

Livelihood Strategy of Hill Dalits from Siranchowk Rural Municipality, Gorkha

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on the livelihood strategy of hill Dalit in Gorkha. This study examines livelihood diversification as a survival strategy of Dalit households. It shows changes in livelihood strategies along with persistence which have come about historically. Particular attention is paid to the shifts in the economy during the past few decades, particularly with the onset of new development discourse and practice since 1990s. The livelihood strategies of Dalit households seem to be changing depending upon the new opportunities and constraints that have been emerging from local to national and global level. Economic change, education system, modernization, urbanization and globalization, in single phrase, development processes play a decisive role in changing the structure of a society, a community or a group. This paper aims to examine the livelihood strategy of hill Dalit, specifically, analyzing socio-cultural and economic background of the Dalit, examining the changes in the livelihood strategies of Dalit during the last decade; and explaining the constraints and opportunities shaping Dalit's livelihood strategies at present. To conduct this study, an ethnographic approach was employed, utilizing key informant's interviews and observation as the primary data collection methods. The emerging survival strategies of these Dalit amid the special constraints and opportunities brought about by development is the testimony to the Dalit's ability to adjust to the changing contexts. Diverse factors have been involved to bring about transformation in the livelihood of Dalit. The developments/ changes which are going on can be seen to relate to the three principal catalysts which have been introduced in the rural areas since the last two decades.

Keywords: *Dalit, livelihood, strategy, changes, development*

Introduction

Livelihood approach seeks to gain an accurate and realistic understanding of people's strengths and how they endeavor to convert into positive livelihood outcomes (DFID, 2002). Blaikie et al. (1994) have defined livelihood as "the command an individual, family, or other social group has over an income and/ or bundles of resources that can be used or exchanged to satisfy its needs". Most rural households rely on multiple income sources and adopt a range of livelihood strategies. Various activities like occupation, investments, productive strategies and others that individuals/ households undertake constitute the livelihood strategies. Livelihood strategies enable individuals/ households to obtain the means of their survival. Individuals/households develop livelihood strategies according to the environmental contexts. Some continue their traditional strategies while others modify them for meeting the basic requirements of their existence. Several factors impinge upon livelihood strategies that operate from individual/household levels, i.e., internal to regional/nationals/ global level, i.e., external. Hence living of any human population is the output of the dynamic livelihood strategies.

Changes in the livelihood strategies in many cases are the responses to the changing livelihood platforms induced by development practices as envisioned by political regime/politics, the overall nature of economy and the associated environmental changes. The introduction of communication and transportation; commodity circulation and access to market to the rural areas have altered the people's livelihoods in various ways. Environmental changes and developments are likely to displace some groups of people away from such sites of development activities while attracts others towards their centers (Chhetri, 2006). It is worth noting that subsistence agriculture, wage labour and labour migration out of the country are the ways of earning livelihood for the *Dalits* under this study. These livelihood strategies are the results of responses to the environmental changes brought by the development processes over time. These strategies are developed to adapt to the changing circumstances. The changes in the livelihood strategies of *Dalits* are also due to the activities of non-*Dalits* too. Hence, *Dalits*' perception of the environment is closer to Barth as he states that for any ethnic group, the environment is not only defined by natural conditions, but

also by the presence and activities of other ethnic groups on which it depends (Chhetri, 2006). The environment does not refer to only natural conditions but constitutes the social, political, cultural and economic conditions as well. Various factors, operating in macro- and micro-level, affect the environmental conditions. Market forces may create environmental ravages by stripping resources away from local communities. They may interfere with people's subsistence practices by forcing them to compete within the pressures of market activities. Human subsistence strategies are, thus historically shaped and reshaped by changes both in the internal needs of people and the external interests of market and politics (Uprety et al. 2012).

Objectives and Methodology

The general objective of this research paper is to comprehensively examine the livelihood strategy of hill Dalits. The study has specific objectives, which include analyzing the socio-cultural and economic background of the Dalits, examining the changes in the livelihood strategies of Dalits during the last decade; and explaining the constraints and opportunities shaping Dalits' livelihood strategies at present. The research was conducted at ward no. 04 of Siranchowk rural municipality which is situated in Gorkha district, Gandaki province of Nepal. To gather the necessary information, a descriptive research method was employed, focusing on qualitative data collection and analysis. The purposive sample method was used to select participants for the study because of this study is qualitative by nature and participants are limited. The selection criteria considered individuals from the local community members who had experienced with the earthquake. Availability of data and information guided the selection process. Various data collection techniques were employed to ensure comprehensive insights. These techniques included key informant's interviews and observation methods based on the ethnographic approach. Research checklists were utilized during data collection to ensure consistency and thoroughness. Additionally, secondary literature related to the Dalits was reviewed and incorporated into the study.

Thematic classification methods were applied during the data analysis process. This involved identifying and categorizing recurring themes and patterns within the collected data. The analysis aimed to generalize findings and derive meaningful insights by establishing relationships among different variables. By interpreting the analyzed data, the study aimed to draw valid conclusions and provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Overall, this research paper employed an advanced and comprehensive approach to livelihood of hill Dalit. Through a qualitative research design and the utilization of various data collection methods, the study sought to shed light on the subject matter and contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

Socio-Cultural Aspect of Dalit

The *Dalit* community, the focal village of this study is located in Siranchowk rural municipality, eastern part of Gorkha district. However, *Dalits* are the inhabitants of every ward of Siranchowk rural municipality in varying numbers. A pseudo name *Dalit Basti* given for the study area. *Dalit Basti* is located in a slightly slope area. The houses display considerable similarity in design and technique of construction. Most of the houses are two storied with the mud plastered stone walls and steeply pitched roofs of tin and slate. The *Goths* (animals' sheds) are separately constructed near the houses. The village boundaries are clearly demarcated from non-*Dalits*' settlement. *Dalit Basti* is surrounded by *Newar* and *Brahmin* communities.

Vishwakarmas, generally known as *Kamis*, *Darjis* or *Pariyars*, generally known as *Damais* and *Sarkis*, generally known as *Nepalis* are the only *Dalit* castes inhabiting in the area of study. These people are treated as untouchable caste group by non-*Dalits*. Practice of caste-based untouchability has been existed in day to day affairs, mostly concentrated in religious and socio-cultural aspects. This includes denial of inter-caste marriages between non-*Dalits* and *Dalits* and high and low caste *Dalits*, entry into the Hindu temples as well as the houses of non-*Dalits*, and eating food together in festivals and other ritual parties. Within *Dalits* also there is the stratification of high and low socio-cultural rank. *Kamis* and *Sarkis* regard themselves as of high status than *Damais*. The *Dalits* have limited social and ritual relationship with other high-caste people. However, they have been playing important roles in the ritual practices as well as agricultural sphere of non-*Dalits*, especially of *Brahmins*, *Chhetris* and *Newars*, and also in various local cultural and ritual practices. *Damais* and *Kamis* have special roles and functions to perform in local temple, *Kot*. *Damais* are the musicians in the temple. They play the musical instruments collectively specially in Navaratra or Dashain. *Damais* also play their musical instruments in the ritual ceremonies like birth, bratabandha (initiation ceremony) and marriage of non-*Dalits* in a hired basis. *Kamis* sharpen the weapons like knives and swords that are used to sacrifice animals like goats and buffaloes in the temple.

At present both the *Dalits* and non-*Dalits* have perceived that the rigidity of caste system that existed earlier has been waning gradually. In other words, it can be said, on observing the interactions and relations between *Dalits* and non-*Dalits* that caste has been transforming. The practice of untouchability has been flexible in certain aspects than in the past. Yet, *Dalits* have been segregated in certain rituals and social ceremonies. *Dalits* now do not feel their degraded socio-economic status as the concept of inclusion, right, participation, etc have entered into the village's social life. *Dalits* are free to choose their occupation rather than their traditional caste based occupation. It might have become possible because of political and social awareness on one hand and the impact of neo-liberalism on the village economy on the other. It is revealed that economic situation of *Dalits* have been rapidly changing than that of their socio-cultural situation.

In *Dalit Basti* illiteracy is rampant and very few have received higher education. As a result, their economic and social progress is hampered. One of the most important factors which deprived and marginalized the *Dalits* from being employed in government services and other forms of employment is the low level of the educational attainment. Many *Dalit* children who enroll in the primary level do not complete the secondary level. There is the higher trend of drop out of students in the school education. In the past, the reasons behind the low enrollment and drop out of the *Dalits* included caste-based discrimination, socio-economic problems and prejudice against them. However, at present such a condition does not exist that deprives them from getting education. Yet, *Dalits* are not so much interested toward education in social, political and economic liberal conditions. It might be because of their lack of confidence on competence in getting and finding jobs through education. So, *Dalit* parents do not force or encourage their children to complete their school level or higher level education. Even the *Dalits* who have improved their economic condition in the recent years with the involvement in foreign employment are found reluctant in getting education.

The mobility of men is higher as compared to women. In *Dalit* society, men have main responsibilities for the maintenance of their family, while women also support significantly economically. The percentage of women living at home implies that they are more involved in agriculture, domestic works and other cash income generating economic activities, mainly wage laboring. Not all the economically active population is involved in income earning activities. In few instances the population below 15 years of age is also involved in economic activities while the population above 60 years of age engaged in economic activities is significant.

Livelihood Strategy of *Dalit*

Livelihood strategies of people rely on the context or environment in which households work to make a livelihood. As the context or environment is dynamic, the strategies a household adopts cannot remain static. Extension and development of road transport network, expansion of markets and availability of goods and commodities, introduction of communication facilities, and other infrastructural developments in the rural areas, i.e. penetration of capitalist economy or the forces of globalization based on neoliberalism have led *Dalits* to change their livelihood strategies. Traditional economic activities started to lose their strength as the means of livelihood. The traditional artisan production became outdated and incompatible with the new market situation. When a change has been perceived in the economic structures, the households have reacted and adjusted to the new context.

Diversification is the creation of diversity as an ongoing social and economic process, reflecting factors of both pressure and opportunities that cause families to adopt increasingly intricate and diverse livelihood strategies (Ellis, 2000). Various forces to village economy have generated changes in livelihood patterns. These forces are demographic features of household including family size, age and sex, and economic structures including land ownership, access to resources and services, market interaction and development activities. The relations among these forces have set the boundaries of possible income generating activities in which a household has engaged. Engagement of household members in diverse portfolio of income generating activities is in response to financial vulnerability.

The connection of rural areas to markets and cities through roads and communication has brought alternative sources of livelihood for rural populations. The increase in access to markets has created opportunities for new sources of wage labor and other opportunities in non-farm sectors. Population growth, subsequent land fragmentation, decreased availability of arable land, availability of work outside the village, availability of consumer goods in the local market and the need for cash income are bringing changes in the nature of rural livelihoods of *Dalit* along with other caste people as well. These changes have had direct impact in *Dalit*' livelihoods, creating more diversified livelihood sources. In the past, *Dalits* relied mainly on agricultural labour and traditional caste based occupations for subsistence with some income from outside in the form of remittances. However more recently, many of the *Dalit* households could hardly rely on agriculture or the caste based occupation

for their subsistence. At the same time, the sources of subsistence are not limited to a single source. Many *Dalit* households of the study area depended on two, or more than two, sources for livelihood.

Proportions of income generated from the different components of livelihood are not available to compare their contribution for sustenance of household. But, it is evident that for majority of the households, income from multiple sources has intermingled. Putting it differently, most of the *Dalit* households have allocated their labor in multiple occupations of multiple fields of income. It is appropriate to mention here that agriculture for most of the households is of less importance. It is because of the lack of ownership of sufficient cultivable land in one hand and the reluctance of new generations of *Dalit*, like other upper castes, in engaging agricultural practices and searching income beyond farm activities on the other. Hence, non-farm income which is generated either from wage laboring or from foreign employment is significant for household sustenance. In other words, it can be said that remittances and income from wage laboring accounted for a substantial proportion of household income. However, it is interesting that despite of seeking wage labor in off-farm activities, still *Dalit* have been involved largely in agricultural wage laboring. The households with comparatively large size are found to allocate human power in multiple income sources. Except the *Dalit* individuals involved in foreign employment, most of other individuals who live at home are found to be engaged in different works. For example, a same individual can be a wage laborer in agriculture, in construction work, in artisan production as well. It implies that with the seasonal demand of labor, a same individual mobilizes his/her labor for earning.

• Agriculture

Undoubtedly agriculture is the predominant economic activity in most of the rural areas of Nepal. In other words, agriculture is the most important source of livelihood for the rural population. But because of the lack of the ownership of the sufficient cultivable land, most of the *Dalit* households are not engaged in sufficient food production. A majority of the *Dalit* households have food deficiency. Agriculture has never fulfilled the undisputed role of being the primary economic activity not only for *Dalit* households but also for the majority of the households of other castes as well in the study area. *Damai*, *Kami* and *Sarki* have traditionally played significant roles in the rural agriculture all over Nepal by providing different craft services as well as agricultural labourer (Chhetri, 2006). These castes were, and still are, the major labor forces in farming and harvesting of agricultural productions. In fact, most of the *Dalit* of the study area are not agriculturalists themselves rather they were and are the employees of agricultural practices of non-*Dalits*. There was and still there is to some extent the farmer – laborer relationship between non-*Dalits* and *Dalits*. Earlier there used to be a yearly or longer contract between the two parties in accomplishing agricultural practices. But in the present such a trend has declined almost completely.

Land is one of the measuring parameters of socioeconomic status of the population in agrarian rural societies. It is the principal source earning for livelihood for much rural population. But, because of nearly landlessness of majority of the *Dalit* households, their livelihood seems to be miserable. Despite of non-ownership of the land, *Dalits* used to depend in the past to a greater extent and low lesser extent on land for their livelihood as suppliers of agricultural tools and labor. *Dalit* are marginal cultivators due to their smaller land holdings (Adhikari, 2008). It is obvious that most *Dalit* households have small holdings that are not suitable for agricultural production sufficient for more than six months in a year.

The land can be categorized as *Khet* (irrigated fields), *Bari* (terraced, sloped and non-irrigated fields) and *Pakho* (Steep fields not appropriate for cultivation and used for producing fodder and forage for livestock), like elsewhere in Nepal. In the *Dalit Basti* 76.9% of the households do not own any *Khet*, and hence away from paddy production which is considered as the main food grain. 80.8% of the households have *Bari* less than 5 *ropani*. The disparity in the land distribution reflects that there is the disparity in the grain production.

It is difficult for the landless *Dalits*, they believe, to make a living on a share cropping (locally called *adhiyan* and *kut*) basis because fertilizers and pesticides are needed for better production which requires cash and they always have shortage of cash. Further, wage rate is also getting higher every year and above all if weather does not become favourable, then there will be the loss of investment and it would be difficult for the household to cover the loss. There is also a strong perception amongst young *Dalit* that there is no benefit in doing agriculture. So, laboring *Dalit* households are looking for alternatives for their subsistence. Only three households are reported to be involved in share cropping (locally called *kut*) in the study area.

Livestock raising is also considered as one of the integral elements of agricultural practice. But the *Dalit* households under this study are found not so much interested in it. The reason why most of the *Dalit* households do not involve in livestock raising can be attributed to the shortage of the ownership of sufficient land as animals are to be feed with grass and fodder grown in the land. There is also the lack of usable public forest that supports livestock raising.

In the recent year livestock raising needs more investment for feeding them manufactured nutritious food, for preventing and curing the diseases and also for managing breeds. So, many *Dalit* households do not find easy this occupation as they have shortage of cash. They also do not have access to the dairy to sell the surplus cow and buffalo milk since they are considered as polluting caste by other castes. None of the households own large number of animals to form a herd traditionally and also presently.

Dalit households are the consumers of buffalo meat and chicken. Consumption of buffalo meat may be because of the cheaper cost than that of goat meat. However, they do not raise buffaloes in significant number. They depend on upper caste people for the supply of their meat requirements. They purchase the male buffaloes and infertile she buffaloes for slaughtering in some occasions. *Dalit* households prefer to grow local chickens but not so much in a commercial manner. In the recent year high caste people, *Brahmins* and *Chhetri* also consume chicken. So, *Dalit* households sell the chicken for others and also consume themselves. Since the last decade some *Dalit* households who are involved in ploughing the field of other castes tend to have bullocks. In the season of cultivation of paddy, wheat and maize, *Dalit* ploughman with their bullocks are hired in the cash basis. This trend is getting popularity in present as upper caste people left to keep cows and oxen. Ploughman with his bullock gets 1000 to 1200 rupees per day.

• **Artisan Production/ Traditional Caste Based Occupation**

According to the traditional allocation of caste based occupations, *Shudras* lying at the lowest strata of socio-cultural hierarchy and now popularly known as *Dalits* are the artisan producers and service providers for the upper caste people. There has existed the patron-client relationship between so called upper caste people and lower caste people in various forms. *Damais* involve in stitching and repairing of clothes, and play the traditional musical instruments, called *panchebaja*, during important festivals and different cultural and ritual ceremonies. *Kamis* involve in the manufacturing and repairing of metal utensils including household implements such as knives, pots, pans, etc and agricultural implements such as spades, plough blades, etc. The *Sarkis* are the manufacturer and repairer of leather goods such as *Nara* (in some places it is also called *halludo*) used while ploughing the field, musical instruments like *madal*, *damah*, etc and shoes. People who continued their caste based occupations were also using cash in exchange for their services rather than *bali*. *Dalits* who continued to work in the traditional occupation of sewing in still get grains every year for their tailoring work although they increasingly prefer cash. Few *Dalits* who work in the iron workshop (*aran*), are getting grain (*bali*) for their metal working but now they prefer to be paid in cash. In the past, a *Dalit* household used to get at least three *pathiof* grain – paddy or maize or wheat – from the *bista* household. In addition to this, *Dalit* used to get other food items and cloths as well in certain rituals and festivals. However, there used to be a variation in giving and receiving of *bali* between *non-Dalit* and *Dalit* households beyond the minimum contract.

Since the last decade, those households involved in traditional occupation have accommodated their occupation with the changing context of market. With the increasing flow of readymade goods, such as clothes, metal utensils, shoes etc. in the rural areas, traditional occupation of *Dalit* have been declining to a greater extent. They could not compete successfully with the imported factory made goods which compel them either to leave or to modify/ make commercialize their occupation. Massive entry of readymade clothes reduced the tailors' work to a large extent. However, two *Damai* households have established their tailoring shop in local market and stitch the new clothes and repair the old one in cash basis. Yet, they have not completely abandoned the getting of payment in kind.

Both men and women involve in tailoring works. Tailoring households have at least one sewing machine. Four *Damai* households in the study area have two sewing machines. Five households perform their tailoring work in their own house, while two households have established their shop in Amarai, a local bazaar. In some cases, if their clients request them to stitch and repair the clothes in their house, they carry the sewing machine in their clients' house and perform their work. In the naming ceremony of children, rice feeding ceremony, marriage and death rituals, *Damais* are invited to stitch the clothes in upper castes' houses. In case of the birth of son, his naming ceremony, rice feeding ceremony and marriage, *balighareDamai* household has an obligation and right to participate. In such ceremonies a *Damah* is played in the concerned house. Sometimes, *Damais* in a group are also hired for playing their traditional musical instruments and for singing and dancing. However, this trend has become very rare in the recent days. *BalighareDamai* also claim to get new clothes, cash or any other things in kind from their *bista* in some festivals like *Dashain*, *Tihar*, etc and other ceremonies. During the Hindu festivals, such as *Teej*, *Dashain* and *Tihar* the tailors become very busy in stitching new clothes. August to November is their months of tailoring season during which they tend to earn comparatively more cash. During these months major Hindu festivals and marriage ceremonies fall.

The *Kami* households involved in artisan production have their *aran*, iron smithy factory in their own premises. Their work needs more physical force. So, male members of the family are found to be involved in iron smithy. Women support for heating the iron till becoming red in the fire. They also help for making the coal from wood in the forest area of their *bista*. *Kamis* do not purchase the coal from market; rather they make coal themselves, especially in the winter season. They purchase iron in the form of slab from market. In some cases, their clients also bring iron to make *hasiya*, curved knives and *kodali*, spade, etc. *Kamis* become very busy prior to the onset of agricultural season, particularly prior to the monsoon to make the new iron implements, agricultural implements and also to sharpen the old one. They sell new iron implements in cash but do not charge any cash for their *bista* in case of sharpening of the weapons. Like *Damais*, *balighare* *Kamis* also have some obligations and rights to participate in the various ceremonies of their *bistas*. They also get cash or payment in kind in such ceremonies. The role of *kamis* as the maker and repairer of metal goods and kitchen equipments in the village has been reduced drastically during the last couple of decades.

The *Sarkis*, not only of the study area but also of neighboring area are found to be involved in leather processing and refining works. In the study area, out of three *Sarki* households, only one household, better to say only one individual is found to be involved in shoe making and repairing. This household does not have any *bista*. So, shoe making and repairing is completely in cash basis. Since, readymade factory made shoe are available in the villages, locally made shoes have not so much demands. The *Sarki* individual has a shoe shop where he repairs the shoes rather than giving priority for making new shoes. In the recent years with the availability of plastic fiber/rope made *halludo*, leather *halludo* have been completely displaced. This is the reason why *Sarki* households might have given up making raw leather *halludo*. Still, in some respects *Dalits* and *non-Dalit* have maintained traditional *balipratha*. The households from where the *Dalits* get *bali* are popularly known as *bista*. Actually, the term *bista* is used to call the individual members of *bali* providing household. In exchange for *Dalit* products and services, high-caste landowner patrons, *bista* used to provide harvest shares, *bali* and were expected to meet many other subsistence needs of their respective *Dalit* dependents. At the heart of such patron-client relationships there existed a sense of mutual moral and economic obligation and right from both sides. On the one hand *bista* had a right to give *Dalits* some works or receive some services from them while on the other *Dalits* had right to ask food or cash or other items by fulfilling their obligation and loyalty. In the past such a trend reflected economic interdependency between high- and low caste families.

The relations between *bista* and *Dalit* as existed before two decades have been changed significantly. It is obvious that upper caste households, the *bista* of *Dalit* households in the present have less relied on the traditional works of *Dalits* with the penetration of market products in the villages and also their giving up of agricultural practices. So, the give and take relation, reciprocity has been replaced with cash exchange if it is required for *bista* to utilize *Dalits'* products and services. In the past, such patron – client relationship or contractual labour system between *non-Dalits* and *Dalits* was very important for the economy of both. The *Dalit* households who gave up their traditional occupation and hence involvement in *bista* system report that the income, both in the form of grains or cash, declined considerably and forced them to seek other sources. Obviously, the arrival of finished goods that earlier used to be produced locally through the provision of roads appears to have accelerated the disintegration of *bista* system, which could be called the reciprocal exchange involving customary payments in kind in favour of a relationship closer to a market relationship in which cash payment is made for work done.

• Local Wage Labor

With the breakdown of *bista* system and declining artisan production that could not provide sufficient means to livelihood, many *Dalit* individuals turned to be wage laborers. However, the local market for wage labor has not broadened i.e. the *Dalits* well as others willing or forced to sell their labor has very limited options. Despite of several developments, no substantial employment opportunities are created in the villages. The practice of agricultural wage labor has always been one of the indispensable components of the livelihood of most of the *Dalit* households in the *Dalit basti*. Both men and women have been involved in wage laboring since the time immemorial. In the peak agricultural season, especially during paddy transplanting and maize and wheat sowing and harvesting, men and women of *Dalit* households become busy in providing the cash paid services to the other caste households. Most of the *Dalit* individuals engage in wage laboring as unskilled laborer. Some *Dalit* individuals, usually men equipped with skills are also involved in construction works as *mistris* whereas other men and women work as helper. Two head *mistris* were reported from the *Dalit Basti*, one each specialized in wood work, carpentry and wall making, *Dakarmi*. The *mistris* are paid with higher wages as compared to others. Sometimes, the *mistris* also become contractor, *thekedar* for construction works, particularly construction of house, *goths*, toilets, etc. and employ others including their own family members.

Some men engaged in artisan work also prefer to work as a wage laborer as it generates cash immediately. Locally, wage laborers are known as *khetala*. Earlier *Dalit khetala* were paid in grains but in the recent years they are paid almost in cash. The working duration in a day for ploughman, *hali* is nearly 10 hours whereas for other *khetala*, it is nearly 8 hours. *Hali* is fed at least two times, but other *khetala* are fed at least one time. However, this trend varies with the nature of work. Now days, almost all the *Dalit* wage laborers have their own mobile sets. So it has become easy to hire them. In the *Dalit Basti* there are few men as well as women who take the informal leadership in providing laboring works. So, anyone who needs laborers makes a contact with such leading individual and demands the laborer in required numbers.

Long-term contracts for wage labor are hardly found and daily arrangements seem to be common. Some individuals, mostly males are involved in self-employment of producing bamboo mats and baskets (*doko*) during the leisure time and sale them in the village. Five male individuals are reported to be involved in making bamboo mats and baskets. Sometimes they are hired by upper caste people to make such things in their home as wage laborer. Women are not found to be involved in such occupation. There is a clear demarcation of works according to sex in the rural area. Usually men involve in the works that need more physical force as compared to women. The price for wage labor for both male and female has increased significantly in the last decade. The average wages for the labor of male is around Rs. 500-800 rupees per day, whereas for female is around 250 rupees per day. As labour force becomes scarce in the villages due to increased migration of working population out of the villages, there has been an increasing demand for labor in agricultural and domestic works and hence an increase in wage rates.

There have been considerable shifts in the labour practices of *Dalit* households in the last two to three decades. Many *Dalit* men, who used to work as *hali* (land tiller) for high-caste landlord in the past, have stopped such work. In the past, *Dalit* used to get loans from patron and used to till the land until the loan was repaid. Some *Dalit* households since the long time, since many generations worked as *hali* to *non-Dalit* households. But now no evidence of such a case is found in the study area. Yet few men prefer to work as a *hali* for landed upper caste people in contract basis but not as that of past. They believe in that having a relationship with the landlord (*bista*), it becomes easy to ask for monetary and other sorts of help in the times of need. Some are working in the construction works. The majority of *Dalit* households do not produce sufficient grain to meet their annual food needs. They produce less than half of their requirements. At present, majority of the households have been keeping agriculture aside in the pursuit of non-farm activities. This is not a question of *Dalit* households moving from farm activities to non-farm activities rather, it is a dynamic and inevitable process in which they combine activities to meet their various needs over time. This trend is manifested by the living and working of different members of the household in different places for long time.

• Foreign Employment

It is the household that mobilizes human resource for migration and in turn is the recipient of the remittances. The mobility of *Dalit* population has crucial role for sustenance of family mainly because of limited resources and economic opportunities in the villages. Hence, the mobility of population for supporting and earning livelihood is of prime concern at present which was also a feature of past economy but to a lesser degree. The *Dalits'* mobility for earning livelihood includes foreign labor migration.

The political turmoil that grew out nationwide since 1996 with the armed conflict in the country enforced both *Dalit* and *non-Dalit* youths to become foreign labor migrants. They felt insecure in the villages and adopted foreign employment as an easy way to become secure and earn survival. The considerable economic well-being of the *non-Dalit* of the neighboring settlements also has strong influence in their desire/ hope to become labor migrant for present livelihood and future prosperity. Limited opportunities of facilities and jobs/ services are available from local to national level. However, the capabilities of exploiting the limited opportunities are predetermined by the factors like education and financial conditions. The educational attainment of *Dalit* is very poor due to poor economic condition. Because of this, they lack the knowledge, skills and dexterity which do not permit them working in good posts and higher salary paying jobs. They are not specialized in any activities. There remain no alternatives for them besides unskilled wage labor. They know very well that selling labor within the country generates less income while in the international labor market similar labor generates more. Hence, foreign labor migration, the *Dalit* conceived, is an effort to spread household labor and thus to enhance the family survival.

The growing incidence of labor migration out of the country is primarily in response to the shortage of cash for meeting the basic requirements. The basic reason is that very little cash or not at all is generated from the local economy, i.e. agriculture and traditional caste based occupation. The growing availability of various imported consumer goods in the village has increased the trend of consumerism which in turn have resulted the high family expenses. Less interest of the younger generation towards artisan production and agriculture in one hand and the

increasing demands and desires of the *Dalit* households on the other have become the stimulant for labor migration. Migration of *Dalit* individuals to engage in non-farm activities out of the country is substantial. The trend of going India for earning has been a tradition from a long past. In the recent years, particularly since the 1990s, migrating temporarily to the Gulf countries and Malaysia has become a new trend. The migrants maintain a flow of remittances to their families, although the proportion of income sent and its frequency display variation across individual migrants. Remittances have brought some structural changes in the *Dalit* households. They have used the money to construct new house similar to other higher castes, purchase the goods such as furniture, televisions, mobile phones, etc. The remittances coming to the *Dalit* households, some believe, have uplifted living standard and economic status. This has shifted their sense of degraded pride or status too.

Most of the *Dalit* individuals involved in foreign employment from the study area are found in India. They have chosen India as their destination because of the requirement of less investment, no need of special skills, easily understandable Hindi language, easy entry and exit process, i.e., no requirement of passport and visa, and no official restriction on access to employment. Few individuals have chosen Gulf countries and Malaysia for working because of the higher income available there than India. One interesting pattern to be noted is that females are not involved in foreign employment. It seems that their cultural attitude is restrictive for females' independent mobility, especially in foreign employment. Females are also deprived of the ownership of the property, decision making and involving in the public sphere. They are bound to carry out only the domestic activities. However, in case of nuclear family if male is a labor migrant, his wife needs to manage the household economy thereby mobilizing the available resources and the money in her own decision. Yet, now she may call her husband presenting the situation and asking the proper advice. So, it becomes merely exaggeration to say that migrant's wife becomes the decision maker or leader of the family since with the help of communication facility she depends on her husband's involvement in decision making.

Most often, it is men who appear to be making this transition with women still working in caste based attached labor and/or agricultural labor. At the same time, increased out-migration of men has meant that it is women who are left behind who work in the caste based attached forms of labor in agriculture. Not all have shifted from agriculture to non-agriculture. Some have continued working in agriculture, as it provides them with security in times of need. Many laboring households have nevertheless started to look for different sources of income other than or in addition to agriculture. The study shows that there have been some significant changes in the laboring practices of poorer households as they look for new ways to sustain and survive. The shift has been that many have adopted new opportunities for work, however relying on agriculture to some extent. Overall, wage laboring in agriculture along with construction work and dependence on remittances remain the key feature of livelihoods among the *Dalit* population. The remittance income has brought few structural changes in few households besides the fulfillment of consumption needs and debt repayment. For instance, it is invested in housing, land purchasing and others. But most part of the remittance income, most of the *Dalit* households spend in fulfilling basic requirements like food, cloths, medicines, and so on as well as unproductive luxury goods like Television, Mobile phones and other commodities. Though remittances play a vital role in leading the *Dalits'* economy, foreign employment cannot be regarded as a sustainable livelihood strategy. Yet, it has enabled the labor migrant households for uplifting the economic status and living standard.

Conclusions

The emerging survival strategies of these *Dalit* amid the special constraints and opportunities brought about by development is the testimony to the *Dalits'* ability to adjust to the changing contexts. Diverse factors have been involved to bring about transformation in the livelihood of *Dalit*. The developments/ changes which are going on can be seen to relate to the three principal catalysts which have been introduced in the rural areas since the last two decades. These are the extension and development of road transport network, accessibility of modern goods and commodities which are not produced locally and declining traditional artisan production.

There is the lack of dynamism in agriculture as well as other non-farm/ off-farm work opportunities within or near the village. Subsistence oriented agriculture from earlier has been continued. In reality development occurring in and around the village did not profoundly change farming systems and promote a significant expansion of local agri-business. The *Dalit* households are far from self-sufficiency in food production. They try to meet the pervasive and substantial deficit in food production through the purchase of food grains from the market and to some extent through the *balipratha*. There is a remarkable lack of human and financial capital investment in agriculture as it is constrained by the size and quality of land the households hold. Another reason for this is little relative returns from agriculture as compared to other alternative economic activities. Market dependency or consumerism is growing in

Dalit Basti at present. This has increased the household expenditure. The economic linkage between *Dalit Basti* and market is characterized by the inflow of goods and commodities from markets to *Basti* and outflow of cash (generated from outside income) from *Basti* to the market. Such a linkage has forced *Dalit* individuals to be involved in more income generating activities. Several factors: both internal and external, have been operating in shaping the livelihoods of *Dalit*. Little access to local resources, financial vulnerability, low educational status, lack of skills and dexterity in productive works, and penetration of globalization/ capitalist economy in the rural areas are the principal factors, amongst others. Labor mobility is increasingly an important part of people's livelihoods amongst the poorer households. As productivity of agriculture diminishes with land fragmentation, and availability of products from the market, those depending on agriculture have to look for alternative sources of livelihoods. Those living in traditional caste based occupations have also been affected by market penetration in rural areas. Migrating to the plains or nearby towns and cities from interior rural areas has been very common among those looking for new opportunities for employment. Migrating to work in India, on the other hand, has been continuing over the years from both the hills and the plains, and improved roads and connections have made it easier for rural households to continue working in their fields on a seasonal basis. More recently, the trend of migrating towards the Gulf has provided rural households, especially those who can afford it, new opportunities of labor.

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