift is apparent despite the powerful influence of a small number of organized elites. Although the less powerful segments of society are rapidly becoming more critical of each other, decision-making procedures have not yet taken this into account. It is widely held that the closer the relationships are between Dalits, political parties, and civil society, the more cooperatively they will work to resolve issues as a group. Looking closely at the mechanics of local politics, the notion has been turned around. It appears that the aforementioned parties were involved in elites who cooperated and those who flatter them. Orally, they work with Dalits to resolve the problems(H. Nepali, personal communication, Decmebr 20, 2023).

On potential means of integrating Dalits in local resources and decision-making, local duty bearers, leaders of Dalit communities, development players, civil society actors, and dignitaries in the teaching profession were questioned. By sharing their worries, the chosen key informants were able to provide more thoughtful answers to the checklists. Local governance planning is a mechanism that allows multiple stakeholders to make decisions on an equitable basis. Power dynamics in place influence stakeholder involvement and non-participation in the forums. There won't be any representation of the underprivileged in the forums if inclusive policies aren't implemented to support them. Dalits and this are comparable. Fixed seats must be assigned under local government planning in order to formally mainstream Dalits( I. B. Badi, personal communication, December 12, 2023). Dalits are excluded from power because of the discriminatory nature of local governmental and non-governmental entities. Although it has been billed as a participatory process, the current planning process was created with representative democracy in mind. It is dominated by the local elites. Individuals lack any places to make decisions. Individuals are summoned to sign an attendance form. The planning process and human empowerment must go hand in hand. Thus, it is possible to maintain the balance of power and reduce the imbalance of power among various social groups in order to fairly impact the game's rules. Dalits are asked to testify as witnesses during meetings and municipal assemblies. A few attendees voice their wants and worries about the direction of growth( L.Bishwokarma, personal communication, December 15, 2023).

The  comprehensive provisions for women, children, Dalits, indigenous nationals, and individuals with disabilities are a commendable step toward representation and inclusion in resources by earlier Local Self- Governance Regulation 1999. "At present, this kind of inclusive provision to allocate resources for the marginalized groups has not been retained by the existing regulations. As the budget allocation is well-captured by local

elites hailed from high caste groups, Dalits did not access to the budgets whereas fourteen plans were addressed by the budget raised by others"(W.M. Nepal, personal communication, January 12, 2024).

It is evident that exclusion is a condition of disempowerment, dehumanization, and disenfranchisement of a group that is upheld by institutionalized obstacles and underpinned by an underlying ideology of racial, ethnic, or caste supremacy. Dalits are becoming increasingly marginalized in society as a result of the socially created hierarchy of inclusion and exclusion. NGOs and political parties provide the lubricant needed for a sustainable democracy. It is anticipated that the work done by NGOs and political parties will empower the underprivileged. "They serve as go-betweens for the disenfranchised and local elites in the fair distribution of resources and power. Political parties and non-governmental organisations appear to be less responsive to Dalit problems, despite popular belief. The reason is because the vast majority of non-Dalits who are in these institutions' leadership structures have an impact on them" (K.L. Nepali, personal communication, December 12, 2023).

The current planning procedure has benefited the local elites from the perspective of exercising local democracy. The underprivileged segment of society is disregarded while making decisions and setting priorities. "While making acts, regulations, procedural laws and directives, only the meeting was held among the eleceted and non-elected party leaders and local elites hailed from the high caste groups. Dalits were not consulted and invited for their sufferings and problems"(G.K. Kami, December 12, 2023).

There are major inequalities in how resources are distributed and opportunities for equal opportunity between people when tolerance, respect, and dignity are not prioritized, nor is it possible to accept and celebrate people's differences. Because of its remoteness and location-specific features, Nepal's spatial exclusion is manifested in differences in development levels. Poor development indicators for women are a sign of gender-based exclusion, while low levels of development accomplishments for particular castes, communities, indigenous people, and nations are a sign of caste- and ethnicity-based exclusion. "In the local budgeting, Dalits are not heard. In 2022 and 2023, Dalits had raised the concerns of allocation of budgets for driniing water schemes and empowerment trainings. Thoesedemndas were neither heard in the ward or in the subjective commitees. Whereas the three demands of non-Dalits were accessed to the budget"(S.R. Nepali, personal communication, December 20, 2023). Social elites continue to hold great power in society. Despite this, citizens who are engaged in politics and willing to participate to some extent can hold political power increasingly accountable and restrict its growth. An environment where power elites can influence the establishment of hegemony in society for centuries is created by increasing the participation of individuals in domains where power is exercised. An accurate predictor of marginalization, which in turn fuels poverty and injustice,

is an unequal allocation of power within society. All citizens are equal under the "one person, one vote" principle, regardless of their caste, ethnicity, sex, race, or religion. But this notion ignores the sociological reality that so-called high caste males dominate Nepal's political system. "Dalits are not massively inivited to the settlement level meetings during the phase of local level planning. Those Dalits who are in the meeting are not allowed to speak of their local problems. As the planning is well-handled by local elites, Dalits have to look up to non-Dalits for development"( R.K. Dami, personal communication, December 25, 2023).

## Discussion

The results show that Dalits' sociocultural marginalization is reflected in the ways community-based networks make decisions. Its direct effect is also evident in the local party politics and governance, which uphold Dalits' subjugation. In opposition to the norms and values of participatory democracy, the caste system creates division along caste lines based on developmental and other agendas. Caste, which is based on assigned function distinction, is arguably one of the oldest and most prevalent kinds of social stratification. It leads to injustices. Traditionally connected to Hinduism, caste stratification is upheld by an ideology that justifies inequality based on birth status. Depending on one's place in the caste structure, there are restrictions on interactions across castes as well as unequal advantages and obligations. The British colonists contributed to the establishment of the so-called "Higher castes," and more specifically the Brahmans, who over time established laws that guaranteed their superior standing within the larger social hierarchy. Those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, known as Dalits or scheduled castes, have historically been subjected to the most severe enforcement of caste laws. The idea of Dalits as "untouchables," and hence as the other group and outsiders to the caste system, endured via regular acts of humiliation and force. Compared to people who belonged to the caste system, they were seen as illogical, primitive, and backward. Social exclusion is a dynamic and ongoing process that affects people's ability to integrate economically and socially into society. It is further argued that the dynamic process of being shut out, partially or fully, from any or all of several systems.

## Conclusion

Dalits are acknowledged as the lowest class of people in society by the dominant caste system philosophy. Hindu society is psychologically divided into vertical and segmented groups due to deeply ingrained feelings of inferiority and superiority based on caste hierarchy. This pushes society in the direction of a hierarchy that is destroying Dalits' sociocultural fabric. As a result, Dalits are weakened and forced to submit to the social and political structures of their community. The lack of leadership positions and offices in municipal governments is a reflection of the subordination. Non-Dalits have a

strong hold on positions of decision-making in a variety of institutions, including local governments, political parties, and social groups. Decision-making procedures are not just unaffected by Dalits' participation status in local governments. The subordination in local politics will therefore not change despite Dalits being symbolically represented in all facets of life.

### References

Ambedkar, Dr B. (1964). *Writings and Speeches (BAWS) (various years), Volumes 1 to 21*, Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra.

Bhusal, T., & Breen, M. (2021). Federalism and local governance: Exploring multi-lingualism in local decision-making inNepal. *Regional & Federal Studies, 33*(2), 187–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2021.194097.

Borre, O., Pandey, S. R. & Tiwari, C.K. (1994). *Nepalese political behaviour*. Sterling Publishers Private Limited.

Bresser-Pereira, L. (2004). *Democracy and public management*. www.ifcs.ufrj.br accessed on 10 July 2023.

Baral, L. R., Hachhethu, K. & Sharma, H. (2001). *Leadership in Nepal*. Adroit Publicans.

Marshal, C. & Rossman, G.B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research (3rd ed.)*, SAGE.

Diamond, L. (2004).*Why decentralized power in democracy*. A paper presented to the Conference on Fiscal and Administration Decentralization. February, 2004.

Fung, A. (2004). *Empowered participation, reinventing urban democracy*. Princeton University Press.

Flyvbjerg, B. (1998). *Rationality and power-democracy in practice*. The University of Chicago Press.

Gutmann, A. & Thompson, D. (2004). *Why deliberative democracy?*. Princeton University.

Gellner, D., Pfaff-Czarnecka, J. &Whelptoon, J. (eds.)(1997). *Nationalism and ethnicity in a Hindu kingdom.Thepolitics of culture in contemporary Nepal*. Hardwood Academic Publishers.

 Huntington, P. S. (1975). *Political order in changing societies*. G. U. Mehata.

Huntington, S. P. & Joan, M. N. (1976). *No easy choice: Political participation in developing countries*. Harvard University Press.

Hofer, A. (2004). *The caste hierarchy and the state in Nepal: A study of Muluki Ani 1854.*

Himal Books.

Hambleton, R. (2004). *Beyondnew public management – city leadership, democratic renewal and the politics of place*. paper to the City Futures International Conference, Chicago, Illinois, USA, 8 -10 July 2004.

Joshi, B. L. & Rose, L.E. (1966). *Democraticinnovation in Nepal: A case study of political acculturation*. University of California.

Kjaer, A.(2004). *Governance*. Polity Press.

Khanal, R. (nd). *Local governance in Nepal: Democracy at grassroots*. Smirit Books.

Lawoti, M. (2005). *Towards a democratic Nepal: Inclusive political institutions for a multicultural Society*. Sage.

Lohia, R. (1964). *The Caste System*. Rammanohar Lohia Samta Vidyalaya NyasNyas.

Mehta, D. (1998). *Urban governance: Lessons from best practices in Asia*. Urban Management Programme, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UNCHS, Occasional Paper, No. 40.

Pratchhet, L. (2004). Local autonomy, local democracy and the 'new localism. *Political Studies*, Vol. 52.

Paswan, R. V. (1999). The history of Dalit minority. In SantoshBharatiya(ed.) *Dalit and minority empowerment*. Raj Kamal Prakashan.

Pathak, B. (2006). *Intra-Dalit discrimination: A study report on status of Tarai Dalits*. LANCAU-Nepal.

Sharma, G. (2005). *Intra Dalit discrimination*. LANCAU, Nepal.

Shrestha, T.N. (1960). *The concept of local government and decentralization*. Ratna Pustak, Bhandar.

Williamson, O. E. (2001). Economic institutions and development: A view from the bottom. In SatuKahkonen and Mancur (Eds.) *A new institutional approach to economic development*. Vistar Publications.

WB (1997). *World development report: The state in a changing world*. Oxford University.

Young,I. M. (2000). *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Desai, S. and Kulkarni, V. (2008). *Changing Educational Inequalities in India in the Context of Affirmative Action.* 45.2 : 245-270. Print.

Levitas, R., Pantazis, C., Fahmy, E., Gordon, D., & Lloyd, E. (2007). *The multi-dimen-*

*sional analysis of social exclusion.* Department of Sociology and School for Social Policy, Townsend Centre for the International Study of Poverty, and Bristol Institute for Public Affairs, Bristol, United Kingdom: University of Bristol.

Zwingle, S. (2011). How do norms travel? Theorizing international women's rights in transnational perspective 1. *International Studies Quarterly, 56*(1), 115-129. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2478.2011.00701.x