

CHAPTER-I

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INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The division of people on the basis of caste is unique to Hindu society. Hindu society is hierarchically divided as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. According to this religion, the creator of the world *Brahma* created *Brahmin* from his mouth and they are expected to perform teaching activities, *Kshatriya* from his hand and given the role of ruling and providing security, *Vaishya* from his thigh to produce food and perform economic activities and *Shudra* from his feet to serve others. In this way, from the very beginning of the creation, the *Shudras* are shown to have originated from the disrespectful part of the body of the creator and given the task of serving. During the time of extremely feudalistic society, the king (*Kshetrias*) used to rule the country with his might, the priest (*Brahmins*) propounded by the *Vedas*, the traders and farmers (*Vaishyas*) used to handle the economy of the country and *Shudras* had to serve all these classes of people through manual works. The religion, therefore, treated *Shudras* as inferior human beings and the extreme case was that of untouchability. This system was more formalized and ritualized by some famous Hindu sages like *Bhrigu*, who propounded rules and regulations and formed *Manushrimiti* which provided guidance to the kings and further enhanced the caste system. There are several myths related to this division.

From early times by an ordinance of Manu, men of the higher castes or classes were permitted, after marrying a woman of their own castes, to have subsidiary wives from any of the classes below them. This custom seems to have been prevalent, and no definite rule was prescribed that the children of such unions

should necessarily be illegitimate. In many cases there are no doubt that their descendants ultimately became full members of the caste of the first ancestor. According to Manu, the children of a Brahmin by a Kshatriya woman could attain Brahminhood in the third generation and those by a Vaishya woman in the fifth. Such children could also inherit the family property. According to the Mahabharata, if a Brahmin had four wives of different castes, the son by a Brahmin wife took four shares, that by a Kshatriya wife three, that by a Vaishya wife two, and that by a Shudra wife one share. Manu gave a slightly different distribution, but also permitted the son by a Shudra wife to have a share of the inheritance. Thus, by this, it is clear that the son of a Brahmin even by a Shudra wife had a certain status of legitimacy in his father's caste, as he could marry in it, and had been permitted to partake of the sacrificial food at marriage, and could also inherit a small share of the property. The detailed rules prescribed for the state legitimacy and inheritance show the recognized unions of this kind of subsequent prohibitions. This must lead to mixture of blood in the different castes. There is still a survival of it in the practice of hypergamy (Chandra and Chreack: 2002).

Castes are still being historically constructed, or perhaps more aptly being 'deconstructed', as a vertically integrated hierarchy decays into a horizontally disconnected ethnic array. Under these contemporary circumstances, although the overall direction of change is fairly clear, the social fact of caste appears increasingly ambiguous, inconsistent and variable. What people mean when they identify themselves as members of castes- as nearly all Hindus still do-or as non-members of any caste-as many Muslims do-is itself changing in diverse ways, and the same of course applies to the identification of others. Intentions and belief in relation to caste therefore become patently problematic to an extent that they did not realize before and this is partly because the deconstruction of 'traditional'

caste entails the collapse of a relatively coherent, internally consistent ideology (Toppe:2000).

However, the history of the caste system shows that belief in 'putative biological difference', which are expressed through a reutilization of divergent social practices, has not acted as an impediment in transcending the rules of endogamy and the formation of new castes when material conditions bring together families of diverse caste origin but similar socio-economic background. The formation of the Kayastha caste, in early medieval time, is a case in points, as literate professionals drawn from different Varna/castes crystallized into a caste. For a correct understanding of the dynamics of the caste system, we must pay attention not only to 'repulsion' or fragmentation' of castes but also to the processes of fusion which allow this institution to continue and even strengthen itself as social, political and economic circumstances change. For example, in the overseas context, in Trinidad Varna categories have come to replace caste as the endogamous unit and status referent. No doubt endogamy is basic to the morphology of caste but for its origin and sustenance one has to look beyond hypersymbolic manifestations and the ideational explanations which merely beg the question by making it an attribute of the Indian mentality. As we shall try to show, endogamy evolved gradually and acquired rigidity with the growth of patriarchy in a Varna-based class society.

The word Dalits literally means a person emerged from a swamp. As the Hindu religion has classified the castes into four groups, the lowest group, Sudra, has been termed as untouchables. If one from other group touches Sudra s/he has to purify with gold treated water. Other group can not use the dish without putting that in fire if that was touched by Sudra. He is not allowed to enter into the house of an upper caste, if entered has to be purified by a ritual called Puja. These all practices of the society indicate that the Sudra are not given the status of human

beings. This system of inequality is enforced and maintained by social, political, religious and cultural institutions that are creating and maintaining inequality among different groups of people. These institutions are responsible for economic, social, and psychological domination of the lowest rank people, i.e. Dalits.

The distinction between untouchable and other is merely conventional. No one is born as untouchable. Parental upbringing and social suggestion build up habits of untouchability into the individual. It is the process of socialization that makes one realize that the person is untouchable to the person him/her self as well as to others. There are no physical differences between the two. He was of the view that untouchability is not the problem of untouchables alone, just as war is not the problem of militarists. Untouchability with its associate poverty, ignorance and extreme discontent distorts democracy and places society in the top of a volcano. Therefore, the removal of untouchability is a common problem.

There are two principal aspects of the problem of untouchability: religious faith and political power. Both of them have been effective methods of making and mending attitudes of people and organizing social relations.

The illusion of Karma divides people wider apart than the patent differences of the colour of the skin or the shape of the nose. A Brahmin is more alien to Chamar (untouchable caste) than a white to a black and Mongol to a Semite, even though a Brahmin and Chamar cannot be recognized, as such, except by the labels they take for themselves.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DALITS:

With its diverse and extreme geographical and climatic conditions, Nepal, the only Hindu Kingdom in the world till 2001, has its caste hierarchy even more diverse and extreme. The main basis of the social system is based on the caste system. Within the same system its own fellow brothers and sisters are regarded as *Shudra* and untouchables, which usually does not prevail in any other religions in the world.

The so-called untouchables of Nepal are created by the Hindu religion. From the historical studies the existence of caste system can be seen in the Lichhavi period that is from the first millennium. King Jayasthiti Malla restructured the society as advised by four Brahmans invited from Banaras (India). He divided the Newars into 64 caste groups based on the occupational division of labour in the fourteenth century. Later, due to the intensifying process of Hinduization, the Newars developed Dalit groups such as Poda, Chyame etc. Junga Bahadur Rana, the founder of 104-year old oligarchy Rana rule, introduced the National Code of Nepal, 1854, in which he restructured the Nepali society into four-fold caste hierarchy. At the top were Tagadhari (“sacred thread wearing” of “twice-born”) followed by Matawali (“liquor drinking”) Pani nachalne chhoiee chhito halnu napanne (“untouchable, sprinkling of holy water required for the purification of the body”). *Tagadhari* was further sub-divided into Upadhyaya at the top followed by Thakuri, Chhetri and Jaisi. Similarly, Matawali was sub-divided into two groups: *namasine* (“enslavable”) and *masine* (“slavable”). Before the implementation of the law in all parts of Nepal, *Matawalis*, that is, indigenous nationalities had an egalitarian social structure and they were outside the four-fold Varna and Hindu caste system. “Untouchable castes” were further sub-divided as “upper” and “lower” castes. All legal provision, including punishments, was meted out based on caste status. The concept of purity and defilement of body and

food funded the National Code. The National Code required that the *Matwalis* must practice caste-based untouchability against the “untouchables” and “upper caste untouchables” were also required to practice it against “lower caste untouchables”. Although caste discrimination was the hallmark of the National Code of Nepal, 1854, it was abolished by the New National Code of Nepal, 1963. In practice, however, the caste hierarchy introduced in 1854 still continues unabated in every-day-life.

In Nepal, however, the definition of Dalit differs from one source to another. According to Koirala (1996) “dalit” refers to “a group of people who are religiously, culturally, socially and economically oppressed, who could belong to different language and ethnic groups.” He believes that Dalit is not a caste group but a politically coined word used to refer to socially backward caste community in Nepal. In this definition, we could even include many *Indigenous Nationalities* such as Chepang, Raute, Majhi, Kumhal, Bote and others who are equally backward in terms of social and economic indicators. The word Dalit is used in Nepal to identify a vulnerable and poor group of people, who are discriminated against on the basis of their caste. On the other hand, Bishwakarma (2001) prefers to use the term Dalit exclusively only for the so-called “untouchables” of Nepal. He notes that the term Dalit is in use in Nepal over the last 33 years, it is less derogatory than the term “Harijan” as used in India since the 60’s and the term is synonymous to untouchable caste as defined in the Hindu *Varna* model and in the Old Legal Code of Nepal of 1854 (Dahal and others: 2002).

Since the political revolution of 1950 constitutional and legal provisions have consistently provided for the equal treatment of individuals irrespective of caste, but caste related social behaviours were never been declared to be punishable by law. The constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1960), for the first time, declared the practice of untouchability as illegal and punishable by law. The

Civil code was amended accordingly and provided for punishment up to one year in prison or Rs. 3,000 in fine or both. However the code still sought to maintain the status quo as long as entry to temples and religious places was concerned until the Supreme Court declared this provision null and void in 1994.

Although Nepal endorsed the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1970, the enforcement part is weak and the centuries old oppression persists. Thus, Nepal submitted Draft report to the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 which stated:

Social discrimination and segregation is widespread in rural Nepal, particularly among the Hindu caste hierarchy. The low caste people are traditionally segregated and subjected to various types of discrimination because they are considered untouchable. Although such segregation is declared illegal by the law of the land, the low caste people are very much marginalized from the socio-economic and political mainstreams of the country. The caste hierarchy is considered to be the greatest hindrance to social mobility in Nepal.

Bhattachan (2003) and others who did the study on the untouchables of Nepal are of the view that Dalits are neither the original creation of Nepal nor of the Dalits themselves. Four fold Varna model along with caste hierarchy, purity and defilement of water, food and body, division of labour based on descent etc., were created by the Hindus of the Indo-Gangatic plains in India. Both untouchability and descent based division of labour were imported in Nepal from North India.

Macdonald (1984) has cited the list of untouchable castes identified by the old National Code of Nepal. These are as follows:

Castes from whom water is not acceptable but physical contact does not require purification by sprinkling of water are: Musalman, Madheska Teli, Kasai, Kusle, Dhobi, Kulu, Cudara. Caste from whom water is not acceptable and physical contact require purification by sprinkling of gold treated water are: Sarki, Kami, Sunar, Cunura, Hurke, Damai, Gaine, Badihad, Pode, Cyamakhalak.

In 1964 King Mahendra brought new National Code. This Code declared equality to all population of Nepal. But this Code did not consider practice of untouchability as a crime. It did not concern the uplifting of the Dalits. New Constitution of Nepal 1990 guaranteed equal right to all Nepali citizens. It also made the practice of untouchability as a crime. Provision of special social, health and employment opportunities to Dalits is another positive aspect of the constitution.

In the 9th National Plan, for the first time it has been explicitly mentioned about the objectives related to the development of the Dalits in Nepal.

To obtain these objectives it has adopted various strategies. One of the strategies is implementing laws against untouchability. Establishment of National Dalit Commission is a step towards the implementation. The Commission is engaging in collecting information related to Dalits.

Bhattachan (2001) writes, "There is conflicting information about the number of Dalit communities. For example, Sharma (1997) and Hemchuri (1999) have identified 11 and 14 Dalit communities respectively in the Census of 1991.

Recently the "The National Commission for Dalits" has brought a list of caste groups who were identified as Dalits in Nepal Terai. They are Kalar, Kakaihiya, Kori, Khatik, Khatwe(Mandal, Khanga), Chamar (Ram, Mochi, Harijan, Rabidas), chidimar, Dom(Marik), Tatma (Tanti, Das), Dushad (Paswan,

Hajara), Dhobi (Rajak), Pattharkatta, Pasi, Bantar, Musahar, Mestar(Halkor), Sarbhanga (Sarwariya).

Use of the term 'Dalit' is very recent and it symbolizes a struggle for recognition of self-identity, expression of historical reality of oppression due to caste-based untouchability and occupations, and a determination for creation of egalitarian society.

The Dalits is not a homogeneous group. Dalits population in Nepal is divided and its heterogeneity extends to language, religion, and culture. Their differences can be categorized in three broad regional groups: a) Dalits in the hill community, b) Dalits in the Newari community, and c) Dalits in the Terai community. Chamars are one of the major Dalits in the Terai community.

CHAMARS:

The tanners of leather, the preparers of skins, the manufactures of leather articles, and the makers of shoes belong to a well defined class in the Indian social order. Most of these workers, in Upper India, are to-day included under the general term *Chamar*. This occupational group may be traced back to very early times; Tanners (*Charmamna*) are mentioned in the Rig Veda, in the later Vedic literature, and in the Brahmanas.

The Chamars belong to a lower level in the hierarchy of scheduled castes and the other castes in general. Their origin in the occupational class of leather-workers and in the Non Aryan tribal group and their food habits of eating pork, chicken, and beef have pushed them to a lower social status. So they have to live in their own hamlets set apart from the upper castes or the main settlements. Nevertheless, they are an integral part of the rural communities and of the *Jajmani* system. This makes it possible for one to attempt an interpretation of their socio-

economic attributes in terms of their interactions with the higher castes, particularly with land-owning groups, as also in terms of the Reference Group Theory of behavior. However, even though the complexion of Socio-economic parameters has undergone changes the caste identity of the Chamars has not been lost. This provides a rationale for identifying the Chamars as a social group and for attempting a study of their social geography. (Mukerji, 1980)

Chamar or Ramdasi is one of the major communities found in almost all the states of northern India, Nepal as well as in other regions. They are known differently in different areas and as such include many subgroups. Their community name is derived from the Sanskrit word *chamakara*, meaning leather worker. According to the Puranas, the Chamars descended from the union of a boatman and a Chandal woman. Scholars have identified them with the Karewara or leather worker mentioned in the tenth chapter of Manu's Dharmashastra. The father of the caste was Nishada (the offspring of a Brahman father and a sudra mother) and the mother a Vaidcha (offspring of a Vaisya father and a Brahman mother). There were sixteen major sub-castes with eleven hundred and fifty-six subdivisions among the Chamars in the North- Western provinces at that time. In the Central Province, the majority of the Chamars belonged to the Chattisgarh division and the adjacent feudatory states, where they were emancipated from their earlier service status and became cultivators and occasionally even landed proprietors (*malgujars*). In the western parts of Punjab Chamar are called Mochi. The Chamars in different states are listed with their other synonyms and subgroups. In three states, namely Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra, they are notified with the Bhambi. The different subgroups of Chamars claim an independent status for many reasons, some of which are a separate origin, different myths, occupational differences, religious/ sectoral affiliations, etc. Some of these subgroups who claim an independent existence, such as the Jatav, Mochi/Mucho,

Satnami and Rabidas would prefer an identity distinct from the Chamar. Despite this, owing to their being notified with the Chamars, these subgroups have been grouped under Chamar in this volume, irrespective of their claim for a separate identity (Briggs: 1920).

According to 2001 census Chamar population comprise 2,69,661(1.19%) of the total population of Nepal. Among them 26,670 are in Siraha district and 729 are living in Lahan municipality (Central Bureau of Statistics: 2001).

Chamars are endogamous group; they do not permit inter-caste marriage. One who does is socially outcasted by the community. They rank themselves above other untouchables like Dushad, Dom etc. They maintain social distance with other Dalits.

Chamars are on the bottom in every field; their participation in the politics-local to national level is very low. They are not in a position to take part in politics except casting the vote. Some of them have been represented in the local village body, sometimes political parties feel prerequisite for the balanced growth of the society, so they use these people. In Lahan, no Chamars is in higher political post.

Poverty is the basic characteristics of Chamars. They are extremely poor and do not have saving character. Most of the Chamars are landless and only very few have small piece of land. Majority of them are living in small hut in very poor condition. Their income is not sufficient for their necessities other than hand to mouth. They are not able to support their children to have education, and for health services. School enrollment of Chamars is very low. These days they are sending their children to the school but due to poverty and various other reasons only a few are able to complete the school education.

Industrial products have displaced the traditional occupation of Chamars for example the modern shoe making factories have affected the life of the Chamars, who by tradition are used to making shoes. These days they are working as laborer in different fields like agriculture, road construction, brick factories, building construction and also as Rickshaw puller. Young Chamars are going to India and urban areas in order to improve their economic condition. The women's wage is lower than men. The midwife work is also decreasing, because of increasing number of women going to the hospital for child birth.

For last several years, some Dalit-based organizations, including Dalit Mukti Samaj, Dalit Sewa Sangh, Dalit Bikas Sangh, Dalit Utpiran Usthan Manch, Dalit Sramik Morcha, Rastriya Dalit Kalyan Samaj, Nepal Jan Bikas Parishad, Vikasonmokh Samaj, Sustainable Livelihood Forum have been working for Dalits. In local level Saraswoti Samudahik Bikas Manch, and Human Rights Commission are actively working for Dalits of the area. All major political parties have there agenda related to Dalits.

For the first time in the History of Nepal, in 1999, a movement among the Terai Dalits emerged. In Saptari an NGO Saraswati community Development Forum of Saptari had run **Re-generated Frerian Literacy through Empowerment Community Technique (REFLECT)** centres. The Dalit participants in the program discussed the reasons for their humiliations and found carcass throwing as the major one. They refused to throw such dead animals any more. Because of their unity the upper caste did not go against them and their movement was considered as successful. That success was replicated by the Dalits living in Lahan and they too refused to throw the dead animals. In Lahan the upper caste people joined together and imposed economic blockade to the whole Chamar people. This movement is still going on in these areas. The present study will

bring primary information from the perspective of those Dalits involved in the movement.

This study focuses on the movement of Chamars, the so called untouchables who are involved in the movement for their social and economic development in the present context. The study has brought out the causes of the movement and problems they are facing. This study tries to reveal and explore the linkages between present social and cultural changes that are going on between different groups of people categorized on the basis of their social and economic characteristics. It is sure that the findings of the study will be useful for the people and organizations working in the field of social justice and equity. However, in the following section available studies on the movement in Nepal will be reviewed.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

On the whole studies on Dalits' socio-political movements are very few. Most of the literatures on Dalits movements are from India. The chapter on literature review will first explore the Dalits Andolan (movement) in India and Nepal in particular.

Shah (1990) mentions, social movements primarily take the form of non-institutionalized collective political action which strives for social and political changes. He has divided the studies on social movements in India into eight groups based on the participants and the issues involved: peasant, tribal, Dalits, backward caste, women, student, middle class, and industrial working class. He is of the view that each of these movements has four major components: issues, ideology, organization, and leadership.

The main issues around which most of the Dalits movement have been centered in colonial and post colonial periods in India are confined to the problem

of untouchability. They are predominantly anti-untouchability movements. Other than untouchability the issue of increasing reservations in political offices, government jobs and welfare programs are also taken in the movements. Shah classifies Dalits movements as i) reformative and ii) alternative movements. The former tries to reform the caste system to solve the problem of untouchability. The alternative movement attempts to create an alternative socio-cultural structure by conversion to some other religion or by acquiring education, economic status and political power. Both types of movements use political means to attain their objectives. The reformative movements are further divided into Bhakti movement, Neo-Vedantik movement and Sanskritization movement. Alternative movements are divided into conversion movement and religious or secular movement.

The Bhakti and Neo-Vedantik movements were not confined to the Dalits but initiated by Hindu religious and social reformers. According to the pioneers of this movement, untouchability was not an essential part of Hinduism. Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj in India, believed that the caste system was a political institution created by the rulers 'for the common good of the society, and not a natural or religious distinction'. The Neo-Vedantik movements and non-Brahmin movements played an important catalytic role in developing anti-caste or anti-Hinduism Dalits movements in some part of India. The Satyashodhak Samaj and the Self-Respect movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the Adi-Dharma and the Adi-Andhra movement in Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, are important anti-untouchability movements which were launched in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early part of twentieth century.

A major anti-untouchability movement was launched by B.R. Ambedkar in the 1920s in Maharashtra. This has been continuing in different forms till today. It has spread all over India. Ambedkar became the leader of the untouchables. During the 1920s, the Mahar launched unsuccessful Satyagrahas against

untouchability in Maharashtra. The Dalits demanded a separate electorate in the 1930s which led to a conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhi. Gandhi did not think that the problem of untouchability was a political issue.

Although the Indian Constitution of 1947 abolished the practice of untouchability, the Dalits continue to experience discrimination, segregation, and violence. The laws providing for the welfare of Dalits are often ignored. The government of India maintains that the problems should be handled internally and do not represent a form of racism, while the sections of Dalit intelligentsia seek international attention to the problems they face.

Srivastava (2007) finds, Dalits, mostly landless agricultural labourers or manual labourers, need greater political voice and participation in political processes to break free from the age-old socio-culturally imposed bondage, segregation, and discrimination. Despite the advances brought about by the reservation system, customs and other social practices continue to hinder rapid and all-round social emancipation of Dalits. As landless labourers who depend upon the landlord farmers for their livelihood, the Dalits continue to suffer from the traditional caste equations and the landlords continue to profit from it. This system provides fertile ground for atrocities. Only economic empowerment of Dalits, providing them with land and the related wherewithal, can mitigate the social tensions. The caste distinction has not only social but religious sanction. One of the profound changes in contemporary Indian society has been the emergence of a new sense of identity among the Dalits. The Dalit Movement not only rejects the very ideas of pollution, impurity and 'untouchability' but in the process is forging a new vision for Indian society which is different from that espoused by the higher castes.

He further adds Dalits movement itself is a revolt against the obnoxious brahmanical values but at the same time, should express solidarity with all oppressed masses of the world. The movement should build bridges with likeminded groups, secular and democratic organizations, and avoid becoming another cult group. Because if identities are our point of speaking then one should remember Dalits are not a homogeneous community. In fact no community in the world is homogeneous. They are as wide as anybody else and hence these identities fit in there also. This study is suitable only for academic purpose and to provide information about Dalits movement but it is unable to provide direction about Chamar movement in particular. That's why this study fulfills that gap.

Rawat (2005) writes Dalit movements have a rich history of rationalism and humanism. In fact, the historical evolution took place with Buddha's revolt against Varnashram dharma. Buddha not only rejected supremacy of Brahmins but also of the Shastras. Sanskrit was the language of the Brahmins and knowledge their sole domain and Buddha not only demolished their knowledge base of Brahmins but also popularized among the masses by sermonizing in Prakrit. And this tradition of revolt continued at the later stage also. All the indigenous reform movement and religions in India had inherently revolted against the Brahmanical value system, which gave divine sanction to untouchability and caste system. After Buddha, Mahavir Swami rejected the notion of caste and violence in the brahmanical structure. Even the birth of Sikhism is related to the caste prejudices rampant in varnashram dharma system. In the 15th century Kabir talked of rejection of caste system and talked of one God. He attacked rituals and Shastras and talked of a society based on equality.

He also explains that the Mughal rule in India was a status quo one, the emergence of British power made a lot of difference for the downtrodden people.

They brought a sense of liberty for the marginalized communities. Jyoti Ba Phule belonged to Mali (fishermen) community of Maharashtra. Pune's Chitpawan Brahmin would not allow any Dalits and backward to join schools. Women particularly of Dalit community could never dream of going to school. Phule realized that unless the community gets educated they would not be able to emancipate themselves. So he started a massive work of education by starting various schools in and around Pune. The Brahmins opposed education movement among Dalits which they had denied for years. Phule exposed the brahminical literature, wrote plays about the exploitation of the farmers and appreciated Christian missionaries for their noble work in school education.

Annamalai (2002) has raised issues about Dalit movement as strategies to gain political force. There is increasing intolerance of the situation that has not changed for the majority of the Dalits in the fifty five years after independence. The educated Dalits, who can articulate about the exploitation the Dalits are subjected to, try to use intellectual organizational means to fight it. Some visible efforts are: using conferences and media (some examples are the recent campaign to include caste in the UN World Conference on Racism, International Dalits Human Rights Conference, First World Dalits Convention: Towards a Casteless Society, Dalits Solidarity Programme), publication of books and journals (International Journal of Dalits Studies, The Dalits Magazine (a U.S. based publication), Bahujan Youth Times, forming discussion groups (Dalits and Bahujan egroups), action groups (Dalits Liberation Education Trust, DalitsIndia) and building websites to create awareness (<http://www.ambedkar.org> is one example). They educate themselves on the constitutional and legal rights of the Dalits and fight for their implementation and extension using national and international forums. Dalits intellectuals and activists seek to educate and unite

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Dalits to strength their power base. They internationalize Dalits issues to get world attention and support.

Teltumbde (2002) traced out the historical background of the Dalits movement, in the familiar sense of organized resistance of the ex-untouchables to caste oppression, may not be traced beyond colonial times. However, in a wider sense of the struggle of lower castes against the hegemony of Brahminical ideology, it has to coexist with the history of caste itself. The broad framework of caste remaining the same, the Dalits movement could also be seen in a historical continuum with its previous phases. In another sense, it could be taken as the articulation phase of the numerous faceless struggles against the iniquitous socio-economic formation ordained by the caste system that has occupied vast spaces of Indian history.

Teltumbde (2004) has critically raised some key impacts of Dalits movements. Some of them are still consequential to the discourse of revolutionary change in India. The first is about what constitutes a nation. The Dalits movements dismiss the premise of the mainstream nationalist movement that India is a nation. Ambedkar, for instance, repudiated the notion of a nation in a caste society and challenged it saying that each caste was a nation. Phule, who was Ambedkar's preceptor, had said that "unless all the people in the Balisthan (his term for India), including the Shudras, Ati-Shudras, Bhill, Koli etc. become educated and are able to think over and unite, they cannot constitute a nation." Thus, although the anti-caste movement in general and Dalits movement in particular acknowledged the positive aspects of colonial rule and tactically sought to make use of their contradiction with the bourgeoisie nationalists to exert pressure on the latter to agree for desired reforms and devolution of power to the lower castes, it never was so overwhelmed as not to see its long term interests lying in the demise of alien rule.

Das (1983) quotes the compulsions of politics overtook religious spirits, which meant the Brahminic social order, based on castes remained largely unhindered and even influenced the emergent Muslim society with the Hindu converts. Even then this process spelt a sea of opportunity to the untouchables living outside the cities and villages. It was the Muslim invaders who first opened the gates of their cities to these 'Untouchables'. Many 'Untouchables' and low caste people embraced Islam and joined the invaders, partly to avoid persecution and partly in search of better status and fortunes. Those who embraced Islam and joined the armies of Muslim invaders imitated the customs and manners of their new masters. They gradually merged and integrated into Muslim society. Besides those who formally embraced Islam, whether voluntarily or under compulsion, there were millions of those who belonged to the artisan castes like weavers, masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, basket makers, potters, dyers etc., who slowly came to be Muslims.

Sharma's (1985) full-fledged study examines the relationship between the Arya samaj and untouchables. He observes that the Arya samaj was against the political movements of the untouchables. It went against any move initiated by the untouchables for their solidarity and integration.

Omvedt (1994) provides the religious discourse is thus a common feature of all the anti-caste movements. For example, the Satnami movement of the Chamars in the Chhattisgarh plains in Eastern Madhya Pradesh that eventually became an independent religious sect, the Dravid Kazhagam movement of Periyar EVR Ramaswamy Naicker which created a stir by publicly burning the effigy of Rama and celebrating the virtuousness of Ravana; the Nadar Mahajana Sabha in Tamilnadu ,the Ezhava movement of Narayana Guru which culminated in establishment of a new religious sect called Shree Narayan Dharma Pratipalana Yogam in Kerala and the most pervasive Dalits movement led by Babasaheb

Ambedkar curiously reaching its climax of mass conversion to Buddhism; they all signify an overriding hatred for the religious code of Manu and a proposition of an alternate faith for themselves. It essentially embodied dejection with the Brahminism, which was perceived to be the root cause for their sufferings. The most articulate expression of this dejection is found in Ambedkar's analysis that holds overthrowing of 'Hindu' religious ideological hegemony as a necessary condition for the liberation of Dalits.

He mentions about the global movements. He further adds there was a strong revolutionary movement all across the globe that drew its inspiration from the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917. It claimed its ideological strength from the theories of historical materialism, dialectical materialism and scientific socialism propounded by Karl Marx. The Russian revolution had ignited hope of emancipation in oppressed humanity. In India too, it soon took roots and came to be reckoned as a political force, especially in the urban centres where it had a particular appeal among the workers of various factories. The leadership of this communist movement however came from the middle class educated youth who for historical reasons had to come from the upper castes, the majority being the Brahmin itself. Their comprehension of the philosophy of communism was acutely constrained on one hand by the lack of systematic political education compounded by the non-availability of much of the original literature, and on the other by their class and caste consciousness. It rested on the dictums like class struggle, dictatorship of proletariat and notions of the base and superstructure without the underlying dialectics that lent it its specific meanings. This movement was essentially pitted against British imperialism that brought them nearer some sections of the nationalists and tended to ignore the caste as a super structural identity. The emergence of autonomous Dalits movement could not therefore be taken kindly by the communist movement, as it saw the Dalits movement to be

dividing the workers, diffusing the focus of the anti-imperialist struggle and being non-scientific. In their strategic formulation, the open anti-State stance of the communists moreover did not find favour with the Dalits.

This study is suitable only for academic purpose and to provide information about Dalits movements but it is unable to provide direction about Chamar movement in particular. That's why this study fulfills that gap.

Gorringe (2005) highlights the Dalits as a major force in Indian democracy throughout the country. While the political interventions of the Republican Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party in the north are well documented. He focuses on the more recent rise of Dalits politics in the Southern State of Tamil Nadu. Dalits identity assertion and political mobilisation have irrevocably transformed the Indian political landscape. While the impact of the Dalits movement on the terms and definitions of political configurations in Tamil Nadu is clearly visible, behind this macro-level change is the everyday struggle against the entrenched power matrix at the grassroots.

He also, examines the mode of organisation and engagement in politics of the Dalits in Tamil Nadu, and their contribution to the processes of democratisation and egalitarianism. Situating the Dalits movement in the context of socio-political changes in Tamil Nadu and argues that it is at the local level that the relations of power are challenged, negotiated and reconfigured, and it is through these processes that the Dalits movement has brought large sections of the oppressed classes into the fold of India's democratic polity as active participants. With its many insights and unusual methodology, his study will help the students and scholars of Dalits studies of various discipline.

Samel (2004) attempts Dalits Movement during 1857-1950, in four southern states i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Kerala. The author provides valuable insights into the genesis of the concerned movement and leadership, event structure, internal dynamics and the social and cultural consequences. The author has focused on a brief history of the states, caste system, socio-economic conditions of Dalit leaders, organizations of Dalits movement, educational efforts made for Dalits and Temple Entry Movement in South India. This is not a study of Dalits alone, but an attempt to present a social and political history of a fascinating area in a time of rapid change and also a contribution to the regional history of South Asia. This study is suitable only for academic purpose and to provide information about Dalit movements but it is unable to provide direction about Chamar movement in particular. That's why this study fulfills that gap.

Kshirsagar(2006) traces out the history of Dalits liberation movement in India during 1857 to 1956. It attempts to find out the causes of the origin of inhuman practice of untouchability. The study expounds the history of Dalits liberation, with special emphasis on the Dalits organizations and the role played by the leaders individually and collectively for the liberation of their brethren, and their achievements. It covers all the aspects of the Dalits movement. It has been objectively analysed, properly interpreted and systematically arranged in a consolidated form. It would be useful as a ready reference to the scholars, interested in undertaking intensive research on individual leaders, and their role in the movement. It would be beneficial to those activists who prefer to take lessons from their past. Therefore, the book is of great value.

Herald (2007) has given a voice to the oppressed, backward and the poor by challenging feudalism and vested interests. But it is a shocking factor that the same Dalits have stepped into quarrel seeking separate mutts for different sub-

categories among themselves. There is a need for internal reservation but the Dalits movement should not get spilt amidst this.

Hardlmann (2008) elaborates new 'practices' and discourses among Dalits activists since the 1990s and shows how these practices both shaped and changed social relations. It is an anthropological attempt to reach behind the surface of the contemporary Dalits movement. It discusses the kind of discourses found among Dalits activists; the organizational structure of the movement; local practices among activists and also among others. This study also relates the method of anthropological fieldwork to theories about social movements. It offers a historical context as a prerequisite to understanding processes in the contemporary Dalits movement focus on the heterogeneity and the geographical spread of the contemporary Dalits movement. The fieldwork moves from a small locality of Dalits in Lucknow to interaction with Dalit activists in Maharashtra to the life of Punjabi Dalits migrants in Birmingham.

It is revealed from the review of various literatures that Indian society as a whole never accepted hierarchy as a basic value system. The anti-caste movements essentially were against the creed of Brahminism that had ordained the iniquitous social structure. They were always articulated in terms of constituting an anti-thesis to oppressive aspects of the 'Hindu' religion. They invariably materialised in the form of denouncements of these aspects and in corollary, adoption of a different faith, which in their perception was better. These movements invariably needed certain extraneous enablers especially the political congeniality.

These studies are suitable only for academic purpose and to provide information about Dalits movements but it is unable to provide direction to the Chamar movement in particular. It is expected to fulfill the gap of Dalits movement in general and Chamar movement in particular in case of Nepal.

and it symbolizes a struggle for recognition of self-identity, expression of historical reality of oppression due to caste-based untouchability and occupations, and a determination for creation of egalitarian society.

There are very few studies that have been made on Dalits and Chamars as well as their Movement in Nepal. Among them some relevant studies are reviewed here:

Bista (1996) writes “Chamars have charged of dirty and menial works in the community and eat any animal carcass except for that of dog, cat or horse. The Chamars play drums in the wedding band”.

Subedi (1997) writes, Chamars of Dang migrated from India, but they came first to Deukhuri and to the Dang. When they came to Dang they were involved in leather work and as watchman. Due to decline of traditional shoes and rise of factory shoes Chamars mostly started to depend on agricultural labour for their livelihood.

Chamars are Hindu and according to Hindu caste hierarchy they are sudra and consider as Achhut(untouchables). His finding shows exploitation of Chamars by higher caste groups like Brahmin and Chettri. Though the caste based discriminations is not rigid as it was in the past, but the researcher observed some discriminatory practices which still exist in the area. Chamars are not allowed to get water from the well at the same time with other caste people. Most of them are landless, and uneducated therefore backward in every field. Researchers have found that these Chamars are forgetting their traditional culture and language.

Upadhyaya (2000) has made Socio-economic study of Chamars of Janakpur municipality. She says Chamars have separate settlement which is

Bhattachan (2001) writes about the importance of Dalits movement in Nepal. He describes about the contribution of Dalits in Nepalese history. Firstly the Dalits have not started revolutionary movement till now, though they are subordinated since historical period. Similarly Dalits are the skillful human resources of Nepal. They are contributing society through different service sectors, musical field, literature and even in film industries. They have greatly contributed during the unification of Nepal by Prithivi Narayan Shah. He has also pointed out those weaknesses of state and mal-adjustment policies for Dalits in mainstream politics. He has suggested reforming the state and taking part Dalits in state agencies to make equitable and harmonious Nepal. His studies don't contribute to the movements of Dalits as a whole and specific to the charmar of Nepal terai.

He categorizes only three Dalits communities at the national level. These are Mijar Samaj, Biswakarma Samaj, and Pariyar Samaj. Other Dalits castes have yet to get organized. Most of the Dalits are organized as Dalits either as a fraternal or sister organization of different political parties or as NGOs. One such organization of Dalits women is Feminist Dalits Organization (FEDO) based in Kathmandu with its branch offices in other districts”.

Bhattachan and others (2003) who have done a study on the untouchables of Nepal are of the view that Dalits are neither the original creation of Nepal nor of the Dalits themselves. Four fold Varna model along with caste hierarchy, purity and defilement of water, food and body, division of labour based on descent etc. were created by the Hindus of the Indo-Gangatic plains in India. Both untouchability and descent based division of labour were imported in Nepal from North India. In both Nepal and India, however, the use of the term is very recent

known as 'Chamartol'. Very few of them have brick house. They follow Hindu religion. Her study shows very low socio-economic status of Chamars.

Yadav (2001) studies social and economic status of Chamars of Mahottari district. He has found division among Chamars in this area. Chamars are divided into 'Kanujiya' and 'Tirhutia' clans and Tirhutia believes themselves as superior than Kanujiya and avoid marriage relationship. His study also found low socio-economic condition of Chamars.

There is no systematic study on the Chamars movement of Lahan. However some journalist and human right activists have made some observations and published it in National newspapers.

The economic blockade against Chamars in Siraha district after their refusing carcass disposing job. In the morning of 24th March, 2000, people in the Lahan market were sent notice about the social seclusion of Chamars and who ever goes against that will be fined 551 Rupees. After this notice tea shops refused to offer tea to Chamars. One Chamar was taken out of his ticket booking job. Riksa-puller and other Chamars who were involved in different types of labour works were taken out of their work, and even Chamars children were beaten for playing in the street, they were not allowed to enter schools. Notice was posted in the walls and electric polls for Chamars not to walk on others land, not to go out for defecation and warned if the women came out they will be raped, and male will be stoned.

Such Social blockade made Chamars life worse. This was the case of violation of human rights. Such social blockade was made by the land owners. even ex-minister and party leaders were involved. Such blockade attracted human right activists, journalists, and other social workers. Some human right activists

and Dalits association met together and made decision to lift such blockade immediately and no one could compel Chamars to dispose Carcass against their will. However Chamars were not satisfied with that decision and demanded to punish those who were involved in violence against them. According to Chamars the District Officer was not interested to punish those higher caste people, instead engaged in omitting proots and forcing Chamars to withdraw complaints.

Similarly, Basnet (2001) focuses on the chamar as subordinate caste as well as class in Nepal Terai. He established the problems of chamar in both castes as well as class hierarchy. He focuses on restriction towards chamar by high caste and social system.

Hemchuri (1992) mentions about the background of the Dalits movement in Nepal. She does not specify the dimension of Dalits movement. She has just raised the necessities of Dalits movement for the liberation of Dalits. She has not clearly raised specific issues about their liberation. She claims the Hindu religion system has obstacle for Dalits in general. She emphasizes to unite Dalits first and then start to revolt against the social system.

The exploitation of Dalits is feudal in nature. So it is necessarily a revolt against the state rulers and social cultural system. The state formed in Nepal could not address the people's sentiments including basic needs. The state structure must be revised and must be reformed. It excluded the subordinated castes, ethnics and Dalits. So to make it participatory social laws have to be promulgated and reformed as a result Dalits can participate in all agencies of nations. Complete reservation must be there so as to empower Dalits in total. There are various problems in nations related to Dalits. To address these problems about Dalits, State must be reformed and Dalits must revolt as the people's movement in

different societies, so that they can participate in every field by pressuring State, existing social system and more.

The above mentioned literatures concerned more about ethnographic studies i.e. socio-economic profile, migration, fertility and demography. But they do not incorporate changing life pattern of Chamars in Nepal. It is a hope that this movement will become political movement against the discrimination of Dalits in Nepali society. Thus, the study fulfills the gap between ethnographic studies and current affairs of Chamars.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study are to explore the movement and struggle of people identified as Dalits, living in a village of Terai, Nepal. It also tries to understand the relationship between so called untouchables and other caste groups by analyzing the movements of Chamars. This is strongly believed that the findings will remain useful for generating future Dalit friendly policies which help to enhance greater social cohesion and harmony among Nepalese people in future. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. The study aims to prepare an ethnographic account on the Dalits by depicting various aspects of their social (such as demography, education, caste based discrimination, gender etc.), economic (such as land holding, occupation, income, expenditure etc.), and political (political participation, representation at village, district and national government) life to show their status and position in the social structure in Nepal.
2. The study will find out the basic roots of the Dalit movements in Nepal and its various causes cultural, economic and other factors such as

domination by caste, discrimination, poverty which are responsible for the emergence of Dalit movement.

3. The study will try to assess the structure and functioning of the Dalit movement. It focuses on the types and functions of the organizations along with the nature of the movement.
4. The study also intends to explore the current achievements of the movement (reservation in education, employment, politics and strictly implementation of laws against the discrimination in various sectors etc.). Various problems such as strong belief in religious faith, social boycott, lack of objectivity of the movement etc. have been encountered with organized Dalit movement in Nepal. The positive and negative aspects of the movement will be assessed along with the responses of the government as well as contribution of the movement in improving the Dalits' social condition.

METHODS OF THE STUDY:

Lahan Municipality of Sirha district has been selected where the traditional caste system is well established and has maintained a strong identity of caste in the social framework. It is bisected by east-west highway (which brings external social and economic changes to the area) and bordered by Bihar State (one of the poorest, more conservative and densely populated Hindu States of India) in the South. In connection with this movement emerged among the Terai Dalits in 1999 in the history of Nepal. It originated in Saptari District of Nepal. But for the first time Chamars of Lahan Municipality of Sirha District refused to throw dead animals and got success. This issue was raised nationally and internationally by different NGOs and INGOs. In Lahan the upper caste people joined together and imposed economic blocked to the whole Chamar people. This movement is still

going on in this area; this is the reason that I have purposely selected this as my study area.

According to 2001 census Chamar population comprised 26,670 in Sirha district. Among them 729 are living heterogeneously in the seven wards of Lahan municipality. They have in total 161 households.

In order to understand the personal and demographic information of Chamar and their movement of Lahan municipality 161 respondents were selected from all 161 households. The respondents were mostly the head of the household because they knew about the community problems and participated in the movement. They were able to understand the questions related to the Chamars activities and movement. The non-Dalits leaders of political parties, journalists and human right activists, representatives of local bodies, representatives of the administration and authority and NGOs were also selected as key informants for group discussion.

Information was collected primarily through the schedule, observation and focus group discussion. These tools were considered as major tools for collecting data and information from the grass-root level focusing on their view, opinion, attitudes towards Chamars from various people and organizations directly involved with the movement affairs. The information were also collected from the non-Dalit, political leaders, activists, local bodies, local authority, NGO and INGO, who are directly or indirectly involved in the entire phenomena of the movement.

This study used both primary and secondary data. However, the main part of the study primarily based on the interview schedule. The interview included all the Chamar households of the study area. The interview schedule was divided into

two parts. The first part included questions related to demographic information, educational status, occupation, landholding pattern, number and the name of the organizations working in the study area and the second part of the schedule included information about the inter-caste relations, opinion related to untouchability, domestic violence, health and sanitation.

Observation was used to identify the forms, nature and intensity of the existing practices of castes based untouchability and also to determine the nature and extent of double discrimination against women due to the practice of caste based untouchability. Observation technique was followed to gather information on village settlement pattern, types of house, sanitation, food habit, dress pattern, religious activities, ceremonies, use of ornaments, daily routine and different aspects of life of the Chamars.

The following number of focus group discussions with 8-10 people in each from different status was conducted to collect information related to types and nature of discrimination, nature and process of movement and suggestion for establish equitable society. The discussion was conducted among one group of Dalit consisting of both male and female, one group of non-Dalit consisting of both male and female, one group of political leaders from among the political parties namely; Congress, Communist and National Democratic Party, one group of Journalists and Human right activists, one group of Government local bodies, one group of officers of Government offices and one group consisting of officials of Saraswati Community Development forum (NGO).

A standard list of indicators related to existing practices of caste based untouchability and Dalit movement was prepared and relevant indicators were used as checklist to different focus groups. For example: nature and practice of untouchability related questions were asked with Dalits, similarly, movement

related questions were asked with Dalit political leaders, activists and representatives of different Dalit organizations. Non-Dalits were asked about selected questions related to both caste-based untouchability and Dalit movement. Administrators and Authorities were asked questions about the implementation and violation of law and punishment of the guilty.

In the beginning of the focus group discussion, participants were asked to talk about different issues related to caste based untouchability and Dalit movement. Later, questions from the standard list were asked to ascertain whether those form of discrimination and movement exist in the study area.

In order to verify the reliability of the data collected from the primary sources, the data from various secondary sources have been used wherever necessary. For this all available documents related to Dalits and their movements were consulted. These documents are various publications of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), National Planning Commission (NPC), Lahan municipality, related books, reports, articles, pamphlets, daily news papers and other publications.

The study has been interpreted through the use of both qualitative and quantitative data to the elucidate valid picture of the movement. The quantitative data were collected and analysed in the following areas: Caste and Ethnic distribute, village and household economy, income and expenditure pattern and occupation. The qualitative data have been used to elucidate social, culture and religious phenomenon expressed with specific context of human relationship existing within the framework of caste system in Nepal. The thesis is mainly based on qualitative analysis.