

HEADTEACHERS' ROLE IN CHANGING PRACTICE OF UNTOUCHABILITY
AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST DALITS IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

Arati Shrestha

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AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Arati Shrestha* for the degree *Master of Education Leadership & Management* presented on *1 February 2024* entitled *Headteacher's Role in Changing Practice of Untouchability and Discrimination Against Dalits in a Rural Community*.

APPROVED BY

.....
Asst. Prof. Rebat Kumar Dhakal, PhD
Dissertation Supervisor

Being brought up in urban society, having to see and experience the discrimination towards Dalits in rural village is heart wrenching to me every time, when I visit my husband's village. Untouchability and caste-based discrimination is still prevalent in the rural part of Nepal despite the nation's law prohibiting it. Education and educational leaders are the driving force for social change phenomenon. Hence, as a student of education leadership, to study the role of the school headteacher in changing practice of untouchability and caste-based discrimination against Dalits in the rural community have formed the purpose of my study. Comparing the role of school headteachers with transformational leadership role, my study have led towards exploring different roles of headteachers in upgrading position of Dalits in the society and bringing change in attitude and practice of people towards them.

Applying the lens of interpretivism, I have conducted qualitative research taking interview with three school headteachers and three Dalit participants from a rural community in Khotang. Field notes and observations have also been taken to provide valuable insights in the study.

The study shows that headteachers play crucial role in enhancing the status of Dalits in rural communities. Firstly, they make the school Dalit friendly. They ensure timely distribution of scholarships and subsidies, encourage Dalit students to involve in different activities and promote social justice education among school stakeholders. Secondly, they advocate for social inclusion of Dalits in the community and raise awareness against bad culture, superstitious beliefs and blind faiths. They become role models by practicing discrimination-free activities themselves. In this way, their role aligned with four dimensions of transformational leadership. However, these

descriptive role of headteachers are found less practiced in the rural community. Headteachers also fear social isolation when lobbying for change in the community. So, there is a challenge to headteachers to display leadership role in addressing discrimination in the community. Hence, headteachers as transformational leaders should exhibit high patience and resilience to such fear.

In conclusion, the study shows that continuous determination and effort from headteachers is capable of changing attitude and ongoing practice of untouchability and discrimination towards Dalit in their rural community.

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1 February 2024

Arati Shrestha
Degree Candidate

शोध सार

काठमाडौं विश्वविद्यालय शिक्षा सङ्कायको स्नातकोत्तर उपाधिका लागि श्री आरती श्रेष्ठ ले ग्रामीण समुदायमा दलितहरू प्रति हुने छुवाछुत र भेदभावको अभ्यास परिवर्तन गर्न प्रधानाध्यापकको भूमिका शिर्षकको शोधग्रन्थ विक्रम संवत् २०८० साल माघ १८ गते प्रस्तुत गर्नुभएकोले शोधग्रन्थको निम्नोलेखित शोध सार अनुमोदन गरिएको छ ।

शोध सार अनुमोदनकर्ता

उप प्राध्यापक रेवत कुमार ढकाल, विद्यावारिधि

शोधग्रन्थ निर्देशक

शहरी परिवेशमा हुर्केकोले, जब म मेरो श्रीमानको गाउँ जान्छु, गाउँमा दलितमाथि हुने भेदभाव देख्दा हरेक पल्ट मेरो मन दुख्छ । देशको कानूनले निषेध गरेको भए पनि नेपालको ग्रामीण भेगमा छुवाछुत र जातीय विभेद कायमै छ । शिक्षा र शैक्षिक नेताहरू सामाजिक परिवर्तनका सम्वाहक हुन् । तसर्थ, शिक्षा नेतृत्वको (एडुकेशनल लिडरशिपको) विद्यार्थीको हैसियतले ग्रामीण समुदायमा हुने छुवाछुत र जातीय विभेदको प्रथा परिवर्तन गर्न विद्यालयको प्रधानाध्यापकको भूमिका अध्ययन गर्ने मेरो अध्ययनको उद्देश्य बनेको छ । विद्यालयको प्रधानाध्यापकको भूमिकालाई परिवर्तनकारी नेतृत्वको (ट्रान्सफोर्मेशनल लिडरशिपको) भूमिकासंग तुलना गर्दै, समाजमा दलितहरूको स्थितिको स्तरोन्नति गर्न र उनीहरूप्रति मानिसहरूको दृष्टिकोण र व्यवहारमा परिवर्तन ल्याउन प्रधानाध्यापकको विभिन्न भूमिकाहरूको खोजी गर्ने कार्य यस अध्ययनले गरेको छ ।

व्याख्यावादको (इन्टरप्रेटिभिजम को) लेन्स प्रयोग गर्दै, मैले खोटाङको ग्रामीण समुदायका तीन विद्यालयका प्रधानाध्यापक र तीन दलित सहभागीहरूसंग अन्तर्वार्ता लिएर गुणात्मक अनुसन्धान गरेको छु । अध्ययनमा बहुमूल्य अन्तर्दृष्टि प्रदान गर्न फिल्ड नोटहरू र अवलोकनहरू पनि लिएको छु ।

ग्रामीण समुदायमा दलितको हैसियत बढाउन प्रधानाध्यापकको महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका रहेको अध्ययनले देखाएको छ । पहिलो, उनीहरूले विद्यालयलाई दलितमैत्री बनाउँछन् । उनीहरूले छात्रवृत्ति र अनुदानको समयमै वितरण सुनिश्चित गर्छन्, दलित विद्यार्थीहरूलाई विभिन्न गतिविधिहरूमा संलग्न हुन प्रोत्साहित गर्छन् र विद्यालय सरोकारवालाहरू बीच सामाजिक न्याय शिक्षा प्रवर्द्धन गर्छन् । दोस्रो, उनीहरूले दलितहरूलाई समुदायमा सामाजिक समावेशीकरणको बकालत गर्छन् र खराब संस्कृति, अन्धविश्वासहरू विरुद्ध चेतना जगाउँछन् । उनीहरू आफै भेदभावमुक्त गतिविधिहरू अभ्यास गरेर रोल मोडेल बन्छन् । यसरी उनीहरूको भूमिका परिवर्तनकारी नेतृत्वको चार आयामहरूसंग मिल्न जान्छ ।

यद्यपि, प्रधानाध्यापकको यी वर्णनात्मक भूमिका ग्रामीण समुदायमा कम अभ्यास गरिएको पाइन्छ । समुदायमा परिवर्तनको लागि लविङ गर्दा प्रधानाध्यापकहरू पनि सामाजबाट अलग हुने कुराबाट डराउँछन् । तसर्थ, समुदायमा हुने भेदभावलाई सम्बोधन गर्न, नेतृत्वदायी भूमिका प्रदर्शन गर्न, प्रधानाध्यापकहरूलाई चुनौती छ । तसर्थ, परिवर्तनकारी नेताहरूको रूपमा प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले यस्तो डरको लागि उच्च धैर्य र लचिलोपना प्रदर्शन गर्नुपर्छ ।

निष्कर्षमा, प्रधानाध्यापकहरूको निरन्तर दृढ संकल्प र प्रयासले, उनीहरू, ग्रामीण समुदायमा दलितहरूप्रतिको छुवाछुत र भेदभावको प्रवृत्ति र चलिरहेको व्यवहारलाई परिवर्तन गर्न सक्षम हुन्छन् भन्ने कुरा अध्ययनले देखाउँछ ।

१८ माघ २०८०

आरती श्रेष्ठ

उपाधि उम्मेदवार

This dissertation entitled *Headteachers' Role in Changing Practice of Untouchability and Discrimination Against Dalits in a Rural Community* was presented by Arati Shrestha on 1 February 2024.

APPROVED BY

..... 1 February 2024

Asst. Prof. Rebat Kumar Dhakal, PhD

Dissertation Supervisor

..... 1 February 2024

Kul Pd. Khanal, PhD

External Examiner

..... 1 February 2024

Asst. Prof. Shesha Kanta Pangei, PhD

Head of Department

..... 1 February 2024

Prof. Bal Chandra Luitel, PhD

Dean/ Chair of 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.

..... 1 February 2024

Arati Shrestha

Degree Candidate

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DECLARATION

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

.....

Arati Shrestha

Degree Candidate

1 February, 2024

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother who has continuously prayed for me to achieve success in my life. Similarly, I would like to dedicate this work to my husband, Jaya Kumar Tamang, who has been encouraging and supporting me to complete every small to big task in my life. Likewise, my dedication goes to all the Dalits living in rural area of Nepal, who are still victim of caste discrimination and untouchability in their society. They have become my source of inspiration in this work.

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Arati Shrestha
Degree Candidate

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present the context on how I joined with the rural society and my confrontation with the untouchability and discrimination practice of that society. I present my belief in the role of headteacher to educate people in society to bring social change which also forms the purpose of my study. In the same way, I illustrate the statement of the problem specifying the gap which led to formation of the research questions, followed by the rationale of the study. Finally, I include the delimitations of my research in this chapter.

Setting the Scene

Born and grown up in capital city of Nepal, I have collected ample experiences of urban life. But when I got married, I also got opportunity to taste rural life of Nepal. Rural and urban community is different in terms of physical and socio-cultural environment, way of life, norms and values and many other factors such as density of population, birth and death rates, economic activities, caste, class, family, and religion (Mondal, 2014). This is indeed, I also felt when I got to experience the tastes of both.

I am always infatuated with the village. The fresh air, pure water and organic food bring me close to nature when I am in village. Not only this, but the people are also friendly and caring. One small act of kindness means a lot in the village. The homogeneity in the culture, way of living, working habits, norms and values of the people there is what fascinates me a lot. It is also amazing to see how human civilization has exists there.

Even though I like to be in village, it is really sad for me to witness untouchability and discrimination against Dalits. As I observed in a small village in Khotang, they have separate living spaces with separate water tap to use. Financially, they seem the poorer. They still have thatched roof in their houses while almost all of the houses from other castes have already got tin roofs. However, I am mindful that there are a few Dalits who are better- off than non- Dalits in many ways, especially in urban settings. But as I witnessed in the rural context, they do not have their own farm and hence their daily living has to be earned by working in other people's home/farm. It is still ok to work in other people's home for earning their living but what spikes me

a lot is that Dalits can stay as a servant in a so-called higher caste family and do household chores like washing utensils, cleaning toilets, and washing clothes together with working physically very hard in farm to grow food, but they cannot go into their kitchen to cook and eat together.

I experienced the untouchability and discrimination practice in rural village for the first time, when two small boys could not enter, sit and eat with me in the kitchen of a Rai family just because they are Dalits serving that Rai family. Being the guest of that house (holding a kind of higher level among others), I asked the two boys to come in and sit together with me but the reaction of people who served me showed that it is “some kind of against” community rule. The reaction of the two small boys was not different. The boys, one about 6 years and another about 4 years, backed off and did not want to enter the house. My ethics greatly hurt having to see and feel such discrimination and this is something that I must, but do not want to experience every time when I visit the village. When its daytime, the boys would run away when we go inside the house to eat but when it is nighttime, it is heartbreaking to see them sitting outside the house in a bench, waiting for their turn to eat.

In course of time, I saw that in special occasions like Dashain, weddings and other ceremonies, Dalits are also invited into the so-called higher castes families however, they are provided separate space to sit and treat bit differently. The plates where they are served food are aluminum plates while others are served in brass plates. Others do not need to wash their utensils, but they are washing their plates after eating. Even after when they are provided with ‘tika’ from elders, what remains after providing ‘tika’ to them is thrown away which is not needed in case after providing tika to others. Not only this, but I have also confronted many situations where Dalits are tagged for people’s bad fortune and hence, they are provided with scolding and bad names.

Though we are living in 21st century which is marked with globalization, fast paced technological development and profound social and cultural shifts (What is living in 21st century, n.d.), we are still getting the news of Dalit discrimination and untouchability which shows that the discrimination and untouchability is not only in our village but spread into different rural parts of Nepal. In 2020, we got the news about Dalit boy from rural village of Rukum, got beaten up to death for loving so-called upper caste girl and tried to elope from the village (Nepal, 2020). Similarly, a 13-year-old Dalit girl was raped by 25-year-old so called upper caste man in

Rupandehi and was provisioned to marry as a lawsuit which turned to be murdered to death of the girl child as a consequence for which the crime was about to cover by giving the name of suicide by the villagers. Even the authority tried to hide the case (Mulmi, 2020). These are only some representative cases that came into notice through media from rural part of the country. However, there are many other cases which goes unnoticed. Shrestha and Aryal (2020) have also written that “cases of discrimination rarely get to court and even if they result in convictions, the offenders are given small fines or minimal jail time of a few months” (para 9). This shows that the problem is big in our rural community.

‘Caste- Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2068 (2011)’ has been formulated in Nepal to protect the right of every person to equality, freedom and to live life with dignity; and to protect the person from untouchability and discrimination on the basis of origin, caste, race, descent, community, occupation or business or physical condition (Nepal Law Commission, 2019). This act prohibits the practices with regards to untouchability and discrimination and subject to crime and punishment. Despite this law, there are people especially in rural areas, whose mindset towards Dalits are not changed. Even Dalits do not voice for themselves and accept such things as their fate.

Time and again, I ask different people if they think it is right to discriminate Dalits like this, and most of the time, I have got reply from them that it has been continuing for ages and that it is a common practice for them. Also, they say that they cannot go against the community culture. Some are even afraid that they get curse from their ancestors while some are afraid of social isolation and backbiting by the community people.

I question myself, why people are unable to come out of their old belief system, why are they still afraid of what society will say, why they are absent of right logic for anything bad happens to them and why they blame others for their own misfortune. I question myself, why this insanity exists in people of rural community that they are unable to see that all human beings are human beings, same creation of God. And, I question myself, how can this untouchability and discrimination be totally abolished not only in the laws but also from the mentality and practice of people living in rural community. Somewhere the answers to these questions revolve in the periphery of one’s awareness and awakening one’s thought of action. For this, I

believe that there is a need of a role model who can change the existing mindset of people and bring positive change in rural society by their knowledge and action.

Being the student of education leadership, I wondered whether education leaders especially, school headteachers can be that role model. In the words of Khadka and Bhattarai (2021), headteacher as ethical leader correlates trust and honesty, implanting them as exemplary figure in the educational realm. So, I wondered whether this exemplary figure will be an eye opener for the rural community. I wondered, what they can do or how can they contribute in transforming their rural society with regards to Dalit untouchability and discrimination. Not only this, I also wondered, whether school headteachers do care about this issue and are willing to change the society with this matter. All these questions formed the basis for me to do this research.

Headteacher as Driver of Social Change

Social change is dynamic and inevitable. It leads to increased awareness and more understanding in people, due to the presence of more information in the community which enables them to make informed decisions (Applied Social Psychology, 2017). According to Cohen (2011), this also improves civic participation attributed to change in public attitude, motivating them to correct instances of injustice (as cited in ASP, 2017).

Different kinds of social injustices have been a global problem (Alam, 2018). Discrimination of people on the basis of skin color, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, political ideology and castes; gender inequalities; labor exploitation; persecution of minorities; and mistreatment or stigmatization (Alam, 2018), are some examples to social injustices which still exist in our society.

Nepal is different than other countries, in the sense that, there is diversity in geographical regions providing diversity in flora and fauna, great history in the past, diverse cultures and religion along with natural beauty (Nepal Yoga Institute and Retreat, 2017). However, as mentioned by Acharya (2008), the same regional and cultural diversity has led towards difficulty in equal distribution of development. This is further illustrated by Karmacharya and Khadka (2007), that our deep-rooted culture featured poverty, unequal distribution or access of power, resources and opportunities; social injustice and exclusion, exploitation and discrimination. The discriminatory practices which are mainly based on caste, ethnicity and gender are throughout the country which are complex and persisted for decades. Furthermore, they exist more in

rural and remote areas where there is unequal power status, unequal distribution of property and lack of basic facilities (Karmacharya & Khadka, 2007), which I also felt very relatable in my experience.

On the other hand, education is light of life. It is a driving force which can initiate and accelerate the changing attitudes and values of human beings (Mondal, 2013). Moreover, Duncan (2009) stated that great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice. Accordingly, he stated that a great teacher can change the course of a student's life by lighting a lifelong curiosity, a desire to explore and creating a hunger for knowledge. Headteacher, in this sense, holds a greater responsibility in bringing change in students' life.

Headteacher is a manager, leader and administrator of school (Bhujel, 2021). As manager, they manage and monitor the human resources, physical resources and financial resources of the school. They guarantee the safety and security of both the school building and its auxiliary elements in order to facilitate student engagement and learning. They are also in charge of keeping support staffs that can assist the faculty and the school community whereas they are responsible for hiring, choosing and training of a diverse teaching staff (Shell, 2023). As leader, they direct the vision of the school and concentrate on organizational growth and improvement (Bhujel, 2021). They are passionate about local curriculum and prosocial bonds, built around positive shared values which makes them integral part of the community (The principal as a change agent, n.d.). As administrators, they handle day to day operations, maintain school policies and rules, create and maintain a positive, organized and rewarding teaching and learning environment (What is a headteacher, n.d.). As the head of the school, a role model, the director of the educational institution and manager of the teacher and staffs, they are the influencer of the behaviour and academic outcomes of the students, more than other teachers and staffs (Bhujel,2021). Overall, they have the most critical education roles (Shell, 2023).

While performing their educational roles, they foster a change in the school culture by giving teachers and staff members culturally relevant, anti-bias professional development and by amplifying student voice and impact within the school (Jackson, 2018). Giving up control and genuinely incorporating the opinions and ideas of students, headteachers develop student leadership abilities and strengthen their foundation toward navigating realities outside of the classroom (Green, 2018 as cited in Jackson, 2018). Headteachers as agent between community organizations and

school (Jackson, 2018), exchange social capital in a way that bridge the gap of required resources to school and external community. In this way, headteachers lead the school and school community and hence, I believe that they can be actual drivers of social change.

Statement of the Problem

Headteachers as educational leaders (Brown University, 2008), are destined for establishing and promoting proper information and communication system within and beyond school system; maintain school community relationship, social harmony and functional exchange; and assessing situation and providing guidance to cope with changes (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). In relation to the rural community, rural school work in partnership with local leaders and residents to meet the needs of rural youths and families; and it is the school leader, who made the school accessible and viable to the local community. As an instructional leader, school principals create school climate for all teachers, students, parents and school board to work together to accomplish the task of education (Leithwood, 2005 as cited in Subedi, 2019).

Education is not only to be able to read and write, but it is the process of harmonious development of an individual (Sujan, 2023). It is an essential tool for enhancing social development and promote change in society. United Nations defines education as fundamental to enhancing to quality of human life and ensuring social and economic progress (as cited in Sujan, 2023).

In Nepal, education has taken considerable leap while arriving at 21st century (Shah, n.d.). Today all Nepalese has easy access to education, be it a student studying in private schools in urban areas or a student going to community school in rural areas. It has spread in all the nooks and corner of Nepal. Despite the fact, people in Nepal are not able to upgrade their lifestyle. One is still far-fetched from living life of dignity. There is still persistence of untouchability and discrimination against Dalits in different parts of Nepal especially in rural areas. Development is viewed as the product of empowerment, social equality, equity, social justice, and social inclusion (Shahi, 2017), in the absence of which, working status of the society declined and the nation will incline towards poverty. Exclusion, inequalities, and injustices to Dalits have been continued in the name of tradition. School, which is said to be placed on imparting education is itself polluted with such practices. Subedi (2022) claimed that rural schools' environment is not Dalit friendly. He claimed that children from Dalit and non- Dalit families maintain hierarchy among them while performing social

activities which in turn decrease interests in Dalit children to go to school. As per the research (Subedi, 2022), Dalit participation in schools seems to be less encouraging, their learning outcome is inadequate and unfruitful, their irregularities in school and dropout rate are also considerably high. This is credited to the feeling and fear of facing discrimination, injustice, inequality and exclusion in schools in similar ways as they feel in other social setting.

In this way, on one hand we are studying the role of headteacher as educational leader in bringing change in an individual, in a school and in a whole community, but on the other hand, we are still witnessing the unjust society, the discrimination for the Dalits in the rural area, even in rural schools. Having such argument, some gap is realized on whether headteacher are performing only their usual administration job or are they also contributing in transformation of the community where they belong, with regards to make school environment or the whole community Dalit friendly.

Purpose of the Study

My purpose of the study was to explore the role of headteacher as transformational leader in bringing change in practice of untouchability and discrimination against Dalits in a rural community in Khotang district of Nepal.

Research Question

In order to address the above purpose, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do headteachers and community members perceive the role of headteachers in changing practice of untouchability and discriminations against Dalits in the rural community?
2. How are these roles compatible with the four dimensions of transformation leadership theory?

Rationale of the Study

The study explored the expertise of school headteachers with regards to bring changes in the practice of untouchability and discrimination against Dalits in the rural community. The expertise was explored in their idea on how they can lobby against the Dalits issues, and their practices where they have supported Dalits to stand together on the common ground. It studied how headteachers have utilized their knowledge, skills and ability in changing the community environment into Dalit friendly. Hence, this study challenged the leadership position of school headteachers

to bring changes in belief system of people in the community. Besides it also provided with the insight on willingness or inclination of headteachers towards social issues of their community. Alongside, this study also uncovered the community members view on headteachers being role model in their society.

With this regard, this study is expected to strengthen school community relationship through headteachers' involvement in bringing awareness in people about Dalits equality in their community. I also believe that the key insights generated from this research is intended to support policy makers to draft policies which are Dalit friendly and which can utilize and reward the knowledge, skill and abilities of learnt persons like headteachers who fight for daily social injustices. Likewise, taking reference of this research, it might help other researches to study role of education leaders to fight other social disparities in different context.

Delimitations of the Study

There are various roles and responsibilities of headteachers in rural community schools. The headteachers also show different leadership styles to fulfill their roles as school head. However, this study was delimited to explore the transformational leadership role of the headteachers (especially its four dimensions, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individual consideration and intellectual stimulation) to change existing practice and attitude of people with regards to untouchability and discrimination in the rural community setting.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review constitutes of various literature from different scholars, authors and organizations about the topic related to this research. Introduction to Dalits and untouchability and discrimination practiced to Dalits in Nepal are presented in this section. Aligned with the topic, concept on different roles and attributes of school headteachers are provided leading to the theoretical approach of transformational leadership theory for school headteachers. Similarly, this chapter studies the literatures of other scholars relating the role of school headteachers or school leaders bringing change to society. Finally, different policies are reviewed, and research gap is identified.

Untouchability and Discrimination Against Dalits in Nepal

Dalits are the most marginalized group of Nepal. Marginalized group in a sense that they do not enjoy the same privileges as that of the rest of the society. They suffer multiple deprivations such as the access to good education, respectable workplace, voice to opinion and economic stability (Jhajaria, 2019). They are vulnerable to exploitation (Socio, 2020). They are the deprived group of the society who are said to be protected by different governmental and non-governmental laws and forces (Socio, 2020) but still backward to benefit themselves with the facilities of being in a society.

The term Dalits is coined from the caste-based system of Nepal. The castes are divided into four main categories where Brahmins are given top level position, followed by Kshyatriyas and Vaishyas with Shudras remain in the bottom of the hierarchy. Dalits fall in Shudras, the caste representing servants in occupation who are considered to be lower than others and hence treated as ‘untouchables’ (Skibdal, 2018). According to Civil Act (Muluki Ain) 1854, castes like ‘Kami’, ‘Sarki’, ‘Damai’, ‘Badi’, ‘Gaine’, ‘Dhobi’, ‘Halkhor’, ‘Chamar’, ‘Dushad’, ‘Dom’, ‘Musahars’, ‘Kulu’, ‘Pode’ and ‘Chyama’ are termed as untouchables listing in Dalit’s list (World Heritage Encyclopedia, n.d.). Pariyar, Nepali, Bishwakarma, Khadgi, Darji is some of the surnames used by Dalits in Nepal. Traditionally, they are said to be butchers, musicians, washerman, cobblers, blacksmith, tailors, leather-workers, sweepers and fishermen from their occupation. These jobs were considered

to be low-level income earning jobs and hence they were segregated from their society. Before the law against discrimination and untouchability in 2006 came into enforcement, they were prevented from using public roads, drinking from common wells and entering Hindu temples (Skibdal, 2018). Now also, there is persistence to Dalit discrimination. They are even accused for witchcraft and punished illegally by the society. Nepali (2019), in *The Kathmandu Post* reported that Dalits remain significantly behind by every measure of human development index. Their life expectancy is only 48 years, their poverty rate is 48 percent and the rate of chronic malnutrition in children is 60 percent. Additionally, 85 percent of Dalits have food deficiency while only 43 percent of Nepal's Dalit are literate.

Hence, as a group facing most caste-based discriminations (Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution & Castillejo, 2017) and in terms of socio-economic indicators (Skibdal, 2018), Dalits became the most marginalized groups in Nepal and in this research, I focused them especially voicing for their equal inclusion in the society.

Scenario of Rural Community in Nepal

To understand rural community, one should know the meaning of 'rurality' first. With reference to many other authors, Budge (2006), defined 'rurality' as the characteristics of a particular area or place that share strengths and challenges such as isolation, low population density, interdependence between the community and schools, lived oppression, a history of conflict regarding educational goals, out-migration of talented young people, and a strong attachment to the place.

Hence one can perceive rurality as serene, rustic and isolated living with minimum problems from modern world but at the same time with the reality of higher rates of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy (Curtin & Cohn, 2015). On the other hand, 'community' is formed of group of people living together and sharing same interest, having common goals, way of life and norms (Characteristics of Rural and Urban Community, 2012). Hence, rural community is a group of inhabitants, living geographically remote with sparsely populated, sharing same culture and beliefs and displaying homogeneity in customs, language and profession, mostly inclined to agriculture, leading simple and difficult life and less prone to change due to lack of basic facilities, opportunities and modern technologies.

"According to Central Bureau of Statistics (2012), 80 percent of the Nepalese population are from rural areas with majority adopting subsistence farming as the mainstay of their livelihoods" (Gautam & Andersen, 2016, p. 242). But agricultural

productivity is not sufficient in the community resulting alarming poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition (Khatiwada et al., 2018). Besides gender discrimination, social exclusion and marginalization are found in abundance in rural Nepal causing poorer situation in the area (Khatiwada et al., 2018).

Newer opportunities like open road networks, education, electricity, information and communication technologies have introduced new economic potential through tourism, trade and micro-enterprises, which has also added challenges due to excessive environmental degradation causing climate change affecting rain-fed irrigation system of rural agriculture resulting in less productivity (Khatiwada et al., 2018). This has contributed the marginalized group to depend on others for food and supplies. In a study of ‘Simikot’, one of the remote and rural land of Nepal, Onta and Resurreccion (2011), wrote that Dalit men are obliged to go to trek with ‘Lamas’ as a carrier while Dalit women work in daily labor wages within the village. This also shows that ensuring equal opportunity and prosperity for all is also challenge in rural part of Nepal.

There is no doubt that there is huge gap between rural and urban societies of Nepal. In this regard, The Rising Nepal (2020), reported that Human Development Index of rural and urban societies lies at 0.431 and 0.487 respectively. This difference in HDI has also become one of the reasons for the migration of rural people to the urban areas in pursuit of better opportunities (The Rising Nepal, 2020). Hence, viewing rural community with such higher social disparities, need of change is felt the most in the mindset of people of rural Nepal, so, I made rural community as the basis of my study.

Diverse Role of Headteacher

‘School headteachers’ also referred to as ‘school principals’ are incharge of their schools. They are day to day guide who are responsible for all activities conducted and decisions made by the school. The Wallace Foundation (2013), pointed out five main practices of school principals – “shaping a vision of academic success for all students; creating a climate hospitable to education; cultivating leadership in others; improving instruction; and managing people, data and process to foster school improvement”.

In the context of community schools, especially in developing countries scenario, Qutoshi and Khaki (2014) wrote that headteachers serve as both ‘manager’ and ‘trustee’ of the community in addition to being the masters of the school’s

destiny. Their approaches are people-centered and target oriented, and they show themselves as strategic and democratic leaders. They play a crucial role as educational leaders, while carrying out their duties in a complex community school system where the expectations of various stakeholders from the headteacher are far higher than the amount of support and facilitation provided to them.

Similarly, collaborating with neighboring schools and communities is one of the key responsibilities that the OECD suggest for school leaders (Schleicher, 2012). Thus, by creating networks, cooperating, and pooling resources for everyone's advantage, headteachers enhance community collaboration (Schleicher, 2012). For instance, in certain Finish Municipalities, school leaders also serve as district administrators. They collaborate on administration and supervisory tasks, evaluation, and the creation of education plans in order to bring schools and municipalities together to think methodically about fostering a shared vision of education and a unified school system (Schleicher, 2012). In addition, school principals are expected to foster shared principalship among educators, community members and partners (Bhujel, 2021). They also need to show a strong commitment to the belief that every child can learn at a high level and be able to inspire others both inside and outside the school to support the mission and objectives of the institution (Institute for Educational Principal, 2000 as cited in Bhujel, 2021).

According to Davis et al. (2005), "school principals are estimated to be enlightening dreamers, instructional and curriculum principal, assessment specialists, disciplinaries, community originators, public relations/ communications specialists, facility managers, special programs administrators, as well as guardians of numerous permissible, contractual and policy mandates and initiatives" as cited in Bhujel (2021). Hence, taking the diverse roles of school principals, I added the role of headteachers, especially, rural headteachers in transforming community in terms of Dalit discrimination and untouchability.

Linking Education, School and Role of School Headteacher

Education is a prerequisite for rural transformation. Educated people earn more than those without any education and have higher capability to improve the quality of their lives (ILO, 2012 as cited in Sharma, 2014). Further, Sharma (2014), wrote that education address the issue of marginalization through empowering people and creating awareness in them, to involve themselves in community participation for their own development. In this sense, Coker and Bassey (2012), wrote that, "there is

need of diverse and flexible education programs with provisions for multiple learning options which helps in building skills and capacities for harnessing opportunities and improving livelihood and enhancing quality of life of rural people” (as cited in Sharma, 2014, p.90).

Since school is taken as a main hub for education, it takes a major role in imparting knowledge which is adaptable according to the need of their students (Brighouse 2006, as cited in Aliuden, 2015). On the other hand, the purpose of schooling is “to enable children to become autonomous, self-governing adults; become economically self-reliant; lead flourishing lives; and become responsible, deliberative citizens who are capable of accepting the demands of justice and abiding by the norm of reciprocity” (Aliuden, 2015, slide 19). Likewise, it is a medium for promoting social justice education (Clarke, 2016). Social justice education in school encourages students to actively participate in their own education, in addition to supporting teachers in fostering environments that are democratic, critical and empowering for learners (Hackman, 2005, as cited in Hytten & Bettez, 2011, p.8). Hence, social justice education in school has been a factor to create awareness in people in bringing positive change in the community and contributing to build fair and just society.

In order to make school adaptable as per the need of learners, school headteacher as an instructional leader demonstrates expert knowledge of core business of teaching and learning, curriculum development, assessment and reporting. They motivate and lead their teaching staff, evaluate their performance, provide training, and set goals and expectations to enable good education for the children. In addition, they serve as spokesperson for their school to parents and the community at large (Writer, 2020) to create a homogenous learning environment for the learners.

Hence, education is the key to human development while school is the medium where the school headteacher is key person to lead the instructional practice and overall environment of the school. So, in this study, I also studied the administrative role of headteachers in school which will contribute in addressing the issue of marginalization and social justice in school education which ultimately contribute in their community.

Review of Previous Studies

On the basis of my study topic, several literatures are reviewed where emphasis is given to the Dalits education and role of school headteachers and their impact in school, education and community.

In research done by Bishwakarma (2009), I found that the case of four Dalit scholars in Nepal who despite of the discrimination and exclusion from the society succeeded in their educational journey as well as in their life. In the study, the socio economic and educational barriers to the Dalits in school enrollments and learning achievements are explored together with the main factors influencing some Dalits' academic success in the era of untouchability and caste-based discrimination. The major finding of the study was that Dalits face discrimination in the school which directly affects their mental health, causing them to feel humiliated and hence compelled to drop out from the school. Besides, they face numerous other barriers that hinder their educational progress, such as, most of the Dalits are living in rural areas where there is no access to education geographically, physically and mentally. They are poor and sending children to school in other area means spending money in rents and other associated which is difficult economically. Even if they are willing and able to spend, because of the existing caste-based discrimination and untouchability in the society, they find it difficult to find the place of living in another place. In this scenario, there are some Dalits who are successful in their education and quality of life. Because they are successful, they get less or no discrimination from their society. The reason behind their success is attributed to their good family environment, good economic background, students' own aspiration and easy accessibility to the education. Hence, Bishwakarma further stated that the country should implement inclusive education or a reservation system, such as quotas, to help lessen the barriers that Dalit community faces in Nepal which makes them get the education easily ahead. I relate this research with my study by searching role of the school headteacher in making school environment inclusive to Dalits and providing them good access and guidance in the academy so that the Dalits can take their education to the new height instead of dropping out in lower level.

Aligning with the study of Bishwakarma, I reviewed the study made by Bishwamani Subedi (2022), which is an ethnographic study made in relation to make Dalit friendly schools in Nepal. According to Subedi (2022), there is a problem in the existing education in school to Dalits. He saw that the problem lies in the perceptions,

practices and constructs concerning school education to Dalits. So, he studied how can a school be made Dalit friendly. As a result, he confined his study into two themes, which are, interest-based learning environment and issue-based learning environment in school. According to Finn (2010), as cited in Subedi (2022), Dalit children quit school because they feel that the environment is not conducive to their interest and attitude. The personality of the Dalits often does not go in line with the school setting, the cause of which is the cultural orientation of such marginalized children which do not likely to prepare them to be fit in the school setting (Bishwakarma, 2009 as cited in Subedi, 2022). Hence, schools or the authorities should make effort in making the environment of the school which induce the personal interests of Dalit children. On the other hand, “the issues of untouchable, exclusion, humiliation, injustice, and inequality prevailing in the social setting” (Subedi, 2022, p117) do not let the Dalit children enjoy the academic setting prevailing in the schools, so in addition to ensure school environment free from discrimination, injustice, inequality and exclusion, the change is required to obtain in the attitude, concept and feeling of the Dalits which is influenced by their existing caste- based experiences. Hence, in my study, I explored if this is possible by the effort of school leadership.

When it comes to school leadership, school principal leadership is pointed out in the first place. So, a journal article of Khanal and Park (2016) has been reviewed to study the role and impact of school principals’ leadership for overall development of school education. In this journal article, the authors reviewed and related different other articles from all over the world to study what research has to say about school principal leadership. As a result, they reported that school principal matter to successful school including student achievement, teacher motivation, instructional excellence and innovation and change. A principal’s ability to lead in the recruitment, selection, and retention of highly qualified teachers has a greater and direct impact on students’ achievement. Similarly, a principal who advocates for the community and is highly visible in community, creates a relationship of trust and understanding between school and the community, which led change in school- parents relationship, causing ultimate success in school outcome (Khalifa, 2012 as cited in Khanal & Park, 2016). School principals play vital role in maintaining discipline in school. Discipline in school, is building a sustainable positive climate acceptable for all students so that they can get into their full potential. This is important for the inclusiveness and

acceptable environment in school (Ministry of Education, Ontario 2012 as cited in Khanal & Park, 2016). Preston et al. (2013), stated that responsible and effective principals create a warm and nurturing environment for teachers, parents and students and they work together for improvement (as cited in Khanal & Park, 2016). They have knowledge about planning and policies but still prioritize the needs of students, parents, teachers and community members. In this way, school principal leadership is capable to impact overall business of educational development in school and in the community.

In another study of Preston and Barnes (2017), they reviewed the literatures on professional competencies and personal qualities of successful principals in rural schools of America, Canada and Australia. As a result, they found two attributes of the principal i.e., successful rural principals promote people-centered leadership and they are agents for change. Further elaborating, school principals collaborate with/through staff members, parents, students, community stakeholders and social capital. Those school principals who foster collaborative relationship within the school community is one who promotes and endorses public education that is capable of addressing the issues that many rural communities face in the 21st century (Harmon & Schafft, 2009 as cited in Preston & Barnes, 2017). Moreover, a collaborative learning environment develops problem solvers, recognizes and seizes possibilities and encourages further collaborations, coalitions, networks and partnerships. Likewise, principals led change by balancing local and district needs, as well as being an effective instructional leader. They need to be seen as active community members.

In this regard, Budge (2006) explained that successful school principals understand the mentality of their community and are willing to be visible, accessible and approachable in the community (as cited in Preston & Barnes, 2017). In the doctoral study led by Barbour (2014) and Bartling (2013) as cited in Preston and Barnes (2017), one of the important components to be successful rural principal is to keep in contact and communicate with students, teachers, parents and community members so as to influence them.

Hence, with these attributes of successful rural principals, I related my study to investigate and compare the role of rural school principals in bringing change in discriminative practice and untouchability to Dalits in their rural community.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Leaders, who transform their followers through their inspirational nature and charismatic personalities, is actually the true essence of transformational leadership theories (Leadership-central.com, 2010-2020). According to this theory, “a person interacts with others and is able to create a solid relationship that results in a high percentage of trust, that will later result in an increase of motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, in both leaders and followers” (Burns, 1978 as cited in Leadership-central.com, 2010-2020, para 1). In the words of Northouse (2001), “transformational leadership is the ability to get people to want to change, to improve, and to be led. It involves assessing associate’s motives, satisfying their needs, and valuing them” (as cited in Hall et al., 2019, p1.). So, this is a leadership approach which causes the individuals and the whole social system to change.

There are four elements to transformational leadership (Ugochukwu, 2021): inspirational motivation (IM), idealized influence (II), intellectual stimulation (IS) and individual consideration (IC).

Inspirational motivation involves the leaders’ ability to implant inspiration and motivation in their followers by exhibiting clear vision and communicating expectations for the future. Leaders demonstrate commitment to the goals that has been laid.

Idealized influence is the concept that leaders build trust, respect and confidence with the followers. Leaders being positive role model and displaying a charismatic personality influences others to want to become more like the leader.

Intellectual stimulation involves leader to challenge the status quo and promote continuous innovation. Leaders ask for new ideas from followers and change the way followers think about problems without criticizing their idea. Leaders convey the vision to the followers which help them see big picture and succeed in their efforts.

Individual consideration involves the leader recognizing and attending to each followers needs. This includes one to one coaching and mentoring, recognizing and valuing the motivations, desires and needs of individual member in a group. This allows followers to develop and achieve their full potential in an environment they are comfortable in.

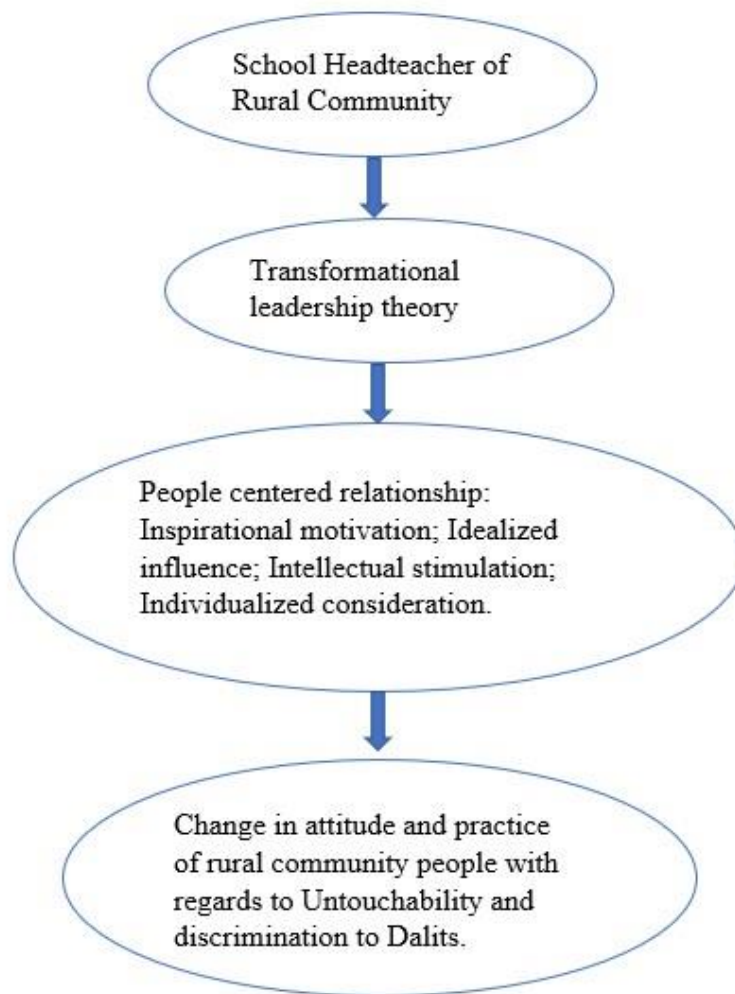
So, utilizing these four components of transformation, leaders help transform their followers into more productive and successful individuals.

In the context of educational institutions, Smith and Bell (2011) stated that the most effective leadership style is the transformational leadership style, which is predicated on engagement, collaboration and dedication to assist teachers/ staffs / members wherever feasible (as cited in Ghimire, 2022). Transformational leader supports the advancement of professionals for the benefit of the institutions. Through the delegation of responsibility and creation of a sense of community, transformational leadership facilitate individual goal setting and commitment towards it (Lynch, 2015). There is no offer of reward, instead teachers/ staff/ members are empowered to become leaders via mutual trust and responsibility which helps them to maximize their performance. The study of Wahab et al. (2014) also found that the practice of transformational leadership by school leader help increase job satisfaction and commitment of teachers, which in turn increase students' achievement. Allen, Grisby and Peters (2015) also studied that transformational leadership have strong positive association with learning outcomes (as cited in Ghimire, 2022). Hence, transformational leadership practice is best and effective in educational practices.

Ghimire (2022) wrote that headteacher is a person who can play the role of transformational leader in the school as they are the most powerful, impressive and influential person in the school community. With the transformational leadership approaches (Lynch, 2015), school headteacher can effectively manage school resources, establish social and interpersonal bonds and form networks, show mastery in knowledge about educational matters, become role models and be regarded as respectable by their peers. With this, by putting an emphasis on the entire school community rather than just the leader's interests, transformational leadership can change the mindset of both staff and students.

Therefore, I found this theory applicable and relevant to my research agenda and serves as a pathway to distinguish transformative roles of headteachers in the rural society.

Based on the theoretical review, I have sketched the theoretical framework of this study as following:



Educational Policies on Social Inclusion of Dalits

Since Nepal became a multiparty democratic nation in 1990, social inclusiveness in all facets of development, including education has been a significant political issue (Neupane, 2019). However, women, Dalits and tribal indigenous groups continue to be marginalized from mainstream political and development agendas (Bhattachan, 2003 as cited in Neupane, 2019). According to the Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization (2015), which was cited in Neupane (2019), there is severe educational deprivation among Dalits in Nepal, with literacy rates only 52.4% compared to the 65.9% national average. As in many other nations, Nepal Government has stated its commitment to inclusive education, and this low educational status has continued to be one of the main obstacles to Dalits' human development (Neupane, 2019). The EFA (Education for All) National Plan of Action 2001-2015 outlined the government's policies and priorities for inclusive education

and made a commitment to eradicating gender disparity and ensuring equal access to education for all, including girls, children in difficult situations and ethnic and linguistic minorities (ADB, 2010). With the proposed program of ten months of pre-service training with scholarships for women with potential from ethnic groups and Dalits, the MOE policy of 2003/2004 intended to provide at least two female teachers per school (Timsina, 2004; UNESCO2005; MOE 2017 as cited in Neupane, 2019). This was done to promote Dalit participation in the education sector.

In order to improve access to basic education for all gender and ethnic minorities, with a focus primarily on remote areas, the latest education program SSDP (School Sector Development Program) 2016-2022, decentralizes responsibility for the school sector to local government with four objective pillars of equity, quality, competence and relevance (Neupane, 2019). The recruitment of female teachers and teachers from disadvantaged groups, free basic education, scholarships, incentives to overcome indirect and opportunity costs, non-formal education, alternative schooling and expanding access through new facilities and schools while paying attention to equity issues and campaigns are just a few of the key strategies. Similarly, training to raise awareness and support for inclusive education, differentiated instruction, classroom diversity, new curricula and textbooks in larger minority, new policy on mother tongue, and bilingual education pilots are some examples of quality strategies that government has taken for inclusive education for all.

With this regard, to encourage Dalits to go to school, there has been a provision of distributing NPR. 450 cash to each Dalit students per year, in addition to providing free text books and free primary education (International Dalit Solidarity Network [IDSN], 2018). In new education policy (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Government of Nepal, 2019), it is also stated that all children are ensured with free education up to basic level (Section: 10.4), whereas measures including promotion of reservation, positive discrimination and priority incentives will be taken for ensuring further educational opportunities to socio-economically backward people (Section: 10.29). Most importantly, there is also mention of making school and teachers fully responsible for eliminating untouchability in school and providing equal opportunities for equal treatment and learning to all in order to end the psychological effects of untouchability on children (Section: 10.29.9).

Although there are government policies and provisions that are distinctive to eradicating discrimination against Dalits from the community, International Dalit

Solidarity Network (2018), in their briefing report mentioned that in practice, teachers and peers discriminate against children from Dalit communities. Children of Dalits are not allowed to drink water from same tap, are addressed rudely and are separated into different lines. This ultimately resulted in dropouts and poor academic performance of Dalit children.

Hence, this concludes that although there are government plans and policies to address the issue of social inclusiveness in education sector they are not as effective to eradicate the Dalit discrimination from the society.

Literature Summary

Dalits are the marginalized group of Nepal facing the most caste- based discrimination. Caste-based discrimination and untouchability is highly prevalent in rural area of Nepal than urban areas where human development index is comparatively lower. According to the literature, Dalits who are successful in their life face less discrimination from society. The success in their life is attributed to their good family environment, good economic background, student's own aspiration and easy accessibility to education. Dalit children often lag in education because they get same feeling of discrimination in school which is not conducive to their learning interest and attitude. Hence, schools should be made Dalit friendly while education should be inclusive.

There are different government policies and plans in Nepal to include and increase Dalits participation in education such as maintaining reservation quotas, providing subsidies along with providing free admission and textbooks to socially-economically backward people. Despite, these plans, and policies have not been effective to address the issue of Dalit participation in education.

On the other hand, school headteachers as educational leaders create homogenous learning environments for the learners. They as instructional leaders are involved in core process of teaching and learning, curriculum development, assessment and reporting. They are the mediator between school and community. In addition to this, successful rural principals promote people-centered leadership and they are agents for change.

Taking transformational leadership as theoretical approach, headteachers role as influencer, creator, motivator and stimulator is studied, which in turn, emphasized that being a transformational leader, headteacher is able to transform the community with their knowledge, skills and ability.

Research Gap

Various studies have been made about untouchability and caste-based discrimination practices in Nepal. Different policies have also been reviewed to fight against such social injustices in Nepal. Studies have been found which emphasized in educating Dalits for their rights. Also, studies have been made on different role of school leadership for school-community partnership and maintaining quality instructions and teaching in school. However, in those studies, there is hardly any link between the role of school leaders, particularly, headteacher's role to change practice of untouchability and caste-based discrimination in Nepal. So, this study explored the connection of school headteacher in community transformation especially with regards to practice of Dalit discrimination and untouchability in rural scenario of Nepal.

CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains a detailed explanation of the process on the basis of which the research has been conducted. Firstly, my philosophical assumptions are discussed which shaped my research paradigm and research design hence afterwards. Then, the process of selection of participants for the study, preparation of study tools, fieldwork and information collection and analysis are presented. Finally, the quality standards of the research and ethical considerations have been discussed in this section.

Philosophical Foundations of the Study

Philosophical foundations of the study are the basis of the study under which one's beliefs and assumption lies in developing knowledge of a particular field (Saunders et al., 2009). These philosophical beliefs and assumptions are divided into three branches: ontology, epistemology and axiology.

Ontology

Reality is a part of mind and is socially constructed through our perceptions (Assalahi, 2015). So, one thing is right for a person but not for another. Reality keeps on changing. The perception of headteacher on changing practice of untouchability and discrimination towards Dalits came different from what the Dalits and headteachers perceived. Similarly, while discussion and interaction with them, the knowledge I perceived and interpreted became different. Hence, I accepted the multiple realities in this study.

Epistemology

Knowledge is jointly constructed by two parties, the researcher and the participants (Kamal, 2019). The participants are aware of social phenomena and their interactions with the researcher reflect their understanding (Assalahi, 2015). In this regard, headteacher's role in changing practice of untouchability and discrimination was investigated with the headteachers and the community members which was interpreted later to generate meaning in this study.

Axiology

As we are involved in axiological thinking in every moment, intentionally or unintentionally and our values guide our thoughts, actions and behaviors in every

aspect of life (Tufail, 2012), this study is also value laden. The participants experience and perceptions were taken as highly valuable asset for this study. Similarly, my values were also incorporated during this study, however I did not become biased and judgmental while data collection, analysis and interpretation. I acknowledged every kind of information received and documented thus received information.

Research Paradigm

Research paradigm is “the collective set of attitudes, values, beliefs, procedures and techniques that create a framework of understanding through which theoretical explanations are formed” (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006 as cited in Aliyu et al, 2015, p.3). It guides researcher to understand their choice on how to explore knowledge better.

I followed interpretive paradigm in this research study. Interpretive paradigm is based on people’s perceptions, ideas, thinking and the meaning that are derived upon by their experience and their social culture (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). The primary emphasis is on identifying and narrating the significance of human experiences and actions (Fossey et al., 2002 as cited in Levers, 2013). So, I was able to generate knowledge about the social world as it is and continue to promote it through interaction and interpretation with the aid of this paradigm.

Research Design

The objective of this research was not only to study the existing behavior or practices of school headteacher in dealing with the matter of untouchability and discrimination but also to dig out the good practices of headteachers through which he can contribute towards bringing change in community members towards dealing with this problem. In order to conduct such research, I must engage the participants in dialogue with the goal of changing their perspective on social systems that deprive them of their intellectual and social needs (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). For this, I used ‘qualitative’ method of research. Using qualitative method has the benefit of producing rich, detailed information that preserves participant perspectives and offers a variety of contexts for comprehending the concept being studied (USC Libraries, 2020). Furthermore, it is difficult to quantify the values and emotions of people (Nel et al., 2018). Additionally, using a qualitative approach enabled me to address participants’ needs, circumstances and situations locally. Overall, it offered me a comprehensive perspective of the phenomena being studied (USC Libraries, 2020).

I applied interpretive inquiry as research method in this study as this is one of the types of qualitative method. Through this method, we seek to interpret the meanings, purposes and intentions that people give to their own actions and interactions with others (Given, 2008). Hence, as an interpretive researcher, I tried to study the perceptions and practices of headteachers in bringing change in attitude and belief of community people against Dalit discrimination. Similarly, interpretive inquiry emphasizes on human experience which cannot be separated from their constantly changing social and cultural environment (Morehouse, 2011). Hence, I considered to emphasize this study into Dalits experience while they have been discriminated in their rural setting and their view on how headteachers can contribute towards this issue. Also, I was focusing this study specifically in changing practice of rural community against Dalit discrimination. In doing so, interpretive research method has been best suitable method because it focuses on context- specific meanings, rather than seeking generalized meaning abstracted from particular contexts (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). Similarly, interpretive research design helped me to collect thick experience from my research participants as this design allowed me to craft the situation or to select research relevant settings, actors, events and documents while I was in the field (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). In addition to this, the system of symbols (e.g., language, visual images, etc.) are used to express and communicate meaning to oneself. Thus, interpretive inquiry was suitable for this study because it uses specific context, thick participants experiences and subjective interpretations.

Research Site and Participant Selection

My study is concentrated in the rural society of Nepal where caste discrimination to Dalits and untouchability practices are prevalent. So, I have selected a village in one of the rural municipalities of Khotang District as my research site purposively. I chose this village because I have been here for many times and each time I have been here, I have seen discrimination to Dalits in this village. Since my husband have worked here as local representative in the past, it was also convenient for me to access my research participants here. In addition to this, I chose this village as my research site because it was also convenient for my research participants to share their stories in their own personal space.

I have used purposive sampling method to select my research participant. Since, my study is related to Dalits discrimination and role of headteachers to fight

against such practices, I have selected three Dalit participants and three school headteachers. Five participants are from same village but one headteacher is from nearby school in same rural municipality, where students from this village go to study after their SEE.

In order to get lively experience and true information from my participants, I went to the home of three Dalit participants and respective schools of each headteacher. I have built good reputation in this village by doing some social service activities, so people in the village know me from beforehand. Also, since I married to a man originated from this village, I am considered as daughter in law of this village. So, I did not have to struggle to build rapport with my participants. However, I had phoned on beforehand to my participants to meet with them and took permission with them to interview them. Also, I had provided the letter of consent to the headteachers stating my topic of interview. This helped my participants to make up their mind and do some homework before the actual interview.

Brief Profile of Rural Village in Khotang

Khotang is one of the districts in Koshi Province of Nepal which consists of 10 municipalities among which 8 are rural municipalities (Aiselukharka Rural Municipality, 2019). The village that I have selected is in one of the rural municipalities which has seven wards. The village is one of the wards. This ward has total population of about 1591 female and 1734 male, among which Dalits constitutes three percent of total population (Data from the record of Ward Office, 2019). There is higher representation of Dalit communities in this village than other wards (Tamang, 2021 from personal communication). Majority of Rai and Tamang lives here along with some Sanyasi, Bhujel and few of Brahmin and Chettri (Tamang, 2021 from personal communication).

This village has two secondary schools, one basic school and three primary schools. Since there is no higher secondary school in this village, students from this village go to neighboring school in nearby village for higher studies. Some go to other cities but most of them prefer to go in high school of nearby village which is only high school in whole rural municipality.

I selected two headteachers from two secondary schools in this village and one headteacher from higher secondary school in nearby village, seeing the presence of Dalit students in these schools. As per the source, there are 21 Dalit students in first secondary school, 7 Dalit students in second secondary school in this village and 30

Dalit students in higher secondary school in nearby village. All these schools are community schools of same rural municipality.

Profile of Participants

As I have selected three Dalit participants and three headteachers as my research participants, I have provided pseudo names to these participants. The pseudo names are DP1, DP2 and DP3 for three Dalit participants and H1, H2, and H3 for three headteachers respectively.

Dalit Participant 1 – DP1

DP1 is a 27 years old male from Dalit community in this village. He is married and already a father of 7 years old girl and 1 year old boy. Occupation wise he is a tailor, which is a traditional occupation in his family. He is the youngest son of his father among three sons and the only one who is continuing the family business. It has been about one year since he has opened a tailoring shop in the marketplace of this municipality for better income opportunity and temporarily living there for good education for his daughter. He is educated up to SLC level and one of the active members in his community. He is also a board member of the local hydro -electricity project in his village. He has also very good interference in village politics. Now and then, he also gets involved in many community building activities. He is a very good candidate for my research study as he has much knowledge about this issue.

Dalit Participant 2- DP2

DP2 is a sixty-year-old lady, who is elected as a local Dalit representative of the ward from party UML in the latest election of 30th Baisakh, 2079. She is a permanent resident of this village. She has a husband and four children. They all are farmers in their village. She is not educated formally however; she has good knowledge of people and places due to her age and experience. Since she has been elected as local Dalit representative, she is participating in different programs run by ward and municipalities. She also meets different people and provide her service to the people in need.

Dalit Participant 3 – DP3

DP3 is a lady of 43 years old and a permanent resident of this village. She is a single Dalit lady with one boy of age 7 years and one girl of age 15 years, both are going to school and are clever in their studies. She owns a very small house and land so she works in others farm and does others household chores and earn her living. She

is not educated but as she is working in other people's place, she has a big network of people.

Headteacher 1- H1

H1 is a lady of age 55 years. She is a local resident of this village in Khotang. She belongs to a Rai Family. She has been headteacher of secondary school in Badel for two years. Before that she was a teacher in same school for 26 years. She has been in teaching profession for 30 years which includes two years teaching in different school in another ward. Her husband is also a teacher in the same school. This school has 195 students from ECD till Grade 10. She has done intermediate in education and she is a primary level teacher. She started in teaching profession by taking 10 months teaching service training. Similarly, she has also obtained TPD training. She is first lady principal in this school. She is very active and believes in team building. Being a local of the same area, she has very good relationship with different stakeholders of this school.

Headteacher 2 – H2

H2 is a man of age 55 years. He is a permanent resident of Biratnagar though he has been living in this rural municipality of Khotang for 26 years now. He has been a headteacher of higher secondary school in this rural municipality for 16 years and before that he had been teaching in this school for 10 years. He has been in teaching profession for 36 years already. He has done his M. A. in Political Science and B. Ed. in English. Similarly, he has done different trainings among which TPD training and Principal Management Training were basic trainings for his profession as headteacher. He is very kind and polite. Since, this school is in center of this rural municipality, different programs like dental camps, health camps, trainings are run in this school in co-ordination with different NGOs, ward and municipalities. Also, there are about 615 students in this school. Hence, as a headteacher of this school, he has better connection with many people and link with different NGOs, ward and municipalities.

Headteacher 3 – H3

H3 is about 52 years old man living in this village as a permanent resident here. He belongs to the Brahmin caste. He has been a headteacher in a secondary school for nine years and before that he was a teacher. It has been 20 years that he has started his career in teaching. He has done Masters in Education with major Nepali subject. There are 97 students in this school. He is a clever man.

Study Tool, Process of Fieldwork and Information Collection

I applied interpretive inquiry in my study and hence primary data is collected through interview. Along with interview, I have taken field notes and done direct observation.

Interview

Interview is one of the qualitative research tool in which questions are being asked and views are interchanged in order to collect information (George, 2023). There are different kinds of interview. With regards to this study, I took one to one interview to understand the key insights of the headteachers on this topic and to find what has been practiced so far. In this sense, the interview became more unstructured type with open ended questions using ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’. An advantage of one-to-one interview is that it is used to uncover the story behind a participant’s experiences and pursuing in depth information around a topic (Quad, 2016). Though it is quite time consuming (Formplus, 2020), open ended and unstructured type of interview provided me freedom and flexibility to generate information from participants in detail. So, one to one interview has been my key tool to this research.

The interview with my participants was guided by interview guidelines. While taking interview with my participants, I used my mobile phone to record the voice for keeping future records.

Since my participants were from my husband’s village, I took an assistance from my husband to arrange time from participants for one-to-one interview. He also supported me in rapport build up with the participants as well as understand their local context. This helped me to reduce biases from researcher sides as well as prevented me to become judgmental. Until I got deeper insight to this topic, I conducted follow up interviews with some key participants again and again through medium of telephone.

Field notes

While I was out in the field, I had my field notes together with me and whenever I confronted with any situation or event which I thought would serve in my study, I took a note on it. Similarly, while I was interviewing my participants face to face, then I also noted their expressions through field notes. This field notes helped me add value to my research study with additional information.

Observation

When I was out in the field, I also did observations. By using this method, researchers attempt to understand people's behavior and societies, by learning about their values, rituals, symbols, beliefs and emotions (Kangal, 2022). So, by doing observation, I learnt how headteachers behave with Dalits and others in their public sphere. Similarly, it helped me evaluate the activities of Dalits and headteachers on the basis of my research question. While doing observation, I used observation note to record the event.

Process of Information Analysis and Meaning Making

The information collected from interview need proper interpretation and generate correct meaning out of it. So, for this, I first transcribed all the raw data that I got from interviews in the same language which has been used to collect data i.e., in Nepali. This helped me make the transcription faster. Then, the field notes were studied carefully, time and again as per need, to code important information from them. To generate theme from the collected information, they were recoded. Some of the key insights available from previous literatures were also integrated. Then these generated themes and the key insights thus obtained were translated in English as English being the language for reporting. For translation, I used my own knowledge in most of the cases, for some words, I translated from 'google translate' and I also seek support from my friends to translate some phrases and words.

The information of the social phenomena thus collected were interpreted to generate the meaning of the study. Special consideration was given to understand the senses of the texts thus collected in the meaning making process.

Quality Standards

One of the strengths of this research is that it is qualitative research and for data collection, multiple data collection methods, i.e. data triangulation has been adopted. Denscombe (2007) stated that data triangulation facilitates the validation of the report (as cited in Gondwe, 2013). As for triangulation of sources, different participants like school headteachers and Dalits participants were interviewed at different points of time. Similarly, to avoid biases and not to become judgmental, my husband assisted me to analyze and understand the local context, making the study into analyst triangulation. This ultimately helped to increase credibility towards this research.

Likewise, various strategies to guarantee trustworthiness in informants while contributing data were applied such as making contract written document stating there will be no disclosure of the participant's identity. In addition, participants were motivated to be frank to share their experience and interviews were taken as normal conversation and in natural settings. This in return helped to develop consistency in the result and increase the reliability of the research.

On the other hand, the research was done for a longer period of time and continuous observation was made regarding the issue even before starting the research which helped to make this research findings relevant and valid.

Ethical Considerations

The conduct of any research study must be done with the utmost respect for people's rights, dignity and integrity (Gondwe, 2013). So, this study was also subjected to certain ethical issues which can be given as follows:

I provided the written consent form to my participants where I mentioned the purpose of my study. I collected those upon their signed consent. Also, I assured my participants that I would protect the privacy of the information thus collected and not to reveal the source of thus collected information orally. That is why, I did not use their original names while reporting. Similarly, I reassured the participants regarding the answers they provided would be treated as confidential and used only for academic purposes.

I also motivated the participants to take part in the knowledge constructions free of their will and I used their natural setting to generate information. I tried to create climate of comfort for this purpose. They were not harmed or abused both physically and psychologically during the conduction of this research.

Additionally, I tried to avoid becoming bias or judgmental in my narratives as far as possible and seek support to understand certain views in local context.

Finally, I honestly adhered to other ethical concerns as required by research guidelines of Kathmandu University.

CHAPTER IV
 ROLE OF HEADTEACHERS IN CHANGING PRACTICE AGAINST DALIT
 DISCRIMINATION IN RURAL COMMUNITY

This chapter presented the perceptions and practices of the participants which is thematized as per the nature of the information collected. The information from the experience of the participants, provided the key to the role of headteachers that they played or should be playing in changing practice of untouchability and discrimination to Dalits in the rural society. The roles are provided in different headings and sub-headings.

Role in Making Dalit Friendly School

When it comes to the role of headteacher, first thing we consider is about school and its environment. What is the condition of Dalit discrimination and untouchability like in the school? How does Dalit students feel in their learning environment? What kind of treatment is given to them? And, what has been school leaders doing in order to make school Dalit friendly? These were some queries which were answered when I interviewed my participants. As per the voice of headteachers, there is no discrimination and untouchability practices to the Dalits in their school. In the Government school system, there is a provision for scholarship to Dalit students (Bishwakarma, 2011) and in the law, discrimination and untouchability practices towards Dalits is punishable act (Nepal Law Commission, 2019). Because of this also, there may not have any such practices in the school. The experience of my participants also tells that no differentiation in behaviors and practices are made between Dalits and Non-Dalits students even if there is no such system or law regarding this. The perceptions and practices of the participants are explained in details as below.

Provide Facilities and Services to Dalit Students

With regards to the topic, headteachers expressed that there has not been any discrimination in providing services and facilities to the Dalit students in the school. Instead, they have got more facilities both from government level and school level. H1 indicated that, both girl and boy students from Dalit caste get scholarship from the government, while only girl students get scholarship from other caste. In her words,

There are different castes students. Despite, the service and facilities that we are providing to different castes students are same. We have not separated them as Dalits. We have behaved in same manner with all students. In addition, both girls and boys are getting scholarship from the government from this caste but in other caste, only girls are getting scholarship from the government. Whatever facilities are provided from the school, we have provided these equally to all students. We have not done any discrimination.

H2 has also the same opinion regarding providing services and facilities to the Dalits. He told that,

With regards to the facilities to Dalits, the state has provided four hundred rupees (NPR 400) to both male and female students as incentives upto Grade 10. Here in this school, we take three hundred rupees (NPR 300) as monthly fees in Grade 11 and Grade 12 with other students but we have made free monthly fee to the Dalit students. This is the facility we are providing to them for their better education. Also, as a Dalit student, they are free to use any materials and facilities available to use in the school, there has never been any discrimination.

According to Bishwakarma (2011), the literacy rate of Dalit community is only 33.3%, which is comparatively very lower than other castes such as Kayastha (82%), Thakali (75.6%), Brahmin (74.9 %), Newar (71.2 %) and Chhetri (60.1 %). Also, he wrote in his report that drop out situation is more frequent among Dalit caste than other groups. The reason to which is because of discrimination by their teachers, peers and management committee. Similarly, because of their financial condition, they are compelled to work at their home or outside somewhere, which makes them not attend school or leave in the middle.

Hence, providing discrimination free facilities and services from school is a way that headteacher can promote education in Dalit children. Likewise providing incentives and extra facilities and scholarships to Dalit students can be an initiative that headteachers can take to discourage drop outs among Dalit students.

Encourage Dalit Children to Involve in Different Activities - Give Priority

Though ‘caste discrimination and untouchability’ is a punishable offense and in school, such activities are discouraged, Dalit students still feel isolated among their peers. Recently, there has been news of suicide of a Dalit student of engineering in India, who was said to feel isolated from his peers because of his caste (Thomas,

2023). So, to make them feel equal and included among all students, school environment should be open and friendly to them. Considering this fact, H3 shared his experience on how this function in his school,

When in a community or in a group, if only same caste people are concentrated then it is very difficult to bring improvements in ongoing traditions. But if the community have mix of people, then change is possible and hence there will be quick development. Here in our school, we have seen that all children have blended very well. They (Dalit students) also participate in extra-curriculum activities. We have involved them in all kinds of programs. We have made them such an environment where they also take initiative themselves to take part in activities. This may be the reason that we have different results here. Among seven Dalit children here, three of them stood in first rank and one in second, in their academic result. Others are also good in their study.

Hence, it is found that when the Dalit children are given priority and involved them in different activities, their performance will also improve. So, headteacher's role is to make the school environment inclusive towards Dalit students.

According to the literature, Dalits are backward to benefit themselves with the facilities in the society. As per H3, there are two main reasons behind their backwardness: the first is that, they are not given chance by the society and second is that, they themselves do not take initiative to come forward. So, in his view, what headteachers or teachers can do, is to give first priority to these children who are backward in activities in schools. These children should be given an opportunity of leadership in different activities as well as reward them for their initiatives which help them to be active from next time. He opined,

We should give first priority to them (Dalits) in every communal activity, or student activities or personal activities. For example, in school, if they are playing any game then place them in the front of the game. Let them be leader of that game and after that reward them immediately. So, when they are given priority and when they are rewarded for their leadership, they become active from tomorrow. This is one way. Also, not only in speech but practically, they should be involved. For example, if there is any rally from school then let the Dalit children do the leadership and let the teachers help only if they are not capable to do the task. In this way, they will automatically be successful.

In this way, encouraging Dalit children to take the lead and involving them in different activities will help them build self-confidence and hence, they will come forward and mix with other children in a good way.

In this respect, H2 said that they are serious about this matter and it is really very important to bring such types of programs in school which encourages Dalit children to come forward.

Promote Social Justice Education in School

Most of the time, children are segregating other children on the basis of castes, religion, gender, position and place, knowingly or unknowingly. The reason to this is because they are influenced by their adults and learn from them. They do not understand what they are doing is good thing or not. They are not aware of consequences. They just follow the ongoing trend of the society. In this respect, H3 stated that,

Dalits have become Dalit not by themselves. They are made Dalits by other caste. This is because of lack of consciousness in people. So, to aware them education is must.

So, in order to aware the pupils in school, there is need of special education, i.e., social justice education. Social justice education is a process to educate student about the disparities and inequalities which exist in the society and to encourage them to take action to work against it which helps to meet people's need in an equitable manner (Clausen, 2017).

During the interview with the participants, it is found that H2 has been practicing social justice education in his school. He said that he uses to provide lectures to students and teachers about non- discriminative practices in the school. With this respect, he shares as,

Time and again, I, myself go to the classes and tell them that when we enter into this school as a student or as a teacher, we should not do any kind of discrimination to the children on the basis of castes, religion, language, gender, those living in remote village or in the market area, have's and have's not. In my view, all our students are equal and that is what I have been briefing to all students as well. There is no such activity in our school. In case of Dalit students also, they do not feel that they are Dalits and others are dominating them because of their castes. I don't think they feel it like that here.

So, in this way, there is a role of headteacher to promote social justice education in the school. They should promote that all are equal and everyone should work for each other's need in an equal basis. If they found any discriminative practices by students or teachers then proper counseling should be provided to them so that they actually understand that there is no higher caste and lower caste and what exists is just a mankind in this world.

Demonstrate Discrimination Free Activities in School

Action speaks louder than words. Like this saying, on interviewing my participants, the practice of discrimination free activities in school is found to be very important in order to actually rooted out discrimination and untouchability from the school and also in society. In this respect, DP1 suggested that,

In the leadership of Headteacher, there should be different trainings to the teachers in school regarding how to end caste discrimination. This should be practice strictly in school and made effective like they do with other trainings such as curriculum development training and quality education training. If they do so, then there is a chance to change the existing society.

Unlike the idea of training in school, story of exemplary practice is shared by H3, in his school like this,

Our teachers in my school don't do any discrimination towards Dalit. Instead, we have a teacher in our school who married a Dalit girl and set example of non-discrimination. We have also made easier to his situation. We did not make any issue to this action and did not say anything to him. And another thing, we sit together and eat together when we are in meetings and some parties.

As students learn from the actions of their adults, this is a great thing to learn from the teachers in this school. Likewise, H1 also shared that there is same tap for Dalit and other students and they also drink water from the hand of their Dalit students. They do not care about caste in school.

Observation 1: Date 7th April, 2023

In a result and prize distribution ceremony of a school from H1 in this village in Khotang, all the parents both from Dalit students and others were placed together. There are the highest number of Dalit students studying in this school. Both Dalit students and other caste students were to receive the prizes and no discrimination

was done in providing the prizes. Similarly, those who won the prizes were provided with red 'tika' from the same plate.

After the result and prize distribution ceremony, there was a parent- teachers meeting and, in the meeting, all the parents and teachers were asked for suggestions on improving quality education in school and increasing benefit to the students there. Everyone, irrespective of the caste, was asked for their suggestions and all the good suggestions were valued equally.

Hence, demonstrating such activities in school create harmonious environment for Dalits in school, so, headteachers should really exhibit such discrimination free practices in school and make other teachers and students to do so as well.

Role in Creating Awareness Among People in Society

In the scenario of rural society, many discriminative activities are happening towards Dalits, despite the existence of law against caste discrimination and untouchability in the constitution. They are still prohibited to enter into the temple and use the main tap to get drinking water. They are not allowed to enter into other's kitchen, in some cases, they are not allowed into other's house as well. They need to sit outside separately. When there is birthday party, gatherings and weddings then they are separated and don't let them join the big feast together with other guests. Limitations are set for them that they cannot touch the food. Also, many people do not eat food which are touched by Dalits in the village. In this regard, DP2, shared her experience as,

There was a training in village and we all parents of different castes from school participated in the training. In the training, they served tea. We took the tea but there were many who did not want the tea. They said they have headache and stomachache and they had several other reasons. But something clicked on my mind that we were sitting in same floormat and because of this, they did not want to take the tea served together with us or the tea which is touched by us.

Hence, such discrepancy is seen in the society. Some reasons for the continuation of such activities are found from the interview of the participants, like, continuation of the culture, lack of self-confidence, fear from society and blind faiths and superstitions. However, the core reason behind all the reasons seemed to be lack of awareness and proper education among the people. Thus, it is very important that

people of the society are educated properly to create awareness against these things. It can be further explained as below.

Awareness Against the Bad Culture

Discrimination and untouchability act has been the outcome of culture in Nepali society. When a child is born in Dalit family then from small age, they have been taught not to enter into others home, not to go to the common tap for drinking water and follow the practices which has been continuing from ages from their elders. They have been following these practices without knowing the specific reason for them. The children from higher castes also copy the activities from their elders and become superior in-front of Dalits from early age. So, these activities have been passed from one generation to another and become a culture in long run. Some people even take this culture as their responsibility and wish to continue the trend. With this respect, DP3 expressed her view as,

We (Dalits and other castes) are not in same level. If somebody say that we are in same level then also we cannot accept them, because, these customs are brought by our forefathers and we are obliged to follow that. To stay separately outside and eat separately.

In this way, one's custom and culture have great influence in people. H3 opined that

There is lack of awareness in people that they should not discriminate among people. But this awareness is lagging because they are brought up in bad culture, their whole family has been nurtured like that and hence the same learning from their family has been passed from one to another.

Observation 2 - Date 7th April, 2023

There is a Dalit boy of age around 6 years, living with same Rai family where I am also living when I visit this village. He mostly follows me wherever I go in the village because I like to give him sweets and candies. So, when I went to interview H1 at her school, he also followed me in the school. He came together with me till the doorstep of main entrance to principal's room but he did not come inside. This is strange to observe that even when I called him inside and even on H1's invitation, he did not come inside. He waited for me patiently outside the principal's room.

After, we have finished the interview with headteacher, I went to the house of DP2, who is a Dalit local representative of the ward. He followed me there also. But there, he entered into the common room without any invitation.

So, it is very important to break this chain of culture between people, which is possible only when the upcoming generation or existing generation understand that the discriminative practices are really bad practices and they are not bringing any good to any people.

As per H1, she sees it very difficult to break the chain of culture in people. Being in the village and following her own Rai culture, she said,

If we look into this modern age in urban areas, the culture there is different. The people there do not care who is from which caste. All are equal from their point of view. But, to look into our culture, in this village, there is a problem here with castes system. We have different rules like they (Dalits) should not enter into our house and touch the fireplace and likewise. Even if we forcefully ask people not to discriminate among Dalits and others, it seems not possible. We can bring Dalits into our house, it might be possible however to ask other people to take them (Dalits) inside their houses saying all are equal in society, is not possible.

She further opined that,

I think it is not possible to go to each household and ask them not to discriminate people with regards to castes, because it will take very long time to make them understand about these things. But of course, changing thinking of people takes time.

She also claimed that it is more difficult to change the thinking of old generation people than young generation. She narrated the story of Michael Darji (name changed), an incident of elderly Dalit, which happened in her life with regards to caste discrimination. She said,

Once there was a Dalit man called Michael Darji. We requested him to enter our house but he denied. He said, "it has been so many years that I have followed my culture, now I won't enter in somebody's house". We really asked him a lot to enter but he did not want to come in and he didn't. He actually felt for his culture.

This means even if there is an attempt to change the culture of untouchability in the society, the people with old thinking may not let it happen.

H2 has also the same opinion regarding that, it will be very difficult to change the old generations and the people with old thinking. But he also said that,

It is difficult to bring change in people's faith and belief system which has been rooted from years in this society, however as a Headteacher, we should try our best to lit the light of awareness in people living in this society as much as we can. It's not easy to change old people and people with old thinking but as far as we can get, we should spread that we all are equal. We should play this role in this society.

In this sense, headteachers have role to play in creating awareness in people in the society. As per H3, headteachers are one part of the society and they have responsibility to bring improvements in the society. He said that they have responsibility to make people understand what is truth. In his words,

I, my family or my team, we are learnt people in the village and that is why, there is a hope with us in the village. We are responsible persons in our village and the people think that they do not have understanding but we have. So, what we need to do is that we need to make them understand the reality, the truth. If we tell them wrong things just because they do not know anything then the generation will be pushed 50 years back. So, as a Headteacher, it's our responsibility also to bring improvements in the village. Not only in the school, if we tell them something good and right then the whole society will listen to us. So, we are a member of this society.

So, as a learnt person, headteachers have role to influence people by imparting knowledge about ongoing bad culture with regards to Dalit discrimination and bring changes and improvements in the deeds of society.

DP1 also has the similar opinion regarding the headteachers' leadership. As per his saying, headteachers are the change agent of the society, and if they work against Dalit discrimination and untouchability then that will be a success. He also provided some ways on how headteachers can work against it. This is provided as,

I take teachers as the main social change agent, especially headteachers. If they run a campaign against Dalit discrimination and untouchability then it will be a success. The government has made the law but it is us, we villagers in our society who need to implement it. So, it is us, we villagers who needs to

improve and the responsibility to improve us goes to the headteachers along with the whole school team. In the upcoming days, if they do some activities like calling parents meeting, doing program for students like street dramas, some seminars and conferences and take this issue in ground level in a positive way and run good awareness bringing activities then I hope that this system of Dalit untouchability and discrimination will end till some extent.

Hence, it means that headteachers as leaders, are capable of changing the cultural thinking of people by creating awareness in them by running different awareness program or anti- discrimination campaign.

Being the Role Model in the Society

It is easier to say in words than actually putting the same thing into action. Making things happen needs hard work and dedication. Transformational leaders also encourage actions that help the team to achieve their goals and their vision of success, motivating followers by appealing to their own self-interest (Needle, 2021). So, headteachers as transformational leaders need to implant trust and be loyal to their followers. They need to be ethical and actually perform the activities against the culture of discrimination and untouchability in the society. They need to be role model in the society.

In this age, many people, even in rural society, know that any discrimination on the basis of caste is against our law. However, Dalits are still not able to be benefitted of this law. From the study, it is found that Dalits lack self-confidence. The headteachers complaint that they do not take any initiatives against these practices and they themselves backed off even if somebody else provide them such opportunity to move forward and be like normal people. Even DP1 agrees that they lack self-confidence. He said,

May be because of our childhood habit or may be because our father and mother taught us such behaviors from early age or maybe we have imprinted bad behaviors from people from early days, we feel difficult to go against such discriminatory practices. To get involved in some groups, to enter there (inside somebody's house), to go in there and to enjoy together with other friends (in a party), let's say, we do not have that confidence. It feels that something wrong will happen or I feel that I am doing some kind of mistake.

In this way, lack of self confidence in Dalits, is also prohibiting themselves to enjoy their rights of being free citizens.

Likewise, fear in people, is also observed as hindrance to abolish caste discrimination and untouchability from the rural society. There are two kinds of fear. The first is the fear of society and elders. This fear is seen both in the higher caste people and Dalits. The higher caste people, if they let the Dalits enter into their house or in their kitchen or behave same as other people then they are afraid what will society say to them. They fear if they need to be isolated from the society. Similarly, the elderly people who have same old concepts of untouchability and discrimination will be angry with them. H1 said that “if we allow Dalits to enter in our house and eat inside and if our elders knew about it then they will be very angry with us and they will even leave eating from our kitchen”. Similarly, Dalits fear that if they cross their boundaries then they will get humiliation and punishment from others. Their whole activities are influenced by this thought. DP3 shared her one of the incidents on how she was afraid when she was asked to get in the house to perform household chores. She recalled:

I was called in Anna's (name changed) mother house (Rai family) to work. There she asked me to paint all the floor with cow-dung and mud. She also asked me to paint the kitchen floor. I was so afraid to do the job. I did it with my left hand and ran away as soon as possible. I did not touch the fireplace though. I was afraid if somebody sees me doing the job. So, I even closed the door while doing it.

While telling this story, I can feel her fear in her face. She was bit excited and bit reluctant to tell this story.

Just like the fear for elders and the society, the second fear is related to blind faith and superstition. This is fear for God. This is mostly prevalent in Dalits. It is said that there is God in the fireplace (Agena) of Rai and Tamang people's home. If this fireplace is touched by low caste people, then the God will get angry and they will curse the people. As a result, they will get sick and to some extent die of curse. Because of this fear, Dalits themselves are so afraid to take initiative to go inside the kitchen of Rai and Tamang people's home. While talking about untouchability, DP3 expressed her interest that even if it is free to go inside others home and enter into the kitchen, they will not go there because they are afraid of getting the curse and get sick. She was made to believe this so much that she even gave proof of it. She told:

My maternal uncle's sister Mona (name changed) entered into Brian's (name changed) house (Rai family) and ate meat inside there as a result she died. Her body tear down. So, I am very afraid of it.

In this way, the fear in people is not letting this untouchability and discrimination practice to disappear from the society.

Since lack of confidence and fear in people are hindering society to change, it is very essential for the leaders of the society to work towards creating confidence in Dalits and to drive away fear from the people to change the scenario. So, to the question of how this is possible, DP1 suggested that,

As for headteachers, they should start with themselves. With respect to this village, there is a Dalit community, so the learnt person like headteacher should go there and start themselves, eating there. They should ask for water to drink from Dalit hand, they should ask to eat food made from Dalits, they should show that there is nothing wrong in doing these activities. When learnt person like headteachers have done such activities then positive message will flow in between parents of the school.

Hence, DP1 thinks that change should be brought in from headteachers activities.

DP2 also opined that headteachers should play role in creating same level in people and there should not be hierarchy in caste system. When asked how can headteachers maintain the same level in people, then she said that

To maintain same level of people, we all should be united, isn't it? We should be united and do not follow discriminative activities. Headteachers cannot tell us to go far away and don't come near.

Hence, there is an expectation from headteachers to actually perform the anti-discriminative activities in front of people. When asked, if they actually do these anti-discriminative activities then, DP1 told that,

Though in school, during educational programs they publicize that they should not follow discriminative activities and discrimination on the basis of castes is punishable act, they do not practice in real life situation. they are like other villagers who actually cares about upper castes and lower castes and follow activities which are followed by other villagers.

This means that headteachers are only putting their principles about untouchability and discrimination in words and may not be visibly practicing in the society.

When a question is asked to DP2 and DP3, if there is any example of headteacher in this perspective, both are unable to give reply to this question. Both have an expression of not knowing the answer. They thought a little and both have same answer to it which was, “I don’t go to school so often so I don’t know much about it.”

This signifies that the participants also did not find any attempt that headteachers have made in practicing non discriminating activities in the society.

But, it’s not that headteachers are not doing anything from their side, its only that it is not visible. H2 shared his experience as,

I have never discriminated as Dalits or other castes. My main residence is in Biratnagar, and in my neighborhood, there lives a Dalit sister. She comes to our house and we go to her house. We don’t do that (discriminative and untouchability practices).

Likewise, H1 also shared her experience as,

In today’s scenario, when we are outside of our house and we are together with Dalits then we sit together and eat together. There is no discrimination. There is equality. But it is bit difficult inside our house.

So, it seems that headteachers have actually started to perform against these discriminative practices in the society however, it is mostly outside of the main stereotype society. It is still challenge for them to take Dalits inside their kitchen or to go to Dalits and eat in their kitchen. When a probing question was asked to H3 that if he goes to Dalit and eat from them then will it be fearful for him then in return, he replied that there will be some fear but if one is independent then such fear can be overcome. In his words,

Yes, there will be fear but it is like this, I ate, I will be afraid suppose, but I need to be self-sufficient. If I am independent, nothing will happen to me if I ate from them. If somebody pointed out me then I will take that risk myself. I won’t quarrel or fight with that person but I will spread my idea of non-discriminating activities and after some day, I will be successful. For that, we need to consistently be in it.

He further added that,

For example, today I did this, people pointed out me and disdained me from the society. I should not be hopeless. Those who do not have education or are not aware of fact, they will disdain. Those who did the right work they will get result at the end from somewhere. For that, one need to get going consistently.

In this way, H3, inspired others to follow the right track to bring changes in the society. It will be challenging but sooner or later it will get result. Though H1 said that it is difficult in her culture but she is optimistic that change can be brought too. At the end, she said that,

You asked me and I said it is not possible to do but if we try very hard then it is also not impossible. Today, they will enter in my house, tomorrow in some other's house and we can do that. Actually, we all humans are same, only our gender is male and female but we all are same. These castes discrimination is only culture made by our ancestors. Otherwise, we all are equal. Everyone should get their rights equally.

So, leader like H1 can change the mindset of the people in the society by showcasing her positive attitudes and deeds towards Dalits in the rural community.

Some Critical Observations/ Findings

Taking consideration of all the narratives, it is found that the role of headteachers in changing ongoing practice of caste-based discrimination and untouchability is undeniable. Their role in making school environment Dalit friendly and spreading social justice education among people of the community while creating awareness in people against such bad practices is really change oriented leadership role that none other than headteachers can perform in the society. However, there have been some narratives and observations, which depict that headteachers are not sufficiently displaying impactful leadership role in addressing caste-based discrimination and untouchability issues in rural school and community. This statement is better exemplified by the reaction of DP2 when she was asked about what headteachers can do in this aspect. She did not want to talk about headteachers' role at school and she shifted the story by saying that she does not go to school because there is no such work to go to school. When probing question was asked to her if her children go to school or not then in reply she said,

My children have already left school. Its not that they have completed their study but they left in the middle. My children did not want to go to school. They did not want to study. If they wanted to study then parents would have

gone to school to update about their study. But now, I do not know anything about the school.

This statement of DP2 signifies two things, one is that Dalit children not going to school may have their own personal traits and another is that, there must be some issue in the school that did not appeal the Dalit children to go to school and finish their study. In this situation, headteachers should have taken major step in bringing the children back to school. They must have done table talks and investigated the reasons on why children do not want to complete their study. They should have made some effort to work with their parents and creating environment for children to return to school. But conversating with DP2, I did not feel that there had been anything like that. The participant looked so much uninterested to talk about school and school headteacher. She was responding to her outer environment mostly and talking to her husband and son rather than to the talk with me when it actually started talking about the headteachers at school. This shows that there has been some gap between the school/ school headteacher and the Dalit parents. DP2 being local representative of the ward is still saying that she does not know anything about the school and not willing to talk about the matter also depicts that school may not be as welcoming and informative as it is thought to be for Dalits parents and representatives. Same response was obtained from DP3, when she was asked about the school headteacher. She also was speechless when asked about the roles. When question was simplified and asked if headteachers differentiate the children by saying they are Rai and the other are Dalits then she replied she does not know about this. She also said that she does not go to school even though her daughter is studying in the same school. So somewhere, the school leadership is lagging behind to outreach such community.

Despite the fact that headteachers made some statements that they do not practice discrimination and untouchability to Dalits and provide examples in support of this, these examples are more inclined towards their time they spent in their urban setting. In rural setting, the case is more sensitive and headteachers miss out their role to advocate for Dalits in their community. When DP1 was asked if there is any example that headteacher has come to them and eat in their house on their invitation then he told that,

There is no record of any headteacher or teacher, who have come to us directly, stayed with us in our house and eat together with us.

So, the headteacher are not able to become role model yet in their rural setting. Though they have built their philosophies against such discriminative activities, even though they provide speech in educational programs that such discriminative activities are punishable by law, somewhere in their private space, it is found that they are still hesitant to completely advocate for Dalits. This is why DP1 in his statement told that headteachers also follow the culture of untouchability and behave discriminatively with them like other people in the village.

Similarly, while interviewing with headteachers, I could see how serious they were regarding the Dalit issue raised before them. They provided positive answers to my question with regards to role of headteacher in bringing change in the society. However, I did not see their excitement level going up. This made me feel that I have imposed them with one more responsibility in addition to other responsibilities of being headteacher. This left me with the question that if headteachers would take any initiative themselves in addressing the issue of Dalits from their side in their future activities.

Compatibility of Roles with Four Dimension of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is the process of inspiring change and empowering followers to reach higher goals, improve themselves, and enhance organizational procedures (Wahab et al., 2014). The ability, engagement, and commitment of followers to support the leaders in achieving their objectives are all impacted by transformational leadership (Moolenaar, Daly & Slegers, 2012 as cited in Khalil & Chaudhry, 2021). Headteachers as transformational leader is directly connected to the school and its environment. They are in charge of supervising various teaching and educational patterns. The success of a school depends on the extent to which the mission is thrust upon their shoulder, their personality and capacity for getting along with various facets of society (Ansar et al., 2018). Because of which, the headteachers must work to create the social environments that supports the educational activities they lead.

On the basis of the narratives obtained from the study, headteachers role as transformational leader in the society is compared. It is found that headteachers role are compatible with the four dimensions of the transformational leader. This is further presented as below.

Idealized influence attributes to the capacity of leader to motivate people in a positive way and become a role model. With their charisma, they instill high level of

respect, confidence and trust in others (Khalil & Chaudry, 2021). So, with this ability, headteachers set a clear vision in the society to change the existing practice of untouchability and discrimination. They set an example in their community by behaving equally to all and practicing anti discriminating activities themselves.

Intellectual stimulation implies that leaders encourage innovation and creativity by challenging a group's normal beliefs or views. They encourage critical thinking and problem solving in order to improve the organization (Farnsworth et al., 2020). Hence, headteachers as leaders examines the traditional practice of untouchability and discrimination with scientific reasons. They instill the knowledge regarding existing law against untouchability and caste-based discrimination. They create awareness in people and stimulate their minds to become creative in bringing new practice to deal with problems of untouchability in their society as well as realize the importance of being united in the society against the bad practices.

Individual consideration denotes leaders giving personal attention to each member of the group (Khalil & Chaudry, 2021). They act as a coach, guide, and advisor to everyone and encourage them to achieve goals that benefits both the followers and the organization (Farnsworth et al., 2020). So, headteachers, in this sense, try to flourish social justice education in the society. They try to educate each student, teachers, staffs and stakeholders of the school about ongoing practices of untouchability and discrimination and guide them to eradicate the problem. They could organize door to door awareness bringing program and relay positive message to the society.

Inspirational motivation describes leaders to inspire their followers to commit to the organization's vision (Farnsworth et al., 2020). They motivate and support their followers by addressing their difficulties and need. They foster team spirit to achieve their objectives (Khalil & Chaudry, 2021). So, headteachers motivate his followers to act against existing bad practice of untouchability and discrimination by supporting them in the cause and creating feeling of 'I am there' to his followers. They inspire Dalits to voice for themselves and secure a better position in the society by the means of education. For this, headteachers manage extra scholarship programs to Dalit children and provide discrimination free facilities in the school. They can even organize reward system to those Dalits who do better in different stages of their learning.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the narratives of the participants regarding the role of headteachers against the existing practice of untouchability and discrimination towards Dalits in the rural community of Nepal. Stories from both headteachers and Dalit participants have been included where headteachers' role is studied within and outside school periphery. Starting from the school itself, headteachers role is seen irreplaceable in making school Dalit friendly. For this headteachers are found to be responsible for ensuring discrimination free facilities and services to the Dalit students. Similarly, headteachers have role to play in encouraging Dalit students to come forward, give priority to them and make them able to take leadership position. Headteachers are responsible to make school environment inclusive towards Dalits. Similarly, they are to promote social justice education in school. Besides school, headteacher have role in creating awareness among people against bad culture, superstitious beliefs and blind faiths. For this, headteachers should influence people to see the reality and make aware of the truth behind people's act of discrimination and untouchability. From the stories, it is also found that headteachers as a leader, should demonstrate discrimination free practices themselves and be a role model in the society. Finally, the theoretical connection of headteachers' role with transformational leadership is made in this chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTION

In this chapter, thorough discussion on the matter of Dalit discrimination is presented based on the findings and interpretations of the information received from the research participants. The role of headteachers is discussed on the basis of two themes which are: Headteacher's role as a school leader and headteacher's role as a community leader. The role of headteachers is also compared with the transformational leadership role. Finally, conclusion and implications are made providing brief reflection of the research journey.

Discussion

Caste based discrimination and untouchability practices are still prevalent in the rural community of Nepal. There is no doubt that headteachers as a learnt personality and leader in the community, have role to play in bringing change in the society with regards to these practices. As per the findings, the role of the headteachers is discussed as school leader and role as community leader.

Role as School Leader

While interviewing the headteachers, their statement and their body language saying that they do not do any kind of discrimination to Dalits, shows that they are mentally aware that these discriminative and untouchability practices are not good and should not be practiced in the society. However, only keeping their knowledge limited to themselves is not enough. Headteachers have role to play in bringing awareness about Dalit discrimination and untouchability to the whole society. They should start from their own school. Headteachers as a leader in school, contribute to the development of the educational program and social climate that teachers and students must follow (Headteacher Job Description, n.d.). So, in this term, headteachers can bring special programs for Dalit students and parents. A very good example to it is the social justice education which is seen to be practiced by Headteacher 2 in his school. But only briefing the students in their classroom and saying that we should not discriminate people on the basis of castes, gender, area, have's and have's not, is not enough. In the leadership of headteachers, very intensive programs should be conducted in the school specifically regarding untouchability and caste – based discrimination. These programs should not be limited to students only

but also to the teachers and parents or to all stakeholders of the school. As Participant 1 advised, street dramas, door to door awareness program could be conducted. Social justice education can be put in the local curriculum and special training could be provided to the teachers with regards to it. In Nepal, 21st of Jestha is taken as the national day for “Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and Untouchability” (Bhattarai, 2022). However, very few people know about this in Nepal and very few news in media is heard about the activities happened in this day. So, headteachers should take an initiative to celebrate this national day by organizing different activities in school. One can organize awareness bringing program or consultation programs in school or in society. Similarly, reward distribution program or program to felicitate Dalits students and parents can be organized on the same day to mark this day. Banners and pamphlets could be printed and distributed. The issue of Dalit discrimination and untouchability is like ray of fire in the forest which grows silently but takes destructive look in the society. So, to kill this fire, as much publicity is required as possible so that the issue is well known to people in society and they understand that this social disparity should be abolished from their society. This responsibility of publicizing about Dalit discrimination and untouchability should be taken by headteachers of schools as they could mobilize the manpower and resources of the schools.

It is a good initiative from Government that each Dalit students get NPR. 400 annually in addition to free scholarship they get. This motivates Dalit parents to send their children to school and get education instead of sending their children to work for earning their living. Budhathoki (2013), in his research wrote that scholarship programs helped poor Dalit people to minimize the cost of schooling. He further wrote that it has helped to increase the number of school enrolment in the community. So, it is the responsibility of headteachers to proper and timely management of scholarship fund to the Dalit students. With regards to the scholarship program, the scholarship provided to the Dalit students in Grade 11 and Grade 12, in the school of Headteacher 2, is also an appreciable activity. This helps Dalit students receive higher education. As education plays a most important role in the overall process of development such as social advancement and economic improvement (Bishwakarma, 2009), it is very important for Dalit children to obtain proper education. So, ensuring scholarship opportunities for Dalit students by headteachers is a very good step in the field of Dalit education.

Likewise, the headteacher is in charge of everything that occurs in or around the school and is accountable for it. He must give the necessary instructions and ensure that they are followed properly (Kashyap, 2015). In this sense, headteachers can strictly prohibit any discriminating behaviors from both teachers and students to Dalits in their school. Despite in the interview, headteachers claimed that there are not any discriminating practices in the school and Dalits may not feel that they are discriminated, there should be inspection of these activities by headteachers in direct or indirect way. The research made by Bishwakarma (2009), examined the challenges faced by Dalit children in Nepal's education. According to him, discriminatory practices in schools, including discriminatory behavior from teachers and classmates have led to the feelings of exclusion. So, despite being good students, many struggle to achieve their goals due to these obstacles. As per Bishwakarma (2009), for Dalit students, overcoming these obstacles and achieving educational goal are two tasks at the same time, which is different than those of average students who receives an education free from social or psychological pressure. Hence, as a school leader, headteacher should ensure that there are no such obstacles to Dalit children in their schools. Strict control system should be made and provision of fine and punishment could also be introduced in the school rules if anybody found to practice such discriminating practices. The school environment should be pure and free from any kind of discrimination and hence at ease for Dalit students and parents, and hence, headteachers should be responsible for maintaining such environment in the school.

Role as Community Leader

Teachers play crucial role in society as they foster the social, intellectual and psychological growth of the children. They help to mold the mind of the future generations (Editor, 2023). Headteacher, who is the head of all teachers, comes with more important responsibilities. In addition to the expertise as teacher, they must have strong and influential presence within school and its community. As per Pervejsek (2017), one of the responsibilities of headteacher is to build strong bonds and positive relationships with individuals and groups from the local community. However, it seemed from the study that the headteachers from the community schools in village did not seem to be visibly involved with the community thereby. Both Participant 2 and Participant 3 responded that they are unaware of the activities performed by headteachers. This predicted that headteachers there have not done any impactful activity in the community yet. Though all the headteachers claimed that they do not

do any discrimination, their activities need to be seen out in the community so that the locality can learn from their activities. Not only in the public sphere, they should act regularly against oppressions and social injustice in their private sphere as well. Participant 1 claimed that headteachers also follow the same culture of untouchability and discrimination as others follow in their personal space. So, when there is no discrimination and untouchability practices in the principles of headteachers but unchanged attitude towards continuation of the bad culture, it is difficult to build trusting relationship with the community. So, it is very important that headteachers show knowledge together with similar practice towards the issue of non-discrimination and untouchability, so as to create trusting environment with all the stakeholders.

There is a challenge to headteachers while voicing for Dalits in their society. As mentioned in the findings, headteachers, themselves have fear of being abandoned in the society. Not only this, they even feel challenged to bring change in thinking of elder generations. So, in this condition, headteachers should gather the courage to voice for the right thing in the society. They can even take support of like-minded people in the society and unite for the great deeds.

Headteachers are the change makers in the society and people have expectations with them. As narrated by Participant 1, Dalits have a feeling that if headteachers come to them and drink or eat from them without being afraid of the consequences then positive message will flow in the society. So, in this respect, headteacher can be a role model for the society. When headteachers visibly start eating from Dalits hand, allowing Dalits to enter their kitchen and give same level as they give to others, and nothing happens to them then people in the community will encounter the truth of life. Their fear because of superstitions and blind faith will decrease.

Likewise, headteachers can lead by advocating people that there are not any scientific reasons to discriminate people with regards to caste. They can prioritize educating their students, teachers, parents and school community about the law and help promote lasting change by fighting against this systemic injustice. Additionally, they can lead by example with direct action, encouraging the followers to become advocates themselves. When community people get knowledge about the bias and oppression happening in their community and find no reason to do so, change can be felt gradually in the community.

Role as Transformational Leader

Change is inevitable. Though it is not felt immediately, there is gradual shift in mindsets which offers a new lens to view social pattern and cultural norms (Stewart, 2023). Some changes alter only individual lifestyle choices while some have life-changing impact in a group or community. As per Stewart (2023), societal change is powerful when collective energy propels through union of different individuals. As per Ugochukwu (2023), it is the transformational leadership which inspire team members to work together as a single unit rather than many individual parts to realize overall success and bring changes. So, headteachers as transformational leader can unite and guide all the students, teachers, parents and all other stakeholders together in bringing change in practice of discrimination and untouchability in their rural community.

From the study, the role of the headteacher is found to perfectly blend with the transformational leadership attributes. The headteacher can be a role model in their community by practicing discriminative free activities himself. They set a vision of fair society for all and for this they can communicate with each member of their community. They lead the community people by inspiring and motivating them to walk the walk. They instill knowledge, create awareness and support them to avoid such practices. All these roles are compatible with the four dimensions (idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and individual consideration) of transformational leadership.

On contrary, in the study, I found that the headteacher, who are said to be leader for the transformation of their community, also feel the fear of social isolation while bringing the new concept in the society. The transformational leaders, they risk to hamper their relationship with people with their new thought. As per the finding, headteachers fear of hampering their relation with elderly people with traditional concept about untouchability and caste-based discrimination when they allow Dalits inside their houses. So, transformation leaders must also consist of high patience and resilience to such fear. For example, if headteacher have created the vision of creating discrimination free society then he should be adamant to his thought and inspire others as well to walk in his path. He should not compromise in his mission for any fear of social isolation or greed of something else.

Conclusion

Based on the research question, the role of headteacher in changing existing practice of untouchability and caste- based discrimination in the rural community, has been studied. Information from both headteachers and Dalits participants were collected for the purpose of the study.

Headteachers, as leader of school can play vital role in bringing change in society. First of all, they can play role in making school environment Dalit friendly. They should ensure no discrimination activities in and around school. Since education is the roadway to self-development socially and economically, headteachers should make sure that all Dalit children get to study in school by proper and timely management of scholarships to Dalit students. Similarly, they can provide extra services and facilities to Dalit students in order to bring them forward in the society. Headteachers should also make effort in providing social justice education in school so that teachers, students and other stakeholders get to understand about existing social biases and oppressions. Besides, headteacher being a member of community can lead the community in bringing change in untouchability and discriminative practices by bringing awareness in the society. They can bring awareness against the bad culture and superstitions. They can model the anti-discriminative behaviors towards Dalits and set example in the society.

However, it is not easy to break the culture of untouchability and discrimination in the society. Headteachers, themselves have knowledge that they should not discriminate people on the basis of caste and they do not want to follow the culture but still it is very challenging for them to work against this bad culture in rural society. They fear in getting isolated by society themselves. But they are optimistic that in long run, with the united effort of all the like-minded people, they will be able to abolish caste-based discrimination towards Dalits from the society.

Hence, it is concluded that headteachers can play transformative role in changing practice of untouchability and discrimination towards Dalits in the rural society. Despite the effort made by the headteachers, which is not so visible in the community now, this study has opened up the possibility for the ways to headteachers working against the bad system. This study has proven that working against this social disparity might be challenging but this will not be impossible. Continuous determination and effort from the headteachers as leaders can be made possible to change the system for good of Dalits in the society.

Implications

In the area of research, my research contributes to new learning on the different ways on how headteachers can contribute towards changing ongoing practice of discrimination and untouchability towards Dalits in the rural community. This study also provides an insight of different discriminative practices, the reasons behind it and possible challenges one can face in the journey to abolish such social injustice practices. Hence, it implies that the research study can be useful for the practitioner, policy makers and future researchers.

For the Practitioner

Here the practitioner refers to all the educational leaders like headteachers, SMC heads, teachers and educationists. So, these educational leaders may use the learning from this research and practice anti-discriminative activities in their day to day lives. They could provide extra services and give priority to the Dalit students in their school and encourage them to move forward in their life. Not only in the public sphere, but also in their private space, they might be able to behave equally with Dalits and become an exemplary figure in society. Dalits as practitioner, may also learn that they should take initiative by themselves to come forward and be seen as active member of society. People of society, as practitioner, may also try to overcome fear and superstitious beliefs and be able to instill good practices against the bad culture of the society.

For the Policy Makers

There is already a law against untouchability and discrimination on the basis of caste. Though the law says that these discriminative activities are punishable act, there is no mention of ways on how to control these activities. So, this study may help policy makers to draft policies to control such activities. The education department can put social justice education in curriculum and can enforced anti-discriminative activities in school and in the community. Similarly, local government can announce the reward system to motivate those schools or headteachers who effectively work against the discrimination and untouchability towards Dalits.

For the Researcher

This research study has opened up the link between education and social development study. To link headteacher's role in changing practice of Dalit discrimination, this study has used simple narrative approach. So, the future researchers can do critical research in the same topic and can-do better advocacy of

the topic. Similarly, I have used only one small area for completing my research, in span of time, taking the reference of this research, I may take multiple research area and even proposed to do action research in the same topic.

Reflection

I had never thought that my journey of this research would have been so tough but at the same time so exciting for me. As a novice researcher, following all the procedures and guidelines from the Kathmandu University in the process of completion of my dissertation has been very difficult to me. Being a working woman and involved in different business activities, managing time to my study was another challenge. I thought working with my dissertation is not my cup of tea and it would go incomplete when my grandmother passed, who was very dear to me. But as all dark clouds have its silver lining, my attachment towards the rural village and my will to do something for the area, kept my passion for this dissertation alive. I gave up to my writing several times but every time I left, I have turned again and gave continuity to this process of writing. So, this work has been an integral part of my life.

Having background of business, I challenged myself and I decided to do Master's Degree in Education because I wanted to do something good in education sector in the remote village of Khotang. Being born in capital city and having met with all the good facilities here, confrontation to village life after marriage is totally contrasting. People's way of living, food and culture is what fascinated me when I got to go there. I was filled with the thoughts of people living in the village there. That is why, when there is a time to choose topic for my dissertation, I related the topic with the rural community. In addition to this, I wanted to study about the caste discrimination especially, Dalit discrimination and untouchability system in our country because this is what I had confronted in the village, for the first time in my life. So, as a leadership student and from the suggestion of my teachers, I finalize the study topic to be the 'role of headteacher in changing practice of discrimination and untouchability towards Dalits in rural community'.

Though the topic was so fascinating and of my interest, from day 1, I was in doubt whether this topic is relevant for my research study. I was trying to find connection between headteachers' role and Dalit discrimination and untouchability, I was searching literatures and there were hardly any literatures which mentioned role of headteacher in abolishing untouchability from the society. I got some literatures where principals of community schools play role in serving community. They have

people centric relationship and because of this they can bring change in the society. So, on this basis, I had to relate my study and move forward. The more I moved forward the more difficult it would get and somehow, I was discouraged. Turning point came to my research journey when I got an opportunity to participate in a training program organized to the headteachers of Aiselukharka Rural Municipality, Khotang where I met with Prof. Dr. Bidhya Nath Koirala. Dr. Koirala is a popular educationist of Nepal and has already been Head of the Department of Central Department of Education at Tribhuvan University. In the training, he had a content where he spoke about the law against Dalit discrimination and untouchability. There he told that headteachers are obliged to act against the ongoing practice of discrimination and untouchability. They needed to speak up with the society about this as they are the change agent in the rural society. He also mentioned that if any headteacher do not want to speak against the ongoing practice or cannot speak or act against this issue then they should resign from the post of headteacher (Speech, 8th April, 2023). So, this powerful speech of Dr. Koirala has been a source of inspiration to me to continue with this topic. I felt that the topic about discrimination and untouchability is time contextual and what I am doing is actually what is needed in the society. So, I got motivated. My motivation also increased when I interviewed my participants. I was able to derive answers to my questions on how headteachers can play role in changing practice of untouchability and discrimination in the society. I could relate their will to their narrated role.

In this way, my research journey has been overly dramatic. I experienced hardship, discouragement and failure to motivation and success. Through my determination, I could finally give a result to my hard work in this study. Similarly, this research work has been a good source of learning in my life.

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ANNEXES

Annex A: Interview Guideline

Interview Guidelines

Research question	Focused area	Interview questions
Questions to Headteachers		
How do headteachers and community members perceive the role of headteachers in changing practice of untouchability and discriminations against Dalits in the rural community?	Perception of untouchability and discrimination to Dalits in the society.	How do you perceive the ongoing practice of untouchability and discrimination to Dalits in this society? (Probing question: How do you feel about it? Is it right to discriminate people on the basis of caste?) How do you articulate the ongoing trend of discrimination in the society?
	Role of headteachers in school	How is the scenario of discrimination to Dalit students in the school? School environment should be free from untouchability and discrimination practices, what have you done to prevent discriminated practices in school? How will you describe the role of headteacher in preventing untouchability

		and discriminating practices in school?
	Role of headteachers in rural community	<p>How do you perceive headteacher's position in the community? (Probing: how do you place yourself as a community member or a leader?)</p> <p>Can you describe any distinctive role that headteachers or you as a headteacher have played in the past for community change and development?</p> <p>How do you describe the role of headteacher in preventing untouchability and discriminating practice in community?</p> <p>What are the prospects and challenges of headteachers to work against untouchability and discrimination in rural community?</p>
Questions to Dalit representative and other Dalit adults		
	Condition of discrimination and untouchability in rural community	<p>What would you like to say about Dalit discrimination in your village? What is the condition like now?</p> <p>Has it been increased or decreased? If it has been</p>

		increased what is the reason for it and if it has been decreased what is the reason for it?
	Role of headteacher in community	How do you perceive headteacher in the community? (Probing: Do you take headteacher as a leader? An influential person of the community? Why or why not?)
	Role of headteacher in changing practice of untouchability and discrimination to Dalits	Do you think headteacher can be a role model for bringing change in practice of untouchability and discrimination to Dalits? How do you describe the role of headteacher in this area?

Annex B: Data Transcribe

Data Transcribe

Headteacher 1 (H1)

Date: 7th April, 2023

प्रश्न : गाउँघरमा दलित प्रति हुने छुवाछुत भेदभावको स्थिति कस्तो छ अहिले ? अलिकति प्रष्ट पारिदिनुस न ।

उत्तर :

गाउँघरमा अलि छ नै त्यस्तो । अब युवाहरुमा चाहिँ त्यस्तो छैन । अहिले हामी पनि त्यस्तो गर्दिनौं तर एउटा के भने संस्कार अलिकति के चै अप्ठ्यारो हुँदो रहेछ भने हामीले पनि उनीहरु आको बेला घर भित्रै पसेर बस्ने चलन चै छैन, बाहिरै राख्ने चलन छ अझ पनि । गाउँमा उनीहरुलाई पनि त्यसरी पस्नु पर्छ भन्ने चलन पनि छैन । उनीहरु पस्दैन नि । तर पनि हामी यता उता मेला डालो अब बिहे कार्य तिर जाँदा प्रायः जसो एकै ठाउँमा बसेर खाने गछौं तर भोज भतेर तिर पस्ने चलन चै छैन । भोज भतेरमा फरक फरक बसेर खाने, घरभित्र पस्न नदिने, अलिक चै त्यस्तै छ ।

एचयदप्लन त्रगभक्तप्यलस बाहिरको कअभलबचष्य कस्तो छ त? साथसाथि बिचं.....

उत्तर :

अहिले त अब हामी नै हिँड्दा पनि घर बाहिर हिँड्दा संगै बस्ने खाने होइन, सबै सरबर नै छ । त्यस्तो समानता नै छ । त्यस्तो छैन । घरमा चाहिँ छ । बाहिर हिँड्दा डुल्दा त सबै संगै बस्ने संगै खाने नै छ । केहि उ छैन ।

प्रश्न : हाम्रो स्कुलको कअभलबचष्य मा चै दलित विद्यार्थिहरुलाई कस्तो वातावरण छ ? उहाँहरुलाई कस्तो खालको तचभवक्तभलत हरु गरिन्छ ? कस्तो छ उहाँहरुको स्थिति ?

उत्तर :

अब हामीले विद्यार्थिहरु जुन जुन जातका छौं, हामीले दिने सेवा समान रुपले सेवा सुविधा दिएका छौं । दलित भनेर छुट्टयाएको छैनौं । सबै संग समान व्यवहार गरेका छौं । उनीहरुलाई अझ सरकारले छात्रवृत्तिहरु छात्र छात्रा दुबैलाई दिइरहेको छ । अरु जातलाई दिएको छैन सरकारले । छात्राहरुलाई दिएको छ, छात्रहरुलाई दिएको छैन । दलितहरुलाई दुबैलाई दिएको छ । र अब हामीले जे जति सुविधाहरु स्कुलबाट, सबै विद्यार्थिहरु सबैलाई एकदम समान रुपले दिएका छौं ।

एचयदप्लन त्रगभक्तप्यलस भनेपछि स्कुलमा कुनै भेदभाव छैन ?

उत्तर :

मैले चै त्यस्तो देखेको छु । हामीले गरेका पनि छैनौं । उनीहरुले पानी ल्याउँछन्, हामी पिउँछौं, त्यस्तो भेदभाव छैन । मात्र हामीले घरमा चै त्यती उ छ । घरमा पनि हाम्रो बुवा आमा वृद्धहरु संग गारो छ । नभए स्कुलमा केही त्यस्तो छैन ।

प्रश्न : गाउँघरमा हुने भेदभाव, छुवाछुत निर्मुल पार्नको लागि विद्यालयको कस्तो भुमिका हुनुपर्छ ?

उत्तर :

अब मैले विद्यालयको तर्फबाट हामी समान हुनको लागि अलिकति हाम्रो अग्रजहरुलाई गारो हुने हो । अब हाम्रो उमेरको हामी जस्तोले त्यस्तो अप्ठ्यारो हुँदैन । अलिकति हाम्रो सामाजिक अन्धविश्वास नै हो, एउटा अलि जात जातिको भेदभाव, छुवाछुतको कुराहरुले गर्दा उ हुँदैन तर स्कुलबाट गर्न चै हामीले कसैलाई गएर जबरजस्ती यसो गर्नुपर्छ, त्यसो गर्नुपर्छ भन्न पनि सकिँदैन । आफ्नो आफ्नो इच्छा हो । अब उनीहरुको पनि अधिकारमाथि हनन् होला, उनीहरुको इच्छा विपरित काम गर्दा । तर स्कुलबाट नै खासै त्यस्तो.....उनीहरुलाई पनि हाम्रो संस्कार संस्कृती सबै कुरामा घुलमेल हुनुपर्छ भन्नु चै हामीलाई गारो लाग्छ । किनभने, सबैको सोचाई एउटै हुँदैन होइन । त्यस्तै परम्परा, त्यस्तै संस्कारमा हुर्केको हुँदा अलिक उहाँहरुलाई सम्भाउन, बुभाउन गारै पर्छ जस्तो लाग्छ मलाई स्कुलबाट ।

Annex C: Data Translation

Data Translation

Participant 1 (P1)

Date: 6th April, 2023

Q. How is the situation of Dalit discrimination now in this village?

A. Now, looking thoroughly in our present context, the Dalit discrimination is not in the same level as it was in our father's and mother's time. Now, in our time, we do not have to bear such untouchability and discrimination from people but that does not mean that untouchability and discrimination has totally ended, the problem has already solved, its not like that. To some extent, recently, there has not been any incident regarding this issue, we have felt little relief in these eight to ten years.

Probing question: Do you have any example where you became victim of untouchability and discrimination? Any incident like that which has affected your life?

A. Well, that type of big accident which affect the daily life, that type has not happened with me but might have happened with others. In my case, when we go somewhere with friends, to any meetings or social activities or some birthday parties, wedding ceremonies, in those time, we friends go together in our way but when we reached to the place of feast, meetings or any social activities then we can not enjoy sitting together. I need to sit at distance, I need to enjoy sitting separately alone, that type of environment has been developed. I have experienced such discrimination. So, those moments I consider of being an accident in my life.

Probing question: At such situation, you yourself sit separately or somebody asks you to separate? How do you feel in such situation?

A. It is like this in this situation, we, from our childhood, we have habit to stay separately and we are being taught by our parents to do so also. We have been stamped with bad memories and hence we feel it difficult to get involve ourselves. We do not have confidence to say that I will involve in this activity, I will enter there or get intermingled with friends, we do not have such confidence. We feel that something will happen, something wrong will happen.

Q. I return to the village again. What types of untouchability and discrimination happen now in the village? What happens now?

A. If we have to talk about untouchability and discrimination, it is clear now. Now, one cannot touch the drinking water, cannot enter into the feast, cannot go near to

them, if mistakenly go inside the feast or touched them, then there is several news about accidents that we are seeing in the media. Other than the things we see in news, in our own village, in our own experience, we cannot go near to the people, cannot get water from the same tap, cannot enter in others' home, cannot touch the food in the feast, cannot enter there and like that.....

Q. Lets go to the headteachers' leadership role now. How do you take headteacher in your view? Do you put him in leadership role or not? How do you look at them?

A. Now, if I need to express my personal view point, from my own perspective, what I think is, to change the society, the agent is school. In school, you added headteachers, what I will say is to headteachers is that, in school, headteachers or Nepal government should include in every curriculum, give training to teachers about untouchability and discrimination, like there is training about other curriculum and quality education training. They should give training to end this caste-based discrimination, there should be a separate system for this in the school and this is also under leadership of headteacher. If this happens then the society will change, I think. That's why, headteachers have a lot of things to do. They can assemble parents, students and give education on what one can/ should do and should not do. If they do so then it will be better.

Q. What do you think, headteachers can bring change in the whole society and not only in the school?

A. Its headteacher and school who can actually bring change. Its headteacher who is capable of making understand to all. Its headteachers and teachers of school, who is the most educated person in the village, isn't it? They have important role to play in this issue.

Q. What do you think headteachers can do in this issue?

A. Its like that, they can education the students from small classes or from lower level in different way. They can act, show street dramas, explain and analyze about the situation, run some kind of programs. They can assemble parents, run door to door campaign or appoint some experts to teach about this issue. They should start from themselves, just like, in our village, there is a Dalit community, so they as learnt person go there and ask for food to eat from their home, drink water from their hand. Positive message will flow if the learnt person from school does such activities.