

Discrimination and Resistance: An Analysis of Discourse and Counter Discourse in an Anthology of Nepali Poetry¹

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Abstract

This paper aims to represent the caste-based discrimination and the resistance of marginalized Dalits in the anthology of the poem- Āphar: Unmukta Pustā (Anvil: Liberated Generation). The study has adopted a qualitative research approach employing textual analysis to analyze fourteen selected poems from the anthology, focusing on their portrayal of Dalit discrimination and voices of resistance. Foucault's insight of 'discourse and counter-discourse' and Hall's concept of 'representation' are applied as theoretical tools to discuss how the poems expose and challenge caste-based hierarchies, untouchable practice, and social exclusion. The finding reveals that the poems depict caste-based discourse as a tool of discrimination against Dalits while simultaneously presenting Dalit voices as a counter-discourse challenging systemic oppression. Through the poems, Dalits question the dominant caste narratives and demand equality. However, their voice is marginalized and often unheard, and they are culturally and politically excluded from society by exclusionary ideologies. In this regard, findings suggest that ongoing counter-discourses, particularly in literature, media, and politics, are essential for addressing caste discrimination and fostering a more inclusive society.

Keywords: Caste discrimination, Counter-Discourse, Discourse, Representation, Social exclusion, and Untouchable practice

Introduction

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Nepal is known as a country with its caste and religious diversity. Historically, its society was structured around the Hindu Varna system, dividing people into four Varnas and multiple castes. Initially, there were four Varnas and 36 castes (Gurung, 2022). However, this structure became more rigid after the first promulgation of the *Muluki Ain* (National Code), introduced by Prime Minister Junga Bahadur Rana in 1854 A.D. This new rule enforced caste discrimination strictly based on the Varna system (Gurung, 2022; Hofer, 1997). Moreover, the Muluki Ain of 1854 further categorized Nepali society into two primary groups: water-touchable and water-untouchable. Additionally, it classified castes into five groups: Cord Wearers (Tāghādhāri), Non-enslavable Alcohol Drinkers, Enslavable Alcohol Drinkers, Impure but Touchable Castes, and Impure and Untouchable Castes. Of these, groups of Cord Wearers (Tāghādhāri), Non-enslavable Alcohol Drinkers, and Enslavable Alcohol Drinkers were labeled as "pure castes" or water-acceptable castes (Pāni Calnyā). In contrast, the other two groups were designated as "impure castes" or water-unacceptable castes (Pāni Nacalnyā) (Hofer, 1997).

After long struggles and political movements, the *Shudras* came to be known as Dalits. Historically, Dalits have endured systemic torture, exploitation, domination, and discrimination under the Hindu Varna system (Cameron, 2007). Even today, they remain an underprivileged and marginalized group of people in every sector of society. They still face social discrimination and humiliation (Guneratne, 1999). On the other hand, the state has introduced provisions and policies aimed at addressing caste discrimination and eliminating untouchable practices from society. The caste system, introduced through the Manusmriti and later formalized by the Muluki Ain of 1854, was legally abolished by the *Muluki Ain* of 1963 (Hofer, 1997). However, it still prevails in the socio-cultural and daily life of Dalits.

In the context of literary representation of Dalit in Nepal, Nepali literature largely excluded Dalits until the late 20th century, both as subjects and authors (Hutt, 2023). This exclusion in the caste system not only marginalized Dalits socially and religiously but also restricted their access to knowledge, wealth, and literature (Capagain, 2070 B.S.). There was the absence of Dalits in Nepali-language literature until the late 20th century, both as subjects and authors, which highlights their under-representation. It was only after 1990 that a distinct category of Nepali writing, known as *Dalit Sahitya*, began to take place in Nepal. After 1990s, Dalit writers like TR Bishwakarma and Jawahar Roka began publishing literary texts with their issues. Over the past six decades, there

has been a significant shift, with an increasing number of Dalit writers emerging and beginning to shape their own narratives in Nepali literature (Hutt, 2023). Now, Dalit and non-Dalit are presenting the issues of Dalit in literature. Literature has played a crucial role in reflecting the struggles, injustices, and resilience of Dalits. Nepali literature, particularly poetry, novels, and short stories, has often depicted the harsh realities of untouchability, caste-based violence, and systemic marginalization that Dalits have faced (Cameron, 2007).

Accordingly, the paper aims to identify the portrayal of caste-based discrimination and untouchable practices of Dalits and to analyze the counter voice of them against the systematic practice of society. To meet the objective, *Āphar: Unmukta Pust* (Anvil: Liberated Generation, 2073 B.S.) an anthology of poems is selected for the study. The poems collected in this anthology have raised Dalit issues focusing on economic conditions, political situations, socio-cultural biases, and religious domination. The details of the selected 14 poems out of 31 are presented in the following table:

Table 1: List of Selected Poems for Analysis

Poems (In Nepali)	Poem (In English Translation)	Page No.	Poet
"Shudra Sambuk"	["The Untouchable Sambuk"]	pp. 11-12	Kabal Binābi
"Kumāri Āmā ra Sapanāharu"	["The Unmarried Mother and Her Dreams"]	pp. 16-17	Kabal Binābi
"Bho Kāji Ma Achutai Sahi"	["Ok, Kaji I Am Good with Untouchable"]	pp. 18-19	Kabal Binābi
"Bāgi Samāj"	["Rebellious Society"]	pp. 27-28	Keshari Amgai
"Samayekā Bhotāharu"	["The Gifts of Time"]	pp. 29-30	Keshari Amgai
"Chutko Baktabye"	["The Touchable's Speech"]	pp. 33-34	Keshab Silwal
"Dhār"	["The Edge"]	pp. 35-36	Keshab Silwal
"Satyedevi Bolchin"	["Satyedevi Speaks"]	pp. 37-38	Keshab Silwal
"Hajurako But"	["Your Idol"]	pp. 43-44	Prakash Guragai
"Sambidhanko Arthasāstra"	["The Economics of the Constitution"]	pp. 46-47	Prakash Guragai
"Itihasko Yatra"	["Journey of History"]	p. 51	Prakash Guragain
"Sāstiko Sarga"	["The Creation of the Scriptures"]	p. 59	Madhav Ghimire

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“Aparādhī”	["The Culprit"]	pp. 77-78	Raju Sayangtan
“Durghatit Sapanāharu ra Ganatantra”	["The Bad dreams and the Constitution"]	pp. 89-90	Harisaran Pariyār

Dalit poets in Nepal use literature to challenge and resist caste-based oppression. Kēbal Binābi's "Shudra Sambuk" critiques the myth of *R m R jya* by telling the story of Sambhuk, an untouchable beheaded for reading the Vedas, exposing Hinduism's exclusionary beliefs. Binābi's "Kumāri Āmā ra Sapanāharu" reveals the intersectional oppression faced by Dalit women like Badini, who suffer violence from both upper-caste society and Dalit men, highlighting the gendered brutality of caste hierarchies. His poem "Bho Kāji Ma Achutai Sahi" challenges untouchability by ironically demanding upper castes renounce elements like wind, roads, and sky, considered "polluted" by Dalit presence, exposing the absurdity of purity rituals. Keshari Amgāin's works focus on economic exploitation, depicting Dalits trapped in cycles of hunger and bonded labor while reclaiming dignity. Keshab Silwal's poems shed light on how caste dictates labor and suffering, revealing the hypocrisy of Nepal's democratic promises. Prakash Guragāin and Madhav Ghimire dissect cultural hegemony, showing how symbols like "black color" or the "naked soul" dehumanize Dalits. Raju Syangtan and Harisaran Pariyār confront political erasure, questioning who truly benefits from Nepal's republic when Dalits are excluded from progress. These poets challenge caste norms through their writing, advocating for structural change and Dalit liberation. Their work demands more than just empathy, calling for a shift in societal attitudes and practices to achieve true equality.

Discourse, Power and Representation: Theoretical Framework

This study analyzes *Āphar: Unmukta Pust* (*Anvil: Liberated Generation*) an anthology of poems to explore the representation of power, discrimination, domination, and control of Dalits within social contexts. It employs Foucault's discourse and counter-discourse and Hall's representation as theoretical frameworks to examine how the Dalits are presented, dominated, and controlled by in discriminatory societies through literary creations.

Discourse is an expression used by language, which is shaped by power and knowledge within a specific context to create and define meaning (Foucault, 1997, p. 100). It is a systematic and contextual form of expression for producing a structured body

of knowledge. Foucault (1991) introduces the concept of power/knowledge, emphasizing their mutual dependence: "Power produces knowledge... power and knowledge directly imply one another" (p. 27). Supporting this view, Culler (1997) shows the vice-versa relationship between power and knowledge (p. 8). This interdependence suggests that discourse is both a product and a producer of power, as no form of power can exist without discourse. Moreover, Foucault (1964) argues that discourse creates knowledge and that everything exists within a discourse (cited in Storey, p.129). The discourse serves as a tool of social control by establishing rules of inclusion and exclusion. Foucault's concept of "regimes of truth" does not require absolute truth; it only needs to be perceived as true to have an impact. If ideas are accepted, they can establish specific regimes of truth. Discourse involves more than just power imposition; Foucault notes, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (cited in Storey, pp. 129-30). In other words, while dominant discourses of society create structures of power, there is the presence of counter-discourses that challenge the hegemonic knowledge. In *The History of Sexuality* (1976), he argues that there is power; there is also resistance (Foucault, 1978). Counter-discourse emerges as an alternative narrative that seeks to dismantle dominant ideologies.

Accordingly, Foucault states that there is a circular relationship between power/knowledge, discourse, and meaning. Power/knowledge constructs discourse, and discourse, in turn, defines and disseminates knowledge. Discourse is not independent; rather, it is shaped by power dynamics. All cultural expressions, arts, and artifacts derive their meanings from power structures, as Foucault (1972) asserts: "Truth is not outside power or lacking in power" (p. 131). Since discourse is formed through power relations, it shapes what is considered knowledge and excludes other forms of reasoning as unintelligible (Barker, 2004, p. 55). Therefore, discourse functions as a means of representing specific groups or concepts within a structured system of meaning. Regarding this concept, Brooker (2003) explains that discourse creates forms of representation that produce culturally and historically specific meanings (p. 78). Through representation and signifying systems, discourse constructs knowledge and meaning, reinforcing cultural narratives. These representations are neither neutral nor autonomous but are instead embedded in power structures that influence how knowledge is produced and understood.

Regarding representation, Hall (1997) defines it as the use of language to construct or convey meaning of people, objects, and the world around us, stating that

"representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture" (p. 15). In this sense, representation is a system through which meaning is produced. Building on this idea, Nayar (2016) further elaborates, explaining that "representation is the process of signifying (meaning-generation) . . . representation can be an image, a word, a sound, or a concept" (p. 20). In essence, representation is the process of generating meaning through the use of language.

Moreover, Hall views representation not as an independent reflection of reality but as deeply tied to power relations. Representation is shaped by power, which influences the selection, organization, and presentation of people, objects, and ideas. As a result, all representations are discursive forms of power rather than neutral or autonomous. In this similar vein, Barker (2004) adds that representations are cultural constructs, not innocent reflections of reality, and could be constructed differently. Cultural artifacts, through their representations, reflect power dynamics that include or exclude certain elements. Hall (1997) emphasizes that representation is a practice that uses material objects to create meaning, but this meaning depends on symbolic function rather than material qualities. In essence, representation is a signifying system produced by power relations, shaping specific meanings and knowledge.

This study employs the concepts of power, discourse, and representation as theoretical frameworks to validate its central argument. Employing these concepts, it analyzes selected poems from an anthology, *Āphar: Unmukta Pust* [*Anvil: Liberated Generation*] to explore how these poems express discrimination, power, and marginalization within the caste system. At the same time, it exposes the voice of Dalits in the poem as a counter-discourse against their discrimination and marginality. Employing the concept of discourse as social practice, it examines these poems within their broader social context. Through the lens of representation, the paper shows how Dalits are presented in the socio-cultural and economic realms of society through the poems.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, employing textual analysis to analyze the anthology of the poem, *Āphar: Unmukta Pust* (*Anvil: Liberated Generation*). A total of fourteen poems were selected from the anthology purposively based on the common issues of Dalits discrimination and their voice against marginality. All the selected poems from the anthology are closely read and organized; the themes

related to issues are subsequently examined and interpreted using the 'Discourse and Counter-discourse of Foucault as a theoretical tool to understand how poems represent caste-based discrimination within society and how marginalized Dalits raise their voice against the discriminatory practices. Moreover, Hall's insight on 'Representation' is also employed to analyze the poem how Dalits characters are represented or shaped by caste ideologies in the poems. These thinkers' insights serve as supporting tools for establishing theoretical parameters and enriching the analysis of poem. Since the anthology is originally in the Nepali language, the paper relies on the researchers' own English translation using free translation methods to cite and analyze the primary sources.

Result and Discussion

This section critically discusses the major findings that emerged from the analysis of the fourteen poems from an anthology of poems *Āphar: Unmukta Pust [Anvil: Liberated Generation]* drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Stuart Hall, and Michel Foucault. Hall's concepts of identity and representation provide insights into how Dalits are portrayed as "other" within the socio-cultural milieu. Foucault's notions of discourse and counter-discourse illuminate how caste hierarchies are reflected through poetic narratives and how Dalits raise their voice against the existing discourse of marginalization for their identity and equality in society. Both insights of theorists are used as a comprehensive lens to know the portrayal of Dalit struggles, representation, and marginalization in the selected poems.

Discourse of non-Dalits and counter-discourse of Dalits

Nepali societies have long been shaped by the first *Muluki Ain* of 1854, which institutionalized caste-based discrimination and untouchable practices. Moreover, such practices are rooted in religious texts. As Foucault (1978) argues "power operates through discourse, shaping knowledge and social practices" (p. 43). The *Muluki Ain* and other religious scriptures serve as authoritative discourses that construct and sustain caste-based hierarchies. By codifying untouchable practice into law, these texts institutionalize discrimination, making it a "regime of truth" (p. 158) that defines social reality. The state and religious institutions act as power structures that discipline and normalize the exclusion of Dalits, ensuring their marginalization remains unquestioned. However, "marginalized voices challenge dominant discourses by offering alternative narratives" using "counter-discourse" (Foucault, 1978). Moreover, such counter-

discourses emerge as sites of resistance, where subordinated groups articulate their own knowledge systems to contest hegemonic norms. For instance, Binabi's poem "Shudra Sambuk" challenges these dominant discourses by questioning the exclusion of Dalits from accessing Hindu religious texts like the Vedas and Upanishads: "Why Shudra cannot read Veda? Why then, there is no life of Shudra? Yes! Ram I am same Shudra Shambuk, an untouchable of your (Ram) kingdom (pp. 11-12)".

[Ākhir kina Veda padhna hudaina Shudrale?

Ākhir kina Veda chuna hudaina Shudrale?

Ākhir kina jiwan hudaina Shudrako?

Ho Ram ma uhi Shudra Sambuk, timro Ram rajyeko ek achut]

The poetic lines prove that Dalits were deprived of reading and touching the Hindu religious scriptures like Vedas and Upanishads. In this context, they raise their voice against the systematic practice set by the religious discourses set in society. Moreover, the poem also interrogates the binary of touchable and untouchable, asking, 'why then, same as you, I am untouchable, and same as me, you are touchable (Binabi, p. 13)?' ["Ākhir kina timi jastai ma achut ra ma jastai timi chut"]. The discourse of caste division divided people into touchable and untouchable, which deconstruct the naturalized hierarchy imposed by caste discourse and counter-voice of marginality.

Consequently in Binabi in "Bho! Kāji Ma Achutai Sahi" ["Ok! Kāji I am Ok with Untouchable"] Binabi takes a more defiant stance, rejecting the stigma associated with untouchability. The speaker declares:

'If the thing that I have touched is untouchable for you ok, Kaji let me be untouchable. Do not take the breath and cover yourself with the sky that I have already used (p. 18).'

["maile choyeko timilāi chaldaina bhane,

bho! Kāji ma achutai sahi, bas!

Maile phereko swās timile naphere pugcha,

maile odeko ākās timile naode pugcha"]

The speaker in the above lines resists not only reclaims the identity of the "untouchable" but also challenges the upper-caste hegemony. The speaker questions that if Dalits are truly untouchable, then the air they breathe and the sky they exist under should also be considered impure. Such questions of the speaker indicate the subvention of the power dynamics. It also highlights how caste-based discrimination is constructed and resisted.

Binābi's poetry disrupts and legitimizes caste hierarchies by questioning their legitimacy and reclaiming Dalit identity. This interplay between dominant and counter-discourses illustrates the ongoing struggle for representation and equality in Nepali society. Binābi's work not only critiques the systemic oppression of Dalits but also empowers them by challenging the very foundations of caste-based discrimination.

The caste-based society creates a discourse to discriminate against the people of the broader community. However, Dalits are resisting their discourse raising their voice. In his poem "Bāgi Samāj" ["Rebellious Society"], Keshari Amgāi asks, "How can the craftsmen who enjoy their labor become untouchable (p. 27)?" ["Sramamā ramne silpakārharu achut hunchan kasari"]. This reflects the structural inequalities embedded in the discourse of caste-based society, where those who create essential goods are hated and deprived. Dalits and border communities face this discrimination and are treated poorly, even though they deserve respect for their work. As Foucault (1964) argues "discourse is a mechanism of power that constructs social realities, and counter-discourse emerges as a form of resistance against hegemonic norms" (p. 89). In this context, Amgāi's poetry serves as a counter-discourse of Dalit by challenging the dominant caste ideology that devalues Dalit labor while benefiting from it. Similarly, Prakash Gurāgāin, in his poem "Hajurko But" ("Your Boot") states, "When you open the boots, you sit at a distance so that no one can touch you" (p. 44) ["Juttā khole pachi ali para tarkera basnuhunchha tāki nachoiyos hajuralāi"]. This poetic line highlights the persistence of untouchability in Nepali society. Hall (1997) suggests that cultural and social meanings are shaped by representation, which can reinforce exclusionary ideologies (p. 45). In a caste-based society, Dalits are frequently depicted as untouchable, rejected, and socially marginalized. These representations not only mirror but also sustain their marginalization.

Similarly, in "Sambidhanko Arthsastra" ["Economics of the Constitution"], Gurāgāin suspects that 'Kali Malik does not believe that she is allowed to touch the well in the village, does the constitution bring the water for the old woman at her door (p. 47)?' ["Kālī Maliklāi biswās chaina, ahile samma chuna napāyeko gāuko inārbāta, ke sambidhānale ek bālti pāni jhikera, din dinai purāidelā budhi āmāko bhānsāmā"]. In these poetic lines, Kali Malik suspects to the constitutional rights, which often remain inaccessible to Dalits, as social and cultural structures continue to enforce exclusion of Dalits. In this sense, the poem represents the "whole way of life" (Williams, 1958, p. 72)

of the Dalit community, while simultaneously revealing the lived realities of oppression. As Foucault (1972) argues "discourse is not just a form of communication but a system of knowledge and power that defines social realities" (p.76). Dalits, for generations, have been subjugated within a discourse that legitimizes untouchable practices, reinforcing their exclusion. However, the constitution has already granted their right against untouchable practices. They have been represented in a certain way—within a certain "regime of representation" (Hall, 1997, p. 259). In this sense such kind of "discursive representation constructs the discourse of the marginalized to produce knowledge" (Hall, 1997, p. 62) about the exploited and dominated Dalits.

Politics of Dalit Representation and Resistance

Dalits experience marginalization and oppression within the social and cultural realms of society. They often face challenges to employment and suffer from poverty, food insecurity, and inadequate education. These issues are poignantly captured in the poetry of various poets. For instance, Amgāin, in his poem "Bāgi Samāj", expresses the sentiment: 'You talk about conscience, but I talk about hunger; when hunger is satisfied, there would be the discourse of wisdom' (p. 27). ["Chetanāko kurā garchau timi, tara ma bhokko kurā garchu, pet bhariyepachi sāyed jāgdohō gyānko bhok"]. Amgāin's poetry serves as a powerful tool for articulating the marginalization of Dalits and challenging the dominant discourse of caste-based societies. By foregrounding the material realities of hunger, poverty, and exploitation, his work disrupts the elitist narratives of upper castes and asserts the legitimacy of Dalit experiences. This "counter-discourse not only exposes the power dynamics of caste but also calls for resistance and empowerment" (Foucault, 1978). Similarly, the caste system is a hierarchical structure that allocates power, resources, and social status to upper castes where Dalits are socially excluded and living a miserable life. In this regard, Amgāin challenges the upper caste by stating, 'Enjoying work, I am living for thousands of years and living with my belly of lyre. Once you sit, sit only for two days, then you will find how much miserable life is without food (p. 28)?' ["hajārau barsa dekhi srammā ramāyera, bāciraheko chu sārangi pet, basera hera nirlam, duidin-mātra dui dīn, bujhne chau anī, kasto huncha bhokko bedanā"]. His words capture the harsh reality that despite the systemic nature of caste-based oppression, where Dalits are trapped in cycles of poverty and dependency. Similarly, Amgāin in his poem "Samayekā Bhotāharu" ["The Gifts of Time"] narrates 'leave your boss who gave you grains, now you must stitch the gifts of time' (p. 30) ["chāda ye bālighare mālikharu, aba

silaunu parcha samayekā bhotāharu"]. It manifests the power dynamic, where upper castes provide minimal sustenance (grains) in exchange for labor, perpetuating Dalits' economic subjugation. Amgāin challenges the power structures that sustain caste-based exploitation and suggests reclamation of the dignity and autonomy of Dalits.

Through the verses of poem, Dalits challenge the so-called natural structure of caste-based labor division as Foucault asserts that power always produces resistance (1978). In this regard, Keshab Silwal's "Chutako Baktabye" ["The Speech of Touchable"] serves as an example of how marginalized voices can redefine their social positions. The poetic lines highlight, 'how can it be possible? I am taking rest on the top and you are working outside the get of luxury' (p. 33). ["Yo kasari hunasakcha? Ma māthi ārāmdāyi chatamā, ārām pharmāirahechu, ra timi sukhako get bāhira, dukhako pacheuri tālirahechau"]. This discourse focuses on Dalits' love of working and living in their sweat, whereas non-Dalits live in luxury. Therefore, those who engage in hard work should get proper food, clothes, and a good life, but it is just the opposite in Nepali society. This exposes the contradiction within the dominant discourse. By emphasizing that those who contribute the most labor receive the least social and economic rewards.

Additionally, Silwal's poem displays the reality of Dalits such as Damāi, Kāmi, Sārki, Mushahar, and Sunār who work hard for their livelihood. Damāi stitches clothes, Kāmi formats utensils, Sārki cobbles shoes, Mushahar ploughs fields and turns barren fields into fertile land, and Sunār formats temple idols but cannot get sufficient wages. They neither get good wages to satisfy their needs nor do they get love and respect (2073 B.S.). Silwal's poem reflects the dominant discourse that justifies caste-based oppression and constructs a counter-discourse that demands justice for Dalits. By questioning why hard work is met with discrimination rather than dignity, the poem aligns with Foucault's idea that discourse is not static but rather a site of struggle between dominant power and resistance.

Moreover, symbolic meanings reinforce caste-based discrimination as Hall (1997) argues that meaning is constructed through representation, where language, symbols, and discourse shape social reality ideas. Connecting this idea, Gurāgāin (2073 B.S.), in his poem "Hajurako But", highlights the culturally constructed meaning: "Covering with the black, I satisfy my hunger, But I do not understand, why you do not like black color (pp. 43-44)." ["Hajurako butlāi kālo poter chop chāp pārepachi, ma mero bhok metchu, tara bujhdina hajur kina man parāunu hunna kālo ranga"]. This portrayal underscores that the

rejection of "black" reflects deep-seated caste biases, where lower-caste labor is indispensable but stigmatized. The cultural construction of meaning is deeply rooted in these poetic lines.

Dalits are naturally oppressed in society through dominant discourse which is culturally symbolized as stated by Hall (1997), who emphasizes how language and symbols construct reality. In this vein, in "Sāstiko Sarga", Ghimire (2073 B.S.) portrays the images of Dalits such as "Neither there is a cow in the shade, nor clothes on the body, nor a piece of straw on the platform; planted sweat and grew scarcity. Burning hot, naked soul/spirit, Dalits drag every day of the same slave life (p. 59)." ["barbarāuthiyo barāju bārbār, kina bhaiyo bhirako bhakundo? Na ek chimti muskān othamā, na eutā laino gāi gothamā, na ek dharo bastra āngmā, na ek tyāndro parāl machānmā"]. These lines serve as a symbolic representation of poverty and the exclusion of Dalits. The absence of even basic needs in their life and living a pitiable life constructs the meaning that Dalits as socially and economically marginalized and deprived in society.

Furthermore, the poem 'Sāstiko Sarga' states- "Planted sweat and grew scarcity, irrigated the labor and harvested howl; under the scorching Sun, their dark brown bodies endured, pulling the same slave life every day" (p. 59) ["Ropeu pasinā, umāryeu abhāb, sinchiyera sram bhitrayeu hāhākār, dadhāyera dhupamā bhutungo tana, ghisāryeu rojindā uhi dāsi jiwan"]. These lines of poem reinforce Hall's "constructionist approach", where "caste-based discrimination is socially produced" (1997, p. 44). The images like dark brown bodies, sweat, slave life, and under the scorching sun further associate Dalits with suffering and living in hardship. It shows how cultural representations reinforce marginalization of Dalits beyond the issue of class.

Even in a democratic system, Dalits are always politically excluded. Dalits are excluded from political representation and decision-making. Nepal has been a democracy for more than thirty years, but they are still underrepresented due to discriminatory ideology. Hall (1997) argues that representation is not neutral but shaped by dominant ideologies. Consequently, Dalits are absent from political representation. In the issues of Dalit exclusion, Pariyār's (2073 B.S) poem "Durghatit Sapanā ra Ganatantra" illustrates that "But hey, capital city, whom have you made a witness and celebrated the seventh republican day across Tudikhel, as wide as the chest of martyrs?" (p. 90) ["tara, hey rājdhāni!, khai kaslāi sāchi rākhera manāi rahechau timi? sātau ganatantra diwas, sahidharuko chāti jasto sāpat tudikhelbhari"]. The poet, by asking this question, reflects

on the politics of power embedded in national celebrations. While policies are formulated, they are rarely implemented effectively, leaving Dalits as perpetual victims. Similarly, Silwal (2073 B.S.), in his poem "Dhār", exposes the mechanism of exclusion and resistance of it, stating, "You do not allow us to enter the house by making black laws; you may leave us hungry, but I will not stop my work." (p. 35) ["Pasnai nadiyos gharabhitra, kālo kānun banāyera, yā pāriyos bhobhokai rokdina ma āfno kām"]. As stated by Foucault (1978) – "law not just as a set of rules but as a discourse that produces power and control" (p. 76). As speaker stated that the law is being used as a mechanism of exclusion, keeping Dalits outside of the "house" economically deprive them. However, in all cases, resistance persists—they are questioning historical narratives and refusing to stop working.

Moreover, in "Satyedevi Bolchin", Silwal further satirically expresses the mechanism of law: "Can a man be exiled if they are exiled by others? Along with human excrement, I have tasted democracy and humanity; I have tasted law" (p. 37) ["Ke niskāsan gardaimā, mānis nikālincha mānis bāta? Mānisko bistā sangai, maile loktantrako ra ganatantrako rasaswādan gare, maile nyāyeko swād chākhe"]. This verse dismantles the illusions of democracy, humanity, and law, revealing them not as universal goods, but as instruments of power that determine who is included and who is excluded (Foucault, 1978). Dalits have been political victims for generations. While political leaders possess the power to create policies for societal transformation and equity, they have failed to deliver meaningful change for Dalits.

Dalit women face multiple layers of oppression—not only from upper-caste men and women but also from Dalit men. In this representation framework of Hall (1997), Dalits are socially constructed as "untouchable" even within their own communities reinforcing cultural narratives of exclusion. In this regard, Binābi, in his poem "Kumāri Āmāra Sapanāharu" ["Unmarried Mother and Dreams"], highlights the pervasive gender discrimination with the lines: "I am Dikrā Badini, Saheb! I am untouchable to the touchable, untouchable to the untouchable, and crushed under the caste pyramid since the time of my ancestors" (p.16) ["jātiye pirāmidko pidhamā purkhaudekhi pisiye ki chutharuki achut, achutharuki achut, ma hu Dikrā Badini, Sāheb!"]. It reveals a deep-seated caste-based hierarchy within Dalit communities themselves. Similarly, Raju Syangtan in his poem "Aparādhi" ("The Culprit") portrays the plight of women in society through the tragic story of Phul Māyā B.K.: "Phul Māyā B.K was pregnant from her

illicit relationship and was thrown into the Trishuli River” (p. 77) [“kasaiko anaitik garva bokera trisulimā phāl hāni Phul Māyā B.K.”]. The tragic fate of Phul Māyā B.K., who was pregnant from an “illicit” relationship and thrown into the Trishuli River, exposes the deadly consequences of gendered caste oppression. Poet further emphasizes her suffering with the lines: “Phul Māyā was a flower; neither did she have the sky to cover her body nor the earth to lay down as her bed” (p. 78). [“eutā phul thi Phul Māyā, u sang na ākās thiyo odna, na dharti thiyo ochāuna”]. Dalit women have been victims of systemic oppression for generations. Dalit women are subjected to torture, rejection, and social exclusion, reflecting patriarchal and caste-based inequalities in society. Therefore, Dalits; males, females, and children have been the victims of socio-cultural practices. Consequentially, caste operates as both a physical and symbolic system of control, where law, discourse, and historical narratives function to exclude Dalits while simultaneously producing marginalized identities that resist and challenge power structures.

The representation of Dalit characters and their struggle for survival is not simply a reflection of reality but rather a cultural construction with representational effects of realism (Barker, 2004, p. 177). The term “Shudra” confines Dalits within the cultural discourse of the state, shaping their identity and experiences. This discourse is not just a form of communication but a pervasive ideology that influences societal beliefs and values (Barry, 2001, p. 170). Caste divisions, discrimination, and untouchability are not inherent but are socially constructed practices perpetuated by the society

Conclusion

The discourse of Nepali society for Dalits has historically been shaped by discriminatory practices, which have legitimized caste-based hierarchies and untouchability, maintaining Dalit marginalization. However, Dalits have actively resisted this systemic oppression through counter-discourses to challenge the dominant narratives, asserting their identity and resisting oppression. Through the poetry, poets question caste-based discrimination, exposing structural inequalities and advocating for dignity and justice. Their works deconstruct the “naturalized” social order, revealing caste oppression as a socially constructed system rather than an inherent reality. The poems articulate Dalits' struggles against caste discrimination, economic exploitation, and social exclusion. These poems not only deconstruct the dominant discourse but also assert the dignity of Dalit labor, question caste-based divisions, and demand justice. Furthermore, cultural and political representations of Dalits remain shaped by exclusionary ideologies,

limiting their access to power and rights. The ongoing counter-discourse serves as a form of resistance that reclaims Dalit identity and redefines their position in society. Therefore, dismantling caste-based discrimination requires amplifying the marginalized voices. In this context, Dalit representation in media and politics should be promoted and counter-discourses should be encouraged through literature and activism to address caste-based discrimination. Moreover, future studies of anthology may be conducted on the issues of caste dynamics and resistance strategies for fostering a more inclusive society.

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