

## Conference Report



# ENVISIONING NEW NEPAL

## Dynamics of Caste, Identity and Inclusion of Dalits

## **Conference Report**

### **Envisioning New Nepal: Dynamics of Caste, Identity and Inclusion of Dalits**

#### **Godavari Village Resort**

June 20-22, 2010

#### **Organized by**

Samata Foundation Nepal

#### **Supported by**

Open Society Institute (OSI)  
Enabling State Programme, an initiative of UKAid, DFID  
Centre for Constitutional Dialogue (CCD), UNDP

## **Acknowledgement**

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## Abbreviations:

OSI	- Open Society Institute
ESP UKAid	- Enabling state Program, Initiation of UKAid
CCD	- Centre for Constitutional Dialogue
DFID	- Department for International Development
UNDP	- United Nations Development Program
CA	- Constituted Assembly
IDSN	- International Dalit Solidarity Network
NGO	- Non-Government Organization
UGC	- Union Grants Commission
UCPN (M)	- Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
CPN-UML	- Communist party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist)
NCCS	- National Centre of Competence in Research
FEDO	- Feminist Dalit Organization
UN	- United Nations
JVP	- Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LTTE	- Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
IDP	- Internally Displaced People
PDSN	- Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network
UML	- Unified Marxist Leninist
VDC	- Village Development Committee
NC	- Nepali Congress
INSEC	- Informal Sector Service Centre
HDI	- Human Development Index
NACDOR	- National Confederation of Dalit Organization
DNF	- Dalit non Governmental rganization Federation
ASD	- Alliance for Social Dialogue
NNDSWO	- Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization
SEACOW-CEAD	- Centre for Agro-Ecology and Development
JNU	- Jawaharlal Nehru University

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## I. BACKGROUND

After the successful democracy movement of 1990, new political spaces opened up in Nepal for a rights-based social movement by Nepali Dalits. In this period, marginalized groups such as Dalits and Janajatis reinvigorated their movements for ending exclusion and discrimination and for the promotion of inclusion and representation. In many parts of the country a Dalit movement was launched. However the elite, high caste groups captured the government and its administration did not properly address popular demands for inclusion and representation. The latter indirectly followed the longstanding 'divide and rule' principle, promoting a few individuals instead of institutionalizing inclusion and representation.

A significant proportion of the Dalit community participated in the Maoist-led insurgency with the hope of transforming the current hierarchical society and to end social discrimination. This created opportunities for many Dalit individuals to engage in political activities for the first time in their lives. The current 'transitional phase' in Nepal offers, further, unprecedented opportunities for marginalized groups such as the Dalit to renegotiate their relationship within the polity. Already they have made considerable gains in having had 50 members elected to the constituent assembly in April 2008.

Both practically and from the point of view of scholarship, following this process of renegotiation by the Dalit is of great importance. Strengthening their sense of history, of community and of their own contribution to the country would support further gains. Secondly, the Dalit, unlike many other groups of Nepal, have been the focus of relatively little scholarship to date.

The idea of organizing the international conference was to focus on Dalit issues which will help this group in its lobbying and advocacy efforts as well as make a valuable contribution to the academic literature on Nepal's Dalit communities. It was also projected that discussions on the Dalit of Nepal will benefit from a cross-cultural approach. Therefore, inviting scholars studying Dalits outside of Nepal will allow for a better understanding of the specificities, predicaments and opportunities facing Dalits today. Such an understanding, furthermore, will assist CA members to ensure that the new constitution lays the foundations for a more just and inclusive social order in Nepal. Hence, it proposed to organize an international conference on Dalit issues, involving practitioner/activists as well as scholars as presenters, discussants and participants.

## II. INTRODUCTION

Samata Foundation in collaboration with many organizations organized an international conference on “Envisioning New Nepal: Dynamics of Caste, Identity and Inclusion of Dalits” between 20-22 June 2010. The conference was co-organized by India-China Institute, New School University, New York, the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies, US, Nepal Dalit Info Group, Canada and Canada Forum Nepal, Canada in association with International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), Denmark and the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research South Asian Coordination Office, Kathmandu. Feminist Dalit Organization, Jagaran Media Centre, Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization, Jana Utthan Pratisthan, Dalit Welfare Organization and Dalit NGO Federation Nepal were also involved in coordinating this event. This event was a grand success because of the efforts, contributions and support of many people and organizations. Samata Foundation is grateful towards OSI, CCD/UNDP and ESP/UKaid DFID for the funds they have provided us to organize this grand program.

The conference on “Envisioning New Nepal: Dynamics of Caste, Identity and Inclusion of Dalits”, which opened at Yak and Yeti Hotel and continued at Godavari Resort from 20-22 June, 2010, was the first of its kind held in Nepal. The first day was the inaugural ceremony which was formally chaired by the board of director of Samata Foundation, Dr. Madan Pariyar. Chief Guest of the ceremony was Dr. Sukhadeo Thorat, Chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), Government of India who delivered a speech on Dr. Ambedkar’s Perspective on Social Inclusion / Exclusion. The other guests were the representatives from the major political parties namely Bishwobhakta Dulal, Aahuti (UCPN-Maoist), Devendra Poudel (UCPN-Maoist), Ramesh Lekhak (Nepali Congress) and Pradeep Gyawali (CPN-UML). The second day was followed by the conference sessions in Godavari Village Resort. Each session was carried out by the number of speakers from national and international levels. The event brought together scholars, political leaders including CA members and practitioners/activists working on Dalits across South Asia. Such a gathering of minds was long overdue given that the Dalit movement in Nepal began six decades ago.

The event aimed to help fill that gap by creating dialogue between Dalit and non-Dalit political leaders, the academic world and the general public for making Nepali society more inclusive of Dalits and more responsive to the Dalit agenda. It also aimed to provide an opportunity for academics working on Dalits across Asia to set agendas for future collaboration.

The papers presented at the conference covered important issues concerning Dalits such as identity and politics, human rights and dignity, the development paradox, constitution building, federalism, affirmative action and the effects of globalization on the Dalit movement. Two types of papers were presented during the conference; Academic Paper- Under the given theme organizer invited the papers from the professor around the world who are working on Dalit in Nepal and elsewhere; Fellow’s Paper – The organizer awarded a short fellowship to the Dalit youth/Activist and other interested person to do short research on the conference theme. Their papers were supposedly being presented in the conference but due to some technical difficulties only two of the research fellows could present their papers. Out of 29 research proposals submitted, only 9 of the research papers were selected. Please find the list of fellows selected which is provided in the annex. Each one of them was provided with the maximum of Rs. 50,000/- stipend. This conference gave fresh insight to these research fellows and improved and strengthened their writing skills.

The informative and thought-provoking presentations were followed by discussions in which participants raised critical questions and offered a wide range of perspectives. Discussions were particularly enriched by the fact that a large number of participants and panelists belonged to the Dalit community and possessed insights drawn from living experience. The conference also allowed Dalit political leaders including CA members, activists and civil society members to articulate their perspectives on the past, present and future of Nepali politics and the restructuring of the Nepali state. The proceedings of the conference will be published in book form, which will serve as a more detailed record of this historic event. It is hoped that the book will advance scholarship and help strengthen policy on the Dalits of South Asia, in particular Nepal.

## Conference Objectives :

- To provide intellectual space to Dalit political leaders including CA members, activists and civil society members to articulate their perspectives on the past, present and future of Nepali politics and the restructuring of the Nepali state.
- To utilize the opportunity of transition to create dialogue among and between Dalit and non-Dalit political leaders, the academic world and the general public to make political parties and society more inclusive of Dalits at all levels and to be more responsive to the Dalit agenda.
- To advance scholarship on the Dalits of Nepal through publication of a volume on Dalit issues and through developing a research programme in relation to the Dalit of Nepal.
- To provide an opportunity for academics working on Dalits across Asia to engage in dialogue and set agendas for future collaboration.

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### III. WHO ARE THE DALIT?

The following passage by the Dalit writer and leader Aahuti tries to encapsulate the experience of Dalithood: "Of all the forms of social discrimination practiced across the world, 'untouchability' is the most blatant rejection of your humanity. This problem, which may seem normal from a distance, is devastating when you experience it. Being a Dalit does not only mean being denied your rights. It also means being part of a psychologically damaging process that teaches you to accept dehumanization. In this process a Dalit begins to see every right s/he gets as 'kindness' from the 'upper' castes, while the latter see any right granted to Dalits as an act of benevolence on their part."

Within this common experience of Dalithood, how do Dalits distinguish themselves from one another? How does class, caste, geographic location or gender affect the formation of Dalit identity? Do Dalits belong to the same cultural category as "high" caste Hindus, or have they evolved a distinct identity? These were some of the questions raised with regards to Dalit identity.

#### a) Self-definition and Self-perception

Some participants were skeptical about the use of the term "Dalit", which comes from the Marathi language and means "suppressed" or "crushed". For them, the term implies tacit acceptance of their prevailing oppressed status and a

lowering of self-esteem. However, others pointed out that the term 'Dalit' conveys the experiences of 'untouchables' across the world and has allowed them to launch a common struggle. Therefore, as long as caste-based discrimination exists the term would remain meaningful. Some interesting findings about the Dalit's self-perception were shared by Dr. Steven J Folmar, professor at Wake Forest University, US, who has worked among Dalits in Lamjung district. If two children born to a Dalit family and a Bahun family were exchanged right after birth, what characteristics would they take on as they grow up? This was one of the questions he asked his informants. Dalits in the village replied that the Dalit child raised in a Bahun household would undoubtedly "become a Bahun", whereas the Bahuns held that "jat is jat", meaning, a Dalit would remain a Dalit no matter where s/he is brought up. Dalits in the village believed that their "dalitness" was a social construct based on parenting, occupation and the caste system while their Bahun counterparts believed that "dalitness" is an innate, unchangeable quality of inferiority.

A Dalit participant suggested that Dr. Folmar's findings fit the expected grid too neatly. In the participant's experience, most Dalits he met in rural areas regarded themselves as inherently inferior to Bahuns, whom they saw as their patrons and masters. This revealed the extent of their subjugation, he said, and the challenge was to transform this mindset.

#### b) Heterogeneous Entity

There is a need to recognize that Dalits are not a homogenous entity. Dalits are divided along the lines of partition by caste, class, region, gender and political parties. Participants laid great emphasis on the divide that lies between hill Dalits and Madhesi Dalits, and pointed out that Madhesi Dalits such as the Chamar, Dom and Musahar constitute the most disadvantaged even within the Dalit community. As Dr. Krishna Bhattachan pointed out, Madhesi Dalits appreciate hill Dalits' contribution to the Dalit movement but strongly feel that the movement has not raised their issues adequately. Madhesi Dalits also feel dominated by upper caste Madhesis such as Yadavs and Madhesi Brahmins. Despite Madhesi Dalits' participation in the Madhesi movement, the movement has not raised the issues concerning them such as untouchability and caste discrimination.

Further, there is graded untouchability within the Dalit community. Kamis remain at the top; they treat Dalits from the remaining 21 castes as untouchables. The Dom and Musahar are at the bottom of the internal caste hierarchy and are treated as untouchables by all other Dalits. However, the upper castes' claim that Dalits should first give up their own practice of untouchability before expecting non-Dalits to do so. This rings hollow because untouchability was imposed on Dalits by "high" caste Hindus in the first place and Dalits have been forced to enter the vicious cycle of treating 'high' and 'low' among themselves.

#### c) Dalit Women

Dalit women, Madhesi Dalit women in particular, face multiple forms of discrimination both within their community and society at large. Sexual and domestic violence against Dalit women are rampant across South Asia. Only recently three Dalit women including a child were raped and killed by Nepal Army personnel in Bardiya National Park. No action was taken against the perpetrators although voices were raised from several quarters. Kalavanti Raja of Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network described the plight of Pakistani Dalit women, whose caste ("untouchable"), religion (Hindu) and gender make them most vulnerable to all kinds of injustices in a Muslim society. They are frequent victims of brutality and sexual violence but no cases are filed against the perpetrators because all law enforcing agencies in Pakistan are controlled by "feudal lords who kill their own women in the name of honor".

Dr. Vivek Kumar, professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, asserted that the rape of a Dalit woman is not just a sexual act but an act of caste-based violence. Every day three Dalit women are raped in India, he said, and in most cases their private parts are dismembered. These women experience such atrocity not simply because they are women but because they are Dalit women. In Nepal it is the same mentality that drives people to torture Dalit women and feed them human excreta on the charge of practicing witchcraft.

In this context Dr. Bhattachan highlighted the need for Dalit women to launch their own movement.

To that end the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) in Nepal is struggling on two fronts: the "mainstream" women's movement dominated by "high" caste or non-Dalit women and the Dalit movement itself that is dominated by male Dalits. Given the usual emphasis on the need to launch a unified women's movement, one might ask where Dalit women's agenda departs from that of "mainstream" women. Dr. Bhattachan offered a clear answer: "The 'mainstream' women's movement would love to demand proportional representation or at least 33 percent reservation of seats at all levels of the government, but they become happy with filling these positions by 'high' caste or non-Dalit women." Therefore, a separate Dalit women's movement is necessary to ensure caste-based equity within the women's movement.

#### d) Forging a Distinct Identity

It is often claimed that Dalits, although they comprise about one fifth of the population, do not have any particular culture/language or geographical location where they are represented significantly. For this reason the proposed model of federal structure does not delineate any territorial or ethnic unit for Dalits. Even as their oppression by the Hindu caste system is acknowledged, culturally they are often lumped together with upper caste Hindus, who, ironically, are most responsible for their subjugation.

Taking the case of the Sarki community in Ghachok village in Kaski district, Amar BK's presentation

examined whether Dalits have evolved a cultural identity distinct from that of upper caste Hindus although they are part of the same religion and culture. Mr. BK, a research fellow at Samata Foundation, showed how Sarkis' interpretations of Vedic myths uphold the Sarki identity and contradict high-caste interpretations that portray Dalits as inferior and impure. He also noted how the meaning of beef-eating among the Sarki changed from negative to positive as the Sarki's awareness increased over time. Unlike for upper caste Hindus, cow has little religious significance among the Sarki. But due to the stigma attached to their traditional practice of consuming beef and sino (meat of a dead cow), the Sarki in Ghachok decided to give up these items, hoping this would end discrimination against them. However, they soon realized that it is not beef or sino consumption, but their unequal power relation with Bahuns that had pushed them to the lowest status in society. They have now understood that beef and sino are not intrinsically impure but has been socially constructed as such. Therefore, many Sarkis of Ghachok have again started consuming beef. The presentation offered a glimpse of the process in which Dalits are constructing a positive identity or giving a positive meaning to symbols that are considered impure by high castes. Dalit activists and intellectuals need to identify positive elements of Dalit cultural symbols and practices in order to strengthen Dalit consciousness and define a distinct cultural identity of Dalits.

<sup>1</sup> Aahuti, "Hindu Samaj ma Dalit Jatiya Mukti ko Prashna", eds. Mary Des Chene and Pratyush Oonta, Nepal ko Sandarva ma Samajsastra Chintan (Social Science Baha, Lalitpur, 2004); Cited by Hari Roka in his conference paper "Dalit ra Nepali Bikas", June 2010

<sup>2</sup> The address by the UML leader Pradip Gyawali at the opening of the conference also supported the claim that these women were raped.

## IV. DALITS IN SOUTH ASIA

Panelists from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan made enlightening presentations on Dalits in their respective countries.

### a) Dalit Movement in India

The panelists and participants from India offered numerous insights into the Dalit movement in India and helped place Nepal's Dalit movement in a broader perspective. Dr. Ashok Bharati, convener of the National Confederation of Dalit Organizations, India, stressed that the Dalit movement in India started from the time Dalits were pushed into the sphere of untouchability. Their struggle precedes all the modern-day movements led by NGOs, international organizations and civil society although these newer entities often tend to claim otherwise, presenting themselves as the harbingers of the Dalit cause. The first international conference on Dalits, which was held in 1998 in Kuala Lumpur, was not supported by any international donor. Rather, it was organized by the Dalit Diaspora scattered across the world. It is important to remember these facts because they reveal that the Dalits' aspirations are much older and deeper than how they are portrayed.

According to Dr. Bharati, there is a fundamental difference between

the Dalit movement pioneered by Dr. Ambedkar and the movement led by today's civil society. Whereas Ambedkar's movement was driven by a yearning for human dignity for Dalits who he knew were regarded as sub-humans by the Hindu society, civil society's concept of human rights is shaped by capitalist modernity, which treats the question of dignity as secondary. In fact some have argued that the whole notion of human rights as it is conceived today is a neoliberal construct. Dr. Bharati's observations seemed highly relevant in the present global context where multinational organizations promoting neoliberal economic practices define "universal" human rights standards which nation states are required to meet if they want to receive funding.

The Dalit movement in India has come a long way. India currently provides 20 percent reservation for Dalits in all power structures. Dr. Vivek Kumar noted that the movement gathered momentum over the decades due to three main factors: a) persistent demand by Dalits (Ambedkar was the first Dalit to demand Dalit rights in 1919); b) the constitutional mandate of equality; c) affirmative action policy. He suggested that the Dalit movement in India is no longer a homogeneous entity that can be defined in a catch-all phrase. It manifests itself not only as a political movement but also as a movement of Dalit intellectuals, women, employees, NGOs and the Diaspora.

However, despite its myriad achievements, challenges remain. As Rikke Nöhrlind, coordinator of International Dalit Solidarity Network, Denmark, noted, "In India, in spite of constitutional provisions banning

caste discrimination and the special legislation and policy measures adopted, caste discrimination remains widespread – in crude and brutal forms and even taking on modern forms." Ms. Nöhrlind added that almost every delegation to the UN except India recognizes caste discrimination as an international human rights issue. The Indian government's unwillingness to deal with caste discrimination in the UN's human rights bodies is becoming almost "legendary", and its position is being challenged both nationally and internationally.

### b) Sri Lanka: Casteless or Caste-Blind ?

Dr. Kalinga Tudor Silva, who teaches at University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, offered an interesting comparative analysis of the ethnic/caste movements in Sri Lanka and Nepal. He noted that Nepal has a lot to teach Sri Lanka regarding caste issues because the Sri Lankan state does not recognize caste problems. Although Sri Lanka projects itself as a casteless society, it is in fact a caste blind society. There are three parallel caste systems in Sri Lanka, namely, Sinhala, Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian Tamil. Though a uniform notion of untouchability is not found among the people of these three caste systems, each involves caste discrimination of some kind. On the basis of limited data available, a recent study suggested that about 20 to 30 percent of people in Sri Lanka are affected by caste-based discrimination of one form or another. However, the ruling elite fears that raising the caste issue will threaten the brutally guarded Sinhala nationalism. In this regard Sri Lanka lags far behind Nepal, where caste and ethnic struggles continue to gain momentum despite the elite's fear-mongering about social disintegration.

Sri Lanka has experienced two popular uprisings in recent decades – the JVP uprisings (1971 and 1987-89) and the LTTE uprising that began in 1983. Both these uprisings were militarily suppressed by the state committed to a political agenda of Sinhala nationalism. Following Sri Lanka's independence in 1949 both Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms increasingly took on a hegemonic character where caste, class and gender differences within an ethnic group were disregarded. Although both the JVP and the LTTE had significant participation of underprivileged caste groups and women, the leaders of these movements largely ignored caste and gender issues. Thus, unlike the Maoist movement that mobilized the masses with the agenda of ending discrimination based on caste, ethnicity and gender, the major political movements in Sri Lanka operated within a nationalist framework and made caste, class and gender totally invisible. This, however, did not prevent the oppressed castes from bearing the brunt of these struggles. Oppressed Tamil castes became the worst victims of the LTTE war against the state. For example, Panchamars, who are considered untouchables, make up a significant proportion of IDPs in Sri Lanka.

Thus, whereas in Nepal the participation of oppressed groups in the Maoist movement paved the path for their empowerment, in Sri Lanka their involvement in political struggles further victimized them. Whereas efforts are being made to address Dalit problems in the constitution of Nepal, in Sri Lanka it is a challenge even to discuss caste discrimination openly. However, Dr. Silva concluded that suppression cannot extinguish caste problems, which may resurface in the post-war environment and call for a policy response.

### c) Dalits in Bangladesh: A Long Way to Go

Two panelists, Zakir Hossain of Nagarik Uddyog and Dr. Iftekhar Uddin Chowdhury of Chittagong University, shed light on the status of Dalits of Bangladesh. Although Dalits make up only about 4 percent of the population in Bangladesh, they are significant in number due to the large population of Bangladesh. Mr. Hossain noted that at present the Dalit issue has become a 'hot cake' for donors and NGOs in Bangladesh. He warned against the danger of the NGO sector co-opting an issue it does not understand.

In Bangladesh statistics on Dalits vary according to sources. Estimates range from 400,000 to 500,000 and more. Dalits were first brought to Bangladesh (then part of India) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century from various parts of India to remove the dead bodies following a massacre in Dhaka by Burmese pirates. Over time more Dalits were brought to Dhaka as sweepers. Dhaka City Corporation does not have disaggregated data for Dalits, thousands of whom live in and around the city. The state has made no special provisions for Dalits, who face discrimination in every sector from education, employment, housing and health to civil and political rights.

Dalit villages or colonies have insufficient primary schools, and even if Dalit children have access to school, they face discrimination in classrooms. Many Dalits in urban areas do not speak Bangla, which makes them further apart from the mainstream. Most of them eke out a living as sweepers in Dhaka, but this job too has become increasingly scarce as the poor from other communities compete for it. Although they clean the city every day, they do not have an identity holding number because they don't own a house. Others

engage in manual scavenging, which involves great health hazards. They live in cramped, unhealthy conditions, and even those who might afford to rent a better place or buy land cannot do so due to caste discrimination. As strong patriarchal values dominate the Dalit community, Dalit women suffer the most in and outside their homes.

Despite these glaring problems the national constitution has no special provisions to protect the rights of Dalits. Unlike in Nepal or India, Dalits in Bangladesh do not have the awareness or wherewithal to organize themselves and demand their rights. There are three Dalits in the parliament but they don't identify themselves as such. However, some organizations such as BDERM, a national network of Dalit and excluded communities, have been making efforts to improve the condition of Dalits in Bangladesh. As a result the government has pledged to allot some fund for the extremely marginalized in the national budget of this fiscal year. This is a step forward given the long-standing neglect of Dalits by the state. However, there is still a long way to go for ensuring equal rights for them. There is a strong need for advocacy, mobilization and targeted development interventions on behalf of Dalits.

### d) Dalits in Pakistan: A "Religious Minority"?

Kalavanti Raja is the first Dalit woman in Pakistan to receive a master's degree. Ms. Raja's presentation illuminated the complex problem of being a Dalit in a Muslim country and how the state's lumping Dalits together with the Hindu religious minority has further disadvantaged them.

There are about 2.5 million Dalits in Pakistan, and they are referred to as Scheduled Castes. Following Jinnah's death in 1948, the state has remained in the hands of 'feudal lords, religious bigots and the military', who are completely apathetic to the plight of Dalits. The national constitution does not even mention Scheduled Castes, let alone contain provisions for them.

For 62 years Pakistan has been controlled by ten feudal families. To change this situation it is important to first change the electoral system. There is no separate consideration for Dalits in the election, but as religious minorities they have been offered three ways of entering the parliament in different periods of time: a) religious minority quotas in parliament b) separate elections c) the right to vote in general elections. However, none of these channels could ensure inclusion of Dalits in the state structure.

Religious minority quotas in the parliament brought no representation of Dalits as all the seats were bought by rich Hindu businessmen. This is despite the fact that Dalits make up 75 percent of the Hindu minority in Pakistan. Separate elections finally allowed

Dalits to obtain 3 out of the 4 Hindu minority seats on the strength of their population, but since it was 'separate election', Dalits continued to be excluded from the mainstream. In the 2008 election, all religious minorities were allowed to vote in the general elections, and 10 seats were reserved for them in the parliament. But as usual the Hindu elite captured all of these seats. Until March 2009 the parliament did not have a single Dalit sitting; only under pressure from certain quarters was one Dalit placed as senator. He is the first Dalit senator in the history of Pakistan. Moreover, under the 2008 election, a few incentives like the 6 percent employment quota for Scheduled Castes have been abolished with the argument that all such castes are religious minorities.

Unlike in Nepal or India, Dalits in Pakistan are absent from the government's or political parties' agenda. Their categorization as a 'Hindu religious minority' has ignored their identity as Dalits and failed to address the multiple layers of discrimination they face in the society. Pak Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN), which is still in its formative stage, is now making efforts to sensitize and mobilize Dalits.

## V. THE DEVELOPMENT PARADOX

Several panelists highlighted that untouchability is a critical but not the only problem of Dalits. The lack of access to education, health and employment, and landlessness among Dalits are equally pressing issues. In his richly informative presentation, political analyst and CA member Hari Roka noted that despite the overall improvement in the condition of the marginalized over the last decade, Dalits still lag behind in every sector. Their representation in the national job market, their access to resources such as forest and land, or even foreign employment, remains negligible in proportion to the development programs run by the government and non-government organizations.

### a) Sobering Statistics

A glance at the recent poverty rate data included in Mr. Roka's presentation reveals that the economic status of Dalits has improved little compared to other groups, mainly the Bahun-Chhetri.

#### Poverty Rates by Social Groups (in %)

Social Group	1995/96	2003/04	Change
Overall	41.8	30.8	-26
Bahun-Chhetri	34.1	18.4	-46
Dalit	57.8	45.5	-21
Newart	19.3	14	-28
Hill Janajati	48.7	44	-10
Tarai Janajati	53.4	35.4	-34
Muslims	43.7	41.3	-6
Tarai middle class	38.7	21.3	-26
Others	46.1	31.3	-32

Source: UNDP 2009

Dr. Mary Cameron, professor of anthropology at Florida Atlantic University, reiterated that social and economic empowerment is the key to removing inequality in society, and provided some distressing data on the Dalits' socioeconomic status. According to the 2009 Human Development Report, 62 percent of active Dalit population in Nepal cannot read at all, whereas only 18 percent of Brahmins fall in this category. Other socio-economic indicators reveal similar gaps: 66 percent of active population of Dalits has attained no formal education; only 21 percent has primary education; 13 percent has secondary education and less than 1 percent has higher education. (The corresponding figures for Brahmins are 26 percent, 15 percent, 45 percent and 14 percent respectively.) On the health indicators, 27 percent of Dalits are moderately anemic compared to 18 percent among Brahmins; 26 percent of Dalits has received medical treatment to the recent diarrhea outbreak compared to 49 percent among Brahmins. Dalits have the highest combined percentage of poorest and poorer quintiles (52 percent) of the wealth index among all caste/ethnic groups. In this context, a mechanism to reach out to Dalits through non-conventional approach to education, health and poverty alleviation programs is necessary. Till now international development agencies have not shown seriousness on the issue.

### b) A Case Study of Dhainkot Village, Muju

Leela Tamata, a Muju-based project coordinator, shared some of the lessons learned while carrying out a grassroots initiative to support Dalits in Dhainkot village of Muju district, which falls at the bottom of the development index ranking in Nepal. Out of the 10,946 Dalits in Muju, only 16 are represented in the local government bodies of civil service, police, army and school. Among the political parties, there are 27 Dalits

in the UCPN(M) district committee, seven in the UML and two in the Nepali Congress. Dalits in Dhainkot village are mired in extreme forms of poverty, untouchability and discrimination. Their condition shows yet again that social identity and economic empowerment are inextricably linked in Nepal. The constitution may have guaranteed equal rights for all, but equality remains a distant dream for the majority of people in the villages.

The initiative led by Mr. Tamata and his team involved mobilizing married Dalit couples through training, mentoring, exposure trips outside the village, etc. The couples were allowed to identify their own problems and solutions and assess the changes as opposed to being pushed into chasing ready-made indicators. As a result Mr Tamata's team was able to help establish 'human capital' in the village for addressing three thematic issues: (a) untouchability and caste discrimination (b) gender discrimination and uterus prolapse, and (c) food security. Visible positive changes have occurred in Dhainkot in terms of Dalits' self-esteem, leadership and communication skills along with non-Dalits' willingness to listen to and engage with Dalits. Untouchability has gone down. Last year Rs 85,000 from the VDC budget was allocated specifically for women and Dalits. The Dalit couple activists managed to bring 89 children, mainly girls, to school. The yield from Dalits' land increased significantly after improved use of the traditional organic manure. The 'effort groups' led by Dalits are steadily growing in strength and a network has been formed between local Dalit leaders and national-level organizations.

A common yet critical lesson of Mr. Tamata's initiative was that the top-down approach to development has failed, and therefore development practitioners must engage with people at grassroots level and implement

context-specific projects rather than imposing a template designed at the top.

### c) The Land Question

In Nepal as in the rest of South Asia the importance of land in ensuring social and economic security can hardly be overemphasized. Ownership of land is inseparably linked to people's identity, livelihood and dignity. Landlessness is hence one of the starker manifestations of powerlessness in Nepal. But as Hari Roka pointed out, Nepali people's access to land has been steadily decreasing over time. The proportion of households that own less than 0.5 ha of land (below subsistence requirement) has increased from 40.1 percent in 1996 to 44.8 percent in 2004 (NLSS II). The 2001 census reveals that 24 percent of households lack cultivable land and about 20 percent are landless. Although disaggregated data is not available, it is safe to conclude that Dalits comprise around 90 percent of the landless in Nepal. Moreover, 91 percent of Dalits still live in rural areas and depend on agricultural labour for a living.

Purna Nepali, a research fellow at Samata Foundation and a Ph.D candidate at Kathmandu University, focused on some key factors behind Dalits' lack of access to land resources. Mr. Nepali's findings were consistent with a number of studies that have shown that landholding (and landlessness) correlates with caste and ethnicity. The system of granting land to high-caste civil servants and favored officers, which began soon after the

formation of the Nepali state, remains a main historical cause behind the landlessness of Dalits. The high land ceilings, feudal and semi-feudal land ownership and associated institutions of bonded labour such as haliya, chariya, haruwa and charuwa, Dalits' limited access to the legal system, the class alliance between landlords and law enforcers, the lack of reliable data on land distribution, the elite's resistance to scientific land reform and the absence of political will are some of the persistent factors behind Dalits' deprivation of land rights.

## VI. POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

It is important to recognize that the exclusion of Dalits is primarily a political problem requiring political solutions. As one participant observed, the CA election of 2006 proved that if inclusive mechanisms are in place, even the most marginalized groups can start coming into the mainstream and representing themselves. In addition to first-past-the-post system, proportional representation ensured 12.8 percent reservation of seats for Dalits. In various constituencies across the country ordinary people from humble backgrounds won the election and defeated the supposedly established leaders. For the first time in Nepal's history, 50 Dalits were represented in the national constituent assembly.

### a) Constitution Writing

Any significant change in the Dalit's status is not possible without land reform. Mr. Roka noted that a huge proportion of Dalits have lost their traditional means of livelihood, but they possess neither cultivable land nor the education required to take up a new occupation. The only way to address their problem is through land reform complemented with low-interest loans, fertilizer subsidies, access to market, guaranteed minimum price for their produce, loan support for installing processing facilities, and protection from free market competition. But the older political parties in power are neither ready to impose progressive tax on the illegal property of the ultra-rich, nor to implement land reform sans compensation. Everyone knows that land reform is not possible as long as the parties beat the drum of "property rights" and claim that the state must "buy" land above the ceiling land from its holders. This way land reform and food security for Dalits will forever remain confined to discussions and papers.

In his compelling opening speech, writer and leader Aahuti reminded that it was the oppressed communities - Dalits, Madhesis, Janajatis and people from the neglected regions - who were most disheartened by the failure to write the constitution within the two-year timeframe. And since the deadline extension on 28 May 2010, they are the ones looking for a glimmer of hope in this gloom. But there is still no sign that the constitution will be written within the next year. The uncertainty surrounding the constitution has threatened the agenda of Dalits and other oppressed communities.

Moreover, writing a constitution just for the sake of it is not going to work anymore. In his overview of Nepal's constitutional history, Tek Tamrakar, a Dalit scholar and activist, reminded how the earlier constitutions repeatedly reinforced untouchability and exclusion of Dalits. Mr. Tamrakar underscored the need to guarantee Dalit rights in the new constitution and establish mechanisms to protect those rights. According to Aahuti, in order to build a new constitution that addresses the concerns of oppressed groups, the

campaign for progressive change must defeat the status quo of 240 years. National sovereignty must replace the culture of national surrender that began with the signing of the Sugauli Treaty. He warned that if this does not happen the constitution will not be written; political crisis will deepen over the coming year and a serious confrontation will take place around 28 May 2011.

### b) Achievements of the Constituent Assembly

Despite all the weaknesses of the Dalit movement in the last two years, some significant achievements have been made in the constituent assembly. Aahuti mentioned that four of the CA committees in particular have raised various issues concerning the Dalit community. These include the committees on a) fundamental rights and directive principles b) state restructuring and distribution of state powers c) protection of the rights of minority and marginalized communities, and d) determining the structure of constitutional bodies. In sum their progress indicates a step forward. For example,

- In the social-cultural sphere, untouchability and discrimination "in any place" has been deemed a "grave social crime". In the education sector, free education and scholarship quotas have been arranged for Dalits for both primary and higher education.
- In the economic sphere, landless Dalits have been guaranteed land and housing. Dalits are to be given priority for employment in the modernized forms of their traditional occupations. They are to be employed on the basis of proportional representation in government, semi-government and non-government industrial sectors. There is also a provision to recruit Dalits to public service, including the army and the police according to the principle of inclusion and proportional representation.
- In the political sphere, the principle of quota has been accepted. Accordingly, there is a provision of 3 percent proportional representation and an additional 5 percent representation of Dalits in federal states and regions respectively. There is a provision of proportional representation in other bodies.

However, there is no guarantee that these provisions will come into effect as soon as the new constitution is written because the constitutional committee has yet to finalize them. Therefore, a struggle is needed more than ever to ensure that the provisions made so far are implemented and that other remaining issues are also addressed.

### c) Political Parties and Dalit Agenda

The majority of Dalits, who are poor and live in rural areas, are out of the loop of the Dalit movement. This is because neither Dalit NGOs nor the political parties have reached out to the Dalit masses. In Dr. Bhattachan's frank assessment of the political parties, the Nepali Congress, which is believed to be a party of the rich people, is not sensitive to the Dalit issues as they are out of touch with the poor Dalits. The CPN-UML is a communist party in name but resembles the NC in its position and action. The Madhesi political parties, all of which are dominated by Tarai Brahmins and Yadavs, are not sensitive to the issues of Madhesi Dalits or Dalits in general. However, the Nepal Rastriya Dalit Mukti Morcha, a Dalit fraternal wing of the UCPN(Maoist), has reached out to many poor Dalits and mobilized

them even if it may be to advance their political goals. This explains why such a huge number of Dalits participated in the Maoist-led People's War and why the first Maoist martyr was a Dalit boy.

Dr. Bhattachan's remarks were foreshadowed by Aahuti in his opening speech. In his experience as a Dalit CA member, Aahuti said he found most of the smaller parties supportive of the Dalit agenda but mid-sized parties like the Nepali Congress and UML only half-heartedly so. At this point in history, even the most reactionary party cannot openly oppose the Dalit agenda, but they know how to spoil things from the backstage. Aahuti claimed that the few achievements made by the Dalit movement are largely a result of UCPN(M)'s dogged efforts.

d) Federalism in Relation to Dalits  
 Amid growing concern that federalism might not address the problem of Dalits, Dr. Mahendra Lawoti's presentation on federalism in relation to Dalits generated much interest and debate at the conference. Dr. Lawoti admitted at the outset that federalism does not directly address Dalits' concerns; however, "it undermines the sources of exclusionary institutions and practices" that have historically marginalized

Dalits. As opposed to a unitary state dominated by one ethnic group, a federal state is a poly-ethnic polity where the right to self-governance would allow all groups to co-exist without facing oppression. In such a structure the caste system would be weaker and the marginalized groups would have more access to governance. Hence, although the media and some upper caste quarters have been warning against the dangers of federalism, a federal state would in fact provide greater space for progressive institutions and policies and for Dalit mobilization.

Since territorial federalism does not directly address Dalit concerns, Dr. Lawoti proposed 'non territorial federalism' as a possible option for the Dalit community. Although non-territorial federalism in other countries (Belgium, Cyprus, India) has been introduced for religious and linguistic communities, it might be applicable to Dalits in Nepal's context. Some of the features would include: (a) a central body of Dalit will be elected by Dalit voters from all over the country during regular elections (to minimize cost) (b) Dalits will get a separate budget and the authority to spend it (c) The central Dalit body will represent their community in negotiation with the state and other groups (d) The central body will bring together all Dalits on a single platform and facilitate their mobilization, which will force social changes (e) It will enhance power-sharing among caste (Dalit) and ethnic groups.

Dr. Lawoti stressed that non-territorial federalism alone is, however, not going to solve Dalit problems unless it is complemented with other institutions and strong economic and political programs. When some participants suggested that the idea of non-territorial federalism was only meant to delude Dalits, Dr. Lawoti replied that he was simply proposing a possible way to make federalism compatible with the Dalit agenda and that it was entirely up to the Dalit community to decide whether or not they wanted to accept it. It was not a "ploy" to deceive the Dalit community as some seemed to suggest. As Dalits are dispersed around the country, the non-territorial mechanism may be the only option to provide them with some level of autonomy and self-governance. In conclusion, he reiterated the need to address the aspirations of marginalized communities, and warned that if their legitimate and peaceful struggles are again ignored by the state, they might be forced to resort to violent means.

## VII. VIOLATIONS AND IMPUNITY

The rise of impunity, especially with regard to injustices faced by Dalits, reflects the state of the judiciary in Nepal. Making the judiciary inclusive and effective in protecting the rights of the marginalized remains one of the biggest challenges in transforming Nepal.

### a) Laws Without Justice

Legal provisions mean little if they fail to provide justice. As Ratna Bahadur Bagchand, an appellate court judge, showed in his presentation, due to limited knowledge of and access to the legal system, Dalits rarely file cases against violations of their rights. Most cases are resolved at the local level and the perpetrators often go scot-free. Even if Dalits manage to file cases with the support of activists, the courts are reluctant to accept them. The 2008 report of INSEC shows that out of the 16 appeal courts in Nepal, only four have received complaints regarding caste discrimination. Particularly in the case of untouchability it is very difficult for Dalits to show evidence, which makes it harder for them to get justice. Moreover, most of the cases are decided with reference to the Civil Code despite the possibility of using higher international standards. Mr. Bagchand noted that the fact that 24 percent of district courts and 12.5 percent of appeal courts refused to provide information for his study further reinforces his claim that Dalits' access to justice is almost negligible.

### b) Party-protected Perpetrators

Protection of perpetrators of caste-based crimes by the state and political parties remain one of the root causes of growing impunity in Nepal. All over the country Dalits are daily humiliated and brutalized but the cases are rarely reported. Even if they are reported and the police attempts to take action, the state and/or the political parties intervene on behalf of the perpetrator, who is associated with power in one way or another. Aahuti complained about the Dalit leaders' fecklessness with regards to daily injustices faced by Dalits. For example, the recent incident in which a Dalit boy was tortured to death in police custody raised no collective campaign by Dalit leaders. A Dalit woman gets raped by security forces but the Dalit leaders require party permission even to protest against such a heinous crime. Instances like this reveal both the political parties' apathy to Dalits' problems and the Dalit leaders' "slave mentality".

## VIII. DALITS AND THE MAOIST MOVEMENT

Barring a few exceptions, most participants agreed that the Maoist-led People's War played a significant role in politicizing Dalits positively. Prior to the war, advocacy for Dalits only focused on untouchability and temple entry as though the Dalit problem was only religious and cultural. The Maoist movement was able to mobilize Dalits and sharpen their awareness of their social, economic and political rights. Motilal Nepali, chair of the National Dalit Federation - Nepal, reminded that 1703 Dalits sacrificed their lives in the People's War and the 2006 People's Movement to build a new Nepal.

### a) Dalits in the People's War

According to some participants including Maoist CA members, Dalits supported the People's War because it presented a clear strategy and course of action for the Dalit movement. During the war many Dalits who had long been marginalized by the state's legal system received justice through the Maoist people's courts, several of which were headed by Dalits. The CPN(M) recruited Dalits in the people's army, distributed land to landless Dalits and promoted inter-caste marriage. As a result untouchability was reduced by 75 percent in Maoist strongholds. The party stressed that the Dalit problem is rooted in economic impoverishment and that the Dalit movement must go along with the class struggle.

Hari Roka recalled that the Dalit community's overwhelming interest in

the Maoist-led struggle finally forced the government to take some measures to detract them from the Maoists. Thus 5 crore rupees was allocated for scholarships for Dalits in the 1995/6 budget and the Oppressed and Dalit Welfare Committee formed in 1996/7. As the People's War progressed with the active participation of Dalits across the country, the government formed the National Dalit Commission in 2002. After joining the political mainstream, the Maoists continued to raise the Dalit agenda which no other parties had raised before. For example, they pointed out the inadequacy of proportional representation and demanded additional rights for Dalits, along with targeted socioeconomic programs and policies. As Dalits comprise a huge proportion of the landless, the UCPN(M) demanded land redistribution with priority to Dalits. It was mainly with their initiative that untouchability was declared a grave social crime. Therefore, although many have pointed out that the Maoists used Dalits as cannon fodder in their war, they nonetheless brought the issue of Dalits to the fore.

### b) Join the "Class Struggle"?

As Dr. Bhattachan noted, almost all Dalits are poor by any international, national or local standards. Some highly educated, well-to-do Dalits do not identify with Dalits and are not interested in the Dalit movement. This is perhaps why some participants, in particular those affiliated to the UCPN(M), asserted that Dalits' marginalization is primarily an expression of class inequality. They suggested that the Dalit movement must unite with the Maoist-led class struggle in order to achieve its goals. "Will the feudal, comprador, bureaucratic capitalist class ever

implement a revolutionary program for Dalits while they are in power?" Aahuti asked. "Of course not. On the contrary, they will turn Dalits into labourers of the lowest order and exploit them as much as they can. Therefore, the Dalit movement must unite with the larger movement that aims to liberate the entire working class. Otherwise the movement will either be co-opted by the capitalist powers-that-be, or be trapped in reformism. The Dalit community has historically belonged to the working class, and it must stand together with the working class."

### c) Class or Caste ?

Some participants claimed that although the Maoists mobilized the marginalized groups, they have not been able to draw their unanimous support because the Maoists operate within the framework of class. The class framework alone is not enough to address the issues of caste and ethnicity.

In his keynote speech, Dr. S. K. Thorat, professor of economics at JNU, noted that a class revolution alone cannot guarantee the rights of Dalits. The identity of Dalits must be taken into account. Some participants also pointed out that although the Maoists claim to advance the Dalit agenda more sincerely than other parties, Dalits are not represented in their leadership. As long as Dalit leaders are nominated by political parties, they have to remain

beholden to the upper caste leaders who rule the parties. The panelists from India reminded that it was precisely for this reason why Ambedkar demanded a separate electorate for Dalits in India. He thought that a double-member constituency (with one seat for a low-caste candidate and one for general membership) would make the general candidate depend on the Dalit community for votes and make him/her more accountable to Dalit issues.

Dr. Vivek Kumar added that the irony of the Dalit movement (both in India and Nepal) is that it started under the leadership of non-Dalits. Somewhere along the way the movement faces the danger of stagnation because the non-Dalit leaders will start to camouflage Dalit concerns with the class issue. For this reason Ambedkar constantly emphasized the need for Dalits to represent themselves in government. His argument was that in a caste-ridden society like India, even “good leaders” are not free from the all-pervasive caste ideology. Upper caste leaders are not charged with the pain and agony of the Dalit masses. It is only when the marginalized represent themselves that they can make a statement to their community and their world that they have come from.

## IX. IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION

It is a widely known fact that neoliberal globalization – in the forms of free market, structural adjustment programs, urbanization, consumerism, etc. – has widened the gap between the rich and poor across the world. At the same time, however, globalization has opened up prospects of liberation and upward mobility for historically excluded groups such as Dalits. Drawing on this inherent contradiction of capitalism, Dr. Chaitanya Mishra briefly discussed globalization’s multi-layered impact on the Dalit community of Nepal.

### a) Multiple Consequences

Dr. Mishra discussed how Dalits’ movement from the rural and local into the urban, cosmopolitan sphere has helped to liberate them from time-honored traditions of untouchability, labour bondage and subordination. In urban, non-local settings, Dalits can not only earn higher wages but also avoid the caste stigma and organize themselves politically. In this context Nepali Dalits’ migration from the villages to Kathmandu and other urban centres has a significant impact on the Dalit movement.

On the other hand globalization and more specifically, “development”, had a long-running negative impact on education among Dalits in Nepal until the mid 1980s. This is illustrated by the gap in the literacy rate between Dalits and non-Dalits, which rose from approximately 2.5-4.5 percent in

1950 to 30 percent in 1980. (The same was true for the health sector.) This literacy gap is symbolic of the gradual worsening of Dalits’ condition through the period of the establishment of the international aid regime in Nepal. However, under the same aid regime the gap again started narrowing down in the mid-1980s, owing most likely to the process of democratization in which elected representatives had to be accountable to specific groups of population. By 1994, 88 percent of children had access to school at a walking distance of half an hour. The democratic environment in which people could voice their concerns and demand their rights played a vital role in bringing about this change. Thus, capitalism in the form of international aid and the rise of democratic politics started producing consequences different from the earlier decades. The example indicates that globalization can have multiple consequences on specific social groups, and these can vary according to the political framework within which they exist at a given period of time.

### b) Reduced Stigma

Dr. Mishra further noted that the expansion of market forces and increased labour migration has weakened the stigmas attached to Dalithood both for Dalits and non-Dalits. The urban middle class in India, which expanded rapidly under the influence of capitalism and globalization, absorbed a large number of Nepali migrants, most of them Dalits, as workers. In addition, the Maoist insurgency and political struggle, particularly in the Mid-western and Far-western hills, politicized and organized Dalits. All these forces have worked to change Dalits’ position in society over time. A Dalit panelist corroborated Dr. Mishra’s observations by mentioning that he was able to receive an education precisely because his elder brother was able to find work in India.

## X. WHO FUNDS THE MOVEMENT?

Some participants complained that too much emphasis is laid on Dalits’ poverty and subjugation, as though they are a people without agency. Raj Kumar Trikhari of ActionAid Nepal presented an alternative narrative that focused on Dalit solidarity and action during the Chamar movement of 1990-2000. Do “development initiatives” directly help remove “Dalit’s unfreedom” that leave them little choices and opportunities? “Development” for Dalit demands transformative approach, essentially human rights based approach to development that looks focused actions for the expansion of freedom.

### a) The Chamar Movement

In 1999 a group of Dalit Chamars in Saptari refused to dispose of an animal carcass and took a stand against the role imposed on them by the caste system. Other groups soon followed suit. The movement, which was supported by ActionAid through its partner NGO, rapidly gained momentum. The upper castes in the districts retaliated by imposing an economic blockade against Dalits and by trying to divide Dalits. Paralysed by the blockade for almost one and a half weeks, the Chamars started seeking help from their community, Dalit groups, civil society and government. Finally, supported by pressure groups and campaigners, the Dalits strategically mobilized the media, human rights organizations, civil society and political parties in their favor. Following many debates, meetings, delegations to the local authority and filing legal cases with the local administration, the upper caste ‘boycott committee’, the local NGO and leaders of the local movement signed a four-point agreement, which lifted the blockade. One of the points of agreement was that no one could force a Chamar to dispose carcasses against his/her will.

### b) The Challenge of Sustainability

While Mr. Trikhari presented the Chamar movement as an example of how development facilitators can contribute to the process of social change through action-oriented initiatives, a larger question raised by this story was addressed in the presentations of Dr. Bhattachan and Dr. Mishra. The question is: Can a local movement succeed without external support? How do we assess the significance of an NGO-led movement? Dr. Bhattachan noted that most Dalit NGOs intensify Dalit movement only as long as international donors provide financial and technical support. This is mainly because Dalit organizations do not receive adequate support from the government and the public. While “anti-NGO” Dalits often criticize Dalit NGOs as “dollar farmers”, the latter complain that such blanket criticism undermines the positive contributions made by specific NGOs at grassroots and national level.

As Dr. Mishra pointed out, the success of the Chamar movement indicates that “while outside support is a necessary condition for the rise of a Dalit social movement, this may also constitute its Achilles heel, as is the case with many similar social and political processes.” Whereas “the internal locomotive” often lacks the power to push the movement forward for a significant period of time, ownership and sustainability of a movement becomes innate with outside support. Even the most successful donor-funded movements cannot escape this contradiction. Dr. Mishra further noted that Dalits in Nepal have not been able to wield the “far more durable and dependable instruments” namely democracy and law to advance their agenda. This is perhaps due to lack of organization among Dalits and fragmentation along party lines.

## XI. TOWARDS A UNITED FRONT

Some panelists observed that the Dalit movement has yet to gain the intensity of other movements such as the Madhesi movement that have changed the psyche of the nation. Is it because Dalits are yet to be united for a common agenda? Most participants agreed with Aahuti's assertion that a united front is crucial for the Dalit liberation movement.

### a) Three types of Front

Aahuti outlined three types of united front that are needed for the Dalit movement: (a) a working alliance based on a short-term agreement between various Dalit organizations on specific local or national issues such as injustice meted out to a Dalit woman accused of practicing witchcraft, a Dalit person tortured to death in custody, rape of a Dalit child and so on (b) a long-term working alliance that will develop a common program with specific economic, political and social goals for Dalit liberation and launch a struggle to achieve these goals (c) a strategic united front that aims to transform the whole political system in collaboration with the political parties that share this vision. All the above three aspects of Nepal's Dalit movement are weak. Why? This question must be answered and this problem must be solved.

### b) Party-led Factionalism

Presentations and discussions at the conference amply illustrated the divides within the Dalit community along party lines. For example, when Aahuti complained that the "status-quoist and reformist" parties like the NC and UML are not sincerely committed to the Dalit agenda, some Dalit participants retorted that the UCPN(M) had only "used" Dalits to advance their political agenda. Participants affiliated to NC and UML were quick to reject the Maoist-affiliated participants' emphasis on "class struggle", just as the latter were dismissive of the two parties' as "lip service" to Dalits. The conference made it clear that the scourge of party-led factionalism, which afflicts every single sector in Nepal, has not spared the Dalit movement either or may have damaged Dalit movement even more.

### c) Subservience and Petty-mindedness

In Aahuti's unflinchingly self-critical analysis, one of the reasons behind the failure to build a common Dalit front is the "slave mentality" of Dalit leaders, who cannot take even a minor decision without their party's consent. "On the one hand the leaders of the status quoist and reformist parties do not want the Dalit movement to unite and gain momentum; and on the other hand, Dalit leaders do not dare act without their permission. How can we build a united front in such a situation?" He further noted that Dalit leaders' "petty-mindedness" forms another obstacle to building a united front. Many hours are spent discussing where to hold a meeting, who should be invited or whose name should appear first on the final decision document. Building a united front is not possible, he said, until Dalit leaders establish a tradition of thinking big thoughts with an open, independent mind.

## XII. SPECIAL PROVISIONS

In his keynote speech Dr. Thorat elucidated the principle of affirmative action in the light of Ambedkar's perspective.<sup>1</sup> He explained the difference between "individual discrimination" (based on a lack of resources or qualification) and "group discrimination" (based on identity), and stressed that "general policies" of empowerment are not adequate for those who face identity-based discrimination.

### a) Why Special Provisions

The vast majority of population in Nepal does not have access to education, health, employment, land, etc. However, in the case of Dalits the channel of exclusion is different because it consists of caste-based discrimination. This makes their problem far more severe and distinctive. For example, a general policy may provide a piece of land or education to a Dalit. But within a system based on caste hierarchy there is no guarantee that a Dalit farmer who works on the land can sell his produce in the market, or a Dalit who earns a degree will get employment. People's refusal to buy milk from Dalit dairy farmers, or their boycotting of Dalit-owned shops across Nepal are just a few examples. Unlike the other poor, Dalits face systematic discrimination even within the market and are deprived of equal opportunities. Dr. Cameron's presentation clearly showed that Dalits accounted for the largest segment of the population that lagged farthest behind in almost all of the socio-economic indicators. Therefore, additional safeguards are necessary to protect their rights. Dr. Thorat stated that the idea that "free competition" will end discrimination and ensure equal rights for all has proved false

<sup>1</sup> Babasaheb Ambedkar (1891-1956) was the architect of the present reservation policy in India.

in many countries such as the US, where discrimination against minorities persisted despite the rise of the free market. Therefore, countries like the US, Northern Ireland, Japan, China, etc. have implemented special policies for safeguarding minority rights. These policies could be in various forms such as affirmative action, reservations, quotas, etc.

### b) Reservations: Who benefits?

In a hierarchical society "equal opportunity" does not guarantee equality because those who are already ahead will go further ahead. A first generation Dalit student cannot compete with upper caste students who are already endowed with the cultural capital required to succeed in a certain field. There is a need for equality of conditions, i.e. reservations, to prevent the exclusionary processes entrenched in the system.

Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani underscored the need to ensure that reservations benefit the most deprived members of every marginalized group. Even within the five broad categories of population in Nepal (Bahun-Chhetri, Janajati, Dalit, Madhesi and women) the levels of economic and social empowerment vary across sub-groups. Not all Janajatis are impoverished and not all Bahuns are privileged. In this context how do we ensure that special provisions such as reservations benefit the neediest members of these communities? Dr. Lohani suggested that the Human Development Index (HDI) indicators of education, health, employment, etc. should be used to identify those who actually need reservations. Those who score above average on the HDI do not need reservations. For example, within the Madhesis, the Kayastha score is as high as 0.9 whereas the Musahar's score is 0.09. This indicates that special provisions for Madhesis should be targeted to benefit the most disadvantaged Musahars as opposed to improving the status of privileged

Kayasthas. There is a need to focus on those who are below average on the HDI and even among them those who rank the lowest should be prioritized.

### c) Righting Historical Wrongs

Dr. Vivek Kumar strongly opposed Dr. Lohani's suggestion that reservations for Dalits should be based on HDI indicators. He argued that reservation for the marginalized is not a poverty alleviation program, and therefore, using HDI indicators to decide who should get reservations is an outrageously flawed notion. The Human Development Index does not take into account the historicity of the exclusion, which is precisely what affirmative action is meant to address. How about evolving a Human Distress Index instead? he asked. Such an index might ask questions such as: How many upper caste people have to clean other people's excreta? How many upper caste people have to remove carcasses from others' homes? How many upper caste people are treated as sub-humans by society?

This sparked an interesting debate in which Dr. Lohani repeated that HDI indicators are still more reliable for determining the level of marginalization than the "arbitrary indicators" suggested by Dr. Kumar. Moreover, he added, in India Scheduled Castes have been identified on the basis of economic, health and educational status. Meanwhile, Dr. Kumar held firmly that affirmative action/reservations should not be conflated with economic uplift. It is not merely about the number of seats gained in the parliament.

Dr. Kumar added that equality is not possible unless the more privileged members of society are willing to make concessions to right the historical wrongs done to oppressed groups. He cited the example of France, where some nobles set an example by giving up their feudal rights during the revolution. However, in Nepal and India the elites are not willing to

concede any of their privileges. They are bent on continuing their monopoly over bureaucracy, judiciary, media, academia, etc. A just and equitable society is not possible unless the marginalized are represented in these modern and secular institutions.

### d) Arousing Animosity?

Participant asked whether special provisions for the marginalized might create animosity among the upper castes. To this Dr. Lohani replied that Nepali people have understood the importance of including Dalits in every sphere of society, so the special provisions for Dalits would not cause resentment among the upper castes. Dr. Kumar added that a convenient argument often made by privileged groups is that reservation policy arouses animosity and divides the society. However, social relations in an inequitable society have long been marked by discontent and animosity. And it is precisely to eliminate these feelings that affirmative action is necessary. In a society marked by deprivation, do we want genuine efforts towards inclusion, he asked, or do we want tiny oases of "merit"? In India reservation policy has created numerous examples of Dalit achievers in different sectors. It has made marginalized communities believe that they do not always have to exist in the lowest rungs of society. Creation of hope and confidence among Dalits is perhaps the most important contribution made by reservations.

Questions raised by an elderly Dalit activist echoed Dr. Kumar's concerns: Does the onus of building an inclusive society fall solely on Dalits? What is the historical responsibility of non-Dalits at whose hands Dalits suffered for centuries? Isn't it as important to educate, enlighten and pressure non-Dalits as it is to instruct Dalits on what they should do?

### XIII. CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the astonishing depth and breadth of perspectives shared at the conference will invigorate debate on Dalits and spur the concerned people including policymakers into action. Rather than producing a list of unanimous recommendations, the conference served as a platform for raising difficult questions, sharing new insights and helping the participants confirm or revise their points of view. However, some observations and suggestions that were frequently highlighted by the presenters and participants are summarized below:

- Dalits are not a homogeneous group but a common experience of Dalithood unites them. It is as important to recognize their common voice as it is to distinguish them according to sub-group, gender, region and class.
- Madhesi Dalits and Dalit women constitute the most disadvantaged groups even within the Dalit community. Targeted, context-specific and bottom-up interventions are necessary for ensuring Dalits' access to education, health and employment.
- Dalits' lack of access to land resource is a major underlying cause of their social and economic marginalization. Absence of political will and the elite's resistance to land reform remains one of the biggest hurdles to improving Dalits' condition. Land redistribution with priority to landless Dalits is the need of the hour.
- Dalits' marginalization, although rooted in religion and culture, is primarily a political problem requiring political solutions. Political empowerment is the key to ensuring their rights in every sphere of society.
- Majority of the political parties are not genuinely committed to Dalits' agenda even though they cannot openly oppose it at this historic juncture. Political leaders who have been raised with feudal values need to undergo a radical transformation in their mindset with regards to Dalits.
- The failure to build a common Dalit front has formed a serious obstacle to advancing the Dalit movement. The most intractable causes behind this are party-led factionalism and Dalit leaders' subservience to their party leaders.
- Class and identity are not wholly extricable. There is a correlation between caste/ethnicity and socio-economic status; therefore, the exclusion of Dalits should not be viewed through an isolated lens of class or caste.
- Globalization has had a dual impact on Dalits. Whereas neoliberal market forces continue to exacerbate Dalits' poverty in rural Nepal, Dalits' movement from the villages to the urban sphere in

and outside the country has helped to liberate them from grinding poverty and stigmas attached to their caste.

- The question of funding a social movement is fraught with contradictions. While the weakness of internal support mechanisms makes donor dependency almost inescapable, even the most successful of donor-funded initiatives tend to be suspect and face the challenge of sustainability. The support and commitment of the government, policymakers and local actors is crucial to advance and sustain the Dalit movement.
- Dalits in Nepal have much to learn from the Dalit movement in India, where Dalit mainstreaming and leadership has come a long way since Ambedkar first demanded Dalit rights from the state.
- Non-Dalits also have a historical responsibility for building a just and inclusive society. Privileged groups need to understand that special provisions for Dalits (affirmative action, reservations, compensation) are a first step towards righting the historical injustices meted out to Dalits. The elite's resentment will only hinder the creation of an equitable society.

The overall result of the conference was extremely productive. The conference was highly appreciated and considered as the most remarkable event in the history of Nepal as long as Dalit movement is concerned. It is hoped that the perspectives and ideas shared at the conference will rejuvenate debate on Dalits and encourage the concerned people including policymakers into action. Furthermore, a good network has been established with the international scholars working in the area of Dalit issues.

*(A conference program list, the names of the chairs, panelists, research fellows, the paper titles, conference information sheet, photographs, announcements of request for proposal and news archives on the local newspapers are provided in the Annex)*

### XIV. ANNEX 1: Conference Program

#### DAY I (Opening)

##### Chair

Dr. Madan Pariyar, Board of Directors, Samata Foundation

##### Introduction and Welcome Speech

Mr. Suvash Darnal, Director, Samata Foundation

##### Keynote Speeches

1. "Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Perspective on Social Inclusion/Exclusion"  
Dr S. K. Thorat, Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi;  
Chairman, University Grants Commission, Government of India
2. "The Dalit Movement of Nepal: Looking Back and Looking Forward"  
Bishwobhakta Dulal (Aahuti), Dalit CA member, Writer and Leader

##### Speakers

1. Dr. Devendra Poudel, Vice-Chair, UCPN (Maoist)
2. Pradip Gyawali, Politburo Member, CPN-UML
3. Ramesh Lekhak, Former Minister of Labour; Central Committee Member, NC

#### DAY II

##### Session 1: Dalits in South Asia

##### Chair

Dr. Seira Tamang, Chairperson, Martin Chautari

##### Speakers

1. "Understanding the Dalit of Nepal"  
Dr. Krishna Bhattachar, Professor, Tribhuvan University,  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Kathmandu
2. "A Comparison of War-related Caste Dynamics in Sri Lanka and Nepal"  
Dr. Kalinga Tudor Silva, Executive Director, International Center for Ethnic Studies;  
Professor, University of Peradeniya
3. "Advocating for Dalit Rights Internationally: Development Experience and Challenge"  
Rikke Nöhrlind, Co-ordinator, International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), Denmark

## Session 2: Human Rights and Dignity

### Chair

Durga Sob, Chairperson, FEDO

### Speakers

1. "Promotion and Protection of Dalit Rights in Bangladesh"  
Zakir Hossain, Nagarik Uddyog, Bangladesh
2. "The Role of Judiciary in Protecting Rights against Caste Discrimination"  
Ratna Bahadur Bagchand, Judge, Appellate Court
3. "Experience of Dalit Human Rights Promotion and Protection in India"  
Ashok Bharati, Convener, National Confederation of Dalit Organization (NACDOR), India
4. "The Concept and Practice of Dalit Human Rights in Nepal"  
Motilal Nepali, Chair, DNF Nepal

## Session 3: Dalit Identity and Politics

### Chair

Hari Sharma, Director, Social Science Baha/ Alliance for Social Dialogue (ASD)

### Speakers

1. "Dalit Conceptions of Caste Membership"  
Dr. Steven J Folmar, Professor, Wake Forest University, USA
2. "Understanding the Paradox of Dalit Cultural Identity in Nepal"  
Amar B. K., Research Fellow, Samata Foundation

### Round Table 1:

Constitution Building and State Restructuring

### Chair

Ramprit Paswan, CA member and Former Vice-Chair of the National Assembly

### Speakers

1. Shambhu Hajara Paswan, Chair, CA committee
2. Khadga Bishokarma, CA member, UCPN(M)
3. Man Bahadur BK, UNDP/CCD
4. Bhakta Bishokarma, Chair, NNDSWO

## DAY III

## Session 4: Globalization and Dalit Social Movement

### Chair

Dr. Chaitanya Mishra, Professor, Tribhuvan University

### Speakers

1. "Dalits and Development in Nepal" Hari Roka, Political Analyst and CA Member, Nepal
2. "Access to Land Resource: Dalits and Their Inclusion"  
Purna Nepali, Research Fellow, Samata Foundation; Ph.D Candidate, Kathmandu University
3. "The Changing Landscape of Bangladeshi Dalits" Dr. Iftekhar Uddin Chowdhury, Professor, Chittagong University

## Session 5: Development Paradox

### Chair:

Rajju Malla Dhakal, Manager, ESP/DFID

### Speakers

1. "Access to Education, Health and Resources as Equity Rights of Dalits in Nepal"  
Dr. Mary M. Cameron, Professor of Anthropology, Florida Atlantic University, USA  
(in association with Dr. Drona Rasali and Dr. Pramod Dhakal)
2. "Fighting for Dalit Rights in Nepal: Critical Stories from the Tarai" Raj Kumar Trikhatri, ActionAid Nepal
3. "Sharing Models of Dalit Empowerment Processes in Mugu District"  
Leela Tamata, Coordinator-Gender Exclusion, SEACOW-CAED, Mugu

## Session 4: Constitution Building & Peace Process

### Chair:

Professor. Dr. Pitamber Sharma / Dr. Bishnu Raj Upreti, Regional Coordinator, (NCCR) North South, South Asia

### Speakers

1. "State of Dalits in Constitution Building in Nepal" Tek Tamrakar, Dalit Scholar and Advocate
2. "Constitutional Building, Federalism, and Dalits: Monoethnic State, Poly Ethnic Polity, and Non territorial Federalism in Nepal" Dr. Mahendra Lawoti, Professor, Western Michigan University
3. "Federalism in India and Dalits Rights: Some Lessons for Nepal"  
Dr. Vivek Kumar, Professor, Centre for Study of Social System, JNU

## Round Table 2: Affirmative Action in South Asia

### Chair:

Prof. Man Bahadur Bishwokarma, Central Committee Member, Nepali Congress

### Speakers

1. Ram Lal Bishwokarma (Former Chair National Dalit Commission)
2. Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani (Former Minister of Finance and Chair of the Reservation Suggestion Committee of Government of Nepal 2004)
3. Dr. Vivek Kumar (Professor, Centre for Study of Social System, JNU)
4. Kalavanti Raja (Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network)

### Closing Remarks

1. Dr. Sumitra Manandhar Gurung, Board of Directors, Samata Foundation
2. Padam Sundas, Board of Directors, Samata Foundation

## ANNEX 2: List of Participants

SN	Name	Organization/Affiliation	Country
1.	Santoshi B.K.	C.A. Member, United Communist Party Of Nepal (Maoist)	Nepal
2.	Dinesh Tripathi	Advocate	Nepal
3.	Dr. Sumitra Manandhar	Board Member, Samata Foundation	Nepal
4.	Ramlal Bishwokarna	Nepal Rastriya Dalit Mukti Morcha	Nepal
5.	Tika Prasad Gauchan	RCDF, Myagdi	Nepal
6.	Rajkumar Trikhatri	Action Aid Nepal	Nepal
7.	Om Prakash BK Gahatraj	CDRD	Nepal
8.	Pachna Singh	GCAP/WNTA	Nepal
9.	Jerome D' Souza	DCA, India	India
10.	G.P. Khanal	Jagaran Media Center (JMC)	Nepal
11.	Santi Devi Chamar	C.A. Member, CPN-UML	Nepal
12.	Ram Lakan Das	Madhesh Dalit Adhikar Samiti	Nepal
13.	Satya Narayan Shaha	Social Development Path (SODEP), Janakpur	Nepal
14.	Kiran Bam	Research Fellow, Samata Foundation / HASTI- AIDS	Nepal
15.	Sita Ram B.K.	SCH- Nepal (Bal Snajibane Kendra)	Nepal
16.	Purna Singh Baraili	Human Rights Film Center (HRFC)	Nepal
17.	Burma Singh Nepali	D.S.S., Muju	Nepal
18.	Leela Tamata	SEACOW-CAED Centre for Agro-Ecology and Development, Muju	Nepal
19.	Resham Pariyar	Peedit Janasewa Bikash Karyakram (PJBK)	Nepal
20.	Dhana Bahadur Sunar	Research Fellow, Samata Foundation	Nepal
21.	Cealia Blonbek	New School, USA	USA
22.	Ashe Brooks Cosh	New School, USA	USA
23.	Sarada Pandey	Research Fellow, Samata Foundation	Nepal
24.	Asmita Nepali	Dalit Welfare Association (DWA)	Nepal
25.	Kamal Kumar Bishwokarma	HRCDCC, Nepal	Nepal
26.	Raju Rasali	Jana Utthan Pratisthan Library, Palpa	Nepal
27.	Rana Bahadur Ramtel	Research Fellow, Samata Foundation	Nepal
28.	Shiva Kumar Mahara	MDF	Nepal
29.	Vijay Prasad Mishra	NNRC, Biratnagar	Nepal
30.	Ganesh Khatiwada	Action Aid Nepal	Nepal
31.	Naba Raj Mudwari	Research Fellow, Samata Foundation	Nepal
32.	Rem Bahadur B.K.	Jagaran Media Center (JMC)	Nepal
33.	Samir Sharma	National News	Nepal
34.	Shivaji Gayek	Radio Jagaran, Butwal	Nepal
35.	Dr. Steven j Folmar	Wake Forest University, USA	USA
36.	Rup Sunar	PDRC	Nepal
37.	Sapana Das	Wake Forest University, USA	USA
38.	Dain Finke	Wake Forest University, USA	USA
39.	Brian Harper	Wake Forest University, USA	USA
40.	Bal Bahadur Pariyar	Former District Education Officer	Nepal
41.	Rinju Rasaily	Freelance Researcher, India	India
42.	Sukhalal Nepali (Badi)	Dalit Mahila Ekta Kendra	Nepal
43.	Mukul Ranjan Shikder	BDERM- Bangladesh	Bangladesh
44.	Uddhab Pyakurel	Research Fellow, Samata Foundation, Ph.D candidate, Jawaharlal Nehru University	India

45.	Suresh Dhakal	CDSA/TU	Nepal
46.	Ranendra Barali	Nepal Rastriya Dalit Mukti Morcha	Nepal
47.	Dr. Nirula Singh	India	India
48.	Ramprit Paswan	C.A. Member, CPN-UML	Nepal
49.	Amrit Biswakarma	Jagaran Utthan Pratisthan- Nepal	Nepal
50.	Saroj Dillu Vishwakarma	Yuva Sangh	Nepal
51.	Pradeep Sob	Safe Nepal, Kailali	Nepal
52.	Erisha Suwal	SFCG	Nepal
53.	Bidushi Dhungel	Republica	Nepal
54.	Rima Nepali	C.A. Member,CPN-UML	Nepal
55.	Parshuram Ramtel	C.A.Member, UCPN(M)	Nepal
56.	Tej Bahadur Mijar	C.A.Member, UCPN(M)	Nepal
57.	Padam Sundas	Chair, Samata Foundation	Nepal
58.	Shambhuazara Paswan	C.A.Member , Congress	Nepal
59.	Laxmi Pariyar	C.A.Member , Congress	Nepal
60.	Gopal Baraili	Dalit Nigrani	Nepal
61.	Dilip R. Nepali	Human Rights Film Center (HRFC)	Nepal
62.	Biru Nepali	Jagaran Media Center (JMC)	Nepal
63.	Aita Bishwokarma		Nepal
64.	Rajendra Maharjan	Freelance	Nepal
65.	Sarita Pariyar		Nepal
66.	Julio Chitalar	CSAS	Nepal
67.	Bimal Phnuyal	Action Aid, Nepal	Nepal
68.	Aphi Lal Okheda	Human Rights Forum	Nepal
69.	K.K.Pandey	Freelancer	Nepal
70.	Sita Devi Baudel	C.A.Member, UCPN(M)	Nepal
71.	Raju Paswan	Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC)	Nepal
72.	Arati Rana	Enabling State Programme (ESP)	Nepal
73.	Bharat Nepali	Enabling State Programme (ESP)	Nepal
74.	Nabina Aryal	Gorkha	Nepal
75.	Padam Singh Bishwokarma	N.D.S.	Nepal
76.	Nirmala Vishwokarma		Nepal
77.	Cherry Smith	Fulbright Scholar	USA
78.	Dr. Celayne Heaton Shrestha	London School of Economics, UK	UK
79.	Sagun Lawoti	Interpreter from UNDP	Nepal
80.	Prerana Marasini	Interpreter from UNDP	Nepal
81.	Suvash Darnal	Managing Director, Samata Foundation	Nepal
82.	Dr. Narendra Mangal Joshi	Staff, Samata Foundation	Nepal
83.	JB Bishwokarma	Staff, Samata Foundation	Nepal
84.	Bhola Paswaan	Staff, Samata Foundation	Nepal
85.	Arjun Bishwokarma	Staff, Samata Foundation	Nepal
86.	Rajan Pariyar	Staff, Samata Foundation	Nepal
87.	Anishaa Lama	Staff, Samata Foundation	Nepal
88.	Suraj Bishwokarma	Staff, Samata Foundation	Nepal
89.	Reena Burathoki	Intern, Samata Foundation	Nepal
90.	Tensuva Mourati	Intern, Samata Foundation	Nepal
91.	Dikesh Maharjan	Intern, Samata Foundation	Nepal
92.	Eugenia Pietrogrande	Intern, Samata Foundation	USA

### ANNEX 3: Lists of Chair and Speakers

S.N	Name	Role	Organization/ Affiliation	Country
1.	Dr. S. K. Thorat	Keynote Speaker	Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; Chairman, University Grants Commission, Government of India	India
2.	Bishwobhakta Dulal (Aahuti)	Keynote Speaker	Dalit CA member, Writer and Leader	Nepal
3.	Dr. Devendra Poudel	Speaker	Vice-Chair, UCPN (Maoist)	Nepal
4.	Pradip Gyawali	Speaker	Politburo Member, CPN-UML	Nepal
5.	Ramesh Lekhak	Speaker	Former Minister of Labour; Central Committee Member, NC	Nepal
6.	Dr. Krishna Bhattachan	Speaker	Professor, Tribhuvan University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Kathmandu	Nepal
7.	Dr. Kalinga Tudor Silva	Speaker	Executive Director, International Center for Ethnic Studies; Professor, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka
8.	Rikke Nöhrliind	Speaker	Co-ordinator, International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), Denmark	Denmark
9.	Zakir Hossain	Speaker	Nagarik Uddyog, Bangladesh	Bangladesh
10.	Ratna Bahadur Bagchand	Speaker	Judge, Appellate Court	Nepal
11.	Ashok Bharati	Speaker	Convener, National Confederation of Dalit Organization (NCDOR), India	India
12.	Motilal Nepali	Speaker	Chair, DNF Nepal	Nepal
13.	Dr. Steven J Folmar	Speaker	Professor, Wake Forest University, USA	USA
14.	Amar B. K	Speaker	Research Fellow, Samata Foundation; Kathmandu	Nepal
15.	Shambhu Hajara Paswan	Speaker	Chair, CA committee	Nepal
16.	Khadga Bishwokarma	Speaker	CA member, UCPN(M)	Nepal
17.	Man Bahadur BK	Speaker	UNDP/CCD	Nepal
18.	Bhakta Bishwokarma	Speaker	Chair, NNDSWO	Nepal
19.	Hari Roka	Speaker	Political Analyst and CA Member,	Nepal
20.	Purna Nepali	Speaker	Research Fellow, Samata Foundation; Ph.D Candidate, Kathmandu	Nepal

21.	Dr. Iftekhar Uddin Chowdhury	Speaker	Professor, Chittagong University, Bangladesh	Bangladesh
22.	Dr. Mary M. Cameron, (in association with Dr. Drona Rasaili and Dr. Pramod Dhakal)	Speaker	Professor of Anthropology, Florida Atlantic University, USA	USA
23.	Raj Kumar Trikhatri	Speaker	ActionAid Nepal	Nepal
24.	Leela Tamata, Coordinator-Gender Exclusion	Speaker	SEACOW-CAED, Muju	Nepal
25.	Tek Tamrakar	Speaker	Dalit Scholar and Advocate	Nepal
26.	Dr. Mahendra Lawoti	Speaker	Professor, Western Michigan	USA
27.	Dr. Vivek Kumar	Speaker	Professor, Centre for Study of Social System, JNU	India
28.	Ram Lal Bishwokarma	Speaker	Former Chair National Dalit	Nepal
29.	Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani	Speaker	Former Minister of Finance and Chair of the Reservation Suggestion Committee of Government of Nepal 2004	Nepal
30.	Kalavanti Raja	Speaker	Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network	Pakistan
31.	Dr. Madan Pariyar	Chair	Board of Directors, Samata	Nepal
32.	Dr. Seira Tamang	Chair	Chairperson, Martin Chautari	Nepal
33.	Durga Sob	Chair	Chairperson, FEDO	Nepal
34.	Hari Sharma	Chair	Director, Social Science Baha/ Alliance for Social Dialogue (ASD)	Nepal
35.	Ramprit Paswan	Chair	CA member and Former Vice-Chair of the National Assembly	Nepal
36.	Dr. Chaitanya Mishra	Chair	Professor, Tribhuvan University	Nepal
37.	Rajju Malla Dhakal	Chair	Manager, ESP/DFID	Nepal
38.	Dr. Bishnu Raj Upreti	Chair	Regional Coordinator, NCCR North South, South Asia	Nepal
39.	Prof. Man Bahadur Bishwokarma	Chair	Central Committee Member, Nepali Congress	Nepal

## ANNEX 4: Lists of Research Fellows

SN	Name	Organization/Affiliation	Research topic
1.	Amar B. K	Researcher	Understanding the Paradox of Dalit Cultural Identity in Nepal
2.	Dhana Bahadur Sunar	Researcher	Hill Kami's Disappearing Ancestral Occupation
3.	Hem Lamsal	Development Worker	The contribution of Dalit civil society in Nepal's peace process: a study from the perspective of Dalit movement
4.	Kiran Bam	Student	Seasonal Migration and Risk of HIV among the Dalit Community of Far western Nepal
5.	Naba Raj Mudwari	M.Phil Candidate, Tribhuwan University	Dalit Girl's Perception Towards Discrimination: A Phenomenological Study
6.	Purna Nepali	Ph.D Candidate, Kathmandu University	Access to Land Resource: Dalit and their Inclusion
7.	Sarada Pandey	Teacher, Butwal	Sexual Abuse among Dalit Female Manual Workers involved in Construction work
8.	Rana Bahadur Ramtel		Study on Dalit issues in new constitution making process
9.	Uddhab Pyakurel	Ph.D Candidate, Jawaharlal Nehru University	Social Exclusion and Inclusion in the context of Dalits in Nepal: A case study of Surkhet

## ANNEX 5: News coverage

**Finding INTEGRITY**

ever, Gramsci argued that while "conscience and common-sense" of a certain group may very well hold a different worldview, it is all too often "contradictory and inconsistent".

Amar BS, a researcher on Dalit identity, looks at the Sorkhi (a Dalit group) community in Kaski, and how, although accepting of the Hindu social order, actually holds a completely set of beliefs which they "claim exist low and deep".

It is a fact that, overall, Nepal is a poor country in which poverty is rife. However, unlike other impoverished communities of Nepal, the case of the Dalits can be argued to be Di SK Thosar, professor of Economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, while the Dalit community "shares the problem of poverty with other groups, they also suffer from gross discrimination which the caste system has imposed".

Thus, being that the Dalits are denied basic rights which other ethnicities and caste groups are not. And those denials of rights are "associated with social and cultural identity, not only economic identity".

Unfortunately, the denial of rights to marginalized groups, and especially the Dalit community, has played an immense factor in the community's inability to rise economically. As it stands, "the Dalits are denied equal rights and opportunities, and this is because they don't deserve them, but because traditionally they just didn't have these rights," explains Thosar. He argues that while many groups may be poor due to the lack of resources, the "causation" for Dalits is different. And the cause for this denial of rights "is not capitalism or feudalism, it is the caste system". And while other groups suffered from the dynamics of capitalism and feudalism, the Dalits alongside this also suffered from the dynamics of caste-based discrimination.

Such discrimination was legitimized in the country's Civic Code (Maitihi Ama) in 1854. But on the local level, there was also cultural rooting that reinforced such discrimination, particularly through the way in which local priests explained and institutionalized the power structures of the caste system.

Consequently, creating a new Dalit identity within the community that has been pushed and pulled in different directions by the state, scattered throughout the country.

Whichever group was the most powerful and dominant in the area, the Dalits were forced to conform and accept the norms of the dominant group. This led to almost every Dalit community becoming assimilated into the dominant culture, whether it was Brahmin, Chettri, or Newar. This has led to the Dalits being marginalized and discriminated against in almost every aspect of life.

Today, the Dalits are still marginalized and discriminated against, and while they have been able to make some progress, they still face many challenges. They are still seen as inferior and less intelligent than other castes in terms of access to education and employment opportunities. This has led to a cycle of poverty and marginalization that is difficult to break.

The Dalits are still facing challenges in terms of social and economic inclusion. They are still seen as inferior and less intelligent than other castes in terms of access to education and employment opportunities. This has led to a cycle of poverty and marginalization that is difficult to break.

Erisha Suwal

**Voices from the powwow**

If Dalits are to mobilise themselves effectively, they need to build a common identity

**Shambhu Das**

Shambhu das, president of the Madhes Dalit Adhikar Sangat, said that Dalit fascism was the primary hindrance for the Dalit movement. He said that the conference, which had been historically deprived of their rights and discriminated against, was not able to come up with a common Dalit identity. From day one, he almost every question and answer session raised many important questions such as defining Dalit identity, building a common Dalit identity, political inclusion and regulating dignity.

Shambhu das, a think tank dedicated to Dalit issues, brought together, for the first time in Nepal history, Dalit scholars, lawyers, NGO workers and students from Nepal. Academics and activists from India, Bangladesh, and the US were also present. The various topics discussed included Dalit in South Asia, Human Rights and Dignity, Madhesi Dalit, Globalization and Dalit Social Movement, Development Paradox, and Constitution Building. The discussion of topics discussed raised many important questions such as defining Dalit identity, building a common Dalit identity, political inclusion and regulating dignity.

Among all the pressing questions, Dalit identity was the most urgent one. After about 60 years of struggle, Nepal's Dalit movement faces the challenge of redefining Dalit identity. While the Dalit movement fights for social inclusion, questions on whether the movement itself is inclusive of all the subgroups within the Dalit community were raised. Amid debates on federalism and heightened sensitivity to diverse identities, the question of how to recognize the heterogeneity within itself when creating a common identity for a united Dalit movement came up. There are Dalits, Madhesi Dalits, western Dalits and Dalits within Dalits. Furthermore, what term Dalit means in India and in Nepal is not the same as what it means in Nepal. This heterogeneity and fluidity of Dalit identity dominated the three-day conference to a large extent.

**Ene Lekhna Das of Surkhet, president of the Madhes Dalit Adhikar Sangat**, said, "The struggle is more difficult for Madhes Dalits. First, we are Dalits, then we are Madhesi, then we are Dalits. His friend Shy Kumar Malla of the Madhes Dalit Morcha, Surkhet, said, "Dalits within Dalits are separate although they are both Dalits. The Dalit movement should, of course, be unified, but the two identities should be preserved and separate. They

needs to be redefined. This redefinition is imperative if Dalits, who compose about 15 percent of Nepal's population, want to have a stronger influence in the future. The struggle for Dalit rights for social inclusion, questions on whether the movement itself is inclusive of all the subgroups within the Dalit community were raised. All the participants agreed that more knowledge on all aspects of Dalit identity needs to be produced."

**Producing and exchange of knowledge**

Producing and exchange of knowledge is extremely important if the Dalit movement wants to keep up with the changing circumstances and be better prepared for the future.

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