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**DALIT CHRISTIANS IN NEPAL  
AND THE EXPERIENCE OF CONVERSION:  
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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## **Abstract**

The present research entitled *Dalit Christians in Nepal and their Experiences of Conversion: Opportunities and Challenges* is qualitative research with six chapters: introduction, theory, methodology, data presentation, Discussion, and conclusion. It discussed social, cultural, economic, and political conditions of Nepal since the past till present day, with Hindu religion in center of test to see how it divided the population into two categories, 'touchable' and 'untouchable' in the beginning and Dalits and non-Dalits in the later phase of history. It also took notice of how the Dalits were deprived of their share of birthrights of equality and acceptance. It saw discrimination, domination, and stigma with the Dalits seeking out their rid of all injustice and inhuman treatment just because their logo-name Dalit lingered in their identity, and as long as the identity lingered, they perpetually felt embarrassed and hurt. The research also found that when nothing else could deliver them from domination and discrimination, they opted to conversion. The above findings were not derived just so. It was retrieved by using valid instruments of measurement and reliable frame and pattern of interview questions. Similarly, the information was obtained from the proper informants purposively selected: key informants and Dalit converts. In addition to collecting information in valid and reliable manner, the issue of the research was tested from the Lens of the theories: Social Dominance Theory, Religious Conversion Theory, and Stigma and Social Identity Theory with minor reference to other theories. Standing on the grounds of information, it reached certain conclusions such as Hindu religion and caste system perpetually dominated and discriminated the Dalits, and in search of release from the stigma of Dalits, they took to conversion. The research also discovered that the group of people discriminated as they were; they experienced doubly discriminated after their conversion. Therefore, the journey of research began from the problem of dominance and discrimination of Dalit, went through the test of it in the touchstone of the theories, verification of it from the valid measurement tools, and ended at finding that the Dalits in Nepal increasingly opting to conversion for acceptance and dignity.

## **Abbreviation**

I,I	Informant I
I,II	Informant II
I,III	Informant III
I,IV	Informant IV
I,V	Informant V
I,VI	Informant VI
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
SDT	Social Dominance Theory

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgement</b> .....	
<b>Abstract</b> .....	
<b>Abbreviation</b> .....	
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
1.1 Historical Background .....	1
1.1.1. Dalit .....	1
1.1.2. Christianity and Dalits in Nepal.....	5
1.1.3. Expectation of Acceptance and Career Opportunities .....	6
1.2. Theoretical Framework .....	7
1.3 Research Problem .....	9
1.4. Research Questions.....	9
1.5. General Objectives.....	9
1.6. Significance of the Study .....	10
1.7. A Prior Glimpse of Methodology .....	10
1.8. Motivation of the Research .....	12
1.9. Organization of the Research .....	14
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THEORY</b> .....	14
2.1. Rationale behind the Choice of Theory .....	14
2.1. Social Dominance Theory.....	17
2.2. Religious Conversion Theory.....	20
2.3. Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective .....	23
2.4. Stigma and Social Identity: A Theory of Social Putdown and Management.....	25
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>3. Introduction</b> .....	<b>28</b>
3.2. Qualitative Research .....	30
3.3. Qualitative Research and Data Collection .....	32
3.4. Selection of Informants .....	34

3.5. Interview Guide .....	36
3.6. Ethical Considerations .....	39
3.7. Reliability and Validity .....	41
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION .....</b>	<b>44</b>
4.1. Introduction .....	44
4.2. Interviews with Informants .....	45
4.3. Profile of Informant I .....	46
4.3.1. Close-ended Interview with Informant I .....	46
4.3.2. Semi-Structured Interview .....	47
4.4. Profile of Informant II .....	49
4.4.1. Close-Ended Interview with Informant II .....	49
4.4.2. Semi-Structured Interview with Informant II .....	50
4.5. Profile of Informant III .....	52
4.5.1 Close-Ended Interview with Informant III .....	52
4.5.2. Semi-Structured Interview with Informant III .....	53
4.6. Profile of Informant IV .....	54
4.6.1. Close-Ended Interview with Informant IV .....	55
4.6.2. Semi-Structured Interview with Informant IV .....	55
4.7. Profile of Informant V .....	58
4.7.1. Close-Ended Interview with Informant V .....	58
4.7.2. Semi-Structured Interview with Convert V .....	59
4.8. Profile of Informant VI .....	62
4.8.1. Close-Ended Interview with Informant VI .....	62
4.8.2. Semi-Structured Interview with Informant VI .....	62
4.9. Conclusion .....	65
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>65</b>
5.1.Introduction .....	65
5.2. PROFILE Specific Discussion .....	68

5.3. Discussion of Close-Ended Interview with Informants and Test of Theories .....	69
5.4. Dalit and Conversion .....	71
5.5 Discussion of In-Depth Interview Questions .....	72
5.6 Summary .....	73
<b>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>74</b>
6.1. The Dalits and their Background.....	74
6.2 Research within the Parameter of Topic, Questions and Objectives.....	75
6.3 Research within the Frame of Theories .....	76
6.4. Interview: Choice of the Best Methodology and Most Acceptable Informants.....	76
6.7. Discussion in Connection with the Response Types .....	76
6.8. Findings.....	77
6.9. Claims and Recommendations .....	78
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>82</b>

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Historical Background**

#### **1.1.1. Dalit**

It is no surprise that no country in the world has had a homogenous population. The total population of a country gets divided into castes, sub-castes (high caste, middle caste, and low caste), ethnic groups, indigenous groups, and others. The population further gets divided into religions and regions. It is more so in case of Nepal whose population is heterogeneous broadly and stigmatically divided as “touchable” and ‘untouchables’. Touchables enjoy the status of high class/caste with their job description of Brahmins to study, interpret and perform worship/rituals, Chhetris to fight and defend the territory of the country, Baishyas to make dresses and play bands in the functions and Sudras to make weapons, clear out dead animals, and offer services to the two senior castes in cultivation and transportation of goods and services. Broadly speaking there exist two castes in Nepal: Touchables and untouchables. Going deeper into details, four castes Brahmin, Chhetri, Baishya and Sudra appear. Although there are races of people such as whites and non-whites elsewhere, Mongols, Dravidians, Australos, and Aryans based on their look and language, and males and females based on biological make up; the division of people as Brahmin, Chhetri, Baishya and Sudra are man-made and brought into practice for centuries over this part of the world (Indian Subcontinent/Asia).

Civil Country Code of Nepal of 1854 divided the total population into four castes: Brahmins, Chhetris, Baishyas and Sudras purely based on division of labor. Similarly, earlier than this, The Dalit Index Detail defined Dalits in this way. In Accordance with the Hindu Caste System of 1943 (1910 BS) Civil Country Code of Nepal (translated into English), that section of the population whose hand/touch of water is not accepted as fit to drink and those who are treated as untouchable in social, political, economic and cultural levels, discriminated and marginalized from the mainstream of the state are defined as Dalits (1843, p. 2). Similarly, The Constitution of Nepal from 2015 in section 28 has had a provision of National Dalit Commission to address the discrimination and grievances of the Dalits (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015). The very formation of the National Dalit Commission is an assertion of Dalits being dominated. The Dalits (Aryans) who look no different from Brahmins and Chhetris and always embraced Hindu religion since the time of division of caste based on occupation and division of labor without any inquiry, resistance, or expression of reservation until recently. Because Hindu religion steadfastly holds on to strict caste system and validates the norm of touchable and untouchable, and because there appears no room of acceptance of the Dalit in the social, political, economic,



and cultural levels, the Dalits seem to have opted to alternatives where they are treated equally. Renowned sage Manu in Hindu scripture believed in impurities in body and mind (Ambedkar, 2019, p. 25). But it was misinterpreted as the people of certain occupation as impure or untouchable. As such, the occupation should have nothing to do with purity or impurity. The people in the primitive society believed that impurity would transfer from one person to another. It transfers on certain conditions: food, drink, birth, initiation, maturity, mensuration, wedding, intercourse, sex, etc. (Ambedkar, 2019, p. 18). Unfortunately, the entire population belonging to certain profession/occupation was branded as Dalit and treated unfairly.

Dalits living in different parts of Nepal are categorized as Dalits of the Hills, of the Himalayas and the Dalits of the Terai. “The Dalit of the Hills include Gandarbha (Singers), Pariar (Damai, Darji, Suchikar, Nagarchi, Dholi, Hudke-total seven categories). The Dalits of the Terai include, Kalar, Kakaihiya, Kori, Khatik, Khachche (Mandal, Khang), Chamar (Ram, Mochi, Harijan, Ravidas, Chadimar, Dom (Marik), Tatma (Tanti, Das), Dusadh (Paswan, Hajara), Dhovi (Rajak, Hindu), Pasi, Bantar, Musahar, Mettar (Halkhor), Sarbhang (Sarbaria), *Natuwa*, Dhandi, Dharikar/Dhanka-total 26, the Dalits of the Himalayas include: Kami (weapon makers), Damai (dress maker) and Sarki (leather worker)” (Ambedkar, 2019, p. 18).

In Nepal, the Dalits are also called Vishwokarmas meaning technicians who make tools and instruments. This subcategory includes Kami, Lohar (ironsmith), Sunar (goldsmith), Agri (Pot maker), Chunara (wooden pot maker), (Pot tinker), Parki (weapon maker). Seen in this way, the Vishwokarmas are local indigenous technicians that make tools of common use for all. There is yet another subcategory as Pariyar. This category includes Damai (band player), Darji (tailor), Suchikar (sweeper), Nagarchi (messenger), Dholi (drum beater), Hukek. Another subcategory is Mijar. It includes cobbler (shoemaker), Masmul (leatherworker) and Bhu/ (Ambedkar, 2019, p. 18).

The roots of the tradition of caste-based system of “touchability” and “untouchability” with discrimination is the product of Hindu social structure that is noticed developed in Indian Subcontinent. According to Pyakurel (Pyakurel, 2011), this doctrine divides people into the pure and impure based on their birth. This stigma of purity and impurity did not abate; it increased with the passing of time. King Jayasthiti Mall of Kathmandu as early as in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, King Ram Shah of Gorkha in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana in 1854 in their respective times strengthened the division of the population as touchable and untouchable. The word Dalit for the untouchable is noticed first used in India and then in Nepal since 1967 (Pyakurel, 2011). The social and economic conditions of the Dalit further aggravated

without any access to education forget about their participation in decision making in the political activities of national or local level.

Regardless of the stigma of untouchability, most Dalits remained Hindus. Pyakurel further says, “For Dalits, activities aimed at studying to acquire knowledge, adopting a trade or vocation with the intention of earning a better living or organizing the community politically became entirely prohibited” (Pyakurel, 2011). Culturally also, they remained segregated as they were not allowed to touch water because the water of their hand touched was considered as contaminated (Pyakurel, 2011). There was no reason why they should be considered untouchable and adopt the work as given by the so called clever upper-class leaders in the past. Given the situation, there was no question of their being invited at feasts and festivals by the locals and the community of the senior castes although they were the ones the society needed most for their service of pot making, cloth making and shoe making. Not just that, they had to have their own priest to perform their initiation and rituals for Brahmins and Chhetris would not even step into their house afraid of defilement. Things worsened so much so that in the passage of time, Sage Manu in Manusmirti (traditionally the most authoritative of the books of the Hindu code (scripture) in India). from the explanation II said, “those who are known as untouchable are not allowed to live in the same community with others; and therefore, be driven out to live in a separate place” (Century, 2019, p. 32). Maybe because they were not united and conscious of their rights, they endured the socio-cultural and socio-political stigma all through. Also, because the society of Nepal was of close nature, the Dalits could not raise their voice. Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher (a prime minister of autocratic Rana family regime) abolished two age old practices of slavery and self-immolation of wife on her husband’s funeral pyre, but the practice of discriminating Dalits persisted. According to the Census of Nepal 2011, out of the total population 2,64,94,504, the population of Dalits is 35,79,128 (B.K, 2018, p. 76). The Dalit community constitutes near about 13.12 percent of the total population. Such a big size of the section of the population ostracized as Dalit needed justice. Obviously, the constitutional provisions have nothing wrong in them. There seem responsive to Dalits. However, nothing changed their destiny.

The political changes of the overthrow of Rana Rule to usher in Democracy in 1951, the banning of political parties, concentration of all the authority in King’s hand by King Mahendra and introduction of active King’s party less (Panchyat) political System in 1960, the Mass Movement of 1990 and the Movement for Republic Nepal of 2007 changed the political system of Nepal, but the plights of the Dalits remained the same. It even restructured administration modality of representation. Clear and convinced that neither the political changes nor the legal

provisions help end this division, “the Dalits developed disillusionment and turned their eyes to acceptance. Not just that. The number of Dalit teachers in community schools and lecturers and professors in universities is of negligible number. Similarly, it is unfair and unjust that there are very few Dalits in government organs like Military, Police, and administration” (B.K, 1918, p. 127).

One of the rising singers, writers, actors, critics, and analysts Yas Kumar in tears in an interview with Television presenter Rishi Dhamala on Prime Times Television program “People Want to Know”. critically describes the deep-rooted concept of Dalit. He explains, “how easily the upper caste Hindus wear the clothes and use the pots made by the Dalits but how they still treat them in an unfair manner. That is a big contradiction. In a cross question that the concept/practice of Dalit in Hindu religion was a thing of the past and now in modern times anybody adopts the professions the Dalit picked since centuries ago, how come there still existed discrimination and ostracization. Like any singer he sings, like any actor, he acts, like any writer, he writes, but how is it that the Hindu caste-based society does not accept them as equal, for example inter caste marriage and integration of the Dalits ” (Kumar, 2021).

Another critic, Central Committee Member of the Nepali Congress Party, Member of the House of Representatives, and Dalit himself Min Bahadur Bishwokarma, addressing the conclusion of the Ward Level Three Day Orientation organized by Tokha Municipality Ward No 11 on Dalits’ Rights, critically begged to differ from the way the people are looked upon as Dalits and Non-Dalits. He expressed his strong conviction that there was no need for the Dalits to feel low and small just because some people thought that way. He asked the participants to free themselves from the conceptual jungle of Dalit but redefine Dalits as those educated, great, gentle, intelligent, skilled, and hardworking (Vishwokarma, 2021).

Renowned critic and analyst Bishwo Bhakta Dulal in his interview with renowned film celebrity Rajesh Hamal on ‘Question of Caste’ in Episode 10, digs up the facts hitherto hidden now brought to light. He discloses the fact of the existence of untouchable-touchable even in the Buddha’s time about 25-26 centuries ago. Bishwo Bhakta Dulal in his description enters the darkest times without print or press, when the speech of the ruler was the law; there was no written law. And law also does end the division between touchable and untouchable; it rather strengthens the system in one excuse or another from its agency of education, religion, administration, literature, etc. There were some slaves and servants assigned to offer service to the ruling class people. They were untouchables. Some untouchable slaves strongly rebelled against the ostracization and alienation. The rulers in order to punish the rebels for their rebellion, because there was no prison, and they could not kill the untouchables because they made clothes

and pots, and did cleaning (most essential services), set them to do their vocation until the end of life. The untouchables had the worst of experiences of hatred but as they died, and because not all could not transfer their worst experiences, their generation continued the profession (Vishwo Bhakta Dulal, 2020).

Critic, analyst, and Vice Chancellor of the Nepal Academy Jagman Gurung in his interview for Everest Nepal digs out facts about no difference between Brahmins and Dalits. “Earlier they were not called Dalits. They had their common Clan God Masta and worshiped natural resources as God and source of power. Western Christians had their mission to divide the Aryans as Brahmins, Chhetris, Dalits, etc. They were all Aryans as they have the same Clan God” (Gurung, 2021).

Dalit, the term tagged to a certain section of the population and the unjust treatment by the society, culture and economy certainly finds a way out to acceptance. Although the term Dalit was man made and long existing, it is not a case in Nepal alone. It exists in India and elsewhere too. Nepal and India have many things in common. They have diverse differences too Sukhdev Thorat in his paper presentation on Untouchables and the Problems of the Lower Caste/Scheduled Caste People describes, “caste system and imposition of discrimination in India in detail with prescription of implementation of Ambedkar’s concept” (Ambedkar, 2012, p. 14).

### **1.1.2. Christianity and Dalits in Nepal**

There is little or no such discrimination in the name of caste in other religions as is there in Hindu. As it is beyond the scope of the present thesis, other religions have not been brought under study to see if there is, what kind of discrimination there is in those religions. The study restricts itself to **Dalits** in Nepal and their conversion into Christianity with expectation of acceptance in social, political, economic, and cultural levels. Christianity began as a movement within Judaism at a period when the Jews had been dominated culturally and politically by foreign powers and had found in their religion (rather than in their politics or cultural achievements) the linchpin of their community (htt). It is seen that when there is discrimination or dominance in one excuse or another, there is either rebellion or quit or conversion into something else. The case is something like bouncing of a ball when it is thrown with a force to the ground. When there is an action, there is a reaction too. The Dalits in Nepal embraced Hindu religion for centuries, but their plights showed no sign of end. Discrimination and ostracization continued.

Hebrew scriptures presented as the stage of a providential drama eventually ending in a triumph of God over all present sources of frustration (e.g., foreign domination or the sins of

Israel) (htt1). The Dalits in Nepal tried all constitutional and other means with hope of end of dominance and discrimination. Everything else changed but the stigma of being Dalit lingered on like a tag that prevented them from integration within the society, culture, economy, and politics. Everything changes in this world. Nothing remains constant. Change is the only constant thing. Christianity is the world's biggest religion, with about 2.1 billion followers worldwide. It is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ who lived in the Holy Land 2000 years ago (htt2). Although there existed domination of one kind or another in Christianity in the beginning, the religion does not divide people as touchable or untouchable. From the above remarks, it becomes clear that, people seek freedom and release from domination. There have been struggles and rebellions since the past. In this line, the Dalits of Nepal with no other alternative of acceptance as equal and fair treatment, started gradually expressing their experiences of grievances. Deprived of opportunities of career development and no chance of change of profession as they were, their economic conditions narrowed down to landlessness and homelessness. In rural areas and some places of the Terai, they worked as bonded ploughmen and farmhands. As has already been referred to above, the Dalits were not allowed to have education at first, apply for jobs of teaching or administration. That being so, they turned to another religion where all people are equal in the eyes of God and there is nothing touchable or untouchable as such. And there were great and marvelous works wrought by disciples of Jesus, insomuch that they did heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cause the lame to walk, and the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear; and all manner of miracles did they work among the children of men; and in nothing did they work miracles save it were in the name of Jesus» (Mormon, p. 465).

### **1.1.3. Expectation of Acceptance and Career Opportunities**

The first Christian missions to Nepal was established in 1715 by Capuchin friars who worked in the Kathmandu Valley. The Capuchins were expelled following Nepal's unification in 1768-9 and Christian groups were officially banned from the country for the next two centuries (When Christian Mission was First Established in Nepal, n.d.). As has already been slightly referred to earlier, Nepal was a close society and Nepal as the only Hindu country in the world. During different political periods, the door to Christianity was almost closed although there were visitors every year for sight-seeing and tour. Christian missionaries started building hospital and schools in Nepal. Shanta Bhawan, Patan and Mission Hospital of Palpa are two of the several examples of the charitable work. Such development work brushed confusion about Christianity aside.

Christian Missionaries extending their contribution to development also started giving out scholarships to deserving students particularly from the lowest economic class. No wonder, the *Dalit* children got such scholarships. Thus, with the passage of time, Christianity made inroad into Nepal and reached out to the poor and needy with hospitals, school buildings, scholarships, Eye Care, Services, Health Camps, etc. Bishwa Mani Pokharel, news chief at Nepal's *Nagarik* newspaper pulls out copies of the census to show the statistical gallop Christianity across Nepal. It listed no Christians in Nepal in 1951 and just 458 in 1961. By 2001, there were nearly 102,000. A decade later that number had more than tripled to more than 375,000. Pokharel and others think the increase is much higher but inaccurately reported (htt3). Hindu religion always suppressing the Dalits without any career opportunities or acceptance in the society and culture, and Christian Missionaries reaching out to the people with their relief package worked as heal to the Dalits. The missionaries' lecture and literature assured the people of no discrimination and gave scholarships to the children. After the political change of 2062-3 BS (2005), Nepal was declared a secular federal republic state, the number of churches and missionaries increased in considerable number. There have been many churches almost in every city of Nepal. The Churches conduct classes and discussions. There has been a trend of more and more people attending the classes and discussions in churches. People of all castes and classes tend to have converged into Christians. The number of Dalits is significantly higher.

Although there have been political changes over the years and people have become educated and conscious of their rights, duties and share of opportunities, the stigma of Dalit still lingered. In mass meeting and seminars, non-Dalits preached equality, acceptance, and inclusion of the Dalits in social, political, cultural, and economic opportunities. Except forming a National Dalit Commission (htt3) and the introduction of quota system in Public Service Commission, the practice of unfair treatment of touchable untouchable did not abate. Therefore, the present research *Dalit Christians in Nepal and the Experience of Conversion* seeks to find out the pull factors of Dalit conversion into Christianity. Amid double stigma (one of untouchability and the other of conversion into Christianity) of the Dalits, the study also tries to find out to what extent the Dalits experience relief with opportunities and what double stigma they suffer in the society. In the orthodox Hindu society, someone converging into Christianity may carry stigma to the converged one. The study will also touch upon this aspect.

## **1.2. Theoretical Framework**

Research is a systematic study of an issue, problem, phenomenon, etc. in a frame of a discipline. It is not a free writing or creative writing the researcher composes the way he/she likes to make

it interesting or unique. Since 1980s theory is used in some academic contexts (not at least, literary, and cultural studies) not as a general concept, but for a particular kind of theory inspired by thinkers like Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida, usually with a tendency towards relativism in respect of knowledge and interpretation (Mautner, 2004, p. 426). One Dalit person converging into Christianity is an individual incidence or problem. But many people dominated and ostracized as untouchable converging into Christianity is a social problem and therefore worthy of study and research. Furthermore, one section of the population (that of Dalits) feeling low and dominated converging into Christianity in Nepal deserves research. It is a researchable problem because the Dalits comprise significant percent of the total population. Research must apply its tools and techniques, patterns, and discipline for the conclusion to be valid and reliable. Therefore, from the nature of the study, two theories appear closely related to the phenomenon. Theory means observed regularities with universal application which ordinary people do not notice or know or bother to know or even need to know (Kafle, 2019, p. 24). Social Dominance Theory by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto (1999) also seems to cover the observed regularities of the Dalits of Nepal. The theory conceives of two major classes: dominant and dominated. To sum up, the theory describes the division wall that separates people with psychological, mythical, political, cultural, and economic walls.

Throughout the human history regardless of country, religion, political ideology, or religion there has been domination of one group or class by another in one form or another. Karl Marx in his Communist Manifesto (1818) described it in detail with explanation of class interest, class conflict and class struggle. One of the most powerful sociological explanations of social conflict is that of Karl Marx, who posited a class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie intrinsic to capitalist industrial society. This notion is powerful in being dynamic, intuitively persuasive, and appealing to fit well with history (Marx). Because there went centuries long class division, class interest and class conflict between the touchable and untouchable groups, this theory also seemed to be closely related to the research problem. There theories have been referred to with a view to taking a position that the Dalit problems is not beyond the theory. There are theories that speak much about such problem. There is yet another theory by **Lewis R. Rambo** and Charles E. Farhadian (2014). Since the present research concerns religious conversion and the theory also describes religious conversion of Dalit into Christianity, this later theory seems far more matching and fitting. Therefore, attempts will be made to investigate things regarding Dalits, their plights, their expectation of acceptance and opportunities, denial of acceptance and opportunities by the rigid and orthodox Hindu caste system, their search of alternative, their conversion into Christianity and the experiences of double stigma of under

caste (untouchable) and newborn Christians from the angle of the theory in the section it is most required.

In review, (reviewer) Jonathan Langston Chism's words, "This well researched handbook offers academics scholars of religion, and graduate students a comprehensive approach to conversion studies 'that is global, interdisciplinary, multireligious and inclusive of the personal, social, cultural, and political dimensions of the human predicament'" (Chism, 2014). The contents and activities of the Dalits are seen from the lens of Conversion Theory.

### **1.3 Research Problem**

It is no exaggeration to say, "No problem, no research". In other words, the need of an inquiry proceeds from day one of people sensing a problem in the society. Once a common problem hinders the flow of usual activities, one readily wants to seek out its solution. Reaching the solution must pass through most often used steps universally used. There is no moving ahead without locating the source and nature of the problem which includes a long list of things such as size, causes and impact of the problem. Understandably, in this present research, the Dalits of Nepal being unfairly treated as untouchable for hundreds of years, their deprivation of life opportunities, increase in domination and discrimination, rise of conflict, and seek out of acceptance from conversion formed the problem.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

Any research seeks to answer certain questions by use of valid process. The research problems splits into research questions and the questions turn to form research objectives. Following are the research questions which the present research seeks to find the answer to: (1) What are the grievances of the Dalits of Nepal? (2) What are the push factors of the Dalits of Nepal to converge into Christianity? (3) What are the opportunities and challenges the Dalit converts face in the community they live?

### **1.5. General Objectives**

The section consists of two objectives: general and specific. The general objective is to find out the reason of the Dalits of Nepal conversing into Christianity. The specific objectives of this research include: (1) To find out the grievances of the Dalits of Nepal, (2) To describe the reasons of the Dalits quitting Hindu religion and to converge into Christianity and (3) To list



out the opportunities and challenges of the Dalits in Nepal after their conversion into Christianity.

### **1.6. Significance of the Study**

A study is of no use if it is not significant and has no applicable value. Studies and research have been done in Nepal on the socio economic and socio-political conditions of the Dalits of Nepal. The researchers looked only into the socio economic and socio-political condition of the Dalits. They did not go beyond the living conditions of the people. The present study goes beyond that to find out how the Dalits suffered socially, politically, culturally, and economically under the grinding stone of Orthodox Hindu caste system, how they were seeking escape from this, how they saw Christianity as a home which sees its followers as equal with respect. It also explains what their expectations were, to what extent they were met and what challenges they faced which were unforeseen earlier. Because the present study will explore hitherto hidden facts, it will be of significance and a useful document for the reformers, policy makers and planners. Therefore, the present research will be of great significance and guidance for the planners, policy makers and leaderships to identify the source of conflict and search of settlement.

### **1.7. A Prior Glimpse of Methodology**

The bulk of the study will be of theoretical description and presentation. The nature of the research problem already tends to predict and presuppose the methods. This is applied research, not pure research. Ranjit Kumar (2005) says that most of the research in social science is applied research. According to him, a study classified as descriptive research attempts to describe systematically a situation, problem, phenomenon, service, or program, or provides information about, say, the living conditions of a community, or describes the types of attitudes towards an issue (Kumar, 2005, p. 10). The study is of exploratory and descriptive in nature. As has been said, the present research concerns Nepali society, Hindu religion, its caste system, and social, political, cultural, and economic problem, and therefore it seeks to study the area of spread and intensity of the Dalits feeling bad and breaking away to converge into Christianity.

The fourth type of research, from the viewpoint of the objectives of a study, is called exploratory research. This is when a study is undertaken with the objective either to explore an area where little is known or to investigate the possibilities of undertaking a particular research study (Kumar, 2005, p. 10). The study explores/ digs up the form and degree of the Dalits being dominated and grieved. It is descriptive because it will describe the socio economic, socio cultural and socio-political conditions of the Dalits. Similarly, it is qualitative research and shall

use secondary sources of data to broaden the previous status of knowledge for study and primary sources of data to present the actual picture of the conditions of the Dalits. Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies differ in the philosophy that underpins their mode of inquiry as well as, to some extent, in methods, models and procedures used. Though the research process is broadly the same both, quantitative and qualitative research are differentiated in terms of the methods of data collection, the procedures adopted for data processing and analysis, and the style of communication of the findings (Kumar, 2005, p. 17). It will use books, journals, newspaper articles, interviews, and miscellaneous sources as secondary sources of data. To generate fresh data, it will use interview with the Key Informants and the converts in structured and unstructured questions.

In connection with discussion of research methods, John W. Creswell (2014), discusses quantitative and qualitative research. According to him, 'In this situation, the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants. This means identifying a culture sharing group and studying how it develops shared patterns of behavior over time, For this, the inquirer seeks to examine an issue related to oppression of individuals. To study this, stories are collected of individual oppression using a narrative approach. Individuals are interviewed at some length to determine how they personally experienced oppression (Creswell, 2014, pp. 16-17). To make the research more descriptive and explore the intensity of the problems and challenges, the researcher will include six participants representative of sex, region, and status. The major tool to generate data will be of in-depth interview with the participants.

All the Dalits living in Nepal shall be the population of the study; and since it is not a census study but a survey one, it will select a sample to be best representative of the population. Ranjit Kumar (2005) observes sample as 'The basic objective of any sampling design is to minimize, within the limitations of cost, the gap between the values obtained from your sample and those prevalent in the population (Kumar, 2005, p. 23) To ensure fair and unbiased representation, the *Dalits* from the regions Himalayan, Hills and the Terai (the map of Nepal with clear division of the regions from where the participants have been taken shall be given in Chapter Four) will be approached as informants. From the Dalits, categories such as males and females, and age groups such as young, adult, and old will be made. At least one respondent from each category will be taken for information.

Under Methodology in general and Tools of Data Collection in particular, most research use Key Informant Interview and Interview with the Dalit Convert. They are widely used tools to ensure validity of the measurement. About the tools of data collection, Ranjit Kumar (2005),

says, 'Interviewing is a commonly used method of collecting information from people. Any person-to-person interaction between two or more individuals with a specific purpose in mind is called an interview. In a focus group interview, you explore the perceptions, experiences and understanding of a group of people who have some experience in common regarding a situation or event ... A questionnaire is a written list of questions, the answers to which are recorded by respondents ( Kumar,2005, p. 123-126). The collected data, some of them in raw form will be processed into a finished form and be plotted in tables to make the information and easy and quick to read and understand. Similarly, meaning will be derived from the information. The information thus obtained and plotted, and the meaning thus derived will be backed with the evidence, details, questions (structured and unstructured) in the index.

### **1.8. Motivation of the Research**

The source of the present research comes off as a result my childhood, school, and college day experiences. It also includes the firsthand experiences of having seen the Dalits treated unfairly to the extent of not being allowed to enter the house of the other non-Dalit people, enter temple for worship, share snacks and breakfast, touch water in the tap and even play together. I was born and brought up in a village called Godavari of Lalitpur district of Bagmati Province where the population comprises different castes, classes, and ethnicities. I noticed discrimination there. At school, noticed the Dalit students sitting in a separate bench. A few non-Brahmin and Chhetri students would share the same bench to sit on but at break they would quietly go to the canteen and eat snacks to avoid the touch of the Dalit fellow students.

I saw discrimination of affection to a very inhuman level by a few teachers too although they would not say it aloud. I remember a very unpleasant event that took place at school. Once a Dalit student topped the class, and a Chhetri boy got placement of second position in the final examination. For ethical reasons, I cannot specify the name of the school and the student. I heard a few locals say the teachers at the school arranged the Dalit student to come first. The student who came second in the class was often made fun of "as unable to win even a Dalit". I heard some locals jokingly say, you let the Dalit win yourself; you could not win him?'

Strict Brahmin students would speak with the Dalit students with a distance of one or two meters away. They would never share snacks at school. They would play together on the ground but when it was time for lunch or snacks, they would never invite the Dalit fellow students because their parents would taunt them if they noticed their children playing together. The non-Dalit friends did not have courage to invite their Dalit friends to share food with them on occasions of rituals, feasts, and functions. I would feel hurt to see all that.

There used to be small fun and treats at school occasionally on School Day and Farewell for the school leaving certificate passed out students. The school would arrange students to cut vegetables, fetch water, cook food and serve it to all. I noticed such fun and treats at school, but in no feast and fun did I notice the Dalit students cooking and serving food. I noticed them sitting in a corner and when the food was served, they would pick their share and eat it. The unspeakable segregation would hurt me. At times, the classes would arrange picnic and outing with a night halt. Each such group would necessarily have a couple of teachers to supervise the students. When they were on an educational tour, by choice or by chance, they would eat at the same hotel or table but at other times, one could see a line of division.

The discrimination I noticed was so prevalent that on special occasions of wedding, initiation and functions of the locals, the patent tailors were called to sew clothes they needed. I found them sitting far in the corner doing the sewing. They would bring the sewing machine to the house because the clothes were too many to be sewed in one day. The tailors would have breakfast, lunch, and snacks. They were required to wash the pots and dry them in the shine. Not just this, the members would walk cautiously to avoid the touch as if any touch would defile them. I wondered how unfair it was. There was nothing I could do at that time because I was just a high school child. Deep down, a resolve grew strong in me that I would bring it out to all. That time I did not know any research.

A special group of tailors were the band players. They were very important for the function to make it special with the music. They would lead the procession of the wedding. At lunch time, they were asked to sit far out in a row. Similarly, it was the Dalits who would make pots and cutleries like spade, sickle, axe and saw. Those Dalits were called ironsmith (*Kami*). There was another category of Dalits who made gold ornaments in their furnace. It was unfair that the clothes they made were essential, the pots and weapons they made were the things of everyday use and the band they played was a must. I wondered how come they were discriminated.

Even now, the Dalits are as discriminated as they were in those days. Because I watched them all and saw the discrimination from my own eyes, I was motivated to conduct a study to see/to find out the experiences of the Dalits and their conversion into Christianity. Indeed, some *Dalits* in group converted into Christianity as a way out of their stigma. Those who converted into Christianity were received with dignity in the churches and prayers, but they faced double stigma of “being Dalit” and “converted into Christianity” in the community. I heard unending tales of troubles and trauma of those Dalits. Therefore, I was determined to conduct research to find out the causes of discrimination, the reasons of the Dalits’ conversion into Christianity and their double stigma of untold stories. About the Hindu caste-system and discrimination of the

Dalits in Nepal has already been discussed much in the introductory section. I was really motivated to do a thorough research on the Dalit woes and troubles. As such there were several topics, I could do research on. I chose this problem because I found it most pressing and worth bringing to the public. It served double purpose: one it helped me at academic rise and two it brought the socio economic, socio political and socio-cultural conditions of the Dalits of Nepal.

### **1.9. Organization of the Research**

The present research on Dalit Christians in Nepal and the Experience of Conversion consists of six chapters each consisting of detail description split into ten subheadings. Similarly, Chapter Two called Theory describes what a theory is, how it functions, and how they are fit to best describe the issue of the present study. The theories include: (1) Social Dominance Theory, (2) Religious Conversion Theory, (3) Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective, and (4) Stigma and Social Identity: A Theory of Putdown and Management. Likewise, Chapter Three deals with methodology whose study is made precise, specific, and organized in the breakdown of (1) Qualitative Research (2) Qualitative Research and Data Collection, (3) Selection of Informants, (4) Interview Guide, (5) Ethical Consideration and (6) Reliability and Validity. Chapter Four discusses data presentation and details of the six informants. Data presentation is followed by semi-structured and in-depth interview with the six informants in a matter of fact look of as is where is fashion. Chapter Five is about the discussion and meaning deriving from the data presentation. It gives a clear picture of the Dalit Christians in Nepal and the Experience of Conversion. Chapter Six is Conclusion and findings which concludes with a brief overview of the entire process of the research. Alongside, it entails an appendix which consists of the interview questions, and other information.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORY**

### **2.1. Rationale behind the Choice of Theory**

As has already been slightly referred to above – under “Theoretical Framework” in chapter one, theory has been projected as a frame or standard parameter for a systematic study of an issue, problem, and phenomenon. The study of an issue, event, or problem in research should be backed up by theory. It is different from free writing or creative writing like a poem, essay, drama, or novel tending to be author specific. Ranjit Kumar makes it clear that (1) Research is being undertaken within a framework of a set of philosophies, (2) uses procedures, methods,

and techniques that have been tested for their validity and reliability and (3) is designed to be unbiased and objective (Kumar, 2005).

Among other theories, Religious Conversion Theory seems closest and more encompassing in connection with the study of Dalits in Nepal. Now that the plights of the Dalits have been described in Chapter One, attempt in Chapter Two has been to fit the theory into the phenomenon (Religion Conversion) to discover the underlying pattern. Hindu religion having orthodox caste-based system of dividing people into touchable and untouchable, the Dalits' experiences of the stigma of Dalit, their struggle to a search of acceptance and their breakup from Hindu to converge into Christianity with expectation of equality and other opportunities serve as surface phenomena. Conflict theory could also address the phenomenon because suppression gave birth to conflict between the Dalits and non-Dalits within the Hindu religion but since the study is more than just conflict; there is religious conversion into Christianity, the second theory best applies to study the phenomenon. Religious conversion underlies the surface phenomenon just like surface structure and underlying/deep structure. They are caused to happen by the underlying structure.

The soundness of a research depends upon the underpinning of it by a theory/theory. When a researcher picks a collective/not individual problem for study, one theory or more theories come associated to it. Theory connection with the problem/phenomenon studied increases wide acceptability of the research. The following lines are worthy of reference. 'In their introduction, the editors provide a solid historiography and overview of the field of conversion studies. They pinpoint that psychologists of religion William James and A. D. Nock, two influential pioneers in conversion studies, focused on conversion as "traumatic" and 'radical experience 'within an individual's soul (5) (Farhadian, 2014). Similarly, according to John Lofland and Rodney Stark state "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," offered a new model for conversion studies that posited that conversion is a gradual and communal process rather than an instantaneous and individual process. Lofland and Stark argued that a new convert's active engagement with his or her new religious community influences them to gradually develop a new way of life that aligns with their new religious community" (Lofland and Stark, 1965).

Of the Social Dominance Theory by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, Conflict Theory by Carl Marx and Religious Conversion Theory by Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, I found the third most preferable as it covers the phenomenon of Dalits of Nepal. Social Dominance theory although seemingly fit, broadly discusses the existence of the dominating and the dominated classes of one form or another. It does not go beyond that boundary to see what next after

social dominance. Likewise, Conflict theory on the other hand, describes the existence of classes, class interest, conflict of class interests and class struggle for change. It takes its main haunch of possible of change from class conflict and class struggle; that is all political. The third theory (Religious conversion theory) best fits to the study of Dalits as it discusses the religious conversion. The Dalits before their breakup were Hindus adhering to the Hindu systems of castes and division of labor. Convinced that the Hindu religion over the centuries did not sound sympathetic to change in a way to accept equality between the Dalits and non-Dalits, the Dalits sought a way out and found conversion into Christianity as the most viable way. Hindu and Christianity being religions and conversion from Hinduism into Christianity being religious conversion, the present theory shall be used as an underpin to explain the facts therein.

The lines given here by the scholars: “More contemporary scholars studying conversion are examining a range of issues and topics such as the impact of sociocultural forces on conversion, what happens in the brain during conversion, identity formation, immigration, intercultural contact, the agency of converts, the relationship between current and past religious orientation, diverse motivations for conversion, embodiment, conversion narratives, and deconversion or the process of disconnecting from a particular religious tradition” (Faradian and Rambo 2014, p. 7-11) sound best fit to the nature of the population under study. Because the present research seeks to study various grievances of the Dalits in Nepal, the socio-cultural forces nagging/discouraging them to stay put/still linger on in the Hindu system, various causes of conversion, and the unforeseen opportunities and challenges in the post conversion life, etc. come under the scanner of the study.

There is another research on Dalits of Sunsari district of Nepal by Agnis Neupane ‘about how they view the faith-based organizations within Christianity that work in Sunsari to improve the lives of the poor and marginalized in the area. I put the research structure too’ on Faith Based Organization-2012 (Neupane, 2012). The research scholar studied the Dalits of one district under the searchlight of Faith Based Organization, slightly different from the study I have chosen although it is about Dalits. He studied the Dalits of Nepal, that of Sunsari district from the perspective of FBO. He discussed conversion, spending much time and effort to describe faith and organization of the Dalits. These lines sound very meaningful for his motivation behind the choice of the issue Faith Based Organization. To borrow his words, “When I was in Sunsari I saw many people changing their religion, from Hindu, Kirat or Buddhism to Christianity. I am from Brahmin community and this area is Maithaili dominated area. The assumption is that the Christian based organizations that work in the area in terms of social services, contribute to the people’s change of religion”(Neupane, 2012). He refers to the conversion from

Hindu, Kirant, Buddhism to Christianity. My study has a marked difference in that it seeks to study the breakup of the Dalits from Hindu into Christianity with grievances of the Dalits, the reasons conversion and opportunities and challenges in the post conversion life. Therefore, the area of inquiry and the perspectives/theories too differ.

### **2.1. Social Dominance Theory**

Theories are not ordinary or random statements. They are tested and proven conditions, standards and parameters accepted universally regardless of when they were introduced, where they were put to experiment, tested, and proven and who all and who else did that. They serve like a master key to open all locks. By all locks, I mean problems nagging people around the world. Social Dominance Theory and the Dynamics of Intergroup Relations: Taking Stock and Looking Forward (DIRTS LF) was developed by Jim Sidanius, Felicia Pratto and Sarna Levin in 2006 whose base and hunch they describe and explain a book by the first two scholars; it is called Social Dominance (1999). By giving due credit to the classical and contemporary theories of social attitudes and intergroup relations, the authors assert that they were able to develop the Social Dominance Theory with ideas and insight from them. Things such as nature and dynamics of intergroup relations, stereotyping and group oppressions interested them in their study to bring the theory to this finished form (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 31).

Human beings endowed with language and faculty of logic, reasoning, comparing, contrasting, and assessing any situations, do not readily accept anything without inquiry and test. Success gives them joy and failure brings discontent. Similarly, they cannot remain contented with any situation if it goes contrary to their existence, survival, and progress. Besides, they are social beings and cannot live in isolation. No two individuals hold the same set of attitudes toward something. Individuals have their interest and priorities and their entry into group exerts pressure to cede many of such interest and priorities. They drop quite a lot of individual fixations to adjust in the group for their collective good. Not surprisingly, there goes a kind of conflict in the mind of man how much he/she should cede in exchange of how much gain of security and benefits from the group. The degree of closeness of relation and distance of it depends on the individual to individual and individual to group relations.

Some relations as assumed and explained by the theorists stay as stereotype long time in existence and effect without any challenge or counter to it. No wonder, trends do not easily and quickly form. It takes a long time for that to build. When behaviors or activities repeat for a long time, it takes the form of practice and the practice at length goes into automation. That automation in the long run turns to tradition or trend. The authors sound right when they say,



“However, there has yet to be a serious effort to integrate these insights into one coherent and comprehensive theoretical model. To accomplish this and gain a firmer purchase on the almost boringly repetitive nature of human oppression, we have developed social dominance theory” (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999).

Society is not just a random group of people. They are bound by, and adhered to different institutions such as marriage, family, religion, culture, education, economy, politics, and several others. Society is a system of several subsystems within the units/institutions. The institutions operate on a pattern of activities, and the society operates on the super system of other systems. Society rests atop the other units there. Although human beings regardless of nationality and geography, have the same number of organs (eyes, nose, mouth, ear, hand ...) and in the same place (nose in nose's place, mouth under the nose and eyes either side of the nose), they look different in build, height, color, and talent, so made by nature with a system of stratification. Likewise, although the five fingers share the same hand, they are of different lengths. There too exists stratification of the type of system. That is to say, people in a society hold different attitude and have different perception of looking at things.

A group or several groups emerges as dominant, and the others stay as dominated. In society too, not all people are of the same talent and have similar access to the resources for progress and success. The individuals in the society are as stratified by their talent, strength, and capabilities. As asserted by the authors, “All human societies tend to be structured as systems of group based on social hierarchies ... this hierarchical social structure consists of one or a small number of dominant and hegemonic groups at the top and one or several subordinate groups at the bottom. Among other things the dominant group is characterized by its possession of a disproportionately large share of positive social value, or all those material and symbolic things for which people strive” (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999, p. 31).

By stratification and hierarchy, this is not to say that dominance of one or several groups over one or several groups is just/right. Thomas Jefferson, the main architect of The Declaration of American Independence (1776), talked of certain unalienable rights (right to live, right to move, right to speech, which individuals cannot compromise with. The same applies true to Group Based Versus Individual Based Social Hierarchy. Under the broad heading of “Social Dominance Theory”, Group Based Versus Individual Based Social Hierarchy is described as certain individuals enjoying power and property while others simply go watching or letting it go. To borrow Sidanius, and Pratto's words, “By the term group based social hierarchy, we mean something quite distinct from an individual based social hierarchy. In an individual based social hierarchy, individuals might enjoy great power, prestige, or wealth by virtue of their own

highly valued individual characteristics, such as great athletic or leadership ability, high intelligence or artistic, political, or scientific talent or achievement” (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999, p. 32).

In the present research, we notice hierarchy between the non-Dalits and the Dalits with stigmatic division scar of untouchability. The hierarchy conceived of as ascribed and privileged goes deeper to prosper the non-Dalits with social, political, economic, and cultural with opportunities of group development. On the other hand, the hierarchy goes to deprive the Dalits of such benefits gradually and increasingly alienating them from progress and success. The Non-Dalits consider themselves as superior and the Dalits as inferior. The sense of superiority and inferiority creates two groups as antagonists. The antagonism deepens and discrimination widens further. The views of Sidanius and Pratto are worth referring in this connection, “but more importantly, that most, if not all forms of group prejudices, stereotypes, ideologies, of group superiority, and forms of individual and institutional discrimination both help produce and are reflections of this group based social hierarchy. In other words, phenomenon such as prejudice, racism, stereotypes, ad discrimination simply cannot be understood outside the conceptual framework of group based social hierarchy, especially within social systems of economic surplus” (Sidanius and Pratto, 2006, p. 38).

As has slightly been referred to and described earlier, just as a ball bounce back with the same force as was applied to throw it down, so the group of people (the Dalits of Nepal in this context) since long let down in this excuse or that tolerate discrimination and deprived only until a certain point of time, bounce back (conversion) to resist, and resent. One could block a river from its flow down in its course by a barricade/dam only for a certain time, but very soon it breaks all blockages and finds its way. In this regard, let us refer to the lines of the theorists, “On the other hand, we do not mean to imply that subordinates do not resist their own suppression, for they most certainly do. At times, this resistance can be quite intense, leading to active rebellion and even social revolution. Nonetheless, successful social revolution is a rare event indeed, and most group-based systems of social hierarchy remain relatively stable over a long swath of time. Therefore, while we recognize that there will always be some element of resistance and resentment within the subordinate groups” (Sidanius and Pratto, 2006, p. 43).

In the light and the spirit of the above lines, the subordinates (Dalits in this research) do resist against the oppression. Naturally, when there is oppression, it gives rise to suffocation of the oppressed and they opt to rebellion. At times, depending on the nature of oppression and the size and strength of the oppressed group, leads to a revolution. Noticeably, this theory clearly speaks of what the Dalits have their way ahead: active rebellion or revolution. It also

says that revolution does not happen very often. Rebellion can. Under the section of Psychology of Group Dominance, the scholars hold a strong position that “Systems of group based social hierarchy and oppression do not just fallout from the sky, nor do they merely result from the accidents and vicissitudes of human history. Rather, while the proximal forces constructing and maintaining oppression systems are complex and multifaceted, they are also the expressions of human will, agency and mind. However, perhaps psychology’s greatest insight is that the human mind both forms and is formed by human society” (Sidanius and Pratto, 2006, p. 61).

Events of like-nature forces to come under the umbrella of group, the group to have differences of hierarchy within it, however, their will to work on common minimum agenda to attain group solidarity against oppression takes enough time for it to reach maturity. They do not happen very often and at the wish or will of some individuals. The function of human mind when it comes to oppression is indicative of what goes on in the mind of the oppressed.

In views of its closeness and discussion of the above dynamics, I found it a fit theory to discuss the issues of the Dalits of Nepal. Although the Social Dominance Theory was not developed in context of the social, political, economic, and cultural situations of Nepal, it is able to address it. Therefore, I will be using the Social Dominance Theory to best describe/explain the grievances, the reasons of the Dalits’ conversion and the opportunities and challenges in the post conversion life. The Dalits begin to feel oppressed (discriminated as untouchable), their gradual movement to organize into a group, their seek out of acceptance, rejection of acceptance, the emergence of a state of conflict and the conflict turning to seeking a way out of religious conversion into Christianity. Although the theory does not go further to describe the way out as religious conversion, it sheds enough light until its formation of psychology. I will use Theory of Religious Conversion Theory by Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian.

## **2.2. Religious Conversion Theory**

There have been many theories in the world very useful and instrumental to study in pattern the events, occurrences, and phenomena (here in this context, the continuous process of the Dalits of Nepal breaking up from Hindu religion to convert into Christianity). Theories build up in/during the scholarly investigation into things starting from observation, going through hypothesis and experiment, and ending up in theory building/conclusion. Besides Social Dominance Theory by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, I shall be using Religious Conversion Theory by Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (2014) to describe the plights and conversion of the Dalits of Nepal into Christianity. Literally speaking, conversion means a lot of things or a

combination of all: (1) an event that results in a transformation (2) spiritual enlightenment causing a person to lead a new life (3) (psychiatry) a defense mechanism represses emotional conflicts which are then converted into physical symptoms that have no organic basis (4) change of religion.

More or less, all the above meaning is condensed in religious conversion because it is a kind of transformation in the life of an individual or group that convert into another set of faith, belief or idea' it is a kind of enlightenment or a change in the outlook of the life and universe, it is also a kind of defense mechanism that seeks out as an outlet when conditions become unbearable and again, it is a change of religion. Conversion in general, and religious conversion in particular in this context is a universal phenomenon occurring and recurring in the world thought and the human civilization. On observing religious conversion from the superficial level, it might seem a country specific and time specific event. But scholars have discovered underlying pattern of religious conversion. The patterns later developed as a theory of religious conversion.

One of the most important and most contentious issue in conversion studies is defining the term "conversion" itself. Perhaps the most straightforward, even if insufficient, way to understand conversion is as "change" or "transformation". The process of religious conversion, or 'converting', the term we prefer, is dynamic and malleable.

In connection with digging up the nature and roots of religious conversion, the scholars go as far as the time of Swami Vivekananda of India, a Bengali Hindu Monk who in 1893 delivered a mesmerizing and revealing speech in the United States at the Meeting of the World Parliament of Religions of Chicago to share his knowledge about Vedantic Philosophy with a thematic note of centrality of God in everyone and everywhere. He discovered and then disclosed the fact that conversion is not something to cause one to raise his/her eyebrow. He elaborated, 'Conversion occurs in all direction. Prior to Vivekananda's visit to the United States, another Indian had traveled West. In the Late nineteenth Century, a Brahmin Hindu Woman Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), who was brilliant poet, Sanskrit scholar, and activist, a polyglot who had memorized nearly twenty thousand Hindu sacred verses by the age of 12, traveled to Britain and the United States for education and converted to Christianity (Rambo and Farhadian, 2014, p. 1).

Religious conversion has had a very long journey and history and has left its mark in the human conditions. Conversion of political ideology, intellectual enlightenment, shift of thought process, took place in many times and in many countries. Phenomenal and legendary figures appeared to change the course of human development and civilization. These lines of Rambo

and Farhadian are worth quoting, “Religious conversion has inspired some of the greatest changes to the human conditions. During what Karl Jaspers called the Axial Age” (C. 800-200 B.C.E.), a period when some of the world’s most significant intellectual shifts occurred. ‘The spiritual foundations of humanity were laid simultaneously and independently in China, India, Persia, Judea, and Greece. And these are the foundations upon which humanity still subsists today’ (as Rambo and Farhadian quoted in the book). The unparalleled transformations that occurred during the Axial Age profoundly altered the world. Through the influence of Platonism, Mahavira, Buddha, King Ashoka, Confucius, Laozi Lao-tzu, Homer, Socrates, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the recoding of the Upanishads new ideas reshaped the world (Rambo, and Farhadian, 2014, p. 1).

Although it is not fair to specify/pinpoint the exact date and place when first religious conversion took place in the world, scholars from their persistent quest to find out the background and reasons of religious conversions, have contributed to the academia with clear benchmarks of religious conversion. However, the germination of conversion began since long back from the time of Socrates, Plato, Buddha... and from China, India, Persia... Because there have been cultural, political, and religious conversions, scholars have traced the roots of it. For the scholars to be able to find a pattern of conversion in the late nineteenth century, there must already have been abundant cases of conversions of one kind or the other throughout human history. In this regard, Rambo and Farhadian’s lines make most meaning when they say, “Theologians and historians have traced these vicissitudes within various traditions and locations. Since the end of the nineteenth century, various academic disciplines have proposed theories and methods to describe, understand and interpret the nature of conversion process. The origin of the field of psychology is deeply connected to this debate because it shaped the context of the early founders of psychology in general and psychology of religion in particular” (Rambo and Farhadian, 2014, p. 5).

During the last five decades, sociology has been the most prominent discipline examining the vicissitudes of New Religious Movements, first in the United States, then in Europe, and eventually in other parts of the world. The research of John Lofland and Rondey Stark (referred to earlier in this research) is especially noteworthy. In their detailed studies of the Unification Church, Lofland and Stark shifted the discussion from notions of passive converts and of sudden and radical changes to an understanding of converting as a process over time in which active converts construct new ways of life in interaction with new religious communities, often ones with charismatic leaders and enthusiastic followers. Lofland and Stark’s 1965 paper, *Becoming a World Savior: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective* began a new phase

of conversion studies (Lofland and Rondey cited by Rambo and Farahadian in *Religious Conversion*, 2014, p. 6).

### **2.3. Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective**

Conversion as a persistent occurrence is noticed in different time periods and geographical locations. Despite different pushing factors, change, transformation or say conversion of ideas, thoughts, patterns of development or religion has always happened, setting the scholars to find its origin, nature, pattern, and type. Along this line, Lofland and Stark's *Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective* has come up of such studies. At the outset it assumes that, "All the men and human groups have ultimate values, a world view, or a perspective furnishing them a more or less orderly and comprehensive picture of the world. When a person gives up one such perspective or ordered view of the world for another, we refer to this process as conversion" (Stark, 1965, p. 862).

The authors/theorists hold a strong conviction that "Frequently, such conversions are between popular and widely held perspectives from Catholicism to Communism or from the world view of an underdeveloped or primitive culture to that of a technically more advanced society" (Stark, 1965, p. 862). Nothing in the world remains static; they change over time and under certain circumstances. Changes do not fall out from the sky. Conditions from under the surface push the events and changes pop up in succession. Most interestingly, they follow same or similar pattern of change or transformation. All human beings no matter where they live or what level of awareness they have and what religion they follow for decades since birth drop it to pick a new one. They have their own world view and conviction.

The authors describe a model of conversion process that of a small millenarian religious cult in a way it serves as a good insight for similar conversions elsewhere. The authors offer seven or so successively accumulating factors that account for conversion. The authors find all seven factors necessary for conversion. The seven factors are described as sufficient conditions. An in-depth study conducted on the group with every possible information from converts, the authors arrived at the seven points of conversion

(1) **Tension:** Every single model consists of tension, strain, frustration, deprivation, and several other things associated with it. 'This tension is best characterized as a felt discrepancy between some imaginary, ideal situation and the circumstances in which these people saw themselves caught up' (Stark, 1965, p. 864). The tension is described as the fall out of discrepancy where people see themselves as caught up. And tension serves as a necessary factor for conversion. "Most people probably have some type of frustrated in their rather diverse aspiration, but pre

converts experienced the tension more accurately” (Stark, 1965, p. 864). The sources and intensity of tension sets the boundary within which a person stays almost suffocated. The suffocation and suppression would naturally overflow to pull out oneself from the group or opt to conversion.

(2) **Type of Problem-Solving Perspective:** In this type, it is said that people have number of definitions and means of coping with their problems. It posits many alternative solutions. They include the psychiatric, the political and the religious. In the first type, the problem is assumed have its source in psyche. Political solution goes a little further to see the source of problem in the social structure. And the religious perspective views the sources and solutions from an unseeable realm. As described in type one, the victim now prone to conversion seeks alternative from psychiatric, political, and religious. The alternative may feel like balm at the acute situation of nonacceptance.

(3) **Seeker ship:** This type is that of those seeking their wellbeing they are entitled to. Unable to find a way out of their problems, the pre converts find conventional religious institutions inadequate to deliver them from the problems nagging them every now and then. Humans are endowed with the power of logic, comparison to think of his/her situation and compare with those of others. They seek out their share of benefit and wellbeing as a member of the community. Once they arrive at a conviction that there is no further getting of their wellbeing, they find the existing institutions as a roadblock to their demand. Their pent-up fury gathers more and more, and it finds its expression into total conversion.

(4) **The Turning Point:** This type considers timing significant. The timing is the period of maturity when the pre-converts reach or are in a process to reach full conversion. It is known as turning point. Everything has its time of fruition and delivery. People do not live all by themselves. They live in family, circle sand community. Quite naturally, they meet one another and share their feelings. In doing so they meet and learn about what others are doing to cope with the situation. Already angry at their situation and seeking a way out, reach a time for full conversion.

(5) **Cult Affective Bonds:** By cult affective bond is meant persons going all through the four previous steps in a line to full conversion. Conversions frequently moved through preexisting friendship pairs. Those already disillusioned and living caught up and seeking better life conditions prepare themselves to full conversion. Pre-converts might shrink at first to jump into the unknown because full conversion is something they are not used to effect bonds increasingly prepares them to full conversion.

(6) **Extra Cult Effective Bond:** The conditions under which extra cult controls are activated go through emotional attachments. In many cases positive attachments outside the cults are other religious seekers. All so because such an extra cult person might be only slightly behind his friend in his own conversion person.

(7) **Intensive Interaction:** “The model presupposes the six factors as sufficient to bring a person to verbal conversion to the deviant perspective, and still demanding one more contingency for him to become a total convert. Normally, verbal converts put their lives as gateway to the cult the six previous factors suffice to bring a person to verbal conversion to the Deviant Perspective. but one more contingency must be met if he is to become a “deployable agent” or what we have termed a total convert” (Stark, 1965, p. 864-874).

The theorists put forward the model of religious conversion. The seven conditions serve as contributing factors for a person to push to conversion. So that the model could be best understood and well digested, they have summarized it thus by presenting the seven factors in brief are “(1) Experience enduring, acutely felt tension, (2) Within a religious problem-solving perspective, (3) Which leads him to define himself as a religious seeker, (4) Encouraging the DP at a turning point in his life, (5) Wherein an affective bond is formed (or pre-exists) with one or more converts, (6) Where extra cult attachments are established or neutralized, (7) And, where, if he is to become a deployable agent, he is exposed to intensive interaction”(Stark, 1965, p. 864-874).

#### **2.4. Stigma and Social Identity: A Theory of Social Putdown and Management**

In my pursuit of study of what it is like to live in a society where a group of people feel let down, stay pent up, furious and suffocating to vent out their trauma despite any crime or offense of their making, I came cross a couple of theories and literature that discuss a trend and route they go through with their traumatic experiences. During my venture into study, I went through *Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective*, *Religious Conversion Theory* and *Social Dominance Theory*, I found them adequately describing the social, political, economic, cultural, and psychological dynamics as factors for their plight and search of alternative ways of delivery. However, I sensed that since there are such situations where people feel small, unworthy, angry, and unhappy seeking a delivery from those experiences, they definitely seek out a way to remedy and delivery.

The theories discussed the route of their departure from the present state of anger to a better domain with acceptance. In my journey to go deeper into the study of what else is there, I found it describes the experiences of the people who feel themselves as outsider in their own society



and circle, community, and country. I came across yet another book delving deep with Stigma and Social Identity: A Theory of Social Stigma by Irving Goffman. The author in the book announces its contents as NOTES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SPOILED IDENTITY. According to him, stigma refers to a social, political, economic, cultural, or psychological logo forced upon a member of the society based on his/her complexion, physical deformity, birth into the family of parents with bad track records, handicap, or belonging to a group or community of people that bear the burn of hatred and insult. The blemish of any of the above stigma sticks on them during their lifetime until death.

The history of the term stigma goes as far as the times of the Greeks who, as the author described, defined like this, “The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places” (Goffman, 1986, p. 1).

No wonder, the trend of one group of people letting the other group of people down is not of recent product or practice. It has been there since very early in this or that excuse. In true sense of the term, it was a form of crime of the group to put the blemish on the other and hate the entire community in that excuse. It was inhuman and cruel of the people to brand/tag a label of slave or criminal, traitor or blemished, polluted, or avoided by the public. Although it was not the choice of the children to be born into the family of slave, criminal or traitor or any such thing, the blemish or the stigma lingered on and could never be washed off.

Today, the term is widely used in something like the original literal sense but is applied more to the disgrace itself than to the bodily evidence of it. Furthermore, shifts have occurred in the kinds of disgrace that arouse concern (Goffman, 1986, p. 1). The society, politics, economy, culture, and awareness of the people now have undergone a drastic change. However, the practice of stigma to continue to linger on in one excuse or another, in one form or another is the indication of the existence of instinct of love and hatred. One or two individuals cannot undo the collective psyche easily. The book has this to say, “Social settings establish the categories of persons likely to be encountered there. The routines of social intercourse in established settings allow us to deal with stranger comes into our presence, then, first appearances are likely to be enable us to anticipate his category and attributes, his “social identity”, -to use a term that is better than “social status” because personal attributes such as “honesty” are involved as well as structural ones, like occupation” (Goffman, 1986, p. 2).

The logo of stigma feels like a nail dug deep in the heart and keeps hurting the person he/she is asleep or awake. They are bottled up and have much to vent out. The stigma pinches the children who grow out to learn that they are different individuals and should not expect to be treated equal. At this point, the letter written to Dear Miss Lonely-hearts by Desperate (name change) is worth referring to. The letter reads, "I am sixteen years old now and I don't know what to do and would appreciate it if you could tell me what to do. When I was a little girl it was not so bad because I got used to the kids on the block making fun of me, but now I would like to have boy friends like the other girls and go out on Saturday nights, but no boy will take me because I was born without a nose-although I am a good dancer and have a nice shape and my father buys me pretty clothes. I sit and look at myself all day and cry, what did I do to deserve such a terrible bad fate?" (intro).

It must be very unbearable to carry on the stigma of any kind-physical disfigurement or a crime committed and the entire society looking down upon the person as nonhuman. Non stigmatized person can only discuss the plights of what it is like to be a stigma victim. Those with the burn of the logo of stigma do not easily take it. There is no question of their 'letting it go'. They are not exceptional. By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances (Goffman, 1986, p. 5).

The question as to how the stigma victim manages his/her situations of stigmatization. Questions arise how the stigma victim adjusts himself/herself in the society. Does the fury abate, and the victim surrenders to the observation of the society? Or does the fury accumulate like a steam to burst like a released pressure? Regarding this, the theory goes on to say, "How does the stigmatized person respond to his situation? In some cases, it will be possible for him to make a direct attempt to correct what he sees as the objective basis of his failing as when a physically deformed person undergoes plastic surgery, a blind person eye treatment, an illiterate remedial education, a homosexual psychotherapy (where such repair is possible, what often results is not the acquisition of fully normal status, but a transformation of self from someone with a particular blemish into someone with a record of having corrected a particular blemish" (Goffman, 1986, p. 9).

Of the stigma of physical deformities, ignorance, and homosexuality the management is that of surgery, education, and psychotherapy. What about the stigma forced upon the person or group of people from caste difference or religion or set of belief? Because that is mostly socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural, there appear two alternatives: one of the stigmatic persons to work hard to raise their economic and professional capacity as said "Once a person

with a particular stigma attains high occupational, political, or financial position-how high depending on the stigmatized group in question – a new career is likely to be thrust upon him, that of representing his career. He finds himself too eminent to avoid being presented by his own as an instance of them” (Goffman, 1986, p. 26).

The stigmatized individual exhibits a tendency to stratify his “own’ according to the degree their stigma is apparent and obtrusive. He can then take up regarding those who are more evidently stigmatized than himself in the attitudes the normal take him to” (Goffman, 1986, P.107). In case of the present research of the Dalits of Nepal under the socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural grindings of division as touchable and untouchable, the release of the pent-up stigma of fury is break up from the Hindu religion and conversion into Christianity. It is more so because not all from the Dalit community are able to raise their capabilities as they are deprived of life chances.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3. Introduction**

Just like the science that studies plant life of a particular region is called botany and the science to study living organisms is called biology, the branch of philosophy to analyze the principles and procedure of inquiry of a particular discipline is known as methodology. It is also a science or system of methods to explain how every single method function to build a system. In one sense, it is also a kind of positivistic science. According to Kerlinger (1986, p. 10 in Kumar, 2005, p. 7) “scientific research is a systematic, controlled, empirical, and critical investigation of propositions about the presumed relationship about various phenomena”. Similarly, “Scientific methods consist of systematic observation, classification, and interpretation of data. Now, obviously, this process is one in which nearly all people engage during their daily lives. The main difference between our day-to-day generalizations and the conclusions usually recognized as scientific method lies in the degree of formality, rigorousness, verifiability, and general validity of the latter” (Lundberg, 1942, p. 5 cited by Kumar, 2005, p. 7).

In the light of the above definition, a verbal image is formed that research is a habit of questioning what everyone does with a systematic examination of the observed information to find answers to the question without a view to instituting appropriate changes for a more effective professional service. Normally, ‘the most dominating three questions: What does the researcher

want to find out about? How does he/she want to find it out? and why does he/she want to find it?’ dominate the whole of research. In another sense, research is the combined answer to ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’. The “what” aspect of the research concerns the research topic whereas the “how” aspect has much to do with methodology which explains how the answer was derived. That “how” aspect is important can be illustrated from an imaginary example of someone wanting to become rich. There would be two ways open to richness: by working hard or by stealing. Richness from hard work is acknowledged whereas richness through robbery is not allowed. Similarly, “why” aspect too has much to do with the importance or significance of the research. That is to say, how will the research contribute to solving the collective problem of the society. Therefore, methodology is something like the machinery of a vehicle that makes it function and move. For that reason, methodology plays its part as the machinery of the research, a hardware that pumps life to the system/research.

Of the two broad types of research: pure research and applied research, the present research belongs to the second category which is also known as social science. Similarly, going slightly deeper into methodology, it is fair to talk a little about research design. To borrow John W. Creswell’s words, “Research designs are plans and procedures for research that span the direction from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. The plan involves several decisions three types of designs are advanced: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method” (Creswell, 2009, p. 3).

There have been many researchers who have tried to find an answer to the question in a valid and reliable way. However, most often people jump into conclusion without bothering to go all through the process or right methods. Skipping of methods and jumping into random conclusion does not qualify the attempt as research. The finding lacks validity and reliability which cripples the research. Normally, the finding of a research is not challenged/questioned if the researcher has used sound methods to arrive at the conclusion. Soundness of the method refers to the adoption of right processes in a way to reach right conclusion. In this context, the words of C. R. Kothari sound most fitting, “Research in common parlance refers to a search for knowledge In fact, research is an art of scientific investigation, Some people consider research as a movement, a movement from the known to the unknown” (Kothari, 2019, p. 1).

Because it would be relevant here to spare a little time and a few pages to discuss what a research is and what its functions are when it comes to research; it already presumes methods which include a number of things such as identification of the population upon whom the study is carried out, selection of a sample; how many people are approached as informants, instrument of data collection; how the required information is elicited, sources of the collection of data,

selection of research designs: qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods, selection of informants, identification of variables, question of validity and reliability, etc. This is the reason why methodology is often called the hardware of the research.

### **3.2. Qualitative Research**

The nature and intensity of the present research calls for the use of qualitative research design. According to Sharan B. Merriam: “The key to understanding qualitative research lies in the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with the world. The world, or reality, is not the fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon that it is assumed to be in positivist qualitative research. Instead, there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what the interpretations are at a particular point in time and in a particular context” (Merriam, 2002, pp. 3-4).

Indeed, as slightly referred to above, the good about social/applied research is that although we use the same scientific methods/ techniques and strategies to arrive at the right conclusion, because we studied on society, the meaning is constructed socially rather than it is already there. The individuals in everyday life keep on constructing meaning and the meaning changes slightly. The meaning is not normally the same as it was decades ago. It changes because the standards of society change too.

Sharan B. Merriam’s observation makes most sense in the words, “From education to anthropology to management science, research students and practitioners are conducting qualitative studies. It is not surprising, then, that different disciplines and fields ask different questions and have evolved somewhat different strategies and procedures” (Merriam, 2002, p. 3-4). In pure research, the subjects under study are animals, objects, plants, chemicals, etc. which retain the same attributes/characteristics. Dogs and cats of the US and Nepal bark alike and carry the same attributes. No matter what the geography or society, or culture, their characteristics persist the same. However, in case of humans, the same does not apply. Meaning changes over time and across geography. Humans are subject to culture other things are not.

Sharan B. Merriam sounds most illustrative and encompassing with the wording of “The design of a qualitative study focused on interpretation includes shaping a problem for this type of study, selecting a sample, collecting, and analyzing data, and writing up the findings. An understanding of this process is important for assessing the rigor and value of individual reports of research. A research study begins with your being curious about something, and that ‘something’ is usually related to your work, your family, your community, or yourself. A research

problem can also come from social and political issues of the day or from the literature. Often these spheres intersect” (Merriam, 2002, p. 3-4). When it comes to qualitative research, one tends to wonder what it is like to conduct a qualitative study. The shortest answer to the wonder is the distinction lies in the way the study has its nature, what the research problem is like, selection type of sample, the way data are collected and analyzed and how the way the finding is reported to the world.

Literally speaking, qualitative research means research that has quality and is not weak in its required strength of components of research; it is complete and full at the same time is able to give adequate information. However, that is not all. Qualitative research is the type of study whose value usually and normally comes in nominal form. Similarly, a researcher cannot use qualitative research design at wish or interest. In this regard, UWE Flick’s expressions give solid answer. “Why use qualitative research? Is there any particular need for such an approach in the current situation? As a first step, why interest in qualitative research has grown considerably over the last few decades. Due to a development that has become known as the pluralization of life world, qualitative research is of specific relevance to the study of social relations” (Flick, 2018, p. 1).

A host of questions arise in the mind of a scholar about the time when research started, where it was tested and who did it. The root of the history of research goes as far as the time of Greek and Roman civilization when the scholars tried research to find the answer to the questions that troubled them, in this regard, the words of George R. Taylor express most. “The Greeks and Romans made significant gains in the field of research through the study of astronomy, medicine, physics, geography, literature, ethics, law, and engineering. They laid the foundation for replacing supernatural events with a systematic way of thinking and investigating problems. Additionally, the Greek and Roman contributions to research enabled mankind to explore the universe and to assist in developing a scientific way of researching for the truth based on factual information; facts that provided man with more reliable answers to many questions present in his environment” (Taylor, 1984, p. 3-4).

Initially, research was done to test the objectivity and pattern of the text. It began from testing to inquiry on astronomy, medicine, physics, geography (pure science) and then literature, ethics, and law (applied/social science). It is a good idea to dig out a little into history because it tells us how research arrived at the eighteenth and twentieth century to probe into everyday problem that intrigue us. Here is what justifies the claim. “It was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that research in the social sciences began. As indicated, the social sciences were modelled after the physical sciences and attempts were made to make the social sciences as objective

as the physical sciences. Thus, around the middle of the twentieth century, qualitative research was being explored for use in the social sciences” (Taylor, 1984, p. 4).

There have been three kinds of research designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods based on mode of inquiry/question types and the form in which the answers are obtained. The definition of the author is worth quoting here. “In qualitative research, data are usually expressed in words. However, in some instances, hypothesis may be used. Descriptive statistics are frequently used to display some data, such as graphs, charts, percentiles, and measures of central tendency. Most qualitative data are classified, and then categorized and extensive narrations are written describing the phenomena in great detail” (Taylor, 1984, p. 4).

### **3.3. Qualitative Research and Data Collection**

Qualitative or quantitative research, data collection is a very important step in the study because without data, there is no deriving meaning or reaching a conclusion. It is the data that speak, and the conclusion is reached. No matter what the research, be it in medical line, political science, history, anthropology or any other applied science, data come from two sources: secondary and primary. In this regard, Ranjit Kumar’s observation sounds to make best sense, “There are two major approaches to gathering information about a situation, person, problem, or phenomenon. Sometimes, information required is already available and need only be collected. However, there are times when the information must be collected. Based upon these broad approaches to information gathering, data are categorized as: secondary data and primary data ... Examples of secondary sources include the use of census data to obtain information on the age-sex structure of a population; the use of hospital records to find out morbidity and mortality patterns of a community; the use of an organization’s record to ascertain its activities; and the collection of data from sources such as articles, journals, magazines, books and periodicals historical and other types of information” (Kumar, 2005, p. 118).

Secondary sources of data as it seems are easy to obtain from the printed sources. They were collected for another purpose but become useful and instrumental for the study one is doing. Moreover, it adds relevance and justification when associated with literature review. Secondary sources of data add smell over gold to the present research. It gives insight to the issue under study; however, it cannot belittle or replace primary sources of data. About the relevance and importance of primary data, Ranjit Kumar gives a worth referring to observation, “On the other hand, finding out the first-hand attitudes of a community towards health services, ascertaining the health needs of a community, evaluating a social program, determining the job satisfaction of the employees of an organization, and ascertaining the quality of services provided by a

worker are examples of information collected from primary sources. In summary, primary sources provide first-hand information and secondary sources provide secondhand data” (Kumar, 2005, p. 118).

In this connection of qualitative research and data collection as per the nature of research, K. J. Devers and R. M. Frankel put a fitting observation, “Over the past several decades, however, the craft of qualitative research has advanced significantly as researchers and methodologists have articulated the techniques and procedures used move from research question to the results. Given the primary research question and resources available, research select one of the domains, or in some cases, combine several (e.g., example of documents and interviews). Moreover, each of these domains, and the specific methods included in them, take time to learn, as discussed. Here, we focus on two general data collection issues and how to proceed once the data are collected: the degree of structure or type of instrumentation used when collecting qualitative data; the pros and cons of audio and/or videotaping; the data management in qualitative research” (Frankel, 2000, p. 6).

Needless to say, that a bulk of research are of qualitative type depending on its procedures and research problem. The phrasing of the research problem paves its way with clear indication of quantitative or qualitative category the given research belongs to. To be more specific, the present study on Dalit Christians in Nepal and the Experience of Conversion calls for qualitative research as it assumes certain inquiry method, the type of data, methods of data collection and philosophical positioning with text and image data. John Creswell gives a very insightful observation in this regard, “Qualitative procedures demonstrate a different approach to scholarly inquiry than methods of quantitative research. Qualitative inquiry employs different philosophical assumptions; strategies of inquiry; and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Although the processes are similar, qualitative procedures rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry” (Creswell, 2014, p. 173).

Dalit Christians and their experience of conversion: opportunities and challenges presuppose that the researcher will collect the data in natural setting, multiple sources of data, inductive method of data analysis, participants’ meanings, holistic account, and theoretical lens as the baseline. John Creswell is more specific when he says, “Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the sight where participants experience the issue and problem under study. They do not bring individuals into a lab, Qualitative research typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents rather than rely on a single data source In the entire qualitative research process, the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning



that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers express in the literature. Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. Qualitative researchers often use lens to view their studies, such as the concept of culture central to ethnography or gendered, racial, or class differences from the theoretical orientation. Qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture (Creswell, 2014, p. 173).

True to the spirit and essence of the observation of John Creswell (2014), the data for the study calls for collection from those Dalits with their experience of conversion plus the opportunities and challenges as seen from their eyes and experiences of everyday life and interaction with other fellow converts. To obtain the fullest picture of the situation, the tools of data collection mostly interview appears viable and most reliable. Similarly, rather than copy pasting the meaning as put forth by scholars, the meaning of the individuals under study have been used. The construction and reconstruction of the meaning started from their interaction with other fellow converts. Alongside, the interpretation and deriving of the meaning began from details to assumption and from assumption to generalization. Side by side, the study focused those Dalits who converted into Christianity with their observation and experience of challenges and opportunities behind the conversion. Last but not the least, the multiple and varied perspectives of the individuals formed a holistic picture of the situation.

John Creswell (2014) is more insightful when he sets the benchmark for the researcher to: “Identify the purposefully selected sites or individuals for the proposed study. The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and research question. This does not necessarily suggest random sampling or selection of many participants and sites, as typically found in qualitative research” (Creswell, 2014, p. 173).

### **3.4. Selection of Informants**

Information in research is very important because it paves the way to derive meaning to reach a flawless conclusion. In one sense, it breathes life into research. Information, firsthand, as such is not readily and easily available; it is to be retrieved from the informants. Informants are none but the people who have memories about the events/problems/issues; knowledge about it or experiences which they can share with the researcher. As the research proceeds, a researcher arrives at a crossroads of choices as to how to determine the informants and how to select them

in a way to make the sample to be best representative. Therese L. Baker is right when he says, “survey research is a method of collecting data in which a specifically defined group of individuals are asked to answer several identical questions. Those answers form the dataset of the study. Survey research is the most common type of social research probably for both the right and wrong reasons. As the old dictum dictates, ‘if you want to find something out, sak!’” (Baker, 1999, p. 201).

During research, a researcher is under pressure of how best to make the research conclusion accurate and infallible. To make it happen, he/she needs to take recourse to sampling; so, because when the study population (in this research all the Dalits of Nepal who have converted into Christianity) is too large and is not feasible to approach to seek out information. When that is the case, the best and most viable/reliable choice is sampling which is a very small section of the population that best represents just like a few drops of blood drawn out for test from one’s body. There is no problem with blood as it flawlessly represents all blood but when it comes to individuals, it is a little intriguing. According to Therese L. Baker, “sampling refers to planned ways of selecting subjects. Which people are going to be studied? Thus, to draw a sample of individuals is to determine who will be studied. Of course, many social research projects focus on organizations, programs, or other aggregates of individuals in formal or informal groups. In the study of groups, the question becomes not who but which” (Baker, 1999, p. 201).

Research always runs the risk of introduction of bias and subjectivity as it is about humans; and human nature is such that everyone has a tilt or inclination to one side or the other, however slight. Nonetheless, there are times and techniques when the entry point of bias and subjectivity can be blocked or eliminated. For that, there are random sampling, convenience sampling, purposive or judgmental sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling. Random sampling assumes every individual as having equal chance of selection regardless of sex, age, region, etc. It was dropped in the present research as it would not ensure the selection of right informants. In the present research, not all Dalits could be the right informant; only those Dalits who converted into Christianity were to be selected. No surprise that the researcher had no choice but pick out those Dalit converts. Convenience sampling could not be the right choice as it would run the risk of bias and poor representation. Therefore, taking the seriousness and gravity of the research under consideration, judgmental/purposive and quota sampling were found best as the informants were to represent age, sex, and regions of Nepal.

Similarly, Key Informant Interview (KII) was found very important because the Converted Dalit pastors, and church clerics would provide enough information about the issue (the volume and tendency of the Dalits converting into Christianity). The bulk of their information elicited

from the KII interview matched with the information obtained from the real informants would build a greater body of knowledge. Interviews were to be taken with the local church authorities: pastors and clerics. Regarding the interview nature, open-ended and close-ended questions (semi-structured) in the interview helped the researcher to get to the root of the problem. Moreover, the research had its tilt slightly to interpretive meaning than positivistic one. As has already been discussed above, the researcher visited the churches, prayer, and similar gatherings to trace the right informants to some extent. Taking into consideration the ethical codes, the church authorities were requested for interview.

About the suitability of purposive/judgmental sampling, T. L. Baker clearly says, “A purposive sample is a form of nonprobability sample in which the subjects selected seem to meet the study’s needs. Although many individuals fit this description, the problem is to know where to find them. The student came up with a strategy. A national Beatles conference was going to be held. He went off to this conference armed with 250 questionnaires and found a ready set of respondents, Quota sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling that is often mistaken for stratified sampling. This occurs because there is an attempt to select certain sized subsamples from clearly defined groups” (Baker, 1999, p. 201).

To ensure that the sampling served the purpose of the present study, the information obtained from the KII aside, the informants were selected from purposive and quota sampling. Nepal is composed of the three regions, it was imperative for the research to include informants from the Himalaya, Hilly and Terai regions. Once that was done, to ensure the collection of accurate data, sex of the informants was also made representative by selecting both male and female from both clusters: Key Informants and Sample Converts. The informants were assured and encouraged by letter and oral persuasion that the information they provided would contribute to solving a great problem. Also, because Nepal is an agricultural country and most people remain busy and cannot give time, the timing of the collection of information was set post monsoon, particularly October and November by which time, the farmers had already cultivated the crops and the harvest time had not come.

### **3.5. Interview Guide**

One of the tools of data collection, and very important, in this research is interview with the group of people under study and key informants who have a wealth of knowledge and experiences about the phenomenon of The Dalit Christians in Nepal and the Experience of Conversion: Opportunities and Challenges. Although it is one of the most sought-after tools in researcher endeavors, it is a good idea that it adheres to a set of guides. In this connection, “It has

been agreed that in a qualitative study, as in research methods in general” (Kitto at al., 2008, in Hanna Kallio and Mari Kangasniemi, 2016), and critically influence the result of the study (Gibbs at al., 2007). Interviews are the most used data collection method (Taylor, 2005) and the semi-structured format is the most frequently used technique in qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Hanna Kallio, 2016, p. 2955).

Interview divides itself into unstructured and structured collectively called semi-structured interview. As its name suggests, interview in research is more or less that same as the one faced by a job seeker during job hunt. Normally, the interview panel which consist of two or more members want to make sure how competent and confident the candidate is. In research, interview is held by a researcher with the people under study in a convenient environment where they can share their knowledge, ideas, and experiences about the issue/problem. According to Ranjit Kumar, “Any person-to-person interaction between two or more individuals with a specific purpose in mind is called an interview. On the one hand interview can be very flexible, when the interviewer has the freedom to formulate questions as they come to mind around the issue being investigated; and on the other hand, it can be flexible, when the investigator has to keep strictly to the questions decided before hand” (Kumar, 2005, p. 123).

Going beyond unstructured and structured interview, unstructured interview divides itself as in-depth interview and unstructured interview allowing complete freedom to the interviewed in the areas of content and structure. The interviewer has freehand at the wording in a way the informant feels comfortable with every assurance of right information to be available. The interviewer can explain the question if he/she senses the informant’s confusion or inconvenience. The researcher makes sure that he/she asks all those questions to elicit information.

In-depth interview goes deep with questions to dig out every bit of information until the researcher is quite sure that the information has been collected. It presupposes/assumes face-to-face live interaction between the researcher and the informants. The interview was recorded in audio and written. The rationale behind two modes of recording was an apprehension of just in case the sound quality during live interview gets poor, the written mode would serve the purpose, and later both the modes would be matched to cross verify the information obtained. Because Key Informant Interview with the church Dalits converted officials, clerics would be contributory to the research, the Key informant interviews were approached, taken time and the interview started. As described above, in-depth interview with simple, short, and introductory questions began and it led to the in-depth questions in the first round. Other sample converts were approached, taken time and held the interview. Most interview questions began with “wh” whose answer came in short and long sentences.

Next to in-depth interview, very useful tool of data collection in qualitative research is focus group interview/discussion. As has been described earlier, the new and old converts are the focused group who could provide fresh information of their experiences of what it was like to convert into Christianity, what their experiences in post conversion was like, what opportunities they thought they would get and what challenges they did not foresee earlier came on their way. Assured that focus group interview/discussion was one of the best, it was arranged in public places, in the house of the informants and church compound when they gathered there for prayer. Regarding the difference between focus group discussion/interview and in-depth interview, Ranjit Kumar has this to say, “The only difference between a focus group interview and an in-depth interview is that the former is undertaken with a group and the latter with an individual. In a focus group interview, you explore the perceptions, experiences, and understandings of a group of people who have some experience in common regarding a situation or event. In focus group interviews, broad discussion topics are developed, beforehand either by the researcher or by the group. These provide a broad frame for discussions which follow (Kumar, 2005, p. 123).

In addition to Key informant interview, focus group interview, and in-depth interview, narratives also constitute a very good interview guide. By narrative, we mean someone telling a story, and another person gathering information. It is even less structured than focus group interview as it lacks predetermined contents. Of course, the researcher prefers to hear the personal experience of the informant. The person providing information recalls the past events or occasions and then narrates it in the form of a story. The way the narratives provide information give a complete picture and pattern of what happened. Connecting this with the research, Ranjit Kumar says, “Narratives have almost no predetermined contents except that the researcher seeks to hear the personal experience of a person with an incident happening in his/her life. Essentially, the person tells his/her story about an incident or situation, and you, as the researcher, listen passively. And, occasionally, you encourage the individual by using techniques of active listening, that is, you say words such as ‘uh huh’, ‘mmm’, “yeah”, “right” ‘and nod as appreciation” (Kumar, 2005, p. 123).

One advantage of narratives over other forms in the interview guide is that it puts the informants in the comfort to elicit information. The researcher raises an issue or event, and the speaker talks about it. The conversation like setting forms a narrative to complete the picture and pattern of the incident. To connect with the issue of the experiences of the Dalits, the researcher approached a couple of informants on individual basis, raised the issue of the Dalits’ experiences of conversion into Christianity. They narrated the entire story of Dalits being

ostracized/ alienated, deprived of their share of rights and freedom, their lack of unity, their poor economic conditions, no social, political, and cultural acceptance, their meeting other Christian converts, their acceptance in equal footing and the missionaries reaching out to them with help and assistance. The narrative unfolded like a roll of thread.

Very like narrative, oral history consists of overt or covert listening to the informants sharing their experiences in feasts, functions, and occasions. It starts from a historical event or episode. The Dalits have had a world of experiences of not being allowed to use a public tap, entry into temples and houses, addressed with lowly language, declining to eat food touched by the Dalits, etc. Tailors, Blacksmiths, leather workers, road and toilet cleaners, band players, etc. have had their untold stories staying pent up, which open like the spool that spins on and on should there arise a chance or forum to share their side of story. Therefore, in view of the above insightful ideas, the researcher used the contents from the interview guide.

To make sure that major questions did not miss out, the researcher made tentative/rough draft of the questions and asked them slightly modified to suit the interaction in the KII and focus group interview. He also raised the issue of the present status of Dalit and what they did to counter the domination of the non-Dalits over Dalits. As a passive listener, the researcher quietly made note of the details he found useful during the interaction.

### **3.6. Ethical Considerations**

Literally, ethics refers to the principle of right or wrong that are accepted by an individual or a social group. In other words, it is a boundary that separates right from wrong as judged from moral standards and social acceptance. For example, you are close and intimate to someone, and he/she shares very personal and confidential matters with you with every trust that you will under no circumstances disclose it without his/her consent, but you did it and it harmed him/her a lot. Your disclosure of the friend's confidential matters is unethical. It is immoral. This was a local and practical example. In research, ethical considerations are more important because the informants provide you invaluable information which easily leads you to reach complete idea/knowledge about the problem/issue. It is immoral if you betray and disclose the real identity of the informant without his/her consent.

Many things shared by the informants as information for your research tend to be such that you should keep it confidential and never disclose the source, or it may put the informant at risk. In connection with the ethicality of information and the sources thereof, the words of Sitti Roshaidai Mohd Arifin are noteworthy, "The protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate ethical principles is important in any research study. In any qualitative

study, ethical considerations have a particular resonance due to the in-depth nature of the study process. The concern of ethical issues becomes more salient when conducting face to face interview with vulnerable group of participants. They may potentially become stressed while expressing their feelings during the interview session” (Arifin, 2018, p. 30).

Some of the information shared by the informants tends to be of very confidential nature which conflicts with the interest of the person or institution it is against. The person/institution upon knowing the source of disclosure may give threats of life to the informants. Therefore, it is highly demanding that the research does not disclose the source, or it may take life of the informants. The informants feel very insecure while sharing the information. As the in-depth information is very important for the research, it is the duty of the researcher to protect the informants by not disclosing the identity or any clue about him/her. Alongside, the observation of Sitti Rosaidai Mohd Arifin is significant, “The process of obtaining consent consists of the following: consent should be given freely (voluntarily), subjects should understand what is being asked to them, and involved persons must be competent to consent (2). This means to participate in a research study, the participants need to be adequately informed about the research, comprehend the information, and have a power of freedom of choice to allow them to decide whether to participate or decline” (Arifin, 2018, p. 30).

Indeed, the researcher, for his/her benefit of interest in the research, should under no circumstances, keep the informant in dark about the purpose of research and assurance of non-disclosure of his/her identity. That is to say, the researcher should not put any psychological pressure or any undue temptation of material benefit in return of the information provided. The informant must be competent that the information provided by him/her will contribute to the solution of a big collective problem of which he/she is a part. Similarly, the researcher should inform the informant about what questions he/she is going to ask. The ultimate right to answer the questions or decline to do so is reserved with the informants. There are ways of protecting the informants from vulnerability of any form, for example, keeping the information top confidential, giving a fake name, age, sex, and locality, or simply declaration of confidentiality.

To borrow the words of the scholar, “The anonymity and confidentiality of the informants was preserved by not revealing their names and identity of the data collection, analysis, and reporting of the study findings. Privacy and confidentiality of the interview environment were managed carefully during telephone communication, interview session, data analysis and dissemination of the findings” (Arifin, 2018, p. 30).

In connection with the present research, the researcher maintained every single tip or guidance as used globally for research. For the research on Dalit Christians in Nepal and the Experience of Conversion, the researcher kept the identities of name, location, profession, sex, and age of the informants confidential to protect them. During the period of collection of data and presenting them in the later phase, the report/narrative was made as objective/impersonal as possible. It was done so because the Dalits still feel insecure of the stigma/logo tagged on them, as on many occasions they fake their real identity because otherwise, they cannot get water to drink, forget about food or space to live in while in journey. The fear what others would feel and have an attitude towards them if they express their experiences of conversion also served as a strong guidance for the researcher (here, me) to keep the identity confidential. It was desirable of me as a researcher to elicit information as the research has nothing to do with WHO SAID rather than WHAT WAS SAID. I sensed fear of insecurity of the informants when they narrated their experiences and realization of the challenges and opportunities.

In the question of ethical issues during research, John Creswell's words make most sense. To borrow his words, Research does involve collecting data from people about people (Punch, 2005 in Creswell, 2009, 6).

“Researchers need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research; guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions; and cope with new, challenging problems” (Israel and Hay, 2006, in Creswell, 2009). “Ethical questions are apparent today in such issues as personal disclosure, authenticity and credibility of the research report, the role of researchers in cross cultural context and issues of personal privacy through the forms of Internet data collection” (Creswell, 2009, p. 87).

### **3.7. Reliability and Validity**

Validity and reliability are the two terms most articulated and demanding of research. It is trustworthiness and function of any research. The worth of research is tested on the touchstone of validity and reliability. It shields the research from the risk of flaw and weakness. Because research is done by humans and about humans, flaws are very likely. Reliability and validity plug in the holes of the sources of the flaws and weakness. Under the sub heading of Threats to Validity, Richard Creswell observes validity thus, “There are several threats to validity that will raise questions about an experimenter's ability to conclude that the intervention affects an outcome and not some other factor. Experimental researchers need to identify potential threats to



the internal validity of their experiments and design them so that these threats will not likely arise or are minimized” (Creswell, 2009, p. 162).

Validity and reliability like Juno’s Swans, come side by side as if they were complementary parts of one whole. While validity is more concerned with proper methods and right procedures, reliability has much to do with the service/function delivered by certain tools to derive right result. It refers to the repeatability of the result no matter how many times the issue/problem is put to test by the same or different researchers. Regarding this, Ranjit Kumar’s words make best sense when he says, “Validity is the ability of an instrument to measure what is designed to measure. Validity is defined as the degree to which the researcher has measured what he has set out to measure” (Smit 1991, 106 in Ranjit Kumar, 153) The concept of reliability in relation to a research instrument has a similar meaning: “if a research tool is consistent and stable, and, hence, predictable, and accurate, it is said to be reliable. The greater the degree of consistency, and stability in an instrument, the greater is its reliability” (Kumar, p. 156).

The problem with research in social sciences is that human behavior, experiences, and attitudes are put to measurement. Normally, just as liquid is measured in liter, cloth in meter and sugar or salt in kilo so human attribute is measured in validity and reliability. How to measure abstract concept such as behavior, experiences and attitudes has always troubled the researcher? However, they have devised ways to put such things under measurement. They have developed some tools/units to measure them. In this regard, the words of Allen A. Drost sounds best fitting. To borrow his words, “An important part of social science research is the quantification of human behavior-that is, using measurement instruments to observe human behavior. The measurement of human behavior belongs to the widely accepted positivist view, or empirical analytical approach to discern reality” (Small bone and Quinton, 2004 in Allen A. Drost). Because most behavioral research takes place within this paradigm, measurement instruments must be valid and reliable (Drost, p. 105).

Under Estimate of Reliability, Allen A. Drost puts his observation, “Because reliability is consistency of measurement over time or stability of measurement over a variety of conditions, the most commonly used technique to estimate reliability is with a measure of association, the correlation coefficient, often termed reliability coefficient (Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1991 in Allen A. Drost) ... Typical methods to estimate reliability in behavioral research are: test retest reliability, alternative forms, split halves, inter rater reliability, and internal consistency” (Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1991 in Allen A. Drost, p. 108).

Test and retest reliability is used as a common method. Its function is to establish reliability of a research tool. In such reliability test, an instrument input is use once. It is used again in a

way the situations remain the same. The ratio is observed and recorded between the two tests. Similarly, split halves technique of reliability is also very commonly used as it is very easy and cost effective. The questions or statements are divided in two halves in a way any two questions or statements measure what they are expected to measure. In connection with this, Allen A. Drost has this to say, “The split half approach is another method to test reliability which assumes that several items are available to measure a behavior. Half of the items are combined to form one new measure and the other half is combined to form the second new measure. The result is two tests and two new measures testing the same behavior. In contrast to test-retest and alternative methods, the split half approach is usually measured in the same time period” (Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1991 in Allen A. Drost, p. 110).

The alternative forms technique is more or less the same as test-retest method. However, in alternative forms technique, different measures of a behavior are collected with a little time apart. Regarding validity and reliability, Roberta Heale and Alison Twycross observe it thus,

“Validity is defined as the extent to which a concept is accurately measured in a qualitative study. For example, a survey designed to explore depression, but which measures anxiety would not be considered valid. The second measure of quality in a qualitative study is reliability, or the accuracy of an instrument. In other words, the extent to which a research instrument consistently has the same results if it is used in the same situation on repeated occasions ... Reliability relates to the consistency of a measure. A participant completing an instrument meant to measure motivation should have approximately the same responses each time the test is completed” (Roberta Heale, 2015, p. 66).

Using the insight of the scholars, every attempt was made to give the present research valid and reliable. Frequent visit and reading into the resources such as books, journals and articles provided ample insight to make the research proper headway. Right procedures and proper methods were used to measure the concept, and for the instruments to give consistent results, every care as taken. The issue being a pressing social problem, globally used methods were used to elicit accurate information. To ensure the validity of the measurement and reliability of the measurement tools, the consistency of the instruments was checked often.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION

### 4.1. Introduction

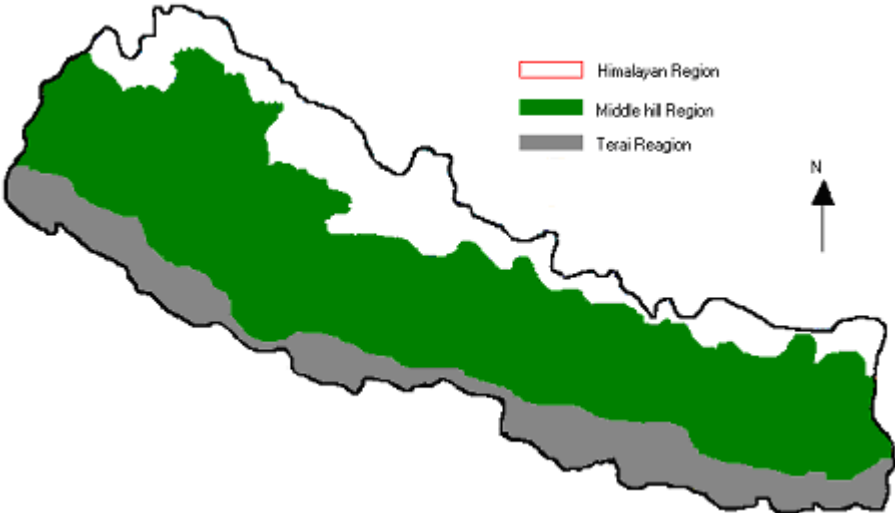
At this point of research, attempt has been made to present the data collected from Key Informants and Sample of Dalit Converts. As stated above, every care has been taken to let the data speak for themselves. To make the information complete, competent, flawless, and representative, three rounds of interview have been taken with Key Informant and three with the sample of *Dalit* converts. The key informants and sample Dalit converts represent Himalaya, Hills, and the Terai (plain land in the south) regions of Nepal. A map of Nepal clearly showing the three regions is given below. Similarly, sex-wise, and age-wise representatives have been ensured while taking interview. With the informants' consent taken with every assurance of their anonymity and confidence of the information, the interview was recorded in audio and written form to crossmatch for accuracy.

The interview pursued two patterns of nature: structured and unstructured-hereinafter the research called semi-structured interview. Each type of the interview consisted of ten questions in a way to cover the area and scope of the research. The informants' convenience of time and modality was discussed with them in advance. They were sent a request/consent letter in advance to seek and obtain their consent for the interview. In addition, the interview questions were sent to them a little earlier so that they could have an idea of what area of information would be sought from them. Furthermore, one assistant was asked to involve in the interview to interpret/translate the questions in Nepali just in case they did not understand or were confused about the questions in English. The interview questions both structured and unstructured are included in the APPENDIXES followed by CONCLUSION in CHAPTER 6. The information is plotted in a way to best read it. Because data presented thus would be clear, their meaning are derived in the section of DISCUSSION OF THE DATA in CHAPTER 5.

Below is the physical map of Nepal that clearly shows the three regions as the places from which the participants have been taken. The Himalayan and its foothills make up the northern border of the country and represent 16% of the total land area. This is the least inhabited region of Nepal, with less than 8% of the population living there. Similarly, the Hilly region constitutes the largest portion of Nepal, **covering** 29.5% of the geographical area, and has a large **area** (19,783 km<sup>2</sup>) of cultivated or managed. Likewise, the plains of Nepal are known as the Tarai (plain land of southern Nepal) which occupy 17% of the land, stretching from the far-

west to the far-east covering the entire southern part of the country. The lowest altitude in this region is known to be 70m above sea level. China lies to the north and India to the east, west and south of Nepal. The Himalayas serve as the boarder while in the south, pillars are planted.

**Physical Map of Nepal**



The northern region remains snow-capped round the year, that makes the population distribution sparse. Although the region has the predominance of the Mongoloid race of people, the Dalits also live there in minorities. Earlier, there were no churches but since the Mass Movement of 1990, churches were established. The number of the converts increased which prompted the establishment of church. In the beginning, the converts were not organized. When churches opened, they became united and held meetings and consultations. Comparatively, the hills have the largest number of church and the Himalayas the smallest. The number of churches in the Terai hangs in between that of the Hills of and the Himalayas.

**4.2. Interviews with Informants**

Below here is a series of interviews taken from six informants (Key Informants and Dalit Converts). In order for the data to have every feel straight from the informants, they are put in as is where basis in italics and quotes. The questions I asked them are followed by the replies from them.

### **4.3. Profile of Informant I**

Key informant I is a converted Dalit pastor in the church of Manang district, Gandaki zone which falls in the Himalayan region. By ancestral profession, he is a leatherworker. As a leatherworker, class profession requires him to strip skin off the dead animals, dry and process them to make shoes and belts. Shoemakers are called Sarki in Nepali language, one of the categories of the *Dalits*. Sad to say, with the trend of people wearing shoes and belts of new brands and best finishing, their profession has suffered. He has slightly changed his profession of buying and selling shoes of modern make for survival. He is 34 years old and has his **schooling of ten years** Like any other Christians, he is devoted to Christianity with 5 years of service as a pastor. In my interview with him, he shared, “I felt hurt when people called me untouchable and declined to include in their functions and celebration. Luckily, I met a few Christians. During interaction, I got to hear about church and Christianity that does not discriminate people. Later, I converted into Christian and in course of time, I rose to the status of pastor to take class, baptize new believers, and keep records thereof”.

#### **4.3.1. Close-ended Interview with Informant I**

In this section of the interview, the respondents were asked ten short questions whose answers in quotes and narratives are given below. Because it was a set of ten close-ended questions, the answers are presented in just words, phrases or in sentences at most. To my question regarding the number of converts and their place of birth, he shared, “It is increasing, the number of believers in the church reaching about 200, belonging to all three regions”. To my concern of how happy or regretful he finds the converts in his observation, he said he finds them very happy. In reply to my question of the reason behind the Dalits’ conversion, the pastor related, “Acceptance served as a pull factor of the Dalits’ conversion”. I requested him to tell how they (the church authority) treat the converts in the church, his reply was, “We treat them equally, fairly, respectfully, and sympathetically”. To answer my question, how they treat one another in and outside the church, he said the Dalit converts treat one another as equals. To my query of which of discrimination, dominance, stigma, or sense of revenge acted as a push factor behind their conversion, he shared discrimination, domination, stigma, and sense of revenge that made them convert. He cleared my concern if there exists discrimination between and across Dalits in and outside the church, he had this to say, “I have no knowledge of discrimination between and across Dalit categories”. To my question if there exist separate church for each category of the Dalits, he said he had not heard of separate church for separate categories. My

next concern was if the Dalits convert in influence and later backslide, his reply was, “The Dalits once converted never backslide”. In reply to my query how happy he finds the Dalits in their post conversion life, he said he finds them very happy in their decision of conversion” (I,I)

#### **4.3.2. Semi-Structured Interview**

To reconfirm the information, I asked Informant I, yet another round of ten questions. Here is what he said. My concern was if the number of the converts in the recent five years was increasing or decreasing, his reply was, “To the best of my knowledge, I see, it is growing day by day, it is increasing. Earlier, there were 25 or so converts. Now the number has reached to 160-200 in our church alone” (I-I).

Likewise, to my query of what in his view made the Dalits convert, sounding a little sad, Informant I answered they were dominated and stigmatized. They did so for acceptance and humanly behavior. There was no question of further enduring the injustice. To my question they convert for gains, he described, “No. I do not convert for gains. My church is not rich”. He further added that Dalit believers contribute a little money to run churches by giving offering and tithes. Some non-Christians blame that conversion is dollar farming. “This is not true, Of course, it is true that the Dalits feel respect and honor in church”. “They share their experiences with friends and the number increases. He added, “We do not force or tempt for conversion” (I-I).

I wanted him to specify the challenges for converted Dalit Christians as heard and seen by him, Informant I, explained, “So far as my knowledge is concerned, staunch Hindus sometimes sneer at Dalit converts outside the church. They often gossip about the converts as changing religion for gains and personal benefits. That is NOT. Within the church, there is no challenge of such things as all are equal and treat fairly. In addition, in the rural areas, a few converts share bitter experience of people still not letting them go close to the other people. They avoid any closeness. In the cities, there is no such thing” (I-I).

Connecting with challenges, I asked him to mention the opportunities behind the conversion in the post conversion life. In this connection, Key Informant I shared his experience like this, “The Dalit converts share their happiness of fair treatment and participation in every fellowship with the church. They remember the times when they were not allowed even to enter the temple or religious functions, forget about worshipping. They get to read the Bible and pray God. They pray for the speedy recovery of the sick. The converts often visit the houses of the other converts and them in help need” (I-I).

In my question to challenging factors to Dalits converted Christians, Informant I described social dominance, caste stigma and caste discrimination as majors responsible for their conversion. To borrow his words, “Yes, it is not just one reason; it is the combination of all three. “The Hindus dominate the Dalits as untouchable and close the door of life chances. The terms Dalits (kami, Damai, Sarki and Pode) stand as stigma. The stigma of caste name causes discrimination. It all pushes them to convert for acceptance to the Christianity”.

Answering my concern of Dalits discrimination status in and outside the church, he said ‘that within the church there exists no discrimination. But the situation is more or less the same in rural areas. That is to say, there is discrimination. His own words are here, “Not in church. But, outside, according to the Dalit converts, in the rural areas some Dalit categories consider themselves as superior. They shrink for marriage across category. Within the church, because all are children of Lord Christ, it is sin to discriminate one another. In the whole of Bible, there is nowhere written or said discrimination is good. In question of marriage, we pastors want the boys and girls to seek the consent of their parents. It is so because force marriage sends out bad message” (I-I).

Regarding the rumor of the existence of separate churches for separate categories of the Dalits: Iron/goldsmith, tailor, leather worker and service Dalits, Informant I shared his view: “No’. It is totally wrong. To the best of my notice and knowledge, there is no separate church. It was to happen so, why convert? Conversion relieves the Dalits of discrimination to equality. All come to church. All pray. All share tea and serve others. There is no discrimination or any sense of superiority or inferiority” (I-I).

When I asked him if he heard or noticed any incidence of Dalit Christians’ backslide old Hindu religion, he said he has not heard of it yet. To put his own words, “I have not heard of it. People do not convert just so. They have a big reason for it. The reason is discrimination and hatred. When they get a totally different environment in Church and Christianity, why would they backslide? Instead, they encourage other fellow Dalits to convert” (I-I) He wanted to add more on this, “It is found that Dalits Christians are found happy in attending church. So, from conversion to the Christianity, the Dalits have no regrets at all”.

When I asked him if he ever heard the Dalit converts express regret on their decision of conversion, and sensed worry of the challenges, he said, “We have occasional tea and interaction with the converts. They make tea and serve others first. I have never seen or heard a convert unhappy or regretting conversion. They say they are happy to find a place (church) where they

are treated as human. They are happy to offer service to God” (Source: Key Informant Interview-2021).

#### **4.4. Profile of Informant II**

Key Informant II is a female of 41 years old. She was born in Gorkha districts of Gandaki zone which falls in Hilly region. She was born, grew up and had a short period of schooling. When I interviewed her in a very homely environment, she sounded happy to disclose how she converted to Christianity. She shared, my parents being poor without a regular source of income, I dropped out from school. Therefore, I am just literate. However, I did not drop reading. I met a man, a cloth maker by profession (of Damai category of Dalits) who was already a Christian, and who I married later, educated me about discrimination, domination, and hatred in Hindu religion. He took me to church to hear the hymns and preach. Thereafter, I converted and rose to the level of pastor. It is already 16 of my service in the Church.

##### **4.4.1. Close-Ended Interview with Informant II**

To informants II, both close and open-ended questions were asked in a way to cover the entire scenario of the Dalit Christians in Nepal and the Experience of Conversion: Opportunities of Challenges. The two series of questions to which Informant II gave answer follows like this:- To my question about the number and trend of conversion in the church in the recent years, she described, “It is increasing, and the number of believers has reached near about 180 in our church”. My next question concerned what of “happy or dissatisfied” she found the Dalit converts in the church, she said she finds them extremely happy. To answer my question what makes them convert as Christian, here is what she said, “The main reason of Dalits “conversion is acceptance into Christianity” My next question was how they (the church authority) treat the converts. Her answer is: “We treat them equally, fairly, respectfully and sympathetically”. Next, I asked her a sister question-how do the Dalit converts treat one another? She said she finds them treating one another fairly.

Responding to my concern which of dominance, discrimination, stigma, or a sense of revenge acted as a push factor behind their converts, she put her observation, thus: “It (the push factor of Dalits’ conversion into Christianity) is a combination of all four (discrimination, domination, stigma, and a sense of revenge)”. To my query if discrimination exists between and across Dalit categories in and outside the Church, her answer was, “No’, it does not”. I asked another question if there existed separate church of separate Dalit categories, she said it was just a rumor. To say in her words, “I have never heard of it”. Answering my concern if she



heard or noticed the Dalits ever backslide after conversion, she said once converted they never backslide. In response to my query what attitude the Dalits have after conversion, she said, they are happy at their decision of conversion.

#### **4.4.2. Semi-Structured Interview with Informant II**

To my question if the number of Dalit converts is increasing or decreasing in the recent five years, Informant II answered, “It is increasing gradually day by day. Every Saturday, we have prayer and songs in group. We call it Mandali (church). It means a circle of believers. We call the converts ‘believers’. Very often, new people come to ask us if they can sit and see. We have no objection. We allow them to sit and see. When they see our activities, group work, help and preach, some of them join our Church as members. They convert when they change from heart. In this way, “it is increasing”.

Question two concerned the main reason behind conversion. The informant replied, “They convert from many reasons, say for example, because of consciousness, good news, good behavior, awareness, and sense of equality. Some new believers have a bad habit of drinking, smoking or conflict at home. After attending the prayer and preaching, they quit all those bad habit”.

In an attempt to clear the rumor that some Dalits convert for the gain of money, she began to say: “Love others’ as Bible says, for minor check-up of people. I have been working as pastor since 2017. I have no idea who says the Dalits convert for money Dalits convert on their own from their free will. We do not give them money or anything to tempt for conversion. How could the church have money? The government does not give us even one rupee. Of course, sometimes, we raise money by contribution from all the members and give dresses to the children of the poorest. Sometimes, we ask other churches to arrange a health camp” (I-II)

I wanted her to make it clear what challenges the Dalit converts face because they live in the same community as the non- Dalits do. In reply to my query, Informant II stated “Social dominance, stigma or discrimination by upper caste is solely responsible behind the Dalits’ conversion. I think, dominance, stigma and discrimination and many other things too play a role for the Dalits to convert. I heard some elderly converts share stories they heard from parents that some Dalits even changed their caste name to avoid the stigma. There is nothing wrong with the caste name”.

In connection with the challenges, the informant wanted to add more, “It feels bad when people outside sometimes behave differently with the Dalit converts. Although things have changed a lot, there are still old people in the country who do not allow their children to mix up

with the Dalit children. Brahmin-Chhetris have changed a lot. But Gurungs, Magars and Rai-Limbu mock at Dalits” ( I-II).

In answer to my question what opportunities the converts find in the post conversion life. Informant II mentioned, “The Dalit converts need no sympathy. They do not need help of kind or cash. They can survive from working hard. They need acceptance, and humanly behavior. They do not get it outside. They get it in the church. They are happy that their prayer reaches directly to God. When that happens, they feel secure”.

To clear the researcher’s confusion how much discrimination among Dalits and non- Dalits existed, and if she noticed discrimination between and across the Dalits too, she said “There still exist different categories of Dalits. Say, for example, Kami, Damai, Sarki and Pode (Iron/goldsmith, tailor, leather worker and service class). They are placed under a common word Dalit. The underlying meaning of Dalit is “untouchable”. The practice of untouchability came down to generation after generation. It set in the mind and blood of people. So, its remnant is found within the Dalit categories in the rural areas. It is not within the church. All can read the Bible. They cook food and share it. I have not noticed any form of discrimination within the church. However, some converts share the stories they heard, there is discrimination within the categories too.”

My next question concerned the rumor of separate Churches for Iron/goldsmith, tailor, leather worker and service Dalits. Informant II said, “This is a propaganda. Non- Dalits spread this rumor. I have heard no existence of it in Nepal. If there exist separate churches and separate Churches, they are not Christians in true sense”. Genuine converts neither believe nor behave in discrimination in any excuse”.

About a big confusion outside that Dalit converts backslide after a few years of conversion, she said, “Once they convert, they feel happy and reprise their decision. Conversion is not like change of dress. Within church, they have a sense of dignity. They get roles and responsibilities. They pray God. The Bible says all people are his children. The converts experience a friendly environment. They get respect and honor. Outside, they do not get it. So, there is no question of backslide” (I-II).

My last question concerned what experience (happy, confused or regret) the converts have in the post conversion life. In reply, she explained she finds the Dalit converts satisfied and dignified life. On occasions, they share their experiences of conversion. Here is what she said, “We have occasional tea and interaction with the converts. They make tea and serve others first. I have never seen or heard a convert unhappy or regretting conversion. They say they are happy

to find a place (church) where they are treated as human. They are happy to offer service to God” (Source: Key Informant Interview: 2021).

#### **4.5. Profile of Informant III**

Informant III is a local of the Terai region. He was born in Chitwan district of Narayani zone. He is 24 years old. He has twelve years of schooling as he has cleared grade 12 from the local school. His status in the church is that of cleric (Deacon), working in administration section. When I contacted him for interview, he said, ‘Let me take permission from my Church authority first’. He called me to say he obtained permission and was ready for interview. He preferred Saturday for interview. He said he is a Kami (ironsmith), one of the categories of the Dalits. His experiences as a convert and cleric are heart-touching. During interview, he sounded emotional when he shared how bad he felt dominated, discriminated, and stigmatized until he converted into Christianity.

##### **4.5.1 Close-Ended Interview with Informant III**

Informant III in response to my question the trend of the converts (increase or decrease), he said, ‘It is increasing, and the number of believers has reached 180 in our church’. In giving answer to my next question to he said, ‘I have found them extremely happy’. In reply to another question what story the Dalits share as main reason behind their conversion, he explained, “To the best of my knowledge, the main reason of their conversion is acceptance and service to God”. Similarly, in reply to yet another question, he began, “We treat them equally, fairly, respectfully, and sympathetically”. To answer of my yet question, he replied, “The Dalit converts too treat one another equally fairly”.

In his reading, a combination of discrimination, dominance, stigma, and a sense of revenge was the push factor behind conversion. In answer to still another question, his answer was, “No discrimination exists between and across Dalit categories in and outside the Church”. To my concern if there existed separate church for each category of The Dalits, his answer was, “No separate church exists for separate Dalit categories”. In reply to my question if the Dalits ever backslide after conversion, his reply was, “They never backslide”. When I asked how the Converts felt in their decision of conversion, he said, “They sound happy at their decision of conversion”.

#### **4.5.2. Semi-Structured Interview with Informant III**

In this connection of interview, I asked informant III if the number of Dalit converts is increasing or decreasing in the recent five years in his reading, Key informant III said, “Obviously, it is increasing. Our record in church says so. First, new visitors come with the converts to ask us to let them sit and see. We have no objection to allow them to sit and see. When they listen to our interaction and see the way we help each other, they want to convert. Some visitors come and sit. They say everything is fine, but they do not convert. We do not force or tempt them to convert because we have nothing to tempt them. Those who convert are committed”.

He was asked about the pressing reason behind the conversion of the Dalits. He described, “Most Dalits and even non- Dalits convert when they compare freedom, respect and dignity in Hindu and Christianity. Hindus do not allow the Dalits’ entry into temple. They do not even accept gifts to God brought by Dalit. So much so that when Dalits keep cows and buffaloes and go to the market to sell milk, it is not accepted if they discover the seller is a Christian. This is too much. Therefore, the Dalits realize that Hindu is not for them and convert with commitment”.

In reply to my second question if he thought the Dalits convert for gains or revenge or acceptance, Informant III replied “They convert on their own without any force or greed of gains. Church would like to help the believers in their need, for example, treatment, education, and other accidental expenses but we cannot do that because we do not have fund. There is no money in church. Who has money to waste? No money or any other things come to church as is the rumor outside. We need a little fund to operate church activities. There is no question of Hindus giving us donation. We ask the believers to contribute a little money and raise a little fund. That is how we maintain expenses”.

Furthermore, to my question of what challenges do the converts face in the same community as they previously were Hindus, the informant answered, “Dalit converts face no challenges within the church and circle of believers. But outside in the society, challenges mount high. They do not invite Dalit converts on celebrations and functions. What would be more inhuman than this? They think the entry of a Dalit Christian defiles their function. They sneer and mock at the converts. Compared to the past, things have changed a lot but in the rural areas the discrimination and insult is still lingers”.

Similarly, I asked what opportunities he thinks the converts have in the post conversion life. In reply, he explained, “The Dalit converts need no sympathy. They do not need help of kind or cash. They can survive from working hard. They need acceptance, and humanly behavior.

They do not get it outside. They get it in the church. They are happy that their prayer reaches directly to God. When that happens, they feel secure”.

Another question asked to him was if it is dominance, stigma or discrimination that makes the Dalits convert into Christianity. He shared his opinion, “In my view, dominance, stigma, and discrimination play a big role for the Dalits to convert. I heard from converts sharing their experiences of some Dalits changing their surname to get rid of the stigma of ‘Dalit. The concept of “superior” and “untouchability” is so deep rooted that there is no or little record of marriage between Dalit and non-Dalit”. Similarly, I asked if he noticed discrimination between and across the Dalits. Key informant III stated, “There are different categories of Dalits: Kami, Damai, Sarki and Poda (Iron/goldsmith, tailor, leather worker and service class). They are commonly called Dalit. How unfair and bias the Hindu religion is to allow division of people as touchable and untouchable? The Hindu scriptures dictate the Hindus to look down upon Dalit. Their holy books say birth as a Dalit is itself a punishment. Its impact is noticed even in the categories of Dalits. Earlier, they practiced as much of discrimination as the so-called high caste people did”.

Next, I asked him if it is true or rumor that there are separate Churches for Iron/goldsmith, tailor, leather worker and service Dalits. In response to my question, he answered, “This is a propaganda planted to defame Church and Christianity. I have heard no existence of it in Nepal. If there exist separate churches and separate Churches, they are not true Christians”.

In response to my question if he noticed the converts backslide into Hindu again, he shared his view, “Once they convert, they feel happy on their decision. Within church, they have a sense of dignity, respect and equal share of roles and responsibilities. They get roles and responsibilities. They pray God. The Bible says all people are His children. The converts experience a friendly environment. They get respect and honor. Outside, they do not get it. So, there is no question of backslide”.

To Key informant III, I further asked, what experience the converts share on occasions in the Church. He shared his experience, “Occasionally we arrange tea and interaction with the converts to hear their views. They make tea and serve others first. I have never seen or heard a convert unhappy or regretting conversion. They say they are happy to find a place (church) where they are treated as human. They are happy to offer service to God” (Source: Key Informant Interview: 2021).

#### **4.6. Profile of Informant IV**

Dalit Convert IV is a sample convert born in the Hills and is now 43 years old. She has had 12 years of schooling from the local school of the area. She has 25 years of history of conversion into Christianity. As a regular visitor and member of the church, she is active at interaction and service camp when the church organizes one such program. Similarly, she is from the category of Sarki (leatherworker). She shared, “Leatherwork is our traditional profession. The surname ‘Sarki’ clings like a stigma that prevents many from visiting others’ house and inviting them in ours”. She said she is engaged in traditional agriculture for livelihood’.

#### **4.6.1. Close-Ended Interview with Informant IV**

To my question regarding the length of her conversion, she said, “It is 25 years I converted”. Answering my question of which category of Dalits, she is of, she said, “I belong to the category of leatherworker”. Similarly, I asked what made her convert as Christian, she said she converted for service to God. Responding to question which of the four acted as push factor behind her conversion, she said, “All four: discrimination, dominance, social stigma and injustice”. Her realization and experiences say, “The number of converts is increasing”. To concern if there exists any form of discrimination between and across Dalits, she shared her experience, “ ‘No, there is no discrimination between or across Dalits”. When I raised my concern about the challenges the Dalits face after conversion, she said” “More discrimination” as the challenge. Similarly, in reply to my inquiry of benefits of conversion, she shared, “Acceptance and dignity” In response to my query, she said, ‘Yes, a little’ I asked if the Dalits once converted ever backslide, she gave her reply, “I have not heard of Dalit converts ever backsliding”.

#### **4.6.2. Semi-Structured Interview with Informant IV**

To my query regarding the length of conversion, Informant IV answered, “It is 25<sup>th</sup> year of my conversion. I had heard of this religion (Christianity) from my relatives when I was 16, a student in high school. I always felt hurt and unimportant when my friends had no objection to play with me at school, but they would fear to invite me for lunch or dinner. I found the friends double dealing; acting as friend but afraid to accept me as equal. I was angry with myself and with the whole community. A vague resentment grew in me. I limited my contact and communication with friends. When I heard of a Church in the town, I felt like going there. Thankfully, we have one here. I was just waiting and when I reached church, I converted into a Christian for dignity as a human being”.

Likewise, in reply to a question what made her convert as Christian, Informant IV said, “There is no single reason that encouraged me to become a convert. As I said earlier, I was angry with my Hindu friends and community. They held pooja (worship) and functions. They

invited almost all others. We Dalits were the ones not invited. What I did not like about the Hindus is the way they discriminated people as Dalit and superior caste. Moreover, they built a temple in the middle of the village. Everyone went to worship. We Dalits were not allowed to offer and accept Prasad (gifts) from there. I wondered what kind of God is that which does not see people as his children. This fury grew in me all the time. When I came in touch with a few Christian friends, I told them to take me to church. I converted on the first day I attended the prayer”.

To my inquiry to describe the trend of the number of converts over the five years, she shared her experience thus, “The number of Dalit Christians is increasing every single year, as you can see. I hope time will come when the number of the Dalit or non-Dalit converts will cross the number of those Hindus. They do not just discriminate the Dalits. I find more discrimination within Hindus themselves. They do not allow females to read the scriptures. They wish the birth of son and discriminate daughter. They do not treat newly married woman well. The mother in laws suppress the daughter in laws. There is no freedom. The number is increasing and must increase to have the Hindus learn a lesson”.

Connecting the answer to question what challenges she found in post conversion period, she described, “Dalits are the most hardworking section of the population, and they are the most exploited ones too. They make pots, clothes, tools, play the band and clean the surrounding. They should have been respected for their services. Just in reverse, they are hated and discriminated. The Hindu so called superior castes of people planted a seed of division into the mind of the Dalits. The Dalits are divided into categories. It is politics played on them to divide and rule. Unfortunately, the Dalits are not organized. They are divided into Kami, Damai, Sarki and Poda. Learning from the Hindu hierarchy, they also practiced discrimination within the Dalits too. That was a thing in the past. All are conscious now. The ten-year Maoist Movement also brought awareness and consciousness”.

Along the same line, I asked her to share her post conversion life, she shared her experiences thus, “I enjoy my post conversion life. I firmly believe that other fellow converts too have similar experiences. I do not see any reason why a Dalit should regret his/her decision of conversion. We are relieved of all forms of bondage and slavery. In church, there is no discrimination. We behave friendly and equally. Who cares what others think of us! We share tea and snacks. We cook and clean collectively. This gives us a sense of energy and strength. I hope we Christians have blessings of God. One day we will prove which religion is inclusive”.

Furthermore, to my concern to specify any challenges in her post conversion life, she explained, “Normally, there are two kinds of circle of people: Christians and Hindus (others). We

have no challenges within our circle. Outside, there is. They do not invite us converts in their functions and ceremonies. They fear we defile their function. We invite them when we have functions. Some come while others fear to join. How narrow minded? I pity the educated ones. They hold degrees and certificates, but they are still rigid. They read not discriminate any in schools and universities. They do not apply it. The Hindus do not behave friendly with us Dalit converts. That is the challenge. What's more, Dalit hotel food and milk products do not sell. Economically, the Dalits are at a disadvantage”.

In this connection, she tried to remove confusion of the rumor that some Dalits convert for gains, “If you are referring to any monetary benefits, I say, there is not anything. But, if you are referring to social and political benefits, there are many in the recent years. Dalits have been educated and conscious. The level of consciousness is increasing. There are a few scholarships for Dalits quotas set aside by government. In public service commission, there are few seats reserved for Dalits. In election also, all the political parties have set aside certain seats as mandatory from Dalit communities. We are not happy with these given facilities. We want to get our share from free competition. We are in a process of getting economic and political benefits. However, we are still deprived of our cultural and social benefits. There exists a strong concept of Dalits and others. This concept is deep rooted into their psychology and unconsciousness. It prevents marriage across Dalits and others. There have been a few runaway and love marriages. There are cases of force break ups. I find these as strong challenges”.

To my inquiry if she noticed marriage within and across the categories of Dalits, Informant IV explained, “I gave answer to this question earlier. However, let me make it clearer. I have seen and read news of marriage between and across Dalits. If the boy and girl are educated and conscious, they marry cross category and caste and convince their parents. But, in most cases, they seek parents' permission to do such marriage. When you marry, you do not marry one person. You marry the entire family and relatives. I have seen marriage between a Dalit boy or a girl and non-Dalit boy or girl. In most cases, such marriage suffers setback of parents and relatives' rejection. If a girl is an educated, beautiful, rich and jobholder, such marriage is very likely”.

In response to my inquiry what experience she has in post conversion period of life, she explained, “Post conversion life may be challenging for a few months because one becomes a talk of the town. Criticism, sneering, and mockery reaches high with bad comments and criticism. He/she maybe doubly made fun of-one because he/she is a Dalit, and two, he/she converted to Christian. Some non-converts view the converts as fallen from height to pit with change of religion. Others look at one as 'gone for gains'. This is so outside the church. When



one goes and mixes with fellow converts, he/she feels happy. I do so. Within church, they have a sense of dignity, respect and equal share of roles and responsibilities. In my view, the biggest challenge is lack of graveyard for burial when a Christian dies. If you do not have a land of your own, the strict Hindus do not let land for the dead”.

He also shared this, “In my view, post conversion life is life of honor, dignity, and acceptance. Everyone seeks equality and dignity. Hindu religion does not let it. It divides people as touchable and untouchable. Identity is a very important thing. The converts seek their identity. The non-converts doubly stigmatize the converts: one as Dalit and the other as convert. In one sense, the convert goes through conflict but as he/she realizes that being a Christian means being a member of a large mass. The population of Christians is probably the largest of all in the world. In case of Nepal, it is small. On occasions, we arrange tea and interaction with the converts to hear their experiences. They make tea and serve others first. I have never seen or heard a convert unhappy or regretting conversion. They say they are happy to find a place (church) where they are treated as human. They are happy to offer service to God’. I have not heard of any backslide” (Source: Interview with Dalit Convert, 2021).

#### **4.7. Profile of Informant V**

Dalit Convert II is a male of 54 years. He is an ironsmith, called ‘Kami’ by profession. Literally, Kami means those who work to make tools and instruments of everyday use. He was born, grown up, educated, and married in Bara district of Narayani zone which lies in the Terai region. He has had 10 years of schooling with School Leaving Certificate degree. He attended a local high school. In addition to visiting and doing service in church, he and his family have opened a shop for income and survival. He shared, “I would like to open a hotel which would earn better money. My surname Kami-Dalit sticks as a stigma to start a profession of my interest”.

##### **4.7.1. Close-Ended Interview with Informant V**

Accepting my request for interview to share his knowledge and experiences, he offered a wealth of information. To my question of his length of conversion, he said, “It is 16 years’ I converted”. In answering my query of the category of **Dalit** he is from, he said, “I belong to the category of Kami. We are what you call ironsmith”. To my concern what made him convert, he opened the reason, “It is for acceptance and service to God”. In reply to my question why he quit his earlier religion to convert as Christian, he explained, “All of discrimination, dominance, stigma and social injustice acted as decisive factor behind his conversion”. He firmly believes the number of converts in the recent years increasing. Here is what he said, “Yes, it is increasing”.

To my query what is the status of discrimination, here is what he said, ‘There is no discrimination within church, but outside, “YES”. He noticed “More discrimination” as a challenge in post conversion life. He has realized acceptance and dignity as the benefit of conversion. In reply to my question, his answer was, “Yes”, a little”. He shares his experience of Dalits’ conversion. To my concern if the Dalits once converted ever backslide, he said “No they never backslide”

#### **4.7.2. Semi-Structured Interview with Convert V**

To my request to specify his history of length of conversion and the present trend of the number of conversions, Informant V said, “It is 16 years I converted. The number of converts is increasing rapidly. I can say from my experience. In the beginning, there were only a few converts in our church. Now the number has reached close to 200. Dalits have become educated and conscious. By use of email and internet and social media, their level of consciousness is increasing rapidly. A very simple rule works behind the increase of converts. That rule is: If you throw a ball with a force, it bounces back. That is to say, the more dominance there is, the more reaction is there. In other words, the more dominance there is the more conversion takes place”.

Similarly, in response to my inquiry to specify the reason behind his conversion, he told, “There is no one single reason that pulled me to drop Hinduism to convert into Christianity. There was a time when people let go discrimination and dominance; they did not speak up. Much water has gone under the bridge since. America granted all rights and freedom to the non-whites. Monarchies were dropped to adopt democracy. Similarly, if a couple develop differences, they can divorce. Why cannot a Dalit break away from Hindu that does not treat him/her as a dignified member? One reason behind my conversion is reaction to dominance. Another reason is protest. Yet another reason is search of dignity and acceptance. On top of all, the most important reason is service to God”.

Speaking from his experience he believes, “The number of converts is increasing. As the number of churches increased, so the number of converts also increased. In the past, particularly before 2006 movement of Nepal, many people thought Christianity was a foreign religion, and its origin was not Nepal. The political change declared Nepal a federal republic which gave equal status to all the religions. Thereafter, the number of converts increased rapidly. The new government relaxed its restriction. Another reason why it increased is because we organize class, orientation, interaction, and discussion. Pastors in our church and those from other churches come and clear confusion. Our aim of conversion is Service to God and get accepted as humans. People are waking that we do not discriminate people. We help those in troubles”.

In response to my concern what made the Dalits convert as Christians, Informant V explained, “We believers converted into Christianity mainly because there was discrimination and domination of Hindu Caste hierarchy. Dalits convert more than other people because they suffered more. If there is again discrimination between and across the categories, there is no point in becoming a true Christian. We consider the Bible as our scripture. We have 100% faith and trust on it. Jesus says all his creations are equal and there is no one superior or inferior. When this is so, there is no question of discrimination among the Dalit categories. If discrimination in any form exists, it is because of confusion. It is a rumor planted by non-Christians. Hindu religion discriminates/divides its people as superior and inferior caste. Maybe they think there is discrimination in Dalit categories too. I have not heard of any discrimination”.

To my request to shed light on post conversion life, the informant expressed his view, “Post conversion life is very happy, and we have got to realize dignity and honor. I wonder why my parents and grandparents did not convert earlier. If they knew there were churches, they would not tolerate discrimination. When we go to church and behave as equals, we feel very happy. Within our circle, I mean, within the circle of believers, we are extremely happy and thank the Church that taught everyone to treat like humans. As for me, I do not care what others say or think of me. I am 100% sure that I have chosen the right path of equality and acceptance. What if the Hindus sneer at us? It does not make any difference. I do not like to argue with them because they are brainwashed by their religion and gurus. Let them what they think. I am sure, more and more people will convert and regret because they did not join church earlier”.

Side by side, he explained, “When I first decided to convert, my parents and relatives asked me what special I found in Christianity to drop Hinduism and convert into new religion. I told them about my bitter experiences of how I was not allowed to touch water, share the same bench at school with other fellow students, and how they feared to invite me for lunch and dinner, I felt very bad. I wished someone came to tell them how inhuman they were. I wonder what mind the Hindu gurus (Hindu religious teacher) must divide people as touchable and untouchable. After conversion, they asked me why I converted, and I told them I did so for acceptance and dignity. In the first few years, they avoided me from company and conversation. As I lived life of simplicity and service, they realized their mistake. I did not look unhappy because they discriminated me. I did not look gloomy because they avoided me. Instead, I did my work and lived a decent life. To sum up, I did not feel any challenges because I am a Dalit and convert”.

Responding my request to clear the doubt if the Dalits convert for gains, he had this to say, “If you are referring to monetary benefits, I say, I have no experience of receiving even one

rupee as benefit. There is no question of benefit because it is not a profession or job. It is religion-your way of life. Non-monetary benefits are many. You can take the example of dignity, acceptance, service to God, equality and we-feeling. We Dalit converts are everywhere. They share pleasant experiences. We are allowed to read the Bible and share our reading with all, male or female. We can interpret it. There is no such thing as you cannot touch the Bible or interpret it. I realize the worth of being born as a human being. We have encouraged our children to work hard at school and come first. We contribute a little money to raise fund. Our church gives small scholarship money to the best performers from our pocket money. We feel proud that they use it best. We organize picnic, outing, tour to far off churches. When we mix up with other fellow converts and share our experiences, we feel proud. That is the benefit of we-feeling. The non-Dalits a non-converts envy our life of simplicity. We do not pick a quarrel or get into debate. When they call us good people, it gives us joy”.

I asked the informant if he noticed marriage between and across the Dalit categories, the informant’s reply went like this, “Yes, but truth to tell, not as much as it should have happened. Marriage, education, and choice of job is one’s birth rights. We cannot force it in the name of equality. If it is a love marriage, there are examples of cross category marriage. But when it comes to arranged marriage, we do not force. If the believers have their brothers and sisters, we encourage them to arrange their marriage. Although it would give good lesson, we do not force such marriage. Force marriage is not lasting. It breaks up”.

In reply to my concern to specify the challenges after conversion, he shared his opinion “You call it challenging, but I don’t find it so. When one converts for dignity, acceptance, and service to God, where from comes the question of challenge”? It is not challenging at all, instead, it is an honor and satisfaction. If you convert without much knowledge about conversion and Christianity, you might feel it challenging. But when you chose on your free will, it is escape from discrimination and stigma. It is a ‘bye’ to dominance and hatred. Don’t all human beings have the same number of organs? Don’t all have red blood? Don’t they breathe in the same air? Doesn’t the sunshine over all? Or the sun also discriminates? How clear is everything? How confused are the non-Christians? I pity them. Once they convert, they feel happy on their decision. Within church, they have a sense of dignity, respect and equal share of roles and responsibilities. They get roles and responsibilities. They pray God. The Bible says all people are His children. The converts experience a friendly environment. They get respect and honor. Outside, they do not get it. So, there is no question of backslide”.

He wanted to add, “Post conversion life is better and dignified for several ways: one, we get to live life of dignity as a human being, two we realize our importance as children of God, three,

we are in no way inferior in our talent and skill. We make pots, clothes, shoes, and tools. We are technicians. Everybody uses the tools we make. It gives me a sense of pride that we make clothes, shoes, and tools for everybody, but they look at us as untouchable. How confused are they? We are very important people. Without our service and technology, they cannot survive. The fun is they worship Bishwokarma Baba (God of Science and Technology). That is our clan ancestor. Worshipping our clan ancestor but hating the descendants is a clear example of too much confusion. We believers are not confused at least” (Source: Interview with Dalit Convert V).

#### **4.8. Profile of Informant VI**

Informant VI is a Dalit convert from the category of tailor/dress maker known locally as Damai. He was born in the Upper Hills of Rolpa district of Karnali zone. He is now 49 years old. He is a devout Christian and has 22 years’ history of conversion. Of all the informants, he is the most highly qualified. He has completed a Bachelors’ Degree.

##### **4.8.1. Close-Ended Interview with Informant VI**

Sounding confident, he offered the answer to my question of how long it is you converted, he said, “It is 22 years I converted into Christianity”. Making my concern of which category of *Dalits* he belonged to, he explained, “I am from Damai category of Dalits”. Answering my concern as to why he converted, he explained, “I converted for acceptance and dignity as a human”. To my inquiry what made him quit his earlier religion, he frankly said, “Discrimination made me drop Hindu religion”. When I asked him if the number of converts is increasing in the recent five years, here is what he said, “Obviously, you can see it is increasing”. My next concern was the status of discrimination. He elaborated thus, “In Church there is no discrimination, outside, there is as much” He viewed Double discrimination’ as a challenge in the post conversion period of life. He did not have a sense of regret in his decision of conversion. Here is what he said, “I feel dignified after conversion”. To my concern if the Nepali society is changing and becoming inclusive recently, he said ‘Yes’ it has changed but very slowly”. To my inquiry if he noticed backslide of the Dalit converts, he replied, “I have not heard of such backslide”.

##### **4.8.2. Semi-Structured Interview with Informant VI**

In response to my inquiry of how long it is he converted, Informant VI told, “This is my 22<sup>nd</sup> year of his conversion and association with conversion and church. There is a hand of an unpleasant event behind my conversion. I would not have converted if one of my friends at school accepted the snacks I offered. The school had just reopened after Dashain (One of the biggest

festivals of the Hindus). I had taken meat and chiura (flattened dry rice) as snacks to school. I told him I had something to offer him. I did not disclose what the offer was. When the bell of break rang, I took him to the corner of a field and opened my tiffin carrier. He sounded afraid and quickly pretended he was not hungry. I could read his face. I was okay as a friend, but he said 'No' to my offer. I wanted to quit the religion that minute, but I had no idea there existed church and conversion. I shared it with my mom and dad too. They told me to take it easy. But I took it as an insult. It happened when I was a student of grade 9 at local high school”.

Connecting his answer to the question of what made him convert, he said, “I think I gave the answer to this question already. Let me say in brief. An incident of insult from my friend led me to convert into Christian. I had heard of discrimination from my parents and relatives. I could not make much sense of it. But, when it came to myself, I hated the religion Hindu and decided to convert. I told my decision to parents. They did not object to it. I noticed discrimination in the community, school, functions, and occasions. I resolved to convert, and I did”.

When I asked him if the number of converts is increasing, Informant VI responded, “In the recent five years the number of Dalit converts is increasing. Almost every week, there are new converts in our church. They join prayer, preaching, and discussion. They find it very effective and ask the church authority to convert them. We do not tempt or force them for conversion. Singing, dancing, discussion, interaction and tea and treat is such fun that a visitor is interested. We call one another with respect. There is no discrimination. We call one another as brothers and sisters. When there is tea and treat, everyone initiates to cook and serve. This chance we never got in Hindu community”.

In response to my confusion if he noticed discrimination between and across the Dalit categories, the informant explained, “I have never noticed discrimination of any form within the church among and across the Dalit categories. We converted for equality and acceptance. There is no question of discrimination. But outside the church and our circle, we find discrimination. The self-announced superior caste of people avoids us from touch and sharing of food and drink. But we do not find discrimination in the cities. In the country, there is”.

I asked him, ‘What is post conversion like?’, he described it, “Post conversion life is very good because I get to live as a human. I find church the only place where we are equal and respected. Because our circle is getting bigger, we get to share and interact. We do not have much concern how the non-Dalits and non-converts look at us. I do not argue or get angry with them. I notice I am ok as a friend, but they do not invite me to lunch or dinner. I do not like this technical relation. So, I do not expect them to call or interact with me”.

Answering my query what challenges he found in the society after conversion, Informant VI shared his view, “I do not feel or experience much challenge in the post conversion life because we are in our circle of converts. There never comes a feeling of challenge, regret, and gloom because every Saturday we assemble in church to pray and interact. Other time also, we talk over phone and share our feelings and activities. The size of our circle is increasing. We often go to other believers’ house for tea and snacks. We discuss our future plans and present activities. I meet non-Dalits and non-converts. I talk to them in cheerful manner. They ask me what makes me look so cheerful. I tell them I have got friends and circle who treat me respectfully. Maybe they get reply and they say they are happy to see me happy”.

In response to my concern if the Dalits convert for gains, he said, “I find benefits and benefits in the post conversion period. It is difficult to quantify the benefits. The first benefit is I got a circle of friends who treat me with respect and honor. Another benefit is I am a part of the church where I feel I am an important person. Yet another benefit is I do not have to feel bad of being discriminated. I feel proud that I am a part of the religion whose population is the largest in the world”.

I asked the informant to make it clear how much he noticed within and across Dalit category marriage, he answered, “I have been invited to three or so across category Dalit converts’ marriage. Most people are educated and conscious that caste is a man-made thing. Boys and girls of today are educated. They are set in a career. They have their own source of income. When they like each other and convince their parents, there is no objection to across category marriage. Of course, I have heard, there is still discrimination and no marriage across Dalit categories. The old generation did not allow across category marriage. New generation have broken the trend”.

I asked him to specify the challenges in post conversion life, Informant VI related his experience, “I don’t think post conversion life is any challenging. Pre-conversion life was challenging, instead. Prior to conversion, I was not in touch with church and church people. I was in the community of the so-called superior caste. I was ok for work and service. But I was not ok as a guest at dinner or lunch. They would not invite me in function. It was enough for me to feel bad. But after conversion, all challenges disappeared because I am with a big circle of believers. All are friends, brothers, and sisters. There is no sense of touch or non-touch”.

Around the end of the interview, I requested the informant to describe his post conversion life, he described it, “Post conversion life is life of dignity and respect. I get fair treatment within the church and circle. We often plan a picnic, get together, outing and visit to new places. We take our parents and children. They enjoy a lot. We all cook and serve. We convert, do not

discriminate any more. In prayer, we sit together and pray God. When prayer is over, we discuss and interact. I do not have any sense of being stigmatized or segregated. We get to read the bible. We discuss the message of God to all human beings” (Source: Interview with the Dalit Converts-2021).

#### **4.9. Conclusion**

From semi-structured interview and in-depth interview, I retrieved a good deal of information. Standing on the ground of information, I arrive at a point to say that the number of converts is increasing every single year. Similarly, the Dalits found Christianity as a home for acceptance and relief. Earlier, they stayed dominated, suppressed, alienated, and stigmatized. The Key Informants and the Converts had the same thing in common that there was no monetary benefit as was rumored and gossiped about. The happiest moment of experience was the realization of acceptance, dignity, and fair treatment. Of course, outside the church, double discrimination existed as challenge. Although the informants had no idea or knowledge of theories of conversion and stigma, their pattern of answer adhered to the four theories discussed in chapter two. Myself being a Dalit, I wanted to see the situation from the eyes of other fellow Dalit Christians. This research provided me such opportunity. This is the brief conclusion I derived. I will elaborate more in Chapter five called Interpretation and Discussion.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1.Introduction**

Chapter One introduced the Dalit Christians of Nepal, their experiences of conversion, with a definition of the Dalits, the Dalit Christians, push factors and pull factors of conversion, the experiences of the Dalits before and after conversion and challenges and opportunities. Chapter Two concerned the theories that encompassed the history, background, pattern, practice, and route of conversion of the Dalits in Nepal in relation with the conversion of others elsewhere in the world. The theory section also examined the observed regularities of conversion in relation to the theories of Social Dominance Theory and the Dynamics of Intergroup Relations: Taking Stock and Looking Forward as developed by Jim Sidanius, Felicia Pratto and Sarna



Levi, Religious Conversion Theory of Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, Lofland and Stark's theory of Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective and Stigma and Social Identity: A Theory of Social Putdown and Management. Likewise, chapter three dealt methodology used to derive information. The chapter went deep into perception to decide what tools and techniques best fit the research topic where it explained the relevance and justification of interview as the best tool and two types of informants (Key Informant and the Converts) as the sources of information.

In close connection with the three chapters, the data presentation in Chapter Four concerned primary sources of data derived in valid and reliable means with twenty questions from the interviews where the informants' profile was immediately followed by close-ended interview and semi-structured interview. Therefore, Chapter Five is posited on the grounds of the preceding four chapters. To make this chapter more relevant and contextual in a way the data establish meaning, every attempt has been made to interpret meaning from the data (information). Although the information gave a clear picture of the research title *The Dalit Christians in Nepal, their Experiences of Conversion: Challenges and Opportunities*, it would require the researcher to investigate the rationale behind the choice of informants, the pattern of responses, frequency of the responses, the relation between the respondents' profile and their experiences.

Each of the two types of interview questions (close-ended and semi-structured) sought to keep themselves in tie-up relation with the theories. The interview questions such as what made the informant convert and the informants' answer 'a combination of dominance, discrimination, stigma and a sense of revenge' indicated the sameness of response. To take another example, the interview question of what challenges and opportunities the Dalit converts faced in their post conversion life kept close relation with the experiences of conversion as the title speaks. Similarly, to justify or falsify the doubt of the question if the informant noticed the number of converts increasing or decreasing in the recent five years, and the respondents' reply of 'increasing' of cent percent clearly showed the tendency of increase of the converts. At this point, no informant's response contradicted with those of others although they did not see or hear the other informants' interview as they belonged to different geographical locations of the country. Yet another interview question if the informants noticed discrimination between and across Dalits in and outside the church clearly hinted at the status of discrimination and the respondents' uniform answers 'no discrimination within the church and discrimination outside the church circle' did not contradict either. That is to say, all six informants have the same sort of experiences of no discrimination within the Dalit Christian circle sensed discrimination (even more discrimination) outside. The sameness of the response from the respondents spoke of the

status of non-discrimination within church and discrimination in the heterogeneous outside community.

Still another interview question what challenges the informants noticed in the post conversion period of life, and the respondents' answer of 'more discrimination' discovered the status of experiences of the Dalit converts. It became clear that they were already discriminated for the stigma of Dalit, and yet another stigma of convert made them experience more discrimination. Again, another question seeking the respondents' reply of what benefit the converts got after conversion, and most respondents' reply of 'acceptance' showed the trend of the sameness of experiences. When this question was raised, most respondents preferred to give long answer, rather than in "Yes" or "No" form. It seemed that the question dug up the blame heaped on them that the Dalits convert for gains. However, their confusion and difference of reply to question if they noticed marriage between and across Dalit categories, and their answers in "Yes", "No" and "Rarely" contradicted with the stats of their experiences.

It clearly hinted at the existence of discrimination between the Dalit categories when it came to marriage existed although they sought the end of discrimination. Most respondents' answer sounded like saying that marriage being a big decision of the couple, parents and relatives did not like to put any pressure. The respondents' experience of slim frequency of across category marriage speaks of the remnants of the existence of discrimination even within the Dalit categories. The Kamis, ironsmiths considered themselves as superior. Even within the Kamis, there were two categories: Kamis and Sunars. The Kamis made tools of iron while the Sunars made ornaments of gold. Even within this category, the Sunar considered themselves as superior to the Kamis. The family and circle of relatives of the Sunar would never approach a Damai, dressmakers or the Sarkis, leatherworker to propose marriage for their children. And, again, the interview question seeking to clear confusion/rumor if the Dalits in Nepal convert into Christianity for greed of monetary gains, and the respondents' open and uniform denial of no monetary benefit as pull factor of conversion shed enough light on their conversion from their free will. This sort of response in uniform nature goes to corroborate with their assertion of conversion for acceptance. That is to say, for the Dalits who carry the stigma of 'Dalit' want immediate rid of it. If they could rid themselves of it, they would have done it already long ago by any means. It therefore necessitated them to convert into Christianity.

Along the same line, the question if the Dalit converts once converted ever backslide, and most of the informants' same response of 'Never', indicated their devotion and commitment to conversion. It also spoke of the Dalits' conversion into Christianity not for monetary gains. This trend of answer goes to link itself with the same question of stigma. A question arises if they

could not drop the surname Dalit from their identity. Since it was a social, cultural, and economic stigma, nothing but conversion could do it. However, no informant was clear if the stigma 'Dalit' would drop itself from their identity soon after conversion. The informants sounded indecisive or confused. This concern has direct link with their response of "more discrimination" in their post conversion life. This is a psychological or symbolic answer of the assertion of the linger of Dalit identity even after conversion. Therefore, in this point, their conversion and the linger of the stigmatic logo of Dalit contradict each other. Not just this, it cleared a BIG confusion if the Dalits convert by chance. It falsified the doubt that they do not convert by chance but by choice. During the interview all six informants (three Key Informants and the rest three Dalit Converts) in one sense or another expressed their extreme dissatisfaction against the Hindu religion, calling it as dividing people into castes, touchable and untouchable.

## **5.2. PROFILE Specific Discussion**

As has already been referred to earlier, the six informants divide themselves into two broad categories: Key informant referring to those who have good knowledge of church related activities in addition to information about the converts. It is so because they come in contact and remain close with the converts. In addition, they keep track of each convert/believer in the church. The information retrieved from the Key Informants corresponds with those of the converts to a large extent. It is more so because they hear the converts interact and share their experiences. However, in a few places during interview they differ in question of opportunities and challenges in the post conversion period life of the converts. It is so because it is the converts who experience the opportunities and challenges whereas the Key informants can only give secondhand information (heard or reported from the converts) about it. Even so, the information does not contradict. Key informants differ in their age, sex, location, educational background, and length of service in the Church. However, their knowledge and experiences sound more or less the same as they have many things in common: same religion, same mission of service to god and same community of believers.

The age of the Key informants ranges from 24 years to 54 years, 3 males and 3 females with a range of schooling from just literate to bachelor's degree. They belonged to the categories of Dalits: Kami (Ironsmith), Damai (Dress Maker) and Sarki (Leatherworker), and Pode (road sweeper/surrounding cleaner). The profile section of the informants ascertains their qualification and competence of the informants. The location of the informants ranges from the Himalayas to the Hills and then to the Terai, plain land. The reason why the informants' profile was

given is because the researcher wanted to justify the relevance and authenticity of the information provided. Although they differ in the age, region, sex, location, and length of association with the church, most of the information are found uniform except a few contradictions. The interview was taken one at a time, in different locations and no other informant saw or heard the other informants to color or influence their pattern of answer.

### **5.3. Discussion of Close-Ended Interview with Informants and Test of Theories**

All six informants gave the same answer to the question of the status and trend of the number of the *Dalits* converts in the recent five years. The current number of the converts in the respective churches differed ranging above 100 to 200 in each church. It indicated the volume of dissatisfaction and search of way out to Christianity to rid themselves from domination and discrimination. However, they all agreed that the number of converts in the recent five years as increasing. Four of the six informants considered “acceptance” as the reason of conversion. Two of them considered the reason for “service of God”. The direction of the answer corresponded with the claim raised in Chapter One-Dalit Christians in Nepal. To maintain reliability, two sorts of interview with close-ended questions and semi-structure (in-depth interview) were used. Given the two sorts of questions (close-ended and semi-structured), different timing of interviews and the informants from different locations, and to a great extent same or similar spirit of answer ensures reliability of the information.

All six informants provided the same response of “happy” and “extremely happy” in their decision of conversion. It eliminates the confusion that the Dalits convert for greed of gains and in adverse situation, they backslide. Most informants considered acceptance as the pull factor behind conversion. To say acceptance pulled the Dalits to converts also means they remained dominated and discriminated as untouchable and wanted to quit Hindu religion into one that would accept the as equals. It also hinted at the stigma of “the lowest caste” they wanted to drop or eliminate by any means, and conversion was the last resort. All three converts gave uniform answer that the church treats them equally, fairly, respectfully, and sympathetically. This was the response to the concern how the church authority treats them. This response neatly corroborates with the Dalits’ conversion for acceptance. Needless to say, where there is acceptance, there is no discrimination; all are treated equally and behaved respectfully. Both types of informants: Key informants and the Dalit converts’ responses corresponds with one another’s that there is no discrimination. It also hinted at the Dalit converts’ release from the stigma of “Dalit”

from their identity. During in-depth interview, all three converts shared their grievances of domination and discrimination due to the identity of “Dalit”

All six informants agreed that there was no discrimination between and across Dalit converts within the church. However, the informants had their experience of discrimination outside. All six informants agreed that the attitude of the non'-Dalits towards the Dalits have changed a little in the recent decades, but the change was too slow for them to wait any longer to keep feeling hurt and stigmatized/traumatized by the put downs. Their experience about the degree of discrimination outside the church differed. Four of the six informants noticed little change in the attitude of non-Dalits towards Dalit converts outside in the community. They believed time, education, political consciousness, and other awareness had very little effect on changing the mindset of the people in the community. The informants elaborated their answer to justify their claim that there was no or little practice of marriage between Dalits and non-Dalits and Christians and non-Christians. By saying this, it proved that the non-Dalit and non-Christian Hindus clung steadfast to the stigma/logo of touchability and untouchability.

All six informants dismissed the doubts of any existence of separate church for separate Dalit categories. They all believed it is a rumor planted to spoil the image of Christianity in general and Dalit converts in particular. Most respondents sounded as victims of discrimination, domination, and stigma of “the lowest caste” seeking quick relief from conversion. I as a researcher found the pattern of the Nepali “Dalits” experience of conversion with challenges and opportunities closely corresponding to the four theories as described in chapter two. The respondents’ reply of the Nepali “Dalits” experience of domination and discrimination in the Hindu society corresponds with the social dominance theory (what the theory says has already been discussed in chapter two, and the same thing has not been described here). The description of the theory did not contradict with the information provided by the informants. The two things (what experiences the informants share and what the theory describes) match and corroborate. Similarly, the Dalit converts ground under Hindu domination and discrimination and ‘Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective’ come to a meeting point of many things in common. The Dalits in Nepal for centuries living hated and discriminated in the Hindu community find Christianity as a shelter of acceptance and treatment of equality. In their reading and understanding, conversion gives them release from the age-old state of hatred. They are deviant as seen from the eyes of the theory in that they quit one religion to plunge into another. This response goes to match with another response of “more discrimination”. Seen from the eyes of eyes of non-converts and non-Dalits, the Dalits’ conversion might appear as a deviant behavior.

The Dalits in Nepal quit one religion (Hindu) to convert into another (Christianity) in search of life of dignity and acceptance. The responses of the informants share many things in common with the Religious Conversion Theory that believes how people convert from one religion into another. Likewise, the way the Dalit converts share their experiences of the stigma they carry for others to put them down corresponds with the Stigma and Social Identity: A Theory of Social Putdown and Management. The responses of the informants come close to what the theories already described.

#### **5.4. Dalit and Conversion**

As described in detail in chapter one, the Hindu caste and race system that started ever since the time of sages and interpreters, unfairly divided people into different castes according to the professions. Sage Manu in his book Manusmriti, (as referred to in chapter one) described the group of people who made tools, dresses, and shoes as Sudras (service class people). To Sudras he described as people of the lowest caste whose touch of water and food would not be accepted by the senior classes. Even their touch would defile. Instead of regarding them as the most important people for social and economic development, they were stigmatized as Sudras, later called Dalits. What Manu described the group of people as Sudras making tools and ornaments, playing bands, and cleaning the surrounding (Kami, Damai, Sarki and Pode) corresponds with the way the informants describe how they went through hatred, stigma, dominance, and discrimination for centuries and centuries. Therefore, the literature's description and the informants' response closely correspond. They do not contradict.

Although the caste and race system as described by the Sages, the four theories of dominance, stigma, discrimination and deviant perspectives and the responses given by the informants have been in different time periods, they do not contradict; rather they come along the same line of division of people, attitude towards the service class people and the experiences of domination, discrimination, and stigma. The Dalits in Nepal called Kami, Damai, Sarki and Pode going through age old hatred was quite natural to seek out to get rid of the domination and discrimination. Seen from the eyes of the deviant perspective, the Dalits are deviants to quit their religion into Christianity. Here too, what the respondents express their experiences of grievances goes close to what the theories already described.

Stigma and the theory of Putdowns perfectly corresponds with the Dalits seeking to get rid of the logo of "touchable" and "untouchable" stigma. The term Dalits clung to their name and class as an obvious identity for the non-Dalits to avoid them form cultural gathering, entry into temples, participation in feast and festivals, marital relation and sharing of food and room. What

exactly the theory of stigma and putdowns describe neatly corresponds with what experiences the Dalit Converts express as agency of dominance and discrimination and stigma go through. It is quite natural for the Dalits to seek out their delivery. The stigma and putdown theory describes the grievances of the stigma victims. Where the stigma and putdown theory ends, religious conversion theory comes to complete the consequences of stigma and putdowns. It results in religious conversion. The put down victims do not just sit traumatized; they seek out an alternative to rid themselves from it. The most reliable alternative is conversion. It is evident from the respondents' responses.

The Dalits in Nepal (from their responses in the interview) take to conversion where they get dignity and honor. Most informants expressed their fury and frustration with the Hindu religion. In their reading, nothing other than religious conversion would change their destiny to rid them from the stigma. Their economic prosperity or change of profession would not make the Hindus accept them. Three of the respondents in their response said the stigma of Dalit identity prevented them (the Dalits) from operating a hotel or sale of milk as nobody would buy their product. The responses also indicated contradiction of need of the tools and service of the Dalits, and avoidance of them from coming close to touch. The letting in of ornaments, clothes, tools, and shoes but avoiding them from coming to touch indicated extreme contradiction of behavior pushing the Dalits for conversion. The respondents in the interview expressed tools and services of the Dalits were ok but their company and touch was not. This justified double standard and discrimination.

### **5.5 Discussion of In-Depth Interview Questions**

To each of the six informants, ten in-depth interview questions were asked. They each provided the research scholar with answers of their personal knowledge, experience, and perception. In this section, attempt is made to investigate the frame and pattern of responses to the questions how they fit in or contradict with the theories and each other's responses. To the concern if the number of converts is increasing or decreasing, cent percent respondents agreed it is increasing day by day in the recent five years. The answer did not differ/contradict with the question and the theories. It established the assumption of increment of the believers as confirmed. Although the responses stretch in length with the reasons of increase, they express the spirit of the response in line of conformity. Similarly, regarding the question of reasons behind their conversion, their answers differed in wording but more or less expressed the sameness of spirit. Four informants considered 'acceptance' as reasons of conversion; while two informants believed

consciousness, good news, good behavior, and sense of equality as the reason behind conversion.

Most respondents denied the Dalits' conversion for monetary benefits. The responses stretched in length, but they agreed that the Dalits were determined for conversion to which the temptation of gift or incentive would not affect. As their conversion was a search of delivery, it was not a forced conversion or conversion for gains. This is evident/clear from the informants' responses. Regarding the challenges in the post conversion period of life, two respondents saw no challenges no matter how the others looked at them. Four respondents sensed a few challenges of double discrimination of Dalit stigma and the stigma of convert. Their responses lingered over community with the people outside the church who doubly hated the Dalits first because they are untouchable and second because they are converts. The converts did not seem to mind what others saw or said. One respondent went to the extent of saying that he felt bad when people discriminated them. However, they sounded determined that they needed no sympathy or support for survival.

To the concern if like the Dalits are discriminated outside church, if they sensed discrimination between the across the Dalit categories too, all six respondents denied any existence of discrimination between and across the Dalit converts within the church. They, however, agreed the existence of discrimination outside as the attitude of the non-Christians took too much time to change to accept the Dalits as equals. No marital relation between the Dalit converts and non-Dalits justified the existence of discrimination outside.

One respondent's response sounded very touching when he referred to the reason behind his conversion. His bitter experience of his friends' avoidance of him from inviting for dinner and sharing of it at school is one example but it speaks for several other similar contexts.

## **5.6 Summary**

The present chapter kept itself close to its scope of discussion. In doing so, it made every attempt to address the research title: The Dalit Christians in Nepal, their Experiences of Conversion. To make it happen, the interview questions were framed in a way to cover the scope of the title. Similarly, the informants were chosen selectively whose experiences and information would make the best sense. The informants shared their knowledge of the number of the converts increasing every day; they expressed their experiences of domination, discrimination, stigma and put down as 'untouchable' from restriction of entry into temple, feast and festivals and avoidance of touch or company. The informants' responses also adequately covered/addressed/projected the 'what-next after domination and discrimination'. In their responses were



found that they resorted to conversion for “acceptance and dignity”. Likewise, the informants’ responses stood as evidence to support the claim of challenges and opportunities. They described ‘fair treatment, acceptance, respect and inclusion’ as benefit and ‘more discrimination and further avoidance from touch and invitation to cultural and religious programs and function’ as challenges.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION**

### **6.1. The Dalits and their Background**

The entire research consisted of six chapters: introduction, theory, methodology, data presentation, discussion, and conclusion with an appendix part in the end. Nepal continued to remain a caste-based country with predominance of Hindu religion for ages and ages although other religions such as Muslims, Buddhists and Christians too existed in the country but in a status of non-count. Civil Code of Nepal of 1854 divided the population into four castes: Brahmin, Chhetri, Baishya and Sudra. Based on race, the population consisted of Mongols, Dravids, Austroloos and Aryans. Hindu sage Manu described the population of this part of the world as ‘touchable’ and ‘untouchable’ claiming that impurities lie in body and mind. Renowned sage Manu in Hindu scripture believed in impurities in body and mind (Ambedkar, 2019, p. 25). The strict Hindu caste system further divided the population of Nepal into four major groups based on the profession in a way the Brahmins to read and write, Chhetris to defend the territory, Baishyas to do business and cultivate, and the Sudras to make tools, ornaments clothes, shoes and sweep the street. The Sudras father divided as Kami (Ironsmith and Godsmith), Damai (dressmaker), Sarki (leatherworker) and Pode (road sweeper). In this connection and line of social and cultural development, King Jayasthiti Mall of Kathmandu as early as in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, King Ram Shah of Gorkha in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana in 1854 in their respective times strengthened the division of the population as “touchable” and “untouchable”.

The Sudras who were technicians in true sense of the term because they made tools, clothes, ornaments, shoes and swept the roads, were defined as Dalits as the Constitution of Nepal 2015 in Section 28 has had a provision of National Dalit Commission to address the discrimination

and grievances of the Dalits (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Thus, the certain breed of people was discriminated as “untouchable”, another stigmatic logo of “Dalit” lingered in their identity. The gap between the Dalits and non-Dalits widened and deepened so much that the other groups of people dominated the Dalits with strict discrimination preventing them from joining other profession and declining to accept food or water of their touch. Not just this, the strict Hindu priests even prevented the Dalits from entering the temple and accepting any gifts of offer for Gods from the Dalits. Therefore, the centuries of domination, discrimination, exploitation, and stigma pushed the Dalits in Nepal into realization of no justice from the Hindu caste system to think of getting themselves rid of this unfair and unjust division and ostracization. Not just this, the Dalits were not allowed to live anywhere close to the Brahmins, Chhetris, and Baishyas. Manu in Manusmriti from the explanation II, said those who are known as untouchable are not allowed to live in the same community with others; and therefore, be driven out to live in a separate place (Century, 2019, p. 32). It was in this social, historical, cultural, and political background that the injustice victims were seeking a way out and the political movement of Nepal 2006, and declaration of Nepal as secular republic state allowed people to adopt any religion. However, the orthodox Hindu culture and dogmatic concept of castes did not change but continued dominating, discriminating, ostracizing, and stigmatizing the Dalits.

The first Christian missions to Nepal was established in 1715 by Capuchin friars who worked in the Kathmandu Valley. The Capuchins were expelled following Nepal’s unification in 1768-9 and Christian groups were officially banned from the country for the next two centuries (When Christian Mission was First Established in Nepal, n.d.). As Nepal passed from one political and cultural changes into another over the centuries, the idea of conversion took roots. Thus, the Dalits in Nepal ever since the beginning perpetually lived under extreme dominance, discrimination, and stigma, seeking total rid of the injustice.

## **6.2 Research within the Parameter of Topic, Questions and Objectives**

It was in this background of the Dalits seeking complete rid of the stigma that I as a research scholar picked my topic of research Dalit Christians in Nepal and the Experience of Conversion. Under the research topic, my research questions were: What are the grievances of the Dalits of Nepal? What are the push factors of the Dalits of Nepal to converge into Christianity? And what are the opportunities and challenges the Dalit converts face in the community they live in the post conversion period of life? In close connection with the research topic and questions, my research objectives were to find out the grievances of the Dalits of Nepal, to describe the reasons

of the Dalits quitting Hindu religion to converge into Christianity, and to list out the opportunities and challenges of the Dalits in Nepal after their conversion into Christianity.

### **6.3 Research within the Frame of Theories**

The present research on Dalit Christians in Nepal and the Experience of Conversion tried to tie up itself with the theories with their description of the required length. As such, there were other theories too, such as Marxist Theory and Structural Functional Theory which could be used in the research. Ongoing through the theories, the following theories were found best fitting to cover the research topic, questions, and objectives. The theories include Social Dominance Theory by Jim Sidanius, Felicia Pratto, and Sarna Levi, Religious Conversion Theory, *Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspectives* of Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, *Stigma and Social Identity: A Theory of Putdown and Management* by Irving Goffman. The Social Dominance theory best covered the domination and discrimination of the Dalits in Nepal. Religious Conversion Theory addressed the experiences of the Dalit Christians' experiences of conversion, Stigma and Social Identity Theory best fit to describe the Dalit Christians of Nepal going through the stigma of their identity as Dalit that made the Dalits to feel more discriminated.

### **6.4. Interview: Choice of the Best Methodology and Most Acceptable Informants**

Chapter Four included methodological reflections. To best connect the "what aspect" of introduction and theory chapters, the 'how aspect' of methodology was equally important. Therefore, in view of the research topic, its area of coverage, the research questions therein and the objectives, the researcher made best use of primary sources of data rather than secondary sources. Of all the tools of data generation, interview with the purposive sampling method was found most suitable for the research. Not just that, in order to make the informants best representative of all geographical locations, sexes and ages, the informants were selected from males and females of different age groups, Dalit Christians categories and the Himalayan, Hilly and Terai regions. Doing so ensured validity and reliability the research. The informants were further categorized as Key Informants and Dalit Converts who could best express their experiences of conversion in connection with the post conversion period opportunities and challenges. Instead of using only one set of interviews, two kinds of interview questions: Close-ended and semi-structured interview questions were asked as tools of data generation.

### **6.7. Discussion in Connection with the Response Types**

Successively (one after the other in order of sequence), Discussion in Chapter Five examined the trend of response (experiences of conversion) in connection with confirmation or contradiction with the theories used. Canning through the responses from all the six informants, I found that the Dalit Christians in Nepal opted/took to conversion to get themselves rid of age-old domination and discrimination to conversion for acceptance and dignity. In uniform voice they said they suffered long the stigma of their identity of Dalit, and in post conversion period of life they suffered further of “more discrimination”. The informants gave uniform response of discrimination, domination, and stigma as the reason of departure from Hindu religion, and equality, respect, fair treatment, and acceptance as the strongest reason of conversion. Similarly, I also found that the number of Dalit converts is increasing every single month. Likewise, those Dalit converts once converted rarely backslide.

### **6.8. Findings**

The research journey on the topic of The Dalit Christians in Nepal and their Experiences of Conversion: Opportunities and Challenges began from the description of the Dalits in Nepal treated as “untouchable” referring to the strict and orthodox Hindu caste system over the centuries, went through the test of the Dalit Christians’ grievances and experiences of conversion in relation with the theories that spoke much about the issue. The Journey of the research passed through the worldwide accepted standards of research methods of primary source of information from the most accepted informants for the research and best tool of data generation from interview with the informants. The journey covered its cycle of discussion of the information obtained. On arriving at chapter six of conclusion, the research arrived at several findings as listed below: (1) The age-old strict and orthodox Hindu caste system perpetually dominated the Dalits in Nepal over the centuries. (2) The Dalits thus discriminated as “untouchable” continued to suffer discrimination seeking out an alternative to get rid of this injustice and putdown of Dalit identity of stigma. (3) During search of their release, they found conversion as the best option to acceptance and dignity. (4) The Dalit Christians experienced ‘double discrimination’ as Dalit and Converted. (5) What the theories used in this research say and what the informants express as response perfectly match to conformity. (6) The Dalit Converts do not convert for any monetary gains other than acceptance and dignity. (7) The number of Dalit converts in the recent years is increasing rapidly. (8) The Dalit Christians once converted never backslide. (9) However, neither the theories nor the informants have been able to specify if conversion were the best option for the Dalits in Nepal to get rid of the age-old domination, discrimination, and

stigma, how come not all the Dalits of Nepal did not convert? This question remains for other future researchers to do their inquiry in their research.

### **6.9. Claims and Recommendations**

I tried my best to make the present research most valid and reliable. I have specifically stated the research questions and objectives as clear as possible. Similarly, I have selected and scanned through the best and proper theories to test the issue of the research. Alongside, I have used the universally applicable tools to generate data. Accordingly, I have thoroughly analyzed the data to derive meaning to reach a conclusion with nine findings. Therefore, I claim objectivity of my research and recommend the planners, policy makers, government authorities and local bodies of good governance to include the curriculum in schools and colleges with introduction of the Dalits as most useful section of the society who make tools and goods essential for the entire population: (1) To rewrite a fair history of the Dalits to undo the unfair picturization of the Dalit Christians as lower caste. (2) To immediately end the practice of discrimination and stigma from legal interference. (3) To give incentive to those who prefer to Dalit-non-Dalit marriage and relationships. (4) To give incentives to those Dalits who start up profession and service.

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## Appendix

### ***KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW***

#### Semi-Structured Interview

(Interview with the pastor/cleric)

My name is..... (Name Changed) .....Sex: Male/Female/Third Sex

I have been here for.....years as a.....to look into.....of the Church.

I come from ... district and am very happy/satisfied/ not much satisfied in this church.

1. According to the record, .... (how many) Christian converts attend the Prayer in this Church and what local and age groups are they? ... of (Himalayan, Hilly and the Terai) from ... to ... years.
2. How satisfied do you find the *Dalit* converts with the benefit? (i. extremely happy ii. Satisfied iii not much iv. complain to increase the benefit
3. What story do the *Dalit* converts share as the reason of their conversion? (i. free will ii. because others did it iii under compulsion iv deviance v. acceptance
4. How do you treat the *Dalit* converts in the church? (i. equally ii. fairly iii. specially iv. sympathetically, respectfully

5. How do the *Dalit* converts treat one another in the church? (i. as equals ii. as seniors iii. as juniors iv as outsiders.
6. What of i) dominance ii) stigma iii) discrimination or iv) sense of revenge is the push factor behind conversion? v) all four
7. Does discrimination exist between and across *Dalit* categories in and outside the Church? i) Yes ii) No iii) a little iv) Not sure
8. Do you have any notice or knowledge of separate church existing for each category of *Dalits*? i) No ii) Yes iii) a thing of past iv) Never heard of
9. What is the status of the converts backsliding after a few years with a sense of regret? i) It happens frequently ii) it happens but not much iii) it happens rarely iii) Never
10. How happy or satisfied or regret have you found the converts in their decision of conversion? i) very happy ii) happy iii) regretful iii) very regretful.

### **Group B Unstructured**

1. Is the number of *Dalit* converts increasing or decreasing in the recent five years in your reading?
2. What makes the *Dalits* convert into Christianity?
3. Do you think the *Dalits* convert for gains or revenge or acceptance?
4. What challenges do the converts face in the same community as they previously were Hindus?
5. What opportunities do you think the converts have in the post conversion life?
6. Is it dominance, stigma or discrimination that makes the *Dalits* convert into Christianity?
7. Do you notice discrimination between and across the *Dalits* category in and outside the church?
8. Is it true or rumor that there are separate Churches for Iron/goldsmith, tailor, leather worker and service *Dalits*?
9. Have you noticed the converts' return into Hindu again?
10. What experience do the converts share on occasions in the Church?

## **2. INTERVIEW WITH THE DALIT CONVERTS**

### **Semi-Structured Interview**

Name:.....(Changed). Sex: Male/Female/Third Sex

Region: Himalaya/ Hills/ Terai

Education: (i. illiterate ii. literate iii. educated)

1. How long is it you converted into Christianity? (.....Years)

2. Which category of *Dalits* do you belong to? (Ironsmith/Goldsmith/tailor/Service class)
3. What made you convert into Christianity? (Acceptance/revenge/service to God)
4. What made you quit your earlier religion? (i. discrimination ii. dominance iii. social stigma iv. injustice)
5. Is the number of *Dalit* converts increasing or decreasing in the recent five years? (increasing/decreasing/no idea)
6. Is there discrimination between and across the *Dalit* category? (Yes/No/ a little/no idea)
7. What challenges have you experienced in the post conversion period of life? (discrimination/acceptance/ more discrimination/hatred)
8. What opportunities do you notice for the *Dalit* converts in the society? (Monetary/political/social/cultural)
9. Has the Nepali society changed in term of inclusiveness? (Yes/No/ a little/ No idea)
10. Have you had any record of the converts return to the Hinduism again because there in the Christianity too there is discrimination? (Yes/No/ a little/No idea)

## 2.1 INTERVIEW WITH THE *DALIT* CONVERTS

### In-depth Interview

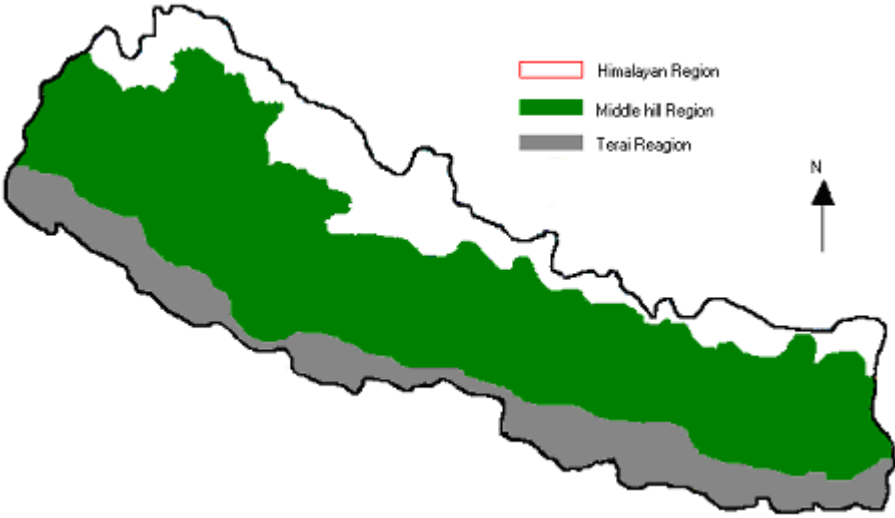
Name:.....(Name Changed)                      Sex: Male/Female/Third Sex

Region: Himalaya/Hills/ Terai

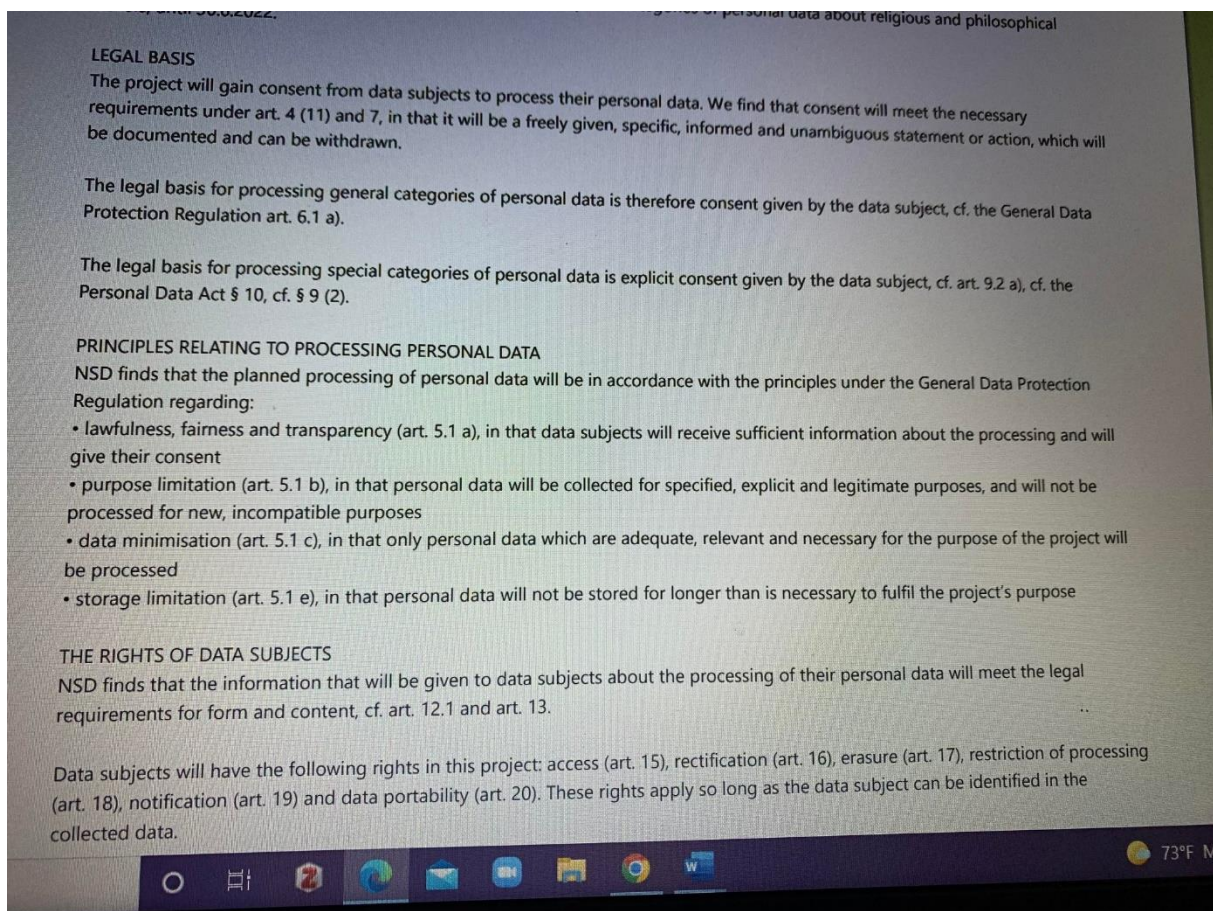
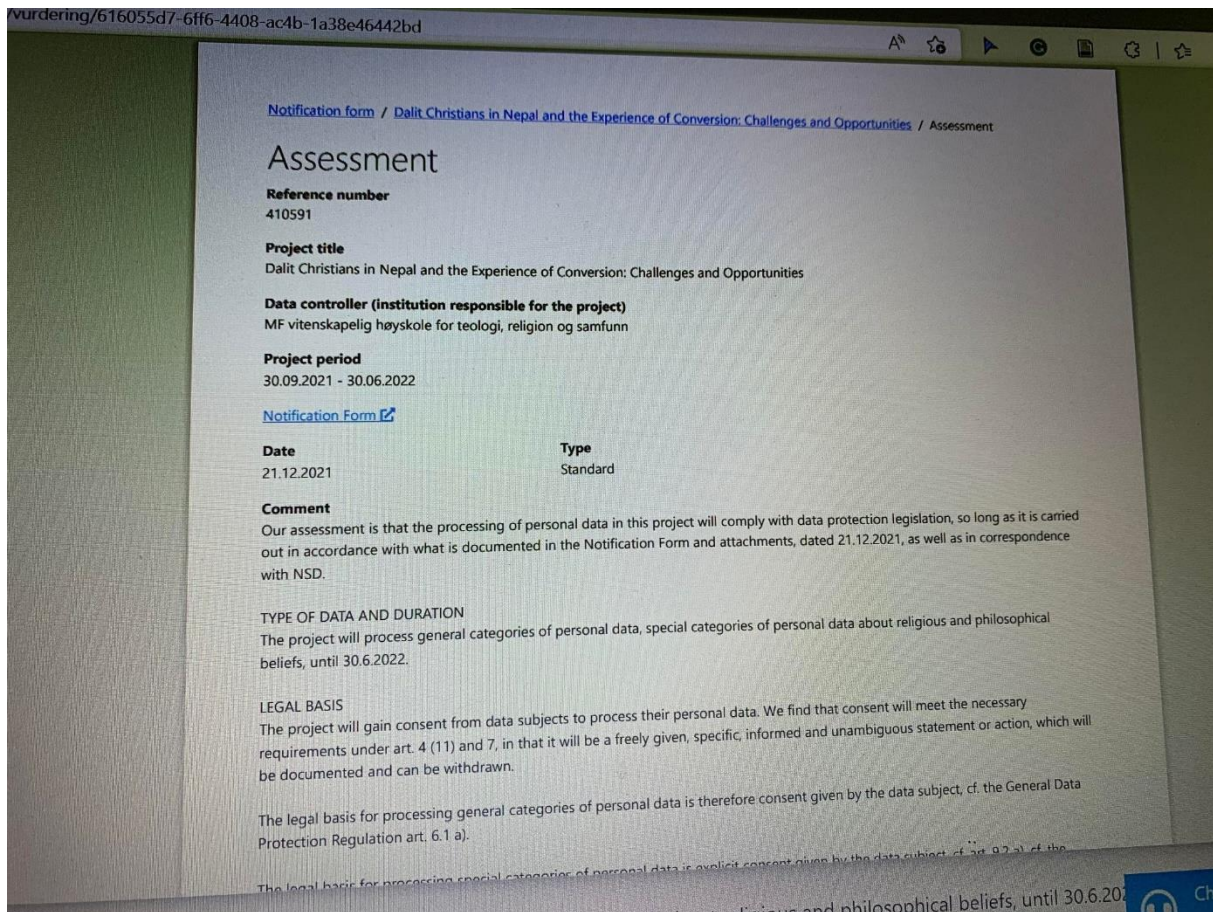
Education: illiterate/literate/ High school/above high school

1. How long is it you converted into Christianity?
2. What prompted you to drop Hinduism to convert into Christianity?
3. Is the number of *Dalit* converts increasing or decreasing in the recent five years?
4. Have you noticed discrimination between and across the *Dalit* categories in and outside the church? If yes, what kind of?
5. What is the post conversion period life like?
6. What challenges did you experience in life because you are a convert?
7. What benefits did you notice in the post conversion period of life?
8. Have you noticed inter and across *Dalit* category marriage?
9. How is post conversion life more challenging? Explain.
10. How is post conversion life better and dignified? Explain.

Physical Map of Nepal



NSD Approval



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Good luck with the project!

Contact person at NSD: Håkon J. Tranvåg

