

Caste and Poverty Intertwined: The Livelihood Challenges Faced by Dalits in Makawanpur, Nepal

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Abstract

The term *Dalit* refers to historically marginalized communities in Nepal who exist outside the traditional caste hierarchy. Derived from the Sanskrit word meaning "oppressed," it denotes groups formerly categorized as "untouchable" within the Hindu caste system. In Manahari, Makawanpur, rural Dalit populations continue to experience caste-based discrimination, limited economic opportunities, and restricted access to education. Despite the implementation of government policies aimed at inclusion, social exclusion remains pervasive, underscoring the need for more effective and targeted initiatives to enhance their livelihoods. This study aims to examine the livelihood challenges faced by the Dalit community in Ward No. 5, Basantpur, of Manahari Rural Municipality. Employing a descriptive research design, data were collected from 35 Dalit households through interviews and participant observation. Primary data were gathered using a census approach and supplemented with secondary data drawn from existing literature, including books and academic journals. Findings reveal entrenched economic, social, and political inequalities. Although Nepal has transitioned toward capitalism, Dalits continue to encounter limited economic opportunities, low political representation, and persistent poverty. Contributing factors include lack of land ownership, inadequate access to education, and exclusion from skilled employment. Addressing these systemic challenges necessitates reforms in land distribution, educational access, and political empowerment to ensure equitable opportunities for marginalized groups. The significance of this study lies in its focus on the socio-economic hardships faced by Dalits in rural Manahari. It brings attention to critical issues such as restricted access to education, healthcare, and employment challenges that are largely the result of systemic caste-based discrimination. The research aims to inform policy development that advances social justice, equality, and inclusion, with a particular emphasis on mitigating caste-based inequalities and poverty.

Keywords: rural Dalit, caste-based discrimination, livelihood challenges, economic marginalization, crisis in traditional professions

1. Introduction

Nepal is an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive, and socialism-oriented federal democratic republic, reflecting its diverse yet unified national identity. Characterized by multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-cultural diversity, Nepal embraces inclusivity and shared aspirations for national progress. The nation's democratic framework ensures the protection of sovereignty and independence, fostering unity among its people. Nepalese citizens, bound by their commitment to integrity and prosperity, collectively strengthen the country's resilience and social harmony. The federal system promotes equitable governance, ensuring representation for all communities (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015).

Nepalese society holds deep roots in the Hindu caste system, with the hierarchy of different caste groups of people within the system. Dalits are one of the caste groups of people within the Hindu caste system whose social, economic, health, and political status are lowest compared to other groups in Nepal (Sunar, 2020). Nepal's ethnic and linguistic diversity, while emphasizing its strong sense of national identity. It highlights the caste structure based on the Hindu Varna system, with Brahmins and Kshatriyas occupying the highest ritual status and Shudras being the lowest. Specific sub-castes such as Damai, Kami, and Sarki fall under the Shudra category. Nepalese society is described as multiethnic and multilingual, with about two-thirds of the population adhering to the Hindu caste framework. The National Code of Nepal (1854) institutionalized a four-tier caste system, reinforcing social hierarchies (Sharma, 2004).

The Dalits are the people of those castes who are categorized as the untouchables in Nepalese society. Dalits were called untouchable because even the sight of their shadow was thought to be polluting. Traditionally, Dalits have been treated inhumanely as "Untouchables." Dalits are considered to be ritually impure and are said to fall outside the social order of the caste system (Cameron, 2007). They are known as 'outcastes' and as such have suffered social exclusion, marginalisation, and alienation for more than three thousand years. As a visible sign of their ritually unclean status, they are denied entry to temples and full or independent participation in religious festivals (Gurung, 2019). They are assigned menial and degrading work, which is considered to be unclean, such as cleaning toilets, skinning and disposing of dead animals, digging graves, and sweeping. Dalits suffer physical and social exclusion and are denied their rights to live with dignity, to a basic livelihood, to contest and vote freely in elections, and to practice their own religion and culture (Kisan, 2021).

Livelihood refers to the various means and resources individuals use to sustain their lives, including the activities they engage in to earn an income and meet their basic needs. This can involve professions, industries, and businesses, forming the core components of livelihood (Chambers & Conway, 1992). A person's capability, which encompasses both tangible assets like property and vehicles, and intangible assets like reputation and social status, plays a key role in shaping their livelihood. In Nepalese society, the primary sources

of livelihood include agriculture, animal husbandry, employment, self-employment, trade, business, and industries, as these sectors directly impact how people sustain themselves (Acharya, 2066).

The livelihood notion has played a pivotal role in shaping development practices since the 1990s. Historically, the influence of environmental determinism dominated much of geographic thinking during the nineteenth century, while economic determinism became central to Polanyi's analysis of societal changes. By the late 1990s, livelihood perspectives gained prominence as a framework adopted by numerous development agencies, each tailoring it to their specific objectives. Furthermore, the environment and development movements of the 1980s and 1990s underscored growing concerns about poverty and sustainable development in Nepal, as well as other developing nations. In contemporary times, livelihood approaches have evolved to integrate the hybrid and interconnected nature of various fields, addressing complex issues such as environmental degradation, poverty alleviation, and gender inequality (Scoones, 2009).

The Dalit community, historically relegated to performing caste-based, menial jobs such as blacksmithing, tailoring, shoemaking, and street cleaning, continues to face social and economic marginalization. This deeply entrenched system of occupation, rooted in caste discrimination, forces (Bhattachan, Sunar & Gauchan, 2009). Dalits are pushed into poverty, limiting their access to other forms of livelihood. The harsh realities of this oppression extend to Dalit women and children, who often work in the households of landlords without receiving fair wages. In many cases, their labor remains unpaid, particularly for those involved in Haliya Pratha (bonded labor) and Khala Pratha (forced labor), where they may receive only food grains as compensation, further perpetuating their disenfranchisement (Aahuti, 2067 B.S.).

Marginalized communities often face numerous challenges, including poverty, lack of quality education, and limited access to healthcare. These difficulties hinder their ability to achieve economic stability and social mobility (Constituent Assembly Secretariat, 2015). However, the absence of adequate government programs further exacerbates their struggles, making it even harder for them to escape the cycle of deprivation. Without well-structured policies and consistent support from authorities, these communities continue to face barriers in improving their living conditions (World Bank, 2016). The lack of financial aid restricts their ability to invest in better housing, education, and entrepreneurship, while the absence of skill development programs limits their employment prospects. Additionally, the unavailability of social welfare schemes leaves them vulnerable to economic crises, medical emergencies, and unemployment. To bridge this gap and promote equality, governments must implement targeted initiatives that focus on providing accessible education, affordable healthcare, and sustainable employment opportunities. By addressing these issues through inclusive policies and community-driven programs, society can ensure the upliftment and empowerment of marginalized groups, ultimately fostering a more equitable and just world (Bhattachan, Sunar & Parajuli. (2009).

1.1 Research Gap

Despite various development interventions, the Dalit community in Manahari Rural Municipality, Ward No. 5, Basantpur, Makawanpur, continues to experience persistent

livelihood insecurities, underscoring critical research gaps. While the 2021 Nepal Census provides broad demographic data, it fails to capture the nuanced and specific livelihood challenges confronting Dalits. Existing literature and reports predominantly highlight structural issues such as income inequality, limited access to education, and social exclusion; however, few studies have critically examined the adaptive strategies Dalits employ to navigate Nepal's evolving socio-economic context. Moreover, there is limited understanding of how caste-based discrimination, constrained resource access, and policy neglect interact to shape the livelihood choices of Dalit households in the post-2021 period. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing more inclusive, context-sensitive programs that accurately reflect the needs and lived realities of Dalit communities.

1.2 Research Objective

The main objective of this study is to explore the livelihood challenges faced by the Dalit community in Ward No. 5, Basantpur of Manahari Rural Municipality, Makawanpur District, Bagmati Province.

1.3 Research Significance

The livelihood challenges faced by the Dalit community, particularly in rural areas like Manahari Rural Municipality Ward No. 5, Basantpur, reflect the socio-economic inequalities in Nepal. Historically marginalized, Dalits experience systemic discrimination that restricts their access to education, healthcare, land, and employment. In Manahari, these challenges are exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure, scarce resources, and entrenched caste-based hierarchies. Many Dalits rely on low-paying and insecure jobs in agriculture, manual labor, and sanitation, which perpetuate poverty and limit social mobility. Their political underrepresentation further deepens their marginalization, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

Studying the livelihoods of Dalits in Manahari Rural Municipality Ward No. 5, Basantpur, is essential for understanding the intersection of caste and poverty. Such research can inform policies that promote social justice, equality, and inclusion. Additionally, it can highlight the need for targeted interventions to enhance access to essential resources, improve skill development programs, and create employment opportunities while addressing caste-based discrimination and fostering social cohesion in rural Nepal.

1.4 Delimitation of the Study

This research study was carried out under the following delimitations:

1. This study is exclusively limited to the Dalit community of Basantapur, Ward No. 5, Manahari Rural Municipality, Makawanpur District.
2. This study has been conducted within the defined scope, adhering to specific objectives and research methodologies.
3. Although there are multiple aspects to study within the Dalit community, this research focuses solely on their livelihood challenges.

1.5 Literature Review

A literature review encompasses both theoretical and empirical reviews, providing a comprehensive understanding of existing knowledge. Theoretical reviews explore concepts and frameworks, while empirical reviews analyze data-driven studies, offering evidence-based insights to support research findings and arguments

1.5.1 Theoretical Review (Dependency Theory)

Dependency theory is a significant theoretical framework that explains the causes of global economic inequality. Developed primarily in the 1950s and 1960s by Latin American scholars such as André Gunder Frank and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, this theory posits that the global economy is divided into two main sectors: the "core" and the "periphery." Developed nations (the core) exploit labor, natural resources, and cheap production from developing and underdeveloped nations (the periphery). As a result, developed countries benefit from the resources of less developed nations, fostering a cycle of economic dependence that perpetuates inequality. Dependency theory asserts that underdevelopment in certain regions is a consequence of their economic and political reliance on more developed areas (Frank, 1969).

Applying Dependency Theory to Basantpur, Ward No. 5 of Manahari Rural Municipality in Makawanpur District, provides a lens to understand the continued marginalization of Dalit communities. Historically oppressed by caste-based discrimination, these communities have been denied access to resources such as land ownership, lack of quality education, employment, and economic opportunities, inability to modernize agriculture, lack of political influence, crisis in traditional professions, while also dealing with challenges such as crop damage from wild animals. This exclusion has led to a cycle of poverty and dependence, echoing the central tenets of Dependency Theory. Despite political efforts and policy interventions aimed at improving conditions, research indicates that Dalits in areas like Makawanpur still struggle with persistent inequalities and limited progress.

1.5.2 Empirical Literature Review

Ambedkar (1986) statement presents a strong critique of the caste system, framing it as a psychological and social affliction rather than merely a structural issue. He asserts that caste is a "disease of the mind," implying that it is deeply ingrained in individual and collective consciousness rather than being a mere external practice. Furthermore, he attributes the origin of this issue to the teachings of Hinduism, suggesting that religious doctrine has institutionalized casteism and untouchability. His analogy comparing casteism to poison reinforces the argument that caste-based discrimination is inherently harmful and cannot be reformed but must instead be eradicated. (Bennett, Tamang, Onta, & Thapa, 2006) describes the assertion that "a bitter thing cannot be made sweet," which underscores his belief that caste oppression is not simply an issue of reform but of fundamental transformation. Ambedkar's critique aligns with his lifelong advocacy for social justice, equality, and the annihilation of caste.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the challenges faced by Dalit communities in Nepal. Many lacked the necessary identity documents to access government-provided relief materials, leading to instances of starvation and suicide. The pandemic also

restricted access to medical facilities, resulting in preventable deaths within these communities (UNDP. (2014). Systemic issues, such as favoritism in relief distribution and the banning of private aid efforts, have highlighted the persistent marginalization and neglect of Dalit populations during crises (Nepal Dalit Commission, 2022).

Scoones (1998) describes the Sustainable Livelihood Framework, a conceptual tool that examines how individuals and communities sustain their livelihoods amidst economic and environmental challenges. Central to the framework is the identification of five key asset categories: human, social, physical, financial, and natural capital, which collectively form the foundation of sustainable livelihoods. Scoones underscores the dynamic interplay between these assets and the broader institutional, policy, and processual contexts that shape livelihood outcomes. By emphasizing the importance of contextual and systemic interactions, this framework has become foundational within the field of development studies and remains a pivotal reference in contemporary livelihood research.

The multifaceted nature of rural livelihoods in developing countries emphasizes income diversification as a vital strategy for managing risks and achieving sustainability. His work highlights the significance of non-farm activities, migration, and remittances as integral elements that contribute to the resilience and economic stability of rural households. By providing nuanced insights into these dynamics, Ellis's book offers practical guidance on poverty alleviation strategies, positioning itself as a seminal contribution to the discourse on rural development. Its enduring relevance underscores its value as a foundational text in the field (Ellis, 2000).

Historically, Dalits have faced pervasive caste-based discrimination, which has confined them to traditional and often menial jobs, reinforcing social and economic marginalization that limits their access to stable, well-paying employment opportunities, thereby perpetuating poverty across generations and making social mobility an arduous task (Gellner, 2007). The rigid caste system has not only restricted their professional choices but also subjected them to systemic exclusion from various socio-economic benefits, resulting in a cycle of deprivation that is difficult to break without significant institutional support and reform. Furthermore, the lack of access to quality education and vocational training has severely hindered their ability to pursue diverse and competitive career paths, reducing their chances of upward mobility and economic independence, as many Dalit children are either deprived of schooling or forced to drop out due to financial constraints and discrimination within educational institutions (Sharma, 2012). Even when some manage to acquire formal education, barriers such as prejudice in hiring processes and workplace discrimination persist, making it difficult for them to secure employment in higher-paying or prestigious fields, thus reinforcing socio-economic inequality. This long-standing marginalization has also contributed to psychological and social challenges, as Dalits often experience humiliation, exclusion, and violence, further discouraging them from seeking opportunities that could improve their socio-economic standing. The persistent nature of this discrimination underscores the importance of policy interventions, affirmative action, and grassroots movements aimed at creating equal opportunities and dismantling the barriers that have historically oppressed the Dalit community (Sedden et. all, 1979).

2. Research Method and Materials

This research presents an analytical study of the livelihood challenges faced by the Dalit communities of Basantpur, Ward No. 5 of Manahari Rural Municipality in the Makwanpur District. The analysis is conducted using a descriptive framework, focusing on the livelihood challenges of Dalit communities through a study of the Dalits residing in Basantpur. This study has employed a descriptive research design. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed for the study, with a preference for qualitative analysis where feasible, especially in the context of social studies. The study utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. Given that there are only 35 Dalit households (27 households of Mijar, 5 households of Pariyar, and 3 households of Bishwakarma) within the Dalit communities in the study area, primary data were collected from all households through census methods. Primary data were gathered through interviews and participant observation with these 35 households. The data collection for this research was carried out between January 20 to 25, 2025.

2.1 Study Area at a Glance

Manahari Rural Municipality, located in the Makawanpur district of Nepal under the Bagmati region, spans an area of 199.52 sq. km. It is situated between 84°42'35" and 85°57'36" east longitude and 27°23'34" and 27°36'37" north latitude, bordered by Hetauda Sub-Metropolitan City to the east, Raksirang Rural Municipality to the west, Chitwan National Park to the west, and Parsa district to the south. Established on 2073-11-22, it comprises 9 wards formed from the merger of Manahari and Handikhola VDCs. This study is located in Ward No. 5, Basantpur, Manahari Rural Municipality, where there is a dense population of Dalits. The village is home to diverse ethnic groups, including Tamangs (46.15%), Magars (14.38%), and other groups like Brahmins, Chepangs, and Dalits. Agribusiness remains the primary source of income, though trade, small industries, and foreign employment also contribute. The population is gradually adopting a modern lifestyle, and the number of local workers going abroad for jobs and education is rising. While most households are electrified, marginalized communities still face limited access to electricity and other new infrastructures. However, the area is rich in cultural diversity, with its residents celebrating various festivals like Dashain, Tihar, Holi, and Buddha Jayanti (Ghale, 2020).

3. Data Analysis and Presentation

In the study area of the Dalit community in Basantapur, Ward No. 5, Manahari Rural Municipality, Makawanpur district, limited land ownership restricts farmers from expanding their agricultural activities, preventing them from modernizing farming practices. The lack of irrigation facilities further worsens the situation, making farmers dependent on unpredictable rainfall. Additionally, the deficiency in scientific and practical education hinders them from adopting advanced techniques. Unemployment remains a major issue, pushing people toward foreign employment, which often comes with its own set of challenges. Wild animals also pose a threat to crops and livestock, adding to the struggles of rural communities. The absence of government programs for marginalized groups and their lack of political influence further hinder their socio-economic progress. Furthermore, traditional professions are facing

a crisis due to modernization and changing economic demands, leaving many without sustainable livelihoods. The livelihood challenges faced by the Dalit communities of Manahari Rural Municipality, Ward No. 5, Basantpur, are as follows:

3.1 Limited Land Ownership

Dalits in Nepal have long faced poverty and deprivation due to historical caste-based discrimination, which has significantly limited their access to land and resources. As a result, many Dalit families are restricted to small, unproductive plots of land, often less than five katthas, with some only owning small homesteads. This lack of land restricts their ability to sustain themselves and create stable livelihoods. The Sustainable Livelihood Framework, as proposed by Scoones (1998), helps to understand the struggles of such communities by highlighting the importance of five forms of capital: human, social, physical, financial, and natural. For Dalits, limited access to productive land, a vital form of physical capital, exacerbates their economic challenges, hindering their capacity to adapt to both economic and environmental challenges. Many Dalits here have less than five katthas of land, and some families only have a small homestead. Due to the scarcity of land, they face significant challenges in securing a livelihood, as they lack productive land to work on.

To address these issues and improve the situation, efforts should focus on providing Dalits with equitable access to land and resources. Land reform policies that prioritize land redistribution and provide support for Dalit families to increase their productive land holdings could significantly enhance their livelihoods. Additionally, programs that strengthen social capital, such as building community networks and providing educational and financial opportunities, could further help Dalits build resilience. Enhancing access to human capital through skill development programs and improved education will empower Dalit communities to break the cycle of poverty and ensure a more equitable and sustainable future (Field survey, 2025).

3.2 Inability of Modernize Agriculture

The Dalit community of Basantpur in Manahari 5 has yet to modernize its agricultural practices. A study conducted from January 20 to 25, 2025, revealed that only two families in the area were cultivating Dragon fruit on a small scale, while land owned by 21 households situated above the main road remained fallow, highlighting a lack of agricultural activity. The primary cause of this inactivity is the absence of irrigation facilities, which has made it difficult to grow even seasonal vegetables. In contrast, 14 households located below the road are actively cultivating seasonal vegetables, wheat, and mustard. Several factors contribute to the slow pace of agricultural modernization in this community. Chief among them is the outmigration of youth for foreign employment, which has reduced the local labor force and weakened agricultural productivity. Additionally, poor irrigation infrastructure and limited awareness of modern farming techniques further hinder progress. As a result, farmers relying on traditional methods face challenges in adapting to present-day agricultural demands. Strengthening irrigation systems, offering agricultural training, and promoting the use of modern technologies could significantly support sustainable agricultural development in the region (Field survey, 2025).

3.3 Deficiency in Scientific and Practical Education

The Dalit community in Basantpur faces persistent barriers to employment in government, non-government, and industrial sectors due to limited access to quality scientific and practical education. Out of 35 households, only three youths have secured government jobs, while most rely on informal skills like driving to sustain their families. Despite the nearby Shree Bhojsiddha Secondary School, many Dalit children are unable to complete their education, primarily due to socio-economic hardships. These challenges have also pushed both young men and women to seek work in Gulf countries. The situation underscores the urgent need for inclusive education, improved infrastructure, better access to scholarships, and targeted support to equip Dalit students with the skills needed for sustainable livelihoods (Field survey, 2025).

3.4 Problems Caused by Wild Animals

Wild animals create severe difficulties for the Dalit community in Basantpur, leading to economic struggles. The primary challenges include crop destruction, livestock predation, and frequent human-wildlife conflicts. Since the Dalit community depends on agriculture for their livelihood, the threat from wild animals is a persistent issue. Living near a dense forest, they often face intrusions from animals like Deer, Antelopes, Monkeys, and Elephants, particularly during the harvest season. These animals cause extensive damage to crops, leading to significant financial losses and food insecurity. The destruction of farmlands has worsened the already vulnerable economic condition of the community.

The dangers posed by wild animals are not limited to crop damage but also extend to human safety. A tragic event occurred when a Tiger attacked and killed an elderly woman who was collecting firewood in the forest, increasing fear and insecurity among the villagers. The repeated intrusion of wild Boars, Monkeys, and Elephants into farmlands further intensifies the struggle. Elephants, due to their massive size, are especially destructive, trampling fields and causing heavy losses. The continuous threat from wildlife has created a challenging environment for the Basantpur Dalits, making their daily survival difficult and uncertain (Field survey, 2025).

3.5 Lack of Government Programs

The three-tier government system, comprising the central government, provincial government, and local government, lack livelihood-oriented programs for Dalits. In Manahari-5, Basantpur, the absence of government initiatives targeting marginalized communities has resulted in significant social and economic disparities. Without proper support, vulnerable groups face limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, further entrenching cycles of poverty and exclusion. This lack of assistance hinders their ability to improve their living conditions and actively participate in local development. Addressing this issue requires urgent government intervention through policies that promote inclusive growth, social protection, and equal opportunities, fostering a more equitable society in the region (Field survey, 2025).

3.6 A Crisis in Traditional Dalit Professions

The given text highlights the socio-economic struggles faced by Dalits due to the persistence of caste-based occupations and limited opportunities for alternative livelihoods. Historically, Dalits have been confined to jobs like blacksmithing, tailoring, shoemaking, and street cleaning roles deemed inferior by society. Poverty and a lack of resources further force Dalits, including women and children, into exploitative labor conditions where they receive minimal or no wages. Systems such as Haliya Pratha and Khala Pratha exemplify the extent of forced labor, where individuals work under severe conditions without proper compensation, often receiving only basic food grains in return. This perpetuates the cycle of economic and social marginalization, making it difficult for Dalits to break free from systemic oppression.

As modernization and capitalism introduced ready-made goods into the market, traditional caste-based occupations lost their demand, leaving Dalits in economic distress. Previously, professions like tailoring by the Damai, blacksmithing by the Bishwakarma, and labor services by the Mijar played a vital role in society. However, with industrialization and increased accessibility to manufactured goods, Dalits struggled to compete, lacking the capital and opportunities to shift to new forms of employment (Field survey, 2025).

3.7 Lack of Political Influence

In Nepal, key political positions at both central and local levels are predominantly occupied by individuals from higher castes. In contrast, Dalits are often excluded from these roles and systematically discouraged from exercising their political rights. Political leaders tend to engage with Dalit communities primarily as a voting bloc rather than ensuring their meaningful representation. Consequently, the challenges faced by Dalits remain largely unaddressed. A case study conducted in Manahari-5, Basantapur, revealed similar patterns of exclusion. Dalits in the area continue to be compelled to work as wage laborers for higher-caste individuals due to their lack of access to productive land. Moreover, respondents unanimously reported that no political party or local government has implemented income-generating initiatives specifically targeting Dalits. The study also observed that political parties have primarily mobilized Dalits to serve party interests rather than to promote their socio-economic well-being. Notably, there has been no significant effort to support Dalit children's education, facilitate their access to foreign employment, or allocate land to landless Dalits (Field survey, 2025).

4. Result Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of Dalit marginalization in Nepal highlights the economic, social, and political barriers that continue to impede their advancement. Scholars such as Blaikie, Cameron, and Seddon (1979) contend that the transition from a caste-based economy to a capitalist framework has failed to generate inclusive opportunities for Dalits, thereby perpetuating their structural disenfranchisement. The lack of meaningful political representation further compounds their struggles, as Dalit leaders are seldom encouraged or supported in pursuing leadership roles within major political parties. With only a limited number of Dalit representatives in both the House of Representatives and the National

Assembly, their voices remain marginalized, reinforcing their systemic exclusion from decision-making processes that could otherwise contribute to the upliftment of their community.

The economic hardships faced by Dalits are deeply entrenched and sustained by limited land ownership, the absence of agricultural modernization, and restricted access to quality education, all of which undermine their financial stability. According to Aahuti (2067 B.S.), many Dalits are compelled to accept exploitative labor conditions or seek employment abroad due to the lack of skilled job opportunities within Nepal. Moreover, caste-based labor systems such as *Haliya Pratha* and *Khala Pratha* continue to subject Dalit workers, particularly women and children, to bonded labor and unjust compensation. These socio-economic constraints perpetuate a cycle of poverty, making it exceedingly difficult for Dalits to improve their living conditions and transcend historical patterns of discrimination (Dulal, 2016).

Addressing these structural inequalities necessitates targeted interventions, including comprehensive land reforms, access to modern agricultural training, and the expansion of skill-based education programs designed to create sustainable employment opportunities. As Sunar (2020) emphasizes, strengthening political representation by ensuring Dalits occupy leadership positions within decision-making bodies is essential for dismantling the cycle of marginalization. Furthermore, applying dependency theory to this analysis reveals how the economic disparities between developed and underdeveloped nations are mirrored in the systemic exploitation of Dalits in Nepal. Ultimately, a multi-sectoral approach integrating economic, educational, and political reforms is imperative for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for Dalits.

6. Conclusion

The Dalit community in Basantpur, Ward No. 5, Manahari Rural Municipality, faces multiple socio-economic barriers that hinder their progress and well-being. Limited land ownership, lack of irrigation, and an inability to modernize agriculture severely restrict the community's potential for economic growth. The absence of scientific education and practical skills further contributes to the economic instability, forcing many Dalits to migrate for foreign employment. The challenges are compounded by the lack of government support, insufficient political representation, and the ongoing threat posed by wild animals to their crops and livestock. These factors reinforce a cycle of poverty, preventing the Dalit community from achieving financial and social stability.

Addressing these issues requires comprehensive and inclusive reforms in land distribution, education, and agriculture. Implementing land reform policies that provide Dalit families with access to productive land, alongside training programs in modern farming techniques and skill development, could significantly improve their livelihoods. Strengthening political representation and ensuring the inclusion of Dalit voices in decision-making processes would empower the community to advocate for their rights and access necessary resources. Moreover, the introduction of targeted government initiatives to combat social exclusion and promote economic development is crucial for breaking the cycle of

marginalization and ensuring a more equitable and sustainable future for the Dalit community in Basantpur.

7. Recommendation

This study, based on information gathered from local informants and field observations, presents three key recommendations regarding the livelihood challenges faced by the Dalit Communities in Basantpur, Ward No. 5 of Manahari Rural Municipality in Makawanpur district, Bagmati Province, Nepal:

1. It is necessary to increase land ownership among Dalits in the area to enhance food production. Additionally, systems for agricultural subsidies should be established.
2. Vocational training programs for the youth should be arranged to improve production and income opportunities within the local community. An environment should also be created where acquired skills can be effectively utilized.
3. It was observed that many men and women have gone abroad for foreign employment after taking loans. There is a need to ensure the availability of easy loans for foreign employment and, upon their return, create an environment conducive to investment in the village.

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