

UNDERSTANDING OF RESERVATION SYSTEM FOR POLITICAL  
PARTICIPATION: A CASE STUDY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, NEPAL

Hritul Paudel

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of the dissertation of *Hritul Paudel* for the degree of *Masters in Sustainable Development* presented on 23 November 2023 entitled *Understanding of Reservation System for Political Participation: A Case Study of Local Government, Nepal*.

APPROVED BY

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Asst. Prof. Suresh Gautam, PhD

Dissertation Supervisor

Nepal's federalization journey has encountered obstacles in establishing political trust and cultivating ethical leadership to strengthen local governance and tackle social disparities. The constitution of Nepal, in 2015 introduced provisions for inclusive political participation, mandating candidacies for women and marginalized groups. While these provisions have enhanced the representation of women and marginalized communities in local government, concerns linger regarding the skills and effectiveness of elected officials.

The research used a transformative research design aimed at understanding the transformative impact of equitable representation in local government elected representatives, particularly through the reservation system and its role in achieving inclusive representation. The research site was Bharatpur Metropolitan City in Chitwan District, Nepal, known for its rapid growth, strategic location, and good transportation links, making it a strategic area for studying the impact of the reservation system on local government.

This study focused on the impact of Nepal's political reservation system on the participation of women and marginalized groups in decision-making processes and their access to leadership opportunities. The research underlines the positive effects of the reservation system in enhancing the involvement of underrepresented groups in local governance. However, the study also acknowledges concerns regarding the system's potential to promote individuals with questionable qualifications into positions of power, potentially marginalizing more competent and deserving candidates.

The study emphasizes the need to strike a delicate balance between ensuring equal access to political positions and upholding the competence and effectiveness of elected officials. It advocates for considering broader socioeconomic factors to ensure that reservation policies effectively benefit those they are intended to empower. In conclusion, the research demonstrates the multifaceted implications of Nepal's political reservation system, highlighting both its positive contributions to addressing historical inequalities and its potential drawbacks. The study emphasizes the importance of continuous refinement, balancing representation with competence, and addressing challenges reserved quota representatives face to ensure the success of reservation policies in Nepal.

*Keywords:* Federalization, Underrepresented, Local governance, Inclusive political participation, Reservation system, Effectiveness, Socioeconomic factors

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23 November 2023

Hritul Paudel

Degree Candidate

This dissertation titled *Understanding of Reservation System for Political Participation: A Case Study of Local Government, Nepal* is submitted by *Hritul Paudel* on 23 November 2023.

APPROVED BY

..... 23 November 2023  
Asst. Prof. Suresh Gautam, PhD  
Dissertation Supervisor / Head of Department

..... 23 November 2023  
Giri Raj Sharma, PhD  
External Examiner

..... 23 November 2023  
Prof. Bal Chandra Luitel, PhD  
Dean/Chair of the Research Committee

I understand that my dissertation will become a part of the permanent collection of the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

..... 23 November 2023  
Hritul Paudel  
Degree Candidate

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.

.....

23 November 2023

Hritul Paudel

Degree Candidate

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Degree Candidate

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	ii
ABBREVIATIONS .....	vi
CHAPTER I .....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter Overview .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Federalism in Nepal .....	1
Provisions in the Constitution of Nepal 2015.....	3
Political Participation in Local Election.....	3
Statement of the Problem .....	4
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Research Questions.....	5
Definition of Terms.....	5
Social Inclusion.....	5
Minorities.....	6
Marginalization .....	6
Municipality .....	7
Local Level .....	7
CHAPTER II:.....	8
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
Political Participation .....	8
Reservation System as Political Participation .....	8
Reservation System in Nepal.....	9
Caste Hierarchies .....	10
Policies Implemented to Ensure Inclusion.....	11
Constitution of Nepal 1990.....	11
Policies overtime after 1990 .....	11
The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007.....	12
Five Year Plans .....	13
Comprehensive Peace Agreement.....	14
Constitution of Nepal 2015 .....	14



Empirical Literature Review .....	16
CHAPTER III: .....	19
METHODOLOGY .....	19
Interpretive Paradigm.....	19
Critical Paradigm .....	20
Transformative Research Design.....	20
Research Site .....	21
Research Participants .....	22
Table 1: List of participants .....	22
Participant-01.....	22
Participant-02.....	23
Participant-03.....	23
Participant-04.....	23
Participant-05.....	24
Data Collection Process .....	24
In-depth Interview .....	24
Data Organization .....	25
Transcribing .....	25
Categorizing and Thematizing .....	26
Data Analysis and Interpretation.....	26
Quality Standards.....	27
Reflexivity.....	27
My Positionality.....	27
Ethical Standards .....	28
CHAPTER IV .....	29
PERSPECTIVE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE POLITICAL RESERVATION SYSTEM.....	29
Chapter Overview .....	29
Understanding the Reservation System .....	29
Gender-Based Reservation.....	29
Caste-Based Reservation System .....	30
Compulsive Reservation System.....	32
Positive Influence and Transformation.....	33
Is Reservation for Empowerment and Representation? .....	34

Boosting Confidence and Overcoming Shyness .....	35
Challenging Traditional Gender Roles and Stereotypes.....	37
Reflection.....	38
The Type of Work Designated for Reserved Quota Representatives .....	39
Participation in Social Activities: Focus on Women and Children.....	39
Incompetence in Work and Participation .....	40
Coordination with Metropolitan Authorities .....	41
Chapter Summary .....	42
CHAPTER V: VOICE OF MINORITIES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE .....	43
Chapter Overview .....	43
Voices of Empowerment: Navigating the Political Reservation System .....	44
Amplifying Empowerment: The Role of Governance .....	45
Beyond the Quota: Navigating Effective Representation.....	46
The Quota System's Impetus for Change.....	47
CHAPTER-VI.....	49
DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, REFLECTION, AND IMPLICATION.....	49
Chapter Overview .....	49
The Resonance of Reservation Systems in Local Government.....	49
Understanding the Reservation System: Balancing -Based .....	49
Caste-Based Reservation: A Call for Economic Equity .....	50
Compulsory Reservation System: Progress and Challenges .....	51
Impact on Society: Empowerment and Representation.....	51
Type of Work Designated for Reserved Quota Representatives: .....	52
Incompetence in Work and Participation: The Role of Support .....	52
Coordination with Metropolitan Authorities: Fostering.....	52
Empowering the Unrepresented and Minority Groups Political.....	53
The Transformation Brought by the Quota System .....	53
Voices of Empowerment: Navigating the Political Reservation System .....	54
Amplifying Empowerment: The Role of in Local Governance .....	55
The Quota System's initiates for Change .....	55
Challenges and Nuances in Affirmative Action .....	56
Intersectionality and Representation .....	56
The Broader Societal Impact of Affirmative Action.....	57
Ensuring Effective Implementation and Equitable Distribution of.....	57

Balancing Affirmative Action and Meritocracy .....	58
The Need for a Nuanced and Inclusive Approach .....	58
Conclusion.....	58
REFERENCES.....	61
APPENDIX .....	65

## ABBREVIATIONS

DoDE	Department of Development Education
EWS	Economically Weaker Section
KUSOED	Kathmandu University School of Education
S.T	Scheduled Tribes

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Nepal transitioned from a central governance system to a federal republic in 2008 aiming at reducing inequality and discrimination. Strengthening local-level government is thus important for institutionalizing of federal structure. Nepal has conducted two elections of the local government after the inception of federalism in 2008 but the participation from all strata of the population is challenging. The research is important for exploring the perception of the locally elected people and their attempt to bring the underrepresented group into the mainstream of development through political participation. In this context, the chapter outlines the research gap, establishes the research questions, and emphasizes the study's importance.

#### **Federalism in Nepal**

Federalism is important in Nepal for addressing the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multicultural diversity. The political transition claims that the federal restructuring of the state benefits from such diversity. However, the anticipation of feudalism faces external challenges like geopolitics and Western influence and internal challenges such as discrimination and poverty, particularly affecting marginalized groups, political representation, bureaucracy, public participation, and overall, in the community and country (Dangol, 2021; Lamsal, 2020). The historic transition has not been smooth and faced many challenges such as mistrust and ethical culture of leadership among the political leaders (Lamsal, 2020).

One of the important aspects to institutionalize federalism is ethical leadership which fosters personal action and interpersonal relationships to conduct the accepted behaviour in two ways of communication. (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Brown et al left the term 'normatively appropriate' kind of vague because they thought that what's considered right or wrong can depend on the situation. (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Mozumder, 2022)

In leadership, qualities like honesty, fairness, and caring about others are important. The author describes the qualities of a moral person as part of being an ethical leader. Another part is being a role model and influencing how your followers behave. Being a good person first helps leaders show others the right way to behave, and this can help rebuild trust from the public (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Mozumder,

2022). So, the level of confidence people has in their elected representatives to perform the task appropriately and honestly for their citizens' interest instead of forming their interests is defined as political trust. Trust in political leaders is very important for the smooth functioning of democratic government. (Lamsal, 2020; Mozumder, 2022).

In the context of Nepal, most people express that the lack of political culture among the political parties is the major reason why the country has failed to strengthen its democracy after 1990 because people have not realized the importance of Democracy (Giri, 2023).

Therefore, to make the political parties and political actors accountable, to make the voice of citizens heard, to influence the decisions, and to hold the government accountable political participation is very important. Political participation can be defined as the act of citizens that influence politics. Political participation includes voting, citizen protest, suicidal attempts, and contacting authorities are some of the participatory activities (Deth, 2021). Among several approaches, political participation can be enhanced through positive discrimination.

Positive discrimination is the legislative strategy to overcome the historical barriers encountered by marginalized communities, socially backward women, Dalit, Madhesi, Tharu, minorities, persons with disabilities, Muslims, gender and sexual minorities in gaining access to the public sphere to minimize the inequality in the involvement and representation of these groups in politics. (Bylesjö et al., 2010).

Nepal is a Federal Democratic Republic country, to ensure positive discrimination, inclusive political participation plays a vital role in every activity such as voting, elections and protesting. The idea of inclusive participation was initiated for equal sharing and equitable distribution of opportunities for all the citizens of the county which ultimately creates a just society and the county. To ensure inclusive participation, the country is trying to institutionalize inclusive democracy (Lamsal, 2020). Hence to create an inclusive society the issue of inclusion was enshrined in the constitution to ensure inclusive participation in the democratization of state institutions.

The World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 defines inclusive society as “a society for all”, in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. Such a society accommodates diversity and provides the tools necessary for people to actively participate in their

political, economic, and social lives. As a result, it overcomes differences in race, gender, class, generation, and geography and assures that everyone has the same opportunities to achieve their full potential, regardless of where they come from. Such a community promotes, simultaneously, each person's well-being, mutual trust, sense of belonging, and interconnectedness(United Nations, 1995).

### **Provisions in the Constitution of Nepal 2015**

Nepal promulgated the 'Constitution of Nepal 2015', marking an end to a decade of political instability, and ensured the transition of the nation to the Federal Democratic Republic Country(The Constitution of Nepal, 2015). For a democratic country like Nepal inclusive participation plays a vital role. Therefore to safeguard inclusive political participation the idea of reservation was also introduced in the elections of Nepal to ensure proportional participation and social safeguard of marginalized, vulnerable, and socially backward groups (DFID & The World Bank, 2015).

Articles 222 and 223 of the constitution of Nepal 2015 elucidates the inclusion provision related to local government. Whereas Article 38(4) of the constitution of Nepal mentions the right of women to participate in all state bodies based on the principle of proportional inclusion and Article 42 mentions the socially backward women, Dalit, indigenous people, indigenous nationalities, Madhesi, Tharu, minorities, persons with disabilities, marginalized communities, Muslims, backward classes, gender and sexual minorities, youths, farmers, laborers, oppressed or citizens of backward regions and indigenous Khas-Arya shall have the right to participate in the state bodies based on inclusive principle. (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015).

According to Section 17 (4) of the Local Level Election Act 2017, the candidacy of women is mandatory for either chief or deputy chief at the local level for the political party and 17(5) makes the candidacy mandatory of two female candidates among which one should be a Dalit female candidate(*Local Level Election Act*, 2017).

### **Political Participation in Local Election**

The country has successfully held the general election of local government twice in 2017 and 2022 AD respectively. In the local elections of 2017, 40.75% (14,352) out of 35,041 elected representatives were female whereas in 2022 41% out of 35,075 were female. (Election Commission, 2017, 2022) which is more than one-third of the elected representatives were female as per the provisions of The

Constitution of Nepal 2015 and the Local Government Election Act (*Local Level Election Act, 2017; The Constitution of Nepal, 2015*).

The recent local election of 2022 seems to have larger negative impacts as the decisions are said to be taken against the principles of inclusive political representation (Ghimire, 2022). Hanna Pitkin (1967) defines political representation: to represent is simply to “make present again.” This is elaborated as political representation is the activity of making citizens' voices, opinions, and perspectives “present” in the public policy-making processes. (Forest, 2009). The recent election of 2022 did not have a significant increase in the participation of female candidates due to the alliance of the major political parties (four ruling parties Nepali Congress, CPN (Maoist Centre), CPN (Unified Socialist), and Janata Samajbadi Party and Rashtriya Janamorchha) where they were seen very reluctant to give the candidacy even to the deserving female and minorities group candidates (Ghimire, 2022). With the results shown above the reservation system only seems to be the only way for Nepali women and also the marginalized communities to be represented proportionally as only 2% of the women won the non-reserved seats for ward members in 2017, mainly because the females were not even nominated for the positions. (Paswan, 2017; The Asia Foundation and Samjhuata Nepal, 2018).

In all this regard, although the constitution has made the provision for an inclusive society this seems to be unimplemented in the real discourse. As mentioned above the exclusive culture of leadership is still dominating the entire system of the country due to which the main essence of reservation has not been incorporated in the real discourse. Therefore, the dissertation has tried to find out the understanding of elected representatives and the status of underrepresented group in local government regarding the reservation system.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The reservation system has been implemented in Nepal since 2007 BS which aimed to promote inclusive participation and equal opportunities for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Although the aim is to promote inclusive participation, it does not address the actual idea of reservation, which is to bring the voice of marginalized and underrepresented groups into the decision-making process or public sphere. The system mostly has been able to reach only certain groups of targeted communities based on their social and economic status.



The reservation system has been adopted in the elections as well to mainstream marginalized, minority, and backward social groups. This equally applied to the election of the local government election of 2017 for the active participation and mainstreaming of all the communities in the process of development. However, there still lies the considerable challenge of implementing the system effectively and bringing the targeted community to the decision-making level. Although the election is abided by the constitutional provision, it is essential to analyze if the reservation practice addressed the spirit of the constitution and meant to include targeted communities.

In this context, this study aims to know the understanding of elected representatives of local government election candidates on the reservation system implemented in the elections by the constitution of Nepal 2015. The research has tried to bring out through a case study whether the political reservation system helped to bring the marginalized and targeted communities into the mainstream development of local government elections. Through this, we will be able to understand whether the quota system established in the election process has been able to create equitable representation in the mainstream or not. At the same time, the research also aims to explore the understanding of the female member and Dalit female member and their understanding of how effectively the quota system has been able to create their representation in the local government.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This research aims to explore the understanding of the local elected representatives regarding the political reservation system in local government in the federal structure of Nepal.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do the local elected representatives understand the political reservation system in the local government?
2. How do the under-represented and minority groups participate in the local election and governance?

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Social Inclusion**

The term 'Social' originated from the Latin word socius and social which means friend and allied respectively which is old French and is late Middle English (Oxford Dictionary, N/A). According to the Collins Dictionary, social means 'relating

to society or the way society is organized'. In terms of the Cambridge Dictionary, social is defined as 'relating to society and living together in an organized way'. Social is 'someone or something that enjoys being with others or has to do with people living or gathering in groups' states Your Dictionary (N/A).

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, inclusion is 'the act of including someone as part of a group, list, etc. or a person or things that are included.' Phenomena that aim to give equal access and opportunities which include people of all castes, gender, race, disability, and others is Inclusion. (Inclusion. melted, 2008)

As per World Bank (N/A), "Social Inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in the society-improving the ability, opportunity and of those disadvantages based on their identity". In terms of the Collins Dictionary, Social Inclusion is the act of making all groups of people within a society feel valued and important. Social exclusion describes a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political, and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state, states the United Nations. United Nations also defines 'Social inclusion as the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged based on age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights.'

### **Minorities**

According to part 34 of the constitution of Nepal 2015 Article 306, part 34 definitions and interpretation "minorities" means ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups whose population is less than the percentage specified by the Federal law, and includes groups that have their distinct ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics, aspirations to protect such features and subjected to discrimination and oppression, minority dictionary defines minority as a racial, ethnic, religious or social subdivision of a society that is subordinate to the dominate group in political, financial, or social power without regard to the size of these group. According to Article 306 of the Constitution of Nepal 2015, 18 different minority groups comprise 0.10 % of the total population.

### **Marginalization**

According to the constitution of Nepal 2015 Article 306, part 34 definitions and interpretation, "marginalized" means communities that are made politically, economically, and socially backward, are unable to enjoy services and facilities

because of discrimination and oppression and of geographical remoteness or deprived thereof and are in lower status than the human development standards mentioned in Federal law and includes highly marginalized groups and groups on the verge of extinction.

### **Municipality**

According to the constitution of Nepal 2015 Article 306, part 34 definitions and interpretation, “Municipality” means and includes a Municipal Corporation and Sub-municipal Corporation.

### **Local Level**

“Local level” means the Village Bodies, Municipalities, and District Assemblies to be established by this Constitution. Unless the subject or the context otherwise are Minorities quires, the legal provisions relating to the interpretation of laws shall, subject to the provisions of this Constitution, apply to the interpretation of this Constitution in the same manner as that provisions apply to the interpretation of the Nepal laws.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter deals with political participation for the representation of marginalized communities in the status apparatus in Nepal. It reviews the literature on reservation systems for marginalized communities and underrepresented groups. Further, this section also analyzes the empirical studies in Nepal or elsewhere relevant to the proposed topic.

### **Political Participation**

Political participation can be defined as the act of citizens influencing politics. Some participatory activities include voting, citizens' protests, contacting authorities, and even suicidal attempts (Deth, 2021). Political participation is relevant for any political system, but it is an indispensable feature of democracy (Longley, 2021). Other examples of political participation include voting in elections, working on political campaigns, donating money to candidates or causes, contacting public officials, submitting petitions, protesting, and working with others on issues. (Akram & Marsh, 2018; Deth, 2021; Longley, 2021).

Political participation is important because it is one of the best ways for ordinary people to make a substantial difference in their community. When people are engaged in the politics of their country, they are better able to understand where the government is going wrong. Once they understand the political problems, they are better equipped to address them. If this political understanding leads to political action, the government will have a clearer understanding of why people are unhappy. If everyone in a country participates in politics, it will be much harder for the government to ignore the people's problems. Therefore, an increase in political participation should lead to more being done to address political and social problems. Which reservation system is also one of the important tools of political participation as it ensures the representation of various communities on the frontline. (Akram & Marsh, 2018; Longley, 2021).

### **Reservation System as Political Participation**

Reservation systems is a form of political participation designed to enhance the representation of historically marginalized groups within political institutions. These policies allocate specific seats or positions to these groups, thereby enabling

them to actively engage in the democratic process. The primary objective is to promote greater equality, social justice, and democratic strength by ensuring that all segments of society are included in political decision-making. (Lori Beaman, Esther Duflo, Rohini Pande, 2010; Parray & Hussain, 2023).

For instance, in India, a notable constitutional amendment in 1993 reserved 33 percent of village leader positions for women, and this reservation system is periodically rotated between elections. Studies have demonstrated that this approach has increased female electoral participation and responsiveness to women's policy concerns. Similarly, the 103rd constitutional amendment, which introduced reservations for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), reflects a commitment to this principle, although it maintains a caste dimension by focusing on upper castes while excluding lower castes and Scheduled Tribes (S.T). (Lori Beaman, Esther Duflo, Rohini Pande, 2010).

The essence of reservation policies lies in their capacity to encourage and facilitate political participation. They ensure that historically marginalized groups have a meaningful presence in political decision-making processes, enabling them to contribute to shaping government policies and directions. By promoting fairness and social equity, these policies enhance the overall robustness of democracy and guarantee that every member of society has a role in determining how they are governed. As such, reservation policies are a crucial component of political participation, empowering citizens to actively shape their government's trajectory (Rajbastian, 2020).

### **Reservation System in Nepal**

The reservation policy in Nepal is intended to promote equity and representation for disadvantaged groups in areas such as education, work, and politics. It was first adopted in 1951, following the overthrow of the Rana monarchy, to lift the Dalits, who had historically been oppressed within the Hindu caste system. King Mahendra established a party-free Panchayat system in 1962, with seats in the National Assembly and local bodies designated for representatives from various occupational, regional, and ethnic backgrounds. A new constitution that protected fundamental rights for all citizens including equality and non-discrimination—was adopted in 1990 as a result of a strong effort to restore multiparty democracy. It also emphasized the importance of defending and promoting the rights of underprivileged

groups such as women, Dalits, indigenous people, Madhesis, and Muslims. (Thapa, 2010).

An interim constitution established Nepal as a federal democratic republic and established a comprehensive reservation system in the civil service, public education system, and political institutions for marginalized groups after a decade-long armed struggle came to an end in 2007 and the monarchy was abolished. (Whelpton, 2005). According to the Civil Service Act of 2007 AD, women, Dalits, indigenous people, Madhesis, Muslims, backward regions, and disabled people received 45 percent of government openings. (Thapa, 2010).

Nepal was declared a secular, federal, democratic republic in 2015, with a new constitution emphasizing proportional inclusion and participation of all segments of society in governmental organizations. It also required that at least one-third of parliament members be female. (Panta, 2011). The reservation system has of course brought positive impacts but the major questions that arise is are we actually heading to what policies has tried to actually bring forward. Are actually marginalized, backward class been in the forefront or it's again among the marginalized as well tokenism plays an important role.

### **Caste Hierarchies**

Practices of caste division have been common in the Hindu system. However, some of them say that the caste system that is being seen today is not the actual following of the system that was done in ancient Hinduism (Jain, 2011; Dhakal, 2011).

According to Jain (2011), the system of Varna caste division was the outcome of tolerance and trust. He argues, "Though it may now have degenerated into an instrument of oppression and intolerance and tends to perpetuate inequality and develop the spirit of exclusiveness, these unfortunate effects were not the central motives of the Varna (Division) system." Following is the pictorial representation of the caste hierarchy created by civil law in Nepal.



Figure 1: Caste Hierarchy created by the civil law of Nepal (Source: Bennett et al., 2006 as in Dhakal, 2011).

### **Policies Implemented to Ensure Inclusion.**

A collaborative policy research titled "Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal: Following the Policy Process from Analysis to Action" was conducted by the World Bank and DFID in 2015. This study presented the main findings of Nepal Gender and Social Exclusive Assessment in four different parts, which included poverty outcomes in terms of gender, caste, and ethnicity, analysis of government and civil society response to gender caste and ethnic discrimination, review of legal issues such as access to health and education, and efforts to involve affirmative policy action through group-based approaches. (DFID & The World Bank, 2015).

### **Constitution of Nepal 1990**

The multiparty democracy of 1990 was considered a platform for expressing (articulating) the problems of historical injustice, and long-standing legitimate grievances of indigenous people, women, Madhesi Dalits, and other marginalized communities (Constitution of Nepal, 1990). After this, the constitution of Nepal in 1991 stated the equality of all citizens before the law, and Nepal was declared a multi-ethnic, multicultural multilingual, democratic, independent, indivisible sovereign state. After which people of Nepal for the first time enjoyed the right although in limited form. Despite everything, it failed to address indigenous people, women, and other marginalized communities. The multiparty democratic system was not able to meet the expectations and aspirations of Nepali people and the situation remained the same even after the multiparty democratic system (Dhakal, 2011).

### **Policies overtime after 1990**

To minimize the problems of social exclusion, Nepal initiated several kinds of policies over a period. One of the prominent steps was the abolition of slavery in 1934 (Dhakal, 2011). The National Code of Nepal, 2020 of the 20th century is considered to be the first enacted law unified in Nepal. To maintain peace and foster good relations between people irrespective of class, caste, or region on Bhadra 1, 2020 (Equal Rights Trust, 2010).

The project was made as a Governance Reform Program (2001-2005) under the soft loan assistance of the Asian Development Bank. Among the major responsibilities, one of the major responsibilities was to find out about the marginalized community and suggest measures to solve the problem related to the communities. With this, for the first time, a quota system was proposed in Nepal for the marginalized people. With all these the broader perspective of the reform program was to make Nepalese bureaucracy more result-driven, people-oriented, and gender-responsive (Gautam, 2008; Dhakal, 2011).

Along with these some of the major agenda is to promote equality, participatory development, positive discrimination, social security, reservation on government employment, local development and targeted program, gender budgeting, and end of discrimination. To increase participation from all the communities, the government introduced the reservation system in civil service in 2007 (Prasai, 2016). Then the second amendment of the Civil Service Act, for women, Ethnic groups, Madhesi, Dalit, Disabled, and the people in remote areas was brought. Despite all these efforts, the impact has not been realized significantly (Dhakal, 2011).

A study conducted in 2010, titled "Quota system in Bangladesh Civil Service: An Appraisal," examines the use of quotas in the recruitment process of civil service in Bangladesh. The study uses secondary sources of data, which include information on the Central Superior Service of Pakistan, the East Pakistan Civil Service, and civil service officers recruited after the independence of Bangladesh. The study concludes that the existing quota system should be evaluated and that there is a growing sentiment within the civil service that the merit system should be given more importance to creating a well-trained and capable civil service that can meet the challenges of the 21st century (Yasmin, 2010).

### **The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007**



The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 also safeguards the right to equality. Clause 3 of article 13 mentions that “nothing shall be deemed to prevent the making of special provisions by law for the protection, empowerment or advancement of women, Dalits, ethnic nationalities (Adibasi-janajati), Madhesi or farmers, laborers or those who belong to a class which is economically, socially or culturally backward or children, the aged, disabled or those who are physically or mentally incapacitated” (The Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007).

### **Five Year Plans**

In the history of the systematic development efforts of Nepal, the government of Nepal included the programs and policies related to the development of indigenous communities, marginalized people, Dalits, Madhesi, and others in the Ninth Five-Year Plan i.e., 1997-2002 (National Planning Commission, 2002). In this plan, the government has accepted its weakness of being unable to bring these communities into the mainstream of development. Although the country has accepted them as development partners it was unable to involve them in the Ninth- Five Year Plan (Gurung, 2009).

The Tenth-five-year plan (2002-2007 B.S) was introduced as the Poverty Reduction Strategy for Nepal which helped to identify human development and social inclusion as one of the four main pillars for poverty reduction (National Planning Commission, 2002). The development program that has been initiated in the tenth five years has again brought many more problems to these communities. Likewise, with the land reform program, social malpractices like *Kamaya Paratha* took hold in the society, and indigenous people were displaced from their traditional livelihood after the establishment of the National Park. Community forest has been another important aspect for hampering the traditional right for forest resources, economic life, traditional technology, skills, beliefs, and practices which have affected their ethnic identity. Later, politics was also dominated by Khas Aryas and elite Newar communities. These led to the new political system called panchayat which developed a new model of one nation one culture, one religion, and one identity (Gurung, 2009).

The parliamentary record shows that the high caste Hindus who constitute only 30.5 percent of the total population comprised 55.16% in 1919 BS, 62.9% in 1994, and 59.5% in 1999 which shows the high caste Hindus were dominating. Not only in the parliament have the marginalized communities had lower representation in the executive body and bureaucracy as well (Gurung, 2009).

### **Comprehensive Peace Agreement**

After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the representation of Maoists in mainstream politics increased the participation of marginalized communities in the legislature. Although participation has increased it was again for the privileged marginalized people and was again not able to solve the real problem of the marginalized communities (Gurung, 2009). The strong issue raised by indigenous people, Dalits, women, Madhesi, and other marginalized communities was to increase their participation in the decision-making process and to restructure the state making it inclusive, participatory, and representative. The demands of these communities were seen being fulfilled and were included in the twelve-point understanding signed between Maoist and 7 different political parties. The commitment to state restructuring has then been addressed in the preamble, part 17, and in many more places of the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2063 B.S (The Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007). Although the state restructuring was insured in the constitution of Nepal, 2007 the state restructuring was held only after the Madhesh movement which forced the government to restructure the state in the federal structure which should be inclusive, participatory, and proportionality represent everyone and many more (Peace agreements.org, N/A). After this, the representation of the indigenous community, women, Dalit, and other marginalized communities has significantly increased in the election after the restructuring of the country.

### **Constitution of Nepal 2015**

Nepal promulgated ‘Constituted of Nepal 2015’, marking an end to a decade of political instability, and ensuring the transition of the nation to the Federal Democratic Republic. With this, the issue of social inclusion was ensured in the constitution to ensure proportionate participation in democratization. In the constitution of Nepal, article 84 and article 176 clearly states the composition of the House of Representative and Provincial (State) Assembly. Similarly, article 222 elucidates on the inclusion provision related to local government (Constitution of Nepal, 2015).

According to Democracy Resource Center Nepal, in the 2017 Local election “Participation of women and minority groups was high, although in terms of actually being elected, and therefore power-sharing, it was underwhelming, mostly symbolic and leaning towards tokenism.” Approximately 40% of the seats were reserved for women i.e. Out of 7 seats 3 (mayor/deputy mayor or Rural Municipality

Chair/Deputy and 2 out of 5 ward level seats) must be women candidates (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Despite the change in structure, only a few elected representatives are women or of other communities in unreserved seats which shows that participation has increased only due to the reservation system but not in the general scenario (Democracy Resource Center Nepal, 2017).

In 2015, a study was conducted to analyze the Indian government's use of the reservation policy to benefit the scheduled caste. The study examines whether the seven decades of implementing reservations have been effective in benefiting the targeted group. The study also discusses the origins of untouchability, which makes reform difficult, and argues that extensive government remedial efforts have been ineffective. The study concludes that equality means providing equal opportunities to everyone, rather than making two individuals equal and that the reservation system intended to increase diversity on campuses (Aparajita et.al, 2015). Another study in 2015, titled "An Analysis of Reservation System in India," describes the history and present status of the reservation system in India. The study explores the provisions for reservation, as well as the merits, demerits, and impact of the reservation system in India. The study concludes that the reservation system aims to increase diversity on campuses and that although caste is used to determine criteria for under-represented groups, there are many other under-represented groups such as women and individuals from northeastern states like Bihar (Rajbastian, 2020).

In 2016, another study focused on Nepal's initiatives and achievements in shaping inclusive governance and referenced the constitution, national policies, bureaucratic representation, and other related issues. The paper emphasized that inclusive governance not only entails structural changes but also changes in policies and interactions between actors in governance.

Additionally, a study conducted in 2018 aimed to identify the status of women's political participation in Pokhara Lekhnath Metropolitan City, Kaski district of Nepal. The study employed the scheduled interview method using the purposive sampling method and Key Interview Informants. The study concluded that providing educational opportunities, freedom from household work, support from partners, strengthening women's organizations, and proper implementation of formulated plans and policies are some ways to increase the qualitative and quantitative aspects of women's political participation. (Dahal, 2021).

A 2019 study conducted in Bangladesh examines the justification behind the extension of the tenure of reserved seats for women in parliament and the democratic process of electing the members of these reserved seats. The study concludes that women's representation in the Bangladesh Parliament is not satisfactory, and there are many obstacles to meaningful representation (Chowdhury, 2019).

### **Empirical Literature Review**

A collaborative policy research titled "Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal: Following the Policy Process from Analysis to Action" was conducted by the World Bank and DFID in 2015. This study presented the main findings of Nepal Gender and Social Exclusion Assessment in four different parts, which included poverty outcomes in terms of gender, caste, and ethnicity, analysis of government and civil society response to gender caste and ethnic discrimination, review of legal issues such as access to health and education, and efforts to involve affirmative policy action through group-based approaches.

A study conducted in 2010, titled "Quota system in Bangladesh Civil Service: An Appraisal," examines the use of quotas in the recruitment process of civil service in Bangladesh. The study uses secondary sources of data, which include information on the Central Superior Service of Pakistan, the East Pakistan Civil Service, and civil service officers recruited after the independence of Bangladesh. The study concludes that the existing quota system should be evaluated and that there is a growing sentiment within the civil service that the merit system should be given more importance to create a well-trained and capable civil service that can meet the challenges of the 21st century (Yasmin, 2010).

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While talking about every positive impact the reservation system has brought, its important we see the other part of discourse that is happening due to the reservation system. Since its beginning, Nepal's reservation system has been debated. Some claim that it is essential for addressing historical injustices and inequalities, while others perceive it as unjust and discriminatory against "upper caste" or "general" communities. Lack of awareness, corruption, nepotism, political involvement, and social resistance have all hampered its efficacy. Despite these challenges, the reservation system has enhanced excluded groups' access and engagement in several parts of society.(Gurung, 1970; Panta, 2011; Thapa, 2010).

After the initiation of the reservation system in the elections, rather than creating an opportunity, it created a vacuum in the political space as the mechanism didn't have enough females who were actively engaged in politics. Medha Nanivedkar (1998) strongly argues that the reservation was meant to create a space for women but ended up creating a gap in the system where only some females were political activists themselves, but most were family members of clever male politicians who quickly moved aside and pushed them forward (Nanivadekar, 1998).

To complete this gap in the reservation system either for the females, Dalits, or any other marginalized community it's very important to build the capacity within every individual from the grass-root level. If not done so the, although the system is very crucial to build a substantive leadership, it is just the tip of the iceberg (Khanal et al., 2012). So, make the leadership worthwhile it's very important to have multi-dimensional reservation system so that ensure reservation in education so that a balance can be created, and political reservation will then actually ensure every representative meaningful representation in the development.

Although there are few studies that talks on the overall effectiveness of the reservation system, there is still a significant gap to understand the effectiveness of political reservation to ensure the substantive representation of politically marginalized groups in governance mechanisms. The above literature review also indicates a significant gap in evidence based academic research regarding how the elected representatives understand the political reservation system and how the underrepresented group have been brought in the discourse.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Interpretive Paradigm**

I conducted this study using an interpretive research worldview because the interpretive paradigm opposes adopting any permanent, unchanging standards by which truth can be universally known. Rather, reality is shaped by human experiences and social context, thus each person has a unique set of experiences that are socially constructed. (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Rhudra, 2016).

In the paradigm, when it is accepted that the process of creating knowledge or meaning is entirely founded on the assumptions of the individual set of experiences, the problem of how two people can communicate arises. While individuals have their reality, the process of meaning-making takes place in a group or social setting where people construct meaning and communicate. (Willis, 2007). When multiple well-argued interpretations of the same phenomenon exist, one interpretation is not chosen or preferred over others as the "correct" one, but the existence of multiple knowledge is accepted with the recognition that different researchers bring different perspectives to the same issue. The goal of interpretive research is to comprehend individuals' interpretations of the social phenomena in which they engage rather than to discover universal, context-free knowledge and truth. (Rhudra, 2016).

The interpretative paradigm is well-suited to find the underlying causes of complex, interrelated, or multifaceted social processes such as inter-firm linkages or inter-office politics, where quantitative data may be biased, inaccurate, or otherwise difficult to collect. The paradigm can also help in the finding of interesting and relevant research questions and issues for future investigation. Interpretive research follows a set of principles that includes naturalistic inquiry which uses the researcher as an instrument. Social phenomena are studied within their natural setting and interpretations must be grounded within their socio-historical context. Researchers must use their insights and experiences, but also be aware of their biases. Interpretation occurs at two levels, and the study must depict the emotions and experiences of participants using expressive language. Immersive involvement of the researcher at the study site is necessary to capture the entire evolution of the phenomenon. (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Therefore, I have used the interpretative

paradigm to explore the experience of the local elected representatives of the reservation system in the local government.

### **Critical Paradigm**

Critical theory originated from the work of a group of twentieth-century scholars affiliated with the University of Frankfurt's Institute of Social Research, including Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, and Jürgen Habermas. Critical theorists held a historical authenticity, assuming that cultural, political, ethnic, gender, and religious forces shape reality to form a social system. (Jorgenson & Kick, 2023; Rhudra, 2016; Willis, 2007).

Critical theory takes a subjective approach, assuming that no object can be studied without being influenced by the researcher. Critical research aims to transform society, not just explain, or comprehend it. Critical researchers seek to expose the beliefs and acts that limit human freedom, ultimately working towards changing the situation. They must address those in positions of power and reveal the repressive mechanisms that cause inequality. (Jorgenson & Kick, 2023; Willis, 2007).

Critical theory strives for a balanced and democratic society by focusing on power relations and the interplay between social institutions such as race, class, gender, education, economy, and religion. Its philosophical nature makes it more inclusive than other paradigms that prioritize methodology over understanding reality's fundamental nature. This allows critical theory to accommodate different perspectives and be less rigid in its approach. (Asghar, 2013; Willis, 2007).

Therefore, I have used a critical paradigm to understand how the reservation system in local government made the representation equitable and meaningful.

### **Transformative Research Design**

Transformative research design is a concept that is interconnected and aims to affect personal and societal development. This design establishes a framework for researching both personal and social levels of transformation. It involves examining ethical, reality-nature, epistemology, and methodology assumptions. (Denzin & Giardina, 2022; Mertens, 2017; Qutoshi, 2015).

Transformative learning, on the other hand, is a process of deep personal growth and development that results in a fundamental transformation in one's viewpoint, beliefs, values, and way of being in the world. It entails more than just obtaining new knowledge or abilities; it involves conquering personal difficulties,



integrating one's personality, and developing the potential for implementing reform at various levels. (Qutoshi, 2015).

The transformative research design recognizes that research can go beyond typical information acquisition and contribute to substantial changes in how we think, act, and interact with the environment. It focuses on difficult societal issues that frequently require collaboration and participation with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. Transformative research can involve the development of new theories, methodologies, or technologies, and it frequently employs an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach. (Denzin & Giardina, 2022). The purpose of transformative research is to influence positive change and contribute to societal transformation. They acknowledge the interconnection of personal and societal levels of transformation and emphasize the necessity of critical reflection, self-inquiry, and connecting with personal experiences to create significant and long-term change. (Mertens, 2017).

Hence, I have chosen to utilize the transformative research design for my study. This design helps to find out how transformative equitable representation in local government has been and how the underrepresented groups has been inclusively represented. By doing so, it becomes possible to anticipate and facilitate meaningful change.

### **Research Site**

Bharatpur Metropolitan City, located in the central-southern part of Nepal, is in the Chitwan District. It serves as the district headquarters and is also a separate Metropolitan authority. (Bharatpur Metropolitan City, n.d.). Chitwan District has a population of 719,859 where 48.9% (351789) of the population is male whereas 51.1% (368070) is female according to the National Population and Housing Census 2021. Among these, the metropolitan comprises 369268 population where 48.4% are male and 51.6% of the population is female. The literacy rate in the metropolitan is 87.2% where 92.1% is the literacy rate is male whereas 82.6% are female in Bharatpur. Bharatpur Metropolitan has a total of 29 wards, which are scattered across 433 square kilometers of geographical area.

Among this, my study site ward number 1 comprised 9109 population where 4571 are male and 4538 are females in the ward. (National Statistics Office, 2021). The city has experienced rapid growth and is known as one of the fastest-growing cities in the country.

Situated on the left bank of the Narayani River, Bharatpur acts as a commercial center for the Chitwan district and the central region of Nepal. Its strategic location at the center of the Mahendra Highway and the Kathmandu-Birganj (North-South) road corridor contributes to its significance. The city's proximity to Kathmandu (146 km), Pokhara (126 km), Butwal (114 km), Ghorahi (275 km), Birganj (128 km), Hetauda (78 km), and Prithvi Narayan (Gorkha) (67 km) further enhances its advantageous geographical position.

In terms of transportation, Bharatpur benefits from good road access. The city also has regular daily air services connecting it to Kathmandu and Pokhara. These transportation links make Bharatpur easily accessible and facilitate connectivity with other major cities and towns in Nepal.

### **Research Participants**

According to Nepal's 2015 Constitution, each Ward Committee in Nepal consists of a Ward Chair and four ward members, with at least two of the members representing women. Among the two females, one should be a female representative, while the other should be a female Dalit representative. All ward representatives are elected using the first-past-the-post electoral system.

I am conducting a case study of Ward Number 1 in Bharatpur Metropolitan City. The participants in my research are the five elected representatives from this ward. The following table provides a list of the participants:

**Table 1: List of participants**

S.N	Participants	Position
1.	Participant-01	Ward Chairman
2.	Participant-02	Ward Member
3.	Participant-03	Ward Member
4.	Participant-04	Dalit Female Ward Member
5.	Participant-05	Dalit Female Ward Member

#### ***Participant-01***

Participant-01 is the Ward Chair of Ward Number 1 in Bharatpur Metropolitan City. Politically, he is affiliated with the Nepali Congress and was elected to this

position with a significant mandate of 1397 votes. As the Ward Chair, Maharjan plays a crucial role in local governance and decision-making processes within the ward.

***Participant-02***

Participant-02 is a Ward Member of Ward Number 1 of Bharatpur Metropolitan City. He is affiliated with the Nepal Communist Party (UML) and received the highest number of votes (1400) among all elected representatives in the ward. Previously, Ghimire worked as a radio presenter, where he used to interview political leaders and realized the need for better candidacy due to their unsatisfactory responses to people's issues.

His journey as an elected representative began when he realized his potential during the candidacy announcements for the election by other candidates. Initially aspiring for the position of Ward Chair, he eventually adjusted his candidacy to become a Ward Member, a decision made in consensus with others.

Even after his win, ward member has been actively reaching out to the people of his ward and has been continuously dedicating himself to work for the people. Ghimire makes sure people feel his presence even in small problems, he makes sure to try to reach them physically when possible.

***Participant-03***

Participant-03 is a Ward Member of Ward Number 1 of Bharatpur Metropolitan City. He is affiliated with the Nepal Communist Party (UML). He is a ward member representing the Thimura, which is a comparatively more rural area among the area of ward number 1. He received a mandate of 1119 votes in the election. According to Gurung, one of the factors that contributed to Gurung's success in the election was his active involvement in addressing the shortage of drinking water in the Thimura area, where he comes from.

As a Ward Member, Gurung has continued to prioritize addressing the drinking water shortage and other issues in the ward. His commitment to community welfare and his firsthand experience in tackling water-related challenges position him well to contribute effectively to the development and well-being of Ward Number 1.

***Participant-04***

She is a prominent female Ward Member in Ward Number 1 of Bharatpur Metropolitan City. Politically she is affiliated with the Nepali Congress and has secured her win, receiving 1343 votes in the election. Remarkably, this is her third

consecutive victory as the female ward member, having previously won in 2054, 2073, and now in 2079.

Her consistent re-elections signify the trust and confidence the residents of Ward Number 1 have in her leadership and dedication to serving their needs. She has been active politically since a very young age and has witnessed various political reforms. She comes from a politically active family background and encourages every female to come out and speak for the change. She expresses a lot has change has happened in society from when she started her political career till now.

#### ***Participant-05***

She is a Dalit Female Member representing Ward Number 1 of Bharatpur Metropolitan City. Politically she is affiliated with the Nepal Communist Party (UML) and gave her candidacy through the same. She received 1231 votes in the election. In the first local government elections after the Constitutions of Nepal 2015 in 2073, she was approached to run for candidacy for the same position but was unable to due to her reasons.

After her win, she has been actively involved in assisting individuals from Dalit communities in various endeavors, demonstrating her commitment to uplifting marginalized groups. Her recent election victory has further boosted her confidence. Despite her perceived lack of formal education, she has embraced a continuous learning mindset and implemented newfound knowledge and skills to contribute effectively to her role as a Ward Member.

#### **Data Collection Process**

The data collected were gathered by deep and meaningful interaction with the participants. The interview was an in-depth interview. Since interpretivism requires us to understand the participants' understanding and the context of the understanding, an in-depth interview allowed me to interact with the participants and know their exact understating of what they think about political participation and how it has been helping the institutionalization of federalism.

#### **In-depth Interview**

An in-depth interview is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intense individual interviews, with a small number of respondents to investigate their viewpoints on a certain idea, program, or issue (Baker & Charvat, 2016; Boyce & Neale, 2006; Budrich, 2016). They are mostly unstructured or semi-structured, allowing the interviewee to direct the conversation according to their

preferences. The interviewer draws on a series of broad questions intended to cover significant aspects of the research subject. These questions may be followed with probe questions to encourage the interviewee to provide more thorough responses. The purpose of the study is to find out participants' beliefs, attitudes, and views to acquire a better knowledge of the research issue. (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

My purpose is to get into the study topic or topics and promote meaningful and detailed interaction with the participant. I tried to contribute as little as possible during an in-depth interview and allowed the participant to take the lead. The interviewer must introduce broad subjects and interfere only when clarification is required. Interjections such as "It's interesting to hear you say that; could you tell me more?" or "Uhm, can you explain what you mean by that?" invite the interviewee to elaborate without imposing the interviewer's own opinions. (Budrich, 2016).

Overall, in-depth interviews offered me a valuable opportunity to investigate participants' ideas, attitudes, and opinions in a one-on-one, face-to-face situation. I attempted to be less direct, allowing the subjects to completely express themselves while remaining neutral and encouraging further explanation. (Baker & Charvat, 2016; Budrich, 2016).

As the study is the case study of Bharatpur Metropolitan Ward number -1, the data collection process using the in-depth interview helped to get more insights on the participants. This helped me to understand the equitable representation of each of the local government elected representatives, what they find on the reservation system that has been imposed in the local elections and how have they helped for inclusive representation.

### **Data Organization**

I have used various tools to properly organize and present my data. In this section, I describe how I have transcribed the interviews, and how I have categorized and thematized the data.

#### **Transcribing**

Transcribing is the first step in the analysis process. I opted to transcribe the interviews as it is an essential part of generating analytical information from the narrative given by our participants. I produced a full script of the interviews. Transcribing the conversation by myself also enabled me fully to immerse myself in the data which was useful.

The researchers must clarify the norms made during transcribing to truly capture the emotion of the conversation. The first consideration I had to make was translating the interviews that were spoken in Nepali to English. Transcribing Nepali interviews took the most time as they had to be translated too. Moreover, the pauses, hesitation, and signals in Nepali are different than in English so I also had to contextualize and make them coherent in the English language.

### **Categorizing and Thematizing**

Before the process of thematization, categorization involves a planned grouping of participant stories into descriptive categories. (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The data must be categorized to speed up the thematization process and produce insightful results. Three crucial steps in the classification process were used in my research: origination, verification, and nomination.

I focused primarily on my careful review of the participant accounts to organize the categories. (Labra et al., 2020; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). I was able to identify and separate parts of their stories that had obvious commonalities by reading and evaluating their narratives. These include their understanding of reservation policies and their experiences as political representatives, among others. Furthermore, I used reflection and rational reasoning to make sure the categories were clear and accurately represented the participants' tales.

In addition, I structured the selection procedure on the themes described in the accounts. In the same way, I used thematic analysis to discuss the data, focusing on the key elements of the participants' accounts. Labra's five-phase approach to generating themes, including familiarization with the data, identifying similar themes, reviewing them, naming the themes, and finally discussing the results, served as my framework. (Labra et al., 2020).

The participants' tales played a crucial role in determining the themes; thus, I used a flexible approach in this process that took that into account. (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). To further develop both the main themes and the sub-themes, I also included theoretical insights from transformative learning.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In my analysis, I followed the interpretative and critical paradigm, which helped me explore the data through several themes and subthemes that corresponded with the participants' perspectives and were consistent with my theoretical framework

(Elliott & Timulak, 2015). I remained committed to critical self-reflection throughout this process, closely reviewing and checking the data analysis.

I utilized the categories, codes, and themes I had previously created to help me with this project. The development of a narrative or plot was an essential approach I used for the data analysis. This narrative method helped me develop a reflective mindset as a researcher and obtain access to a variety of viewpoints. (Willis, 2007). I tried to extract important and relevant interpretations from the participants' stories by richly telling them.

The accuracy of my interpretations was ultimately ensured by the use of transformational learning theories, which also gave my study a theoretical framework. With the help of this method, I was able to fully comprehend the data and derive valuable insights from the participant stories.

### **Quality Standards**

#### **Reflexivity**

In qualitative research, it is necessary to define the contextual intersecting relationship between the researcher and participant to enhance the credibility of the research output and help the audience understand the research work in a deeper context. Research works are confined within a certain time and space and interaction among a certain number of people. This makes the entire research process and research findings contextual (Mertens, 2017). This research is based on semi-structured interviews among 5 elected representatives from ward numbers of Bharatpur metropolitan city. As a researcher, from the same site, I have witnessed the local election after the federalism which has helped me to understand the ground realities of political leaders and voters.

Also, during the data collection process, I could understand the perception of the elected representative on the reservation system. Also, I could understand how the elected representatives elected representatives have felt being elected through the quota system. During the writing process, I could understand how the researcher's approach, helped to bring the real stories of the participants. This will help to make the research contextual.

#### **My Positionality**

This may have influenced my assumptions and expectations before, during, or after the data collection process. However, I have tried to be neutral in the process and have tried to remain as a neutral instrument of data collection. As the research site is

my home-town, I have known some of the respondent for long period of time. So, I have been careful to avoid biases due to personal connections, prior assumptions, and personal expectations. It is also important to define the position of the researcher in the research process to enhance the credibility of the study (Berger, 2015) talks about the position of the researcher either as an insider or outsider regarding sharing experiences with the participants to define differences and similarities among researcher and participants. I am both an insider and an outsider to the research process. I am an insider in the sense, that most of the respondents are selected from my same locality connection and share the same nationality, language, culture, and other social domains. However, I also belong to the outsider category as we have been residing in different parts of the world and differ regarding the profession, way of life, or income status.

### **Ethical Standards**

The social researcher has ample ethical obligations towards the study population and larger society. Among various ethical concerns, the voluntary participation of the research subjects and informed consent about the research topic, potential risks, and use of the research findings, remains the prime issue (Berg, 2001). I have been very careful in informing the potential respondents of the nature of the research and the use of the research findings. I also proceeded to organize the interview only after the potential respondents were ready to be part of the interview. Other ethical concerns in qualitative research include maintaining privacy, and confidentiality and ensuring the anonymity of the research participants (Hay, 2000). For this, I have made sure that the name of the respondent has not been mentioned during the analysis, and that the personal information is kept confidential. All the private and personal information obtained from the interview was treated and processed with maximum confidentiality. Additionally, I have obtained permission from the university to proceed with data collection.



## CHAPTER IV

### PERSPECTIVE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE POLITICAL RESERVATION SYSTEM

#### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter explores the first research question: "How do local elected representatives understand the political reservation system in the local government?" This exploration of elected representatives' perspectives is essential for ensuring substantive representation at the local level. By shedding light on the significance of reservation and quota systems in promoting gender and social inclusion, this chapter aims to underneath the experiences, challenges, and viewpoints of the elected representatives from ward-01 of the Bharatpur Metropolitan City.

#### **Understanding the Reservation System**

This section explored the understanding of the local elected representatives in the political reservation that was implemented in the local government.

#### **Gender-Based Reservation**

The constitution of Nepal has a provision to have a *Mahila wada Sadasya* (Female Ward Member) in each ward of the local government unit. As a result, a democratic election takes place to choose the female ward members. This is a great provision of the constitution to ensure meaningful participation in the planning and development of the local level. However, these reservations have several controversies shared by the locally elected ward chair.

Gender-based reservation has sparked a debate among local elected representatives, especially ward members who are at the bottom of the hierarchies. They also represent the small administrative units and are led by the Ward Chairperson. Most of the ward members in the research site hardly believe that gender-based reservations have brought changes in gender parity in Nepal while some believe it has boosted women's participation and inclusivity, concerns arise about overreliance on the quota system. They also showed dissatisfaction with how the women candidates were chosen by political parties in the local election. The selection process has been affected by local politics and access to the leaders at the district and central levels.

Both the ward members in my research area argued that merit (worthiness) should be the primary factor when selecting candidates for positions. As a result, they could bear the responsibility of the local people in their administrative zone. One of the participants said, Instead of merely filling quota seats with potentially less qualified individuals create the unintentional inequality.

Female ward members had different experiences on the gender-based reservation in local government. Some acknowledge the role of quotas in securing their positions, but others express concerns about limited progression due to the system. This debate highlights the delicate balance between gender-based representation and candidate qualifications, power, and access to leadership at a higher level. One of the research participants said, As one of the elected representatives is illiterate and can do nothing on their own this causes a lot of problem during the execution of the work and hampers the quality of delivery. Therefore, for such cases, the balance between every component seems to be very important.

International data from different countries shows the number of females in local government and reveals that women's representation in local government remains far from equal, with only a few countries exceeding 40% female involvement (ONU Mulheres, 2021). The reason why female still is not being able to come equally with men is because of the societal structure and the tokenism that still exists even while giving the seats/tickets to the representatives. One of the ward members shared that during the local election of 2022 A.D., a highly qualified candidate who could have been a great ward chair decided not to run for office in the election although many people encouraged her to give her candidacy. He mentions that the reason why she backed up was because of the gender inequality that still exists in our society.

It's often hard for women to step forward and take on leadership roles, even when they are capable and motivated. Some capable candidates even step back due to gender disparities, illustrating the challenges women face in stepping forward in our society. The ongoing discussion reflects the complex dynamics of gender-based reservation and the quest for true representation.

### **Caste-Based Reservation System**

The constitution of Nepal 2015 has also a provision to have at least a female member from the Dalit community. This provision from the constitution has tried to bring the backward female member to the mainstream of development.

However, the dissatisfaction with the current caste-based quota system was voiced strongly by the Ward Chairperson of Ward Number 1. He expressed, well! It is important to have a caste-based reservation but prioritizing the caste-based reservation system over addressing economic disparities has many flaws. He emphasized that it was crucial to shift the focus toward addressing economic inequalities and transcending caste boundaries. He stated, Economic disadvantage affects individuals from all castes, even those traditionally considered privileged, such as Brahmins and Kshatriyas (Khas-Aryas). This is very important to understand the intersectionality of the reservation as this ward chair focused more on the economic aspect, but he could not want to bring the historical situatedness of caste hierarchies and fair representation in the local election.

He firmly asserted that the reservation system should target economic poverty, bringing together all marginalized groups, and emphasizing the importance of recognizing candidates' capabilities. This reality, he shared, is evident in our community and daily lives, where the intended beneficiaries of reservation policies often fail to access the benefits, while elite members from various communities find it easy to do so.

The sentiment against the caste-based reservation system is not limited to the Ward chairperson alone; it is clearly expressed across various platforms. Many researchers argue that reservations in elections or civil services should be primarily based on economic status, as poverty presents more significant barriers than caste (Deo, 2023) in contemporary society. The chairperson's insistence on addressing economic inequalities may be attributed to the prevailing tokenism in the candidacy process. His observations extend even within the Dalit community, where he shared, "Even within the Dalit community, there are elite individuals who benefit from the quota, meant originally for economically disadvantaged Dalits." He views this practice as ineffective, encouraging divisions within the community and undermining the original purpose of the reservation system. For him, the system should work towards alleviating economic poverty, rather than exclusively relying on caste as the guiding criterion. The Ward member also highlights instances where representatives fulfilling their designated quotas to them who even lack the basic and important skills, such as the ability to do their signature. This not only causes embarrassment when working within communities but also raises concerns about the representation of female members of society.

I as a researcher have studied the debate of class and caste hierarchies in the reservation system. Many reservations in Nepal are in multifaceted areas such as caste, class, ethnicity, geography, and disability to value the ethos of the constitution of Nepal. However, the interpretation of reservation for uplifting all poor individuals, regardless of their caste affiliations might not be enough. The discussion surrounding reservation systems is complex and continually evolving, shaped by various factors including societal norms, political dynamics, and the drive for inclusivity. Gender-based reservation systems have made a positive impact on female representation at the local level globally. 44% of nations with elected local deliberative bodies have legally mandated gender quotas to address past disparities in local government (ONU Mulheres, 2021).

In my view, the tokenism inherent in the caste-based reservation system has failed to uplift capable and promising women from vulnerable and marginalized communities. Instead, it has allowed proficient women, who could otherwise succeed through open candidacy, to exploit the quotas for easy victories. Such a mechanism does not strengthen federalism; instead, it questions the system's implementation and institutionalization.

While these systems show promise in promoting women's involvement and inclusivity, concerns persist regarding potential drawbacks like overreliance on quotas and challenges to meritocracy. One significant criticism is that the reservation system often benefits the wealthiest individuals and doesn't adequately uplift the most vulnerable (Aryal, 2021). Striking the right balance between gender-based representation and merit-based selection is a delicate task. Achieving effective representation while ensuring candidates possess the required skills and qualifications poses a challenge that demands thoughtful consideration. The experiences of current female members who credit the quota system for their positions underscore the importance of creating opportunities for underrepresented groups.

### **Compulsive Reservation System**

From the above field text and interpretation, the compulsory reservation system has undoubtedly brought a positive change, although the system has not yet been institutionalized. This system, which encompasses both caste and gender-based reservations, has significantly increased the representation of women and minorities in government positions. Without this initiative, such progress might not have been possible. For instance, during the three phases of local elections in 2017, an

unprecedented 14,000 women were elected to various positions in local government (Baruah & Jerryll, 2017).

The compulsory nature of the reservation system has indeed played a vital role in creating more inclusive spaces for women's participation. However, despite these gains, female elected leaders continue to face persistent challenges related to gender expectations and doubts about their capacity (The Asia Foundation and Samjhuta Nepal, 2018). Some participants have highlighted unintended consequences resulting from the quota system. As one participant pointed out, many candidates lacking basic qualifications have been elected due to quota mandates. This not only raises concerns about the credibility of governance but also hinders the effective functioning of local administrations.

Moreover, the influence of political party dynamics on candidate selection is a significant factor to consider. A ward member questioned the candidate selection process of the Nepali congress party, noting that only one woman consistently occupies the same position. This raises concerns about the potential impact of party considerations on the selection process, as this candidate has held the position both after the 2015 constitution and before it. To address this issue, he emphasizes the importance of implementing a fair and transparent candidate selection process within political parties. Such a process would ensure that qualified and deserving candidates can represent their constituencies effectively.

The reservation system has indeed helped more women get involved in local government, which is a positive step. However, if we look at the positions of the female members associated with the local government, a big question arises whether women should only be limited to the positions set aside for them by the quota system. Can this system find the right people to make local government work better? It's a question worth thinking about. I believe women can do well in any role in local government, not just the ones reserved for them. We should support women's participation while also giving them the chance to prove themselves in various roles, making our local government stronger and more diverse.

### **Positive Influence and Transformation**

Despite many loopholes in the policy and during the implementation, the system of course has brought a positive transformation and influence in society. One male respondent recognized the reservation system is increasing women's involvement and their ability to voice their interests at various levels of governance.

This reflects the core intention behind the quota system: to improve historical inequalities and increase representation. Simultaneously, he talks about the approach of the system where he acknowledges possible drawbacks, such as less qualified candidates coming forward because of quotas. This highlights the necessity for a careful evaluation of the outcomes and effects of such a system.

The Dalit woman member presents a different perspective, highlighting the crucial importance of reserved seats in empowering women of marginalized communities. She said, "The introduction of the quota system in the new constitution addressed this disparity by mandating representation for women and Dalits," she reflects. She shares, that reserved seats serve as a transformative mechanism that allows women, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, to actively contribute to governance and policy-making processes.

The other elected representatives also shared and highlighted the importance of the reservation system and the benefits that has created for women and marginalized females. Certainly, we have been able to see females in the government but the strong question that has been raised by all the other representatives is; Has it empowered and brought change to those communities that the reservation system talks about?

Recognizing the broader societal barriers that hinder women's participation and understanding how gender interacts with other identity factors, such as caste, are essential for informed decision-making. The pursuit of equality in leadership roles necessitates a comprehensive approach that encompasses both representation and competence.

In conclusion, these sections' in-depth exploration of the reservation system offers a comprehensive understanding that resonates with the diverse perspectives of local elected representatives. The intricate interplay between representation and socioeconomic equity underscores the ongoing need for critical evaluation and continuous improvement.

### **Is Reservation for Empowerment and Representation?**

A female ward member of ward number 1, *highlights the remarkable transformation brought about by the introduction of reserved seats, stating, the introduction of reserved seats has changed the societal landscape remarkably.* The sight of women in the society was once rare, but now our society has progressed tremendously. Her words capture the profound impact of gender quotas on society.

Additionally, a Dalit female member shares her journey, saying, "*Winning the election boosted my confidence and motivated other Dalit women to step into politics and the public sphere.*" Her experience reflects the empowerment that comes with being part of the quota system. Earlier before the election she was confined to her household chores and had no confidence in coming out in the society. Raising the children and looking after her in-laws was her major task. But she shares that after the election she has her own identity, and growing confidence, and has been making her space in the community. This is the prime example of reservation system in political participation empowering women and minority groups.

Mandated gender quotas have proven to be effective tools for increasing women's presence in local government, with countries that have such quotas typically seeing a seven-percentage-point increase in female representation compared to those without (ONU Mulheres, 2021). In the 2017 local elections, a record-breaking 14,000 women were elected to various positions in local government, marking a historic milestone (Baruah & Jerryll, 2017). The inclusion of female ward members in positions of authority has served as a catalyst, inspiring and encouraging women in the community to actively engage in various aspects of life. These stories illustrate the positive impact of gender quotas in promoting women's participation, empowerment, and societal progress. With all the references we can find that the females are being empowered and the number of representations in terms of number has been increasing but the actual representation for which the reservation system in the local election was initiated still lacks.

### **Boosting Confidence and Overcoming Shyness**

A female ward member reflects on her early days in politics, remembering how she was familiar with all the male members' names yet knew none of the female members in her community. She further elaborates that women's presence in the public sphere was once rare, but now the society has progressed significantly. Similarly, a Dalit female member shares her transformation-how her shy and uncertain behavior gave way to newfound confidence after winning the election. This not only reshaped her journey but also motivated many other Dalit women to step forward and participate actively in politics and the public realm.

Both ward members share instances of interacting with women in their communities who express their intent to engage more and seek assistance. This increased community involvement is associated with women's participation in

politics, where one woman's journey resonates with another's aspirations. The ward chair also explains this, emphasizing that female members' presence has empowered women in society. Their focus on creating projects and programs targeting women in the community exemplifies the ripple effect of increased female representation.

Also, the other male representatives shared they have seen growth in the confidence of the female representatives as before they were only busy with their household boundaries, now they have come to the representation stage, and this has motivated a lot of females in society. Participant 02, a ward member shares that when he goes around the community, he has been asked by many female members to make them prepare for the next election. He mentions this is a big progress in society.

A female ward member reflected on her early days in her tenure of politics, thinking back about a time when she could easily recall the names of all the male members in her community but struggled to identify even a single female member. It was a period when the presence of women in the public sphere was a rare sight, a stark contrast to the progress society has made since then. With a sense of pride, she acknowledges that the landscape has shifted drastically.

In a similar nature, a Dalit female member shares her journey of transformation. She describes how her initial shyness and uncertainty gradually gave way to newfound confidence after winning the election. This transformation not only reshaped her path but also served as a source of inspiration for numerous Dalit women in her community. Her story became a ray of hope, encouraging others to step forward and actively participate in politics and public life.

Both female ward members recounted heartwarming instances of connecting with women in their communities who expressed their desire to become more engaged and seek guidance. This surge in community involvement can be directly attributed to the growing presence of women in politics. One woman's journey resonates deeply with another's aspirations, creating a powerful network of support and encouragement.

The ward chair further elaborated on this point, emphasizing that the presence of female members has had a transformative impact on women in society. Their focus on creating projects and programs targeting women in the community serves as a tangible manifestation of the ripple effect of increased female representation. It's an example of how the empowerment of a few can inspire and uplift an entire community.



Moreover, male representatives also share their observations of the changing landscape. They note that the female representatives, who were once predominantly confined to household boundaries, have now tried to be at the forefront of the government. This transformation has not only motivated many women in the community but has also led them to seek guidance and preparation for future elections. One of the ward members, proudly mentions that he has been approached by numerous female members in the community who seek his assistance in preparing for the next election. This, he believes, signifies a significant and heartening progress in our society.

### **Challenging Traditional Gender Roles and Stereotypes**

The quota system has undeniably brought a profound transformation in our society, challenging the deeply rooted traditional gender roles and stereotypes that have for so long defined our patriarchal norms. In a world where women were historically relegated to the confines of domesticity, the emergence of women in the realm of politics and decision-making has sent shockwaves through these age-old paradigms. The historical underrepresentation of women in legislative, judicial, and executive bodies, as a simple example by Nepal's parliament with its only 6% female participation before 2007 (Dangol, 2021), has long been a witness to the imbalance of power.

As we witness female representatives stepping into the spotlight as capable leaders and decision-makers, our society's deeply rooted belief that such roles were the exclusive domain of men is being questioned and reshaped. This seismic shift in our collective perception has helped in a new era of gender equality, one that recognizes the boundless capabilities of women that extend far beyond the boundaries of traditional roles.

Raju, a respondent, wholeheartedly acknowledges this transformative impact, asserting that "*The presence of female members in positions of authority challenges traditional gender norms and inspires women in our society to pursue leadership roles.*" However, the ward chairman also sheds light on a contrasting viewpoint, suggesting that some female members have struggled to break free from the burdens of family chores and allocate time to other responsibilities. He further contends that some women may be hesitant to step out of their comfort zones and explore roles beyond their traditional assignments.

The significant decline in the number of women winning non-reserved categories in recent elections serves as a big reminder of the urgent need to make substantial strides in female representation and dismantle the traditional gender roles that persist. The ward chair of Ward Number 1 raises a genuine concern: that many programs designed for female members tend to concentrate on sectors such as children and women, often focusing on skill-based training. This pattern underscores the necessity of reevaluating the distribution of authority and responsibilities, aiming for a more equitable and balanced distribution that empowers women to take on a wider array of roles and responsibilities in our society.

### **Reflection**

From the above data text, I interpreted that the reservation system is gradually institutionalizing in Nepal with the ethos of the Constitution of Nepal 2015. I sensed that certain barriers affect reservations from the voices of participants. Some elected members have voiced concerns about the possibility of deserving candidates being overlooked or hindered from ascending to positions of power due to the quota system. To fully maximize the benefits of the system for all deserving women, it becomes imperative to prioritize transparency and fairness in the candidate selection process within political parties.

Furthermore, I also understand that it's crucial to recognize that the reservation system, while undeniably impactful, doesn't comprehensively address all the barriers that women face in our society. Intersectional factors such as caste, economic status, and education can still pose significant challenges to women's political representation. Therefore, adopting a holistic approach that considers these intersections is essential to ensure equal opportunities for all women to actively engage in politics and decision-making processes.

All the participants have agreed that the introduction of the quota system for women within our ward has undeniably led to a profound transformation in our society. It has disrupted long-standing gender roles, empowered women to take on leadership roles, and provided representation to historically marginalized groups. By inspiring women, fostering inclusivity, and dismantling barriers, the quota system has played a pivotal role in shaping a more equitable and just society. However, this journey is far from over.

Sustained efforts are required to navigate the challenges and criticisms that arise, to ensure transparency in the selection process, and to adopt a comprehensive

approach that addresses the multifaceted inequalities that persist. It's a collective commitment that paves the way toward an equitable and representative society where every voice, regardless of gender, caste, or economic status, is not just heard but valued and respected.

### **The Type of Work Designated for Reserved Quota Representatives**

To ensure the optimal utilization of individual capacities, it is imperative to align tasks with the capabilities of elected representatives. The work allocation process becomes pivotal, aiming to harmonize their contributions with the expectations and aspirations of the society they represent.

In my opinion, recognizing and capitalizing on the individual capacities of our elected representatives through thoughtful task allocation is an indispensable step toward realizing our collective goals and the better future we all aspire to achieve. It is a path that, in my view, can pave the way to more effective and responsive governance, ultimately benefiting us all.

### **Participation in Social Activities: Focus on Women and Children**

The division of tasks within the study site often sees reserved quota representatives primarily involved in activities related to women and children. The Chairman emphasized that this task distribution is not based on gender but rather on convenience and interest. He also acknowledged, "Female members demonstrate a clear inclination towards programs related to women, children, and the broader social sphere, as it is what they have been engaged in historically." However, the Chairman thoughtfully recognized the complex balancing act that female representatives must perform, managing their multitude of responsibilities, including household duties. Task assignments must consider these challenges to facilitate effective work management. Both the Chairman and one of the ward members acknowledge their privilege in not having to concern themselves with these additional chores, appreciating the reason behind their feelings of being blessed.

The Ward Chair passionately advocated for a gender-neutral approach, emphasizing that "Female members should not be confined by their gender; they deserve equal opportunities to contribute based on societal expectations and citizens' desires." However, the journey toward this ideal has not been without its challenges. Female and Dalit female members have encountered obstacles that hinder their active participation. The Ward Chair revealed, "Instances have arisen where certain members faced difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities due to reasons like lack of

self-confidence or domain knowledge." In such cases, a quick replacement mechanism is imperative to ensure the seamless continuation of work.

The Chairman observes that female members tend to be pulled towards projects centered on women, children, and social causes, driven by their passion and dedication. However, managing these commitments alongside other responsibilities can indeed be challenging. This sentiment underscores the need for a more holistic perspective in task allocation. Furthermore, the Chairman points out that female members often remain silent during ward meetings, highlighting the necessity for a nurturing environment that actively encourages their engagement and contributions.

So, we must align tasks and responsibilities with the unique capabilities of our elected representatives. In this regard, the work allocation process takes on tremendous significance, as it plays a central role in ensuring that their contributions are in perfect harmony with the expectations and aspirations of the society they have been chosen to represent. When we strategically match the strengths, skills, and expertise of our elected representatives with the tasks at hand, we not only unlock their full potential but also guarantee that the needs and desires of our community are met most effectively. This approach, from my perspective, not only leads to a more productive and efficient governing body but also strengthens the bond between our representatives and the people they serve.

### **Incompetence in Work and Participation**

The experiences of reserved quota representatives shed light on the significant hurdles they encounter in their roles. A project in Thimura served as an illuminating case study. In this instance, female and Dalit female members were assigned leadership roles, but they faced challenges in fulfilling their responsibilities. The female member withdrew prematurely, while the Dalit female representative struggled due to a lack of understanding of the tasks involved. Consequently, the project faced setbacks and was ultimately unsuccessful. The project was then taken over and successfully implemented by a ward member from the same project location. This anecdote emphasizes the critical importance of robust preparatory measures, comprehensive training, and support mechanisms to adequately equip representatives to fulfill their responsibilities effectively.

The Chairman also raises a similar concern, noting that reserved quota representatives often show last-minute hesitation. He elaborates, saying, "We've

noticed instances where representatives drop their commitment at the eleventh hour, even after initially agreeing to participate in certain programs."

However, amidst these challenges, there are also instances of inspiring engagement. A fellow ward member highlights the remarkable commitment of women members. Despite their diverse political affiliations, these women collaborate proactively, understanding a shared commitment to the betterment of the community. This collaborative spirit and dedication serve as a testament to the resilience and determination of these representatives in overcoming obstacles and working together for the common good.

In reflecting on the experiences of our reserved quota representatives, it becomes evident that their roles are riddled with intimidating challenges, exemplified by the illuminating case study of the Thimura project where female and Dalit female members faced difficulties in fulfilling their leadership roles. This shows the critical need for robust preparatory measures, comprehensive training, and effective support mechanisms to adequately equip our representatives. While concerns of last-minute hesitations among these representatives are valid, they highlight the complexities inherent in their roles. However, amidst these challenges, the unwavering commitment displayed by women members, transcending political affiliations, stands as a beacon of inspiration, demonstrating the transformative potential when diversity and unity intersect. These experiences emphasize the ongoing work required to ensure equitable and effective governance that authentically represents the diverse voices and aspirations of our community.

### **Coordination with Metropolitan Authorities**

In the context of local governance, representatives often find themselves facing administrative challenges, particularly in their interactions with higher-ranking authorities like the mayor. These obstacles can include bureaucratic procedures, limited resources, or other logistical difficulties that may hinder their ability to efficiently serve their communities. However, these representatives remain committed in their commitment to making decisions that benefit their constituents, highlighting their independence and determination to address the important needs of their communities autonomously.

Furthermore, it becomes increasingly apparent that effective coordination between individual wards and the overarching municipality is not just beneficial but essential. The Chairman emphasizes that this coordination should be guided by a

collective spirit, one that places the welfare of the entire community above political affiliations or personal interests. In simpler terms, it means that everyone involved in governing a place should work together for the greater good.

Raju adds valuable insights to the coordination dynamic by stressing the importance of improved communication channels between the ward and the municipality. He recognizes that better ways of sharing information and ideas are needed to make sure the government at different levels can work together efficiently. Manoj, in line with these sentiments, acknowledges that it can be tough to coordinate with higher-level authorities due to their busy schedules. He suggested that creating better ways to communicate can help different parts of the government collaborate more effectively. In simpler words, good communication is vital to solving problems and assisting the community, and it's especially important when dealing with government matters. These insights highlight the significance of open lines of communication and collaborative efforts in overcoming administrative challenges and ultimately better serving the community.

### **Chapter Summary**

To sum it up, this in-depth discussion sheds light on the challenges and important factors related to task allocation for representatives in reserved quotas. It emphasizes the crucial need for equal opportunities, inclusivity, and the vital role of women in making effective decisions. The discussion also underscores the importance of providing tailored support to address the unique societal needs that require careful consideration. In the end, it emphasizes a strong commitment to promoting an inclusive governance model, continually improving how local governance works, and empowering representatives by assigning tasks more effectively.

## CHAPTER V: VOICE OF MINORITIES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter addresses my second research question, "How do the unrepresented and minority groups participate in the local election and governance?" The aim is to understand how the reservation system has uplifted the unrepresented and minority groups, bringing their experiences and perspectives to the forefront of political discourse at the local level. This research seeks to understand the impact of the reservation system on these groups through the lens of elected representatives.

#### **Quota System's Influence on Local Governance**

Female ward member perspective, as a dedicated female ward member, explained a sincere account of how the quota system has made a tangible impact on the lives of women. She described how the practical implementation of the reservation system has succeeded to a significant extent, with many areas such as participation in civil service, in elections, and the local government now being fixed to its principles by allocating seats for both female and Dalit female members. Her memories of the early days of the quota system, when only one seat was reserved for women, paint a vivid picture of the transformation this reservation system at the present has undergone over time. It showcases the dynamic nature of this initiative, reflecting the changing landscape of our society.

She also emphasizes the significance of recognizing Dalit women as a distinct category within this framework. She notes that this recognition represents a significant step forward, not only for her political party but also for the public. This acknowledgment serves as a testimony to the importance of designated seats for marginalized communities, demonstrating a deliberate effort to rectify historical exclusion and provide a platform for a diverse range of voices in the domain of governance.

Moving beyond her perspective, the ward member's viewpoint reinforced the quota system's vital role in creating opportunities for marginalized groups, especially women. His support highlighted the system's effectiveness in addressing long-standing inequalities and promoting inclusive participation in the political arena. His endorsement resonated with the broader intention of the quota system, which aims to minimize historical disparities and ensure comprehensive representation.

Nevertheless, another ward member offered a more nuanced view, providing a comprehensive understanding of both the advantages and challenges associated with such an affirmative system. While he acknowledged the system's positive impact on women's participation, aligning with its comprehensive goal of addressing historical inequities, he also raised valid concerns. Specifically, he notes the potential for less qualified candidates to benefit from quotas, highlighting the need for a balanced evaluation of the consequences of the quota system.

In conclusion, striking a balance between maintaining the quality of representation and ensuring inclusivity across all aspects remains a crucial consideration in the ongoing implementation of the quota system. These diverse perspectives, ranging from passionate support to thoughtful critique, collectively contribute to a richer understanding of the complex issues surrounding affirmative action policies.

### **Voices of Empowerment: Navigating the Political Reservation System**

Amplifying the voices of those with firsthand experience in the political reservation system is important in gaining a comprehensive understanding of its functioning and impact. A dedicated ward member, acknowledges the important role of the quota system, vocally saying that it "*Provides essential representation and invaluable opportunities to marginalized groups, particularly women*" This sentiment resonates profoundly throughout the narratives of other participants, collectively illustrating a system that effectively addresses historical disparities and cultivates equitable representation.

The female ward member expresses her contentment in serving the public and underscores the significance of adhering to official protocols backed by documentation, rather than relying solely on verbal promises. She acknowledges the inherent challenges in ensuring compliance with rules and regulations but strongly emphasizes the critical nature of maintaining tangible evidence to guarantee the successful completion of tasks.

Regarding interactions with the Metropolitan Municipality, the female ward member notes her active participation in Municipal Council meetings, while the ward chair typically engages in one-on-one discussions with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and other officials. She finds these interactions relatively accessible, attributing this ease to personal relationships. However, it is worth noting that the other elected representatives share the difficulties they encounter in meeting with higher authorities



within the metropolitan area, highlighting that, for many, personal relationships still hold more influence than strictly adhering to established protocols.

The female ward member mentions the profoundly positive transformations brought about by the quota system for female members. She nostalgically recalls a time when women were often confined to their homes, whereas now, many women pursue careers in fields such as medicine and engineering. She firmly believes that the quota system has not only opened doors but has also empowered women to actively engage in decision-making processes and make substantial contributions to society. Additionally, the Dalit female representative shares her journey, describing how she was once limited to household chores before entering politics. However, after her election, she has grown more confident and independent, highlighting the transformative effect of the quota system on her life.

In conclusion, these personal accounts serve as compelling testaments to the positive impact of the quota system, particularly in empowering marginalized groups, enhancing representation, and fostering newfound confidence and independence among those who were historically marginalized. These stories highlight the significance of policies that promote inclusivity and equitable participation in political decision-making, while also acknowledging the complexity of navigating personal relationships and established protocols in the political landscape.

### **Amplifying Empowerment: The Role of Representation in Local Governance**

The female ward member story shows how being part of local government can make a big difference. She cares about helping people and is very careful with all the paperwork she must do. This shows that the system that reserves spots for certain groups, like women, can have a real impact. She says, "*The quota system has made a big change by letting more women come forward and work in different jobs.*" She works hard to solve important local problems like electricity, roads, and land issues, which shows that this system can make sure the voices of people who were left out before are heard now.

Her success in local elections shows how the quota system can bring about important changes. She says, "Before women couldn't even leave their homes, but now many women have careers in different fields." This shows how the system can create opportunities and empower women to be a part of decision-making. Her leadership in local government shows that when people from groups that didn't have a say before, like women and Dalits, get the chance to speak up for their communities,

it makes a big difference. It makes society fairer and more inclusive. In short, female ward member journey proves that the quota system not only lets people participate but also empowers and transforms communities at the local level.

When I talked to a Dalit female member, I noticed something different. She wasn't very confident because she didn't have much education. She was instantly afraid that she didn't know much, couldn't understand things well, and couldn't speak confidently. She insisted on having her husband present during the interview. Building trust with her was a real challenge. Although she said she felt more confident than before, it wasn't very evident.

On a similar note, another elected representative expressed a similar fear. They were concerned that political parties, in the name of reservation systems and empowerment, might encourage women to only play a symbolic role in politics. It seemed like the idea of intersectionality, where different aspects of a person's identity intersect, wasn't being balanced properly. This imbalance might be preventing capable representatives from taking the stage. Parties are more encouraging the females to be only the dummy characters. The intersectionality seems to lose balance here due to which the capable representatives are not on the floor.

### **Beyond the Quota: Navigating Effective Representation**

A careful and considerate strategy was required to strike an effective balance between the advantages of the quota system and the requirement for capable leadership. The Ward Chair emphasized that the quota system should not discourage competent individuals from seeking leadership positions through open competition. This perspective highlighted the critical significance of a well-rounded representation system that fostered inclusiveness without sacrificing leadership quality. It emphasized the necessity for a system that provided equitable chances to all while maintaining excellence as a fundamental criterion.

Female members' extensive contributions to her ward provided tangible evidence of the profound impact of effective representation. She played a vital role in facilitating various development projects and initiatives, notably women empowerment training programs such as beauty parlor training and doll-making. These initiatives empowered women by imparting valuable skills and creating income-generating opportunities. Her work served as a compelling example of the transformative potential of dedicated representatives who actively engaged with their communities and addressed their needs.

The ward member's perspective added a nuanced layer to the discussion. He acknowledged that working alongside both capable members and those merely fulfilling the quota could be challenging. His recognition that gender itself did not hinder effective contributions but that having competent female members in positions, rather than just filling quotas, could make a substantial difference, challenged deeply rooted stereotypes concerning gender-based limitations. It explained the critical need to evaluate individuals based on their skills and competencies rather than solely on their gender. This perspective highlighted that true progress toward gender equality in leadership required not just representation but also a focus on competence and merit.

### **The Quota System's Impetus for Change**

The impact of the quota system goes beyond reserved political seats; it acts as a catalyst for broader societal change. One of the ward members believed that the quota system sparks women's involvement in areas beyond politics, serving as an inspiration for women across society to raise their voices and participate actively in various fields. This perspective clears how political representation can trigger broader social transformation and empowerment for women.

Female ward members stressed the importance of following rules and regulations, emphasizing the crucial role of official documentation in her work. She diligently ensured that all required paperwork and evidence were properly maintained to carry out tasks efficiently. Her unwavering dedication to serving the public is evident, and she found fulfillment in fulfilling her duties as a ward member.

She also believes that the quota system has led to positive changes by enabling more women to step forward and pursue various professions. She notes the increased visibility of female doctors and engineers in her ward, highlighting the system's role in breaking gender barriers and expanding women's participation in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Regarding the reservation system for female members, she acknowledges the male-dominated nature of the country, noting that initially, only one seat was allocated to women. However, she asserts that both her party and the public have recognized the Dalit female member and supported her in elections. While she acknowledged the system's potential openness to all candidates, she emphasized the ongoing importance of designated seats for marginalized groups to ensure representation and inclusivity.

These observations remind us that while the political reservation system has made important progress, there are still unresolved issues within it. The system aims to create fairness and equality, but there are issues with privilege even within marginalized groups. Disparities in social class exist in every community and can affect how the benefits of the quota system are distributed, preventing the full realization of its intended goals.

Similarly, the Dalit female member highlighted a similar problem when it comes to utilizing the resources and opportunities meant for the Dalit community. While there are various programs and financial support in place, these often end up benefiting the higher-class members of the Dalit community, while those genuinely in need are missed out. These observations point to the need for ongoing efforts to ensure that the benefits of the quota system reach those who need it most, addressing internal inequalities within marginalized communities. Achieving true equity and inclusivity requires not just the presence of policies but also their effective implementation.

The perspective shared by the ward members raises a critical point about the quota system. They suggest that the system should prioritize individuals from backward geographical areas, as these individuals are just as capable as those from the core areas. This observation highlights that while the quota system has taken important steps towards change, there are still essential aspects that require attention and improvement.

In essence, this signifies the need for a more nuanced and inclusive approach within the quota system. It's not just about representation based on gender, caste, or ethnicity, but also considering the unique challenges faced by different regions within a ward or constituency. Achieving genuine equity and empowerment requires a comprehensive evaluation and adaptation of the system to ensure that it truly benefits all marginalized groups and addresses specific contextual disparities.

## CHAPTER-VI DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, REFLECTION, AND IMPLICATION

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter talks about the findings and implications of the research reflects on the context and finds out the conclusion.

#### **The Resonance of Reservation Systems in Local Government**

The allocation of political reservations, whether based on gender, caste, or a combination of these factors, has sparked intense debates and discussions not only in Nepal but also globally. It is essential to scrutinize the implications of these systems comprehensively, as they have far-reaching consequences on governance, representation, empowerment, and the complex interplay of societal norms.

#### **Understanding the Reservation System: Balancing Gender-Based and Merit-Based Representation**

The debate surrounding gender-based reservations highlights the multifaceted nature of the issue. While advocates argue that such reservations have significantly boosted women's participation and inclusivity, concerns are raised about the potential overreliance on the quota system.

Global statistics emphasize the necessity of gender-based reservations. According to ONU Mulheres (2021), only a few countries have managed to exceed 40% female involvement in local government. This alarming disparity underscores the importance of reservations in rectifying historical gender imbalances.

The qualitative research echoes these concerns. Some local representatives voiced reservations about the system's ability to balance representation and candidate qualifications. They believe that merit should be the primary criterion for selecting candidates for positions of responsibility. The fear is that the exclusive reliance on quotas might lead to the appointment of potentially less qualified individuals, inadvertently perpetuating inequality.

An enlightening case in point from the qualitative research is the account of a highly qualified female candidate who decided not to run for office due to pervasive gender inequality. Her reluctance highlights the persisting challenges women face when seeking leadership roles, despite being capable and motivated. This underscores

the delicate balance that must be maintained between gender-based representation and merit-based selection.

The qualitative research supports the need for gender-based reservations as a critical instrument in addressing the historical gender disparity in political representation. However, it also underscores the importance of assessing the system's impact in the long term. It brings to light the necessity of fostering a nurturing environment that not only encourages women to take on leadership roles but also ensures they can prove themselves in various capacities.

### **Caste-Based Reservation: A Call for Economic Equity**

The caste-based reservation system in Nepal has faced significant criticism. The research portrays the dissatisfaction expressed by the Ward Chairperson of Bharatpur Metropolitan's Ward number-01. He firmly advocates that the focus should shift from caste-based reservations to addressing economic disparities that transcend caste boundaries.

The Ward Chairperson's perspective is grounded in the idea that economic disadvantage affects individuals across all castes. His argument echoes the global discourse that poverty poses more significant barriers than caste in contemporary society (Deo, 2023). Addressing economic inequalities is presented as a more effective strategy for uplifting marginalized groups.

Furthermore, the Chairperson identifies tokenism in the caste-based reservation system, where even within the Dalit community, elite individuals can benefit from quotas meant originally for economically disadvantaged Dalits. This practice not only hinders the original purpose of the reservation system but also fosters divisions within communities.

The research also highlights instances where representatives fulfilling their designated quotas lack basic and important skills. This not only raises concerns about the credibility of governance but also questions the representation of female members of society. It becomes evident that the caste-based reservation system's inherent tokenism may have failed to uplift capable and promising women from vulnerable and marginalized communities. Instead, it may have allowed proficient women, who could otherwise succeed through open candidacy, to exploit the quotas for easy victories.

### **Compulsory Reservation System: Progress and Challenges**

The compulsory reservation system, encompassing both caste and gender-based reservations, has undoubtedly led to positive change. This system has significantly increased the representation of women and minorities in government positions, as demonstrated by a record-breaking 14,000 women being elected to various positions in local government during the three phases of local elections in 2017 (Baruah & Jerryll, 2017).

However, this system is not without its challenges. The qualitative research reveals concerns about the competence of some candidates elected due to quota mandates. It emphasizes that the reservation system, while effective in increasing women's participation, can also result in the selection of representatives who may lack basic qualifications.

Party dynamics play a significant role in candidate selection, with indications that some political parties consistently select the same woman for a particular position. This raises questions about the influence of party considerations on the selection process and highlights the importance of implementing a fair and transparent candidate selection process within political parties.

### **Impact on Society: Empowerment and Representation**

The impact of these reservation systems on society is multifaceted. Empowerment and representation stand out as significant outcomes. Ram Maya, a female ward member, aptly captures the transformation brought about by the introduction of reserved seats, emphasizing the remarkable progress in society. A Dalit female member echoes this sentiment, highlighting the transformative power of reserved seats in empowering women from marginalized backgrounds to actively participate in governance and policymaking.

Mandated gender quotas have proven to be effective tools for increasing women's presence in local government. Countries with gender quotas typically witness a seven-percentage-point increase in female representation compared to those without (ONU Mulheres, 2021). The inclusion of female ward members in positions of authority has served as a catalyst, inspiring and encouraging women in the community to actively engage in various aspects of life.

The reservation systems have also challenged traditional gender roles and stereotypes. They have disrupted the deeply rooted norms that once relegated women to domesticity and have ushered in a new era of gender equality. Women have

transcended the boundaries of traditional roles to become capable leaders and decision-makers.

In the process, they have become role models for other women in their communities. This is evident in the increased confidence of Dalit women, who have transitioned from shyness to active participation in politics and the public sphere. The presence of female members has not only challenged traditional gender norms but has also empowered women in society, inspiring them to take on more active roles.

### **Type of Work Designated for Reserved Quota Representatives: Towards Equal Opportunities**

The allocation of tasks for reserved quota representatives primarily involves activities related to women and children. However, the research highlights the need for a more balanced distribution of responsibilities. Task assignments should consider the challenges that female representatives face in managing their household duties alongside their political responsibilities.

The representations not only point to the importance of gender-neutral task allocation but also emphasize the significance of nurturing environments that encourage female representatives to contribute effectively.

### **Incompetence in Work and Participation: The Role of Support Mechanisms**

The challenges that some reserved quota representatives face in fulfilling their roles bring to light the need for robust preparatory measures, comprehensive training, and support mechanisms. The anecdote of the Thimura project, where female and Dalit members faced difficulties in fulfilling their leadership roles, underscores the importance of adequately equipping representatives to fulfill their responsibilities effectively.

Additionally, instances of last-minute hesitations among representatives highlight the complexities of their roles. Such instances call for a quick replacement mechanism to ensure the seamless continuation of work.

### **Coordination with Metropolitan Authorities: Fostering Effective Governance**

Local representatives often encounter administrative challenges when interacting with higher-ranking authorities, such as mayors. Effective coordination between individual wards and higher-level authorities is crucial for efficient governance. These efforts must be guided by a commitment to fostering transparent and open communication channels.



In conclusion, the reservation systems in local government have had profound implications for gender and caste-based representation, empowerment, and governance. While the system of reservation is crucial in addressing historical disparities, maintaining a balance between gender-based and merit-based representation remains a complex challenge. The caste-based reservation system faces criticisms, and there is a growing call for a shift towards economic equity. The compulsory reservation system has yielded positive outcomes but is not without challenges, particularly in candidate selection. The impact on society, however, is undeniable, with increased empowerment, challenged gender norms, and the emergence of role models.

To fully harness the potential of these reservation systems, it's imperative to address the issues of competence, task allocation, and coordination with higher authorities. Moreover, nurturing an environment that supports both genders in taking on active leadership roles is paramount. These qualitative insights provide valuable inputs for refining the reservation systems, ultimately leading to more effective governance and equitable representation.

### **Empowering the Unrepresented and Minority Groups Through Political Reservation**

The exploration of the second research question, "How are the unrepresented and minority groups brought to the forefront by the political reservation system in local government elections?" delves into the profound impact of the reservation system on the lives of marginalized groups, primarily through the experiences and perspectives of elected representatives.

### **The Transformation Brought by the Quota System**

The voices of dedicated ward members, such as Ram Maya, highlight the tangible and transformative impact of the quota system on women and Dalits. The evolution of this system, from reserving just one seat for women to the allocation of multiple seats, reflects the dynamic nature of this initiative, which mirrors the evolving landscape of society.

Moreover, the recognition of Dalit women as a distinct category within this framework signifies a critical milestone. This acknowledgment extends beyond political parties; it is a testament to the significance of designated seats for marginalized communities. It demonstrates a deliberate effort to rectify historical exclusion and provide a platform for diverse voices in the realm of governance.

The ward member's perspective further solidifies the quota system's pivotal role in creating opportunities for marginalized groups. This endorsement resonates with the core objective of the system, which aims to reduce historical inequalities and ensure comprehensive representation. However, the nuanced view of another ward member introduces an essential consideration – the balance between maintaining the quality of representation and ensuring inclusivity. It highlights the need for a measured evaluation of the consequences of the quota system.

In conclusion, the qualitative research reaffirms the importance of a balanced approach when implementing the quota system. Striking an equilibrium between inclusivity and maintaining the quality of representation is a challenging but crucial goal. These perspectives, ranging from fervent support to thoughtful critique, contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding affirmative action policies.

### **Voices of Empowerment: Navigating the Political Reservation System**

Amplifying the voices of those directly involved in the political reservation system is vital in comprehending its functioning and impact. One dedicated ward member applauds the quota system for providing essential representation and invaluable opportunities to marginalized groups, particularly women. This sentiment echoes through the narratives of other participants, collectively painting a picture of a system that effectively addresses historical disparities and promotes equitable representation.

The female ward member's account underscores the significance of adhering to official protocols and maintaining tangible evidence through documentation. This approach, although challenging, guarantees the successful completion of tasks. Her participation in Municipal Council meetings and one-on-one discussions with higher authorities highlights the importance of both official channels and personal relationships in local governance. However, the research also brings forth the difficulties encountered by some representatives when interacting with metropolitan authorities. Personal relationships still hold considerable influence in the political landscape.

Her testimony further underlines the transformative potential of the quota system, which empowers marginalized groups, enhances representation, and fosters newfound confidence and independence among those who were historically marginalized. These stories emphasize the importance of policies that promote

inclusivity and equitable participation in political decision-making while recognizing the intricacies of navigating personal relationships and established protocols.

### **Amplifying Empowerment: The Role of Representation in Local Governance**

The story of the female ward member vividly illustrates how being part of local government can be transformational. Her dedication to serving the public and meticulous approach to paperwork signifies the real-world impact of the system that reserves positions for certain groups. Her involvement in addressing critical local issues, from electricity to roads and land disputes, reinforces the notion that this system ensures the voices of those previously left out are now heard.

The female ward member's success in local elections demonstrates how the quota system can usher in significant changes. The fact that many women now pursue careers in traditionally male-dominated fields reflects the opportunities and empowerment this system offers. Her leadership signifies that when individuals from historically marginalized groups get the chance to represent their communities, it contributes to a fairer and more inclusive society.

However, when interacting with a Dalit female member, a lack of confidence and education becomes apparent. Her hesitancy and insistence on her husband's presence during the interview underscore the ongoing challenges faced by marginalized groups. Another elected representative expresses concern about political parties promoting symbolic roles for women through the quota system. This highlights the need for a balanced approach to implementing affirmative action policies. Intersectionality, the intersection of various aspects of a person's identity, should be considered to avoid hindering capable representatives from taking the stage.

In conclusion, the importance of maintaining a delicate balance between the benefits of the quota system and the necessity for capable leadership is emphasized. The ward chair's perspective underscores the importance of inclusiveness without compromising leadership quality. The extensive contributions of the female members exemplify the transformative potential of dedicated representatives who actively engage with their communities. The ward member's perspective challenges deep-rooted gender-based stereotypes and emphasizes the importance of evaluating individuals based on their skills and competencies rather than their gender.

### **The Quota System's Initiates for Change**

The impact of the quota system extends beyond reserved political seats; it acts as a catalyst for broader societal change. As one ward member points out, the system

sparks women's involvement in areas beyond politics, serving as an inspiration for women across society to raise their voices and participate actively in various fields. The female ward member stresses the importance of following rules and regulations, highlighting the role of official documentation in her work.

The observations point to the need for ongoing efforts to ensure that the benefits of the quota system reach those who need it most, addressing internal inequalities within marginalized communities. Achieving true equity and inclusivity requires not just the presence of policies but also their effective implementation.

Furthermore, the suggestion to prioritize individuals from backward geographical areas within the quota system highlights the need for a more nuanced and inclusive approach. It signifies the importance of considering regional disparities within a ward or constituency.

In essence, these findings underline the need for a comprehensive and adaptable approach within the quota system. It's not just about representation based on gender, caste, or ethnicity; it's about addressing specific contextual disparities and ensuring that the system genuinely benefits all marginalized groups. Achieving true equity and empowerment is a dynamic process that involves not just the introduction of policies but their continuous evaluation and adaptation to the ever-changing social landscape.

### **Challenges and Nuances in Affirmative Action**

Affirmative action is not without its challenges and nuances. As the research findings suggest, there is a need for balance when it comes to maintaining the quality of representation while ensuring inclusivity. A nuanced perspective emerged from one of the elected representatives who raised valid concerns regarding the potential for less qualified candidates to benefit from quotas.

This highlights the importance of evaluating the consequences of affirmative action policies rigorously. It serves as a reminder that while the intentions of these policies are noble, their implementation must be carefully managed to avoid unintended consequences. Such insights highlight the complexity of affirmative action policies and the need for continual improvement and fine-tuning.

### **Intersectionality and Representation**

Intersectionality, the concept that different aspects of a person's identity intersect, is a crucial lens through which we must view affirmative action policies. One of the research findings suggests that the intersectionality of identity is not

always balanced effectively. It points to the possibility that political parties, in the name of empowerment, may encourage women to play a symbolic role in politics. This idea is thought-provoking because it draws attention to the importance of achieving a delicate equilibrium between representation and competence.

While affirmative action aims to address historical inequities and bring marginalized voices to the forefront, it must not inadvertently sideline capable representatives. This perspective challenges deeply ingrained stereotypes about gender-based limitations and underlines the significance of evaluating individuals based on their skills and competencies rather than solely their gender or identity. Affirmative action policies should not be a substitute for meritocracy but a pathway to ensure equitable opportunities.

### **The Broader Societal Impact of Affirmative Action**

Affirmative action policies, like the quota system, are not limited to their immediate impact on political representation. They extend to trigger broader societal change. One of the research participants believed that the quota system has inspired women to be more actively involved in areas beyond politics. This insight highlights how political representation can act as a catalyst for broader social transformation and empowerment for women.

Through the quota system, marginalized groups are empowered not only to participate in governance but also to pursue careers and engage in traditionally male-dominated fields. The increased visibility of female doctors and engineers in areas like Ram Maya's ward exemplifies how affirmative action has the potential to break traditional gender barriers and expand women's participation in various professional domains. The system has the power to make society fairer and more inclusive, both in political and non-political spheres.

### **Ensuring Effective Implementation and Equitable Distribution of Benefits**

The nuances that emerged from the research findings reveal that while affirmative action policies have made significant progress, there are still unresolved issues within them. Internal disparities within marginalized groups, including those related to social class, can affect how the benefits of the quota system are distributed. This internal inequality within marginalized communities' points to the need for ongoing efforts to ensure that the benefits reach those who need them most.

These disparities emphasize that achieving genuine equity and inclusivity requires not just the presence of policies but also their effective implementation.

Policies need to be tailored to address the unique challenges faced by different regions within a ward or constituency. While political representation is essential, the focus should extend beyond identity-based quotas to ensure that the system addresses specific contextual disparities and is equitable for all marginalized groups.

### **Balancing Affirmative Action and Meritocracy**

The debate over affirmative action and meritocracy is a complex one. While the quota system is undoubtedly crucial in ensuring equitable representation, the research findings highlight that it should not discourage competent individuals from seeking leadership positions through open competition. Striking the right balance is a delicate task.

One of the ward chairs emphasized the importance of a well-rounded representation system that fosters inclusiveness without sacrificing leadership quality. This perspective underlines the necessity of providing equitable chances to all while maintaining excellence as a fundamental criterion. It asserts that affirmative action policies should not compromise the quality of leadership and governance but rather enhance them by ensuring diverse voices are heard.

### **The Need for a Nuanced and Inclusive Approach**

In essence, this research underscores the need for a nuanced and inclusive approach to affirmative action policies. It is not solely about representation based on gender, caste, or ethnicity. It also entails considering the unique challenges faced by different regions within a ward or constituency. Genuine equity and empowerment require comprehensive evaluation and adaptation of the system to ensure that it truly benefits all marginalized groups and addresses specific contextual disparities.

The research findings highlight the importance of ongoing improvement and fine-tuning of affirmative action policies. It is not merely about achieving numerical targets; it is about ensuring that marginalized communities are empowered to participate in governance effectively and that their diverse needs and aspirations are addressed.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the political reservation system in Nepal, represented by the quota system, stands as a ray of hope for unrepresented and minority groups. It is a powerful tool for rectifying historical inequalities, empowering marginalized communities, and fostering inclusivity in local government elections. The impact of

this system extends beyond political representation; it inspires broader societal change and breaks down traditional gender and caste barriers.

However, the research findings emphasize the need for ongoing refinement and vigilant management of these affirmative action policies. Striking the right balance between representation and competence, ensuring that the benefits reach those who need them most, and addressing internal disparities within marginalized groups are vital aspects of an effective system.

The examination of gender-based reservations revealed the multifaceted nature of this policy. The qualitative research and global statistics show the importance of gender-based reservations in rectifying historical gender imbalances. However, concerns were raised about the potential overreliance on quotas. The dissertation stressed the need for a balanced approach, maintaining gender-based representation while upholding merit-based selection. The reluctance of a highly qualified female candidate to run for office due to pervasive gender inequality exemplified the ongoing challenges women face despite their capabilities, underscoring the importance of this balance.

The compulsory reservation system, encompassing both gender and caste-based reservations, has undeniably increased representation. However, concerns about the competence of some candidates elected due to quotas surfaced. The selection process within political parties and the potential for repetitive candidate selection raised questions about fairness. The impact of the system on society is profound, evident in the increased empowerment of marginalized groups, challenged gender norms, and the emergence of role models.

The challenges faced by some reserved quota representatives highlight the necessity for comprehensive training and support mechanisms. The research points to the difficulties representatives encounter in fulfilling their roles and the need for a quick replacement mechanism. Effective coordination between local representatives and higher-ranking authorities is crucial for efficient governance.

The impact of the quota system extends beyond reserved political seats, acting as a catalyst for broader societal change. This research has highlighted the system's power to inspire women to participate actively in areas beyond politics. It has challenged traditional gender roles and stereotypes, empowering women in society and encouraging them to take on more active roles. The suggestion to prioritize

individuals from backward geographical areas within the quota system underlines the need for a comprehensive and adaptable approach.

The nuanced and inclusive approach presented in this discussion is a call for continuous improvement in affirmative action policies. These policies should not just be quotas; they should be pathways to true equity, inclusivity, and empowerment. The journey toward achieving these ideals continues, and the voices of dedicated individuals like Ram Maya and the insights from this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of affirmative action in the context of local governance in Nepal.



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## APPENDIX

## PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORMAT

April 2023

## Part 1

Dear participant,

You are cordially invited to participate in an unstructured interview to support the scholar of KUSoED, Masters in Sustainable Development (MSD) dissertation(thesis).

1. Dissertation title: Institutionalization of Federalism -through Political Participation of Local Representatives: A Case Study of Reservation System in Bharatpur Metropolitan City, Nepal.
2. Name of researcher: Hritul Paudel
3. Contact details: hritulpaudel1@gmail.com +977-9855075348
4. Degree title: Master in Sustainable Development (MSD)
5. Course title: ESD 559 Dissertation
6. Degree awarding institution: School of Education, Kathmandu University
7. Purpose of this document: This document's purpose is to state the aim of the research and get your consent to be a willing participant in the data collection process.
8. Aim of the interview: the interview aims to listen to and document elected representatives' understanding of the reservation system. Collecting your stories and experience will help me to know the perception of elected representatives in Local government in reservation systems implemented in Local Government.

9. Why you have been invited? You have been identified as a participant in this case study being an elected representative. Your experience, view, and learning will inform the research question and give insight into the understating of the Reservation System and how it has been initializing federalism.

10. Participation: Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without reason. If you withdraw after the data has been anonymized, it may not be possible to withdraw the data.

11. Interview structure:

- The interview will be connected as per the request of the participant.
- Face-to-face methods of interview will be done.

12. Confidentiality:

- The content of the interview will be confidential and will not be shared with anyone else.

- Data will be stored electronically using password-protected files.
- The interview notes will be stored in a safe cabinet inside my home.

13. Privacy:

- After data is collected the actual name or other identities of the participants will not be used.

- The names will be replaced by a pseudonym to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

- Direct quotes from the participants will only appear under the pseudonym.

- Participants can opt out of any question they want or terminate the interview at any point they wish to.

14. Recording interview:

- For face-to-face interviews, a voice recording will be used.

15. Notes: I will take notes during the interview and transcribe them afterward. Only the researcher will have access to these notes.

16. Data programming:

- Only the researcher will have access to your data and, thus will be responsible for safeguarding the data and participant information.

- At no circumstances will the information of the participant will be made available to anyone.

17. Expiry of the confidentiality/privacy: no expiry time will lapse the confidentiality or the privacy of the participant and the data.

18. Consent withdrawal:

- Participants have the freedom to withdraw their consent even after signing the consent form.

- However, withdrawal cannot be implemented once the participant data has been anonymized.

- The consent withdrawal notice has to be made in written format and emailed to [hritulpaudel1@gmail.com](mailto:hritulpaudel1@gmail.com).

19. Complaints:

- To file any complaints/concerns/feedback regarding any part of the data collection, handling, and analysis process can be forwarded to the supervisor of the researcher: Dr. Suresh Gautam, assistant professor, acting head of the department, at [sgautam@kusoed.edu.np](mailto:sgautam@kusoed.edu.np)

20. Further information: For any further information/questions regarding the interview and data analysis/report process please contact us before the confirmed interview time at [hritulpaudel1@gmail.com](mailto:hritulpaudel1@gmail.com). phone number: +977-9855075348

Consent to participate in Research Activity

Written Consent form

Study Title: - Institutionalization of Federalism -through Political Participation of Local Representatives: A Case Study of Reservation System in Bharatpur Metropolitan City, Nepal.

Researcher: - Hritul Paudel

Subject: Research Consent Form

I confirmed that the researcher had explained the elements of consent to me in detail. Along with I have also read the participation informed consent format which is given to me. Signing this consent form, I assure you that my participation is voluntary and that I don't need to answer all my questions. The purpose and procedure of the research are well explained by the researcher. I am assured that my confidence has been ensured.

By signing this consent form, I allow the researcher to go ahead with the procedures.

Participant Name: -

Participants Signature