

From Hidden to Public Sphere: Social Movement as a Tool for Empowering Marginalized Communities in Nepal

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After the political change of 1990, political and non-political organizations initiated social movements have concentrated on marginalized communities in Nepal. Socially created marginality sounds fertile ground for both political parties to become successful in the state affairs from local to national level. The so-called pro poor political parties including Maoists started their mission to ensure their position in government through penetration and mobilization of marginalized communities. After the People's Movement II of 2006 and regime change from constitutional Monarchy to Democratic (Federal) Republic, social movements have been mobilized to ensure community rights in the new constitution. On the other hand, it has been argued that dominance of civil society activities is considered an effective way of ensuring democratic governance and human rights especially in marginalized areas. In the context of Nepal, from 1990 to 2006, the number of NGOs, most of them funded by bilateral or multilateral sources, had increased from 193 to over 33000 (Shah 2008). Their penetration in marginalized communities has spawned wide range of social movements (i.e., caste/ethnic identity campaigns, women's rights, peasant and minority movements, etc.). In the name of civil society advocacy, specific caste/ ethnic organizations have been formed to mobilize respective communities for 'expansion and contraction of identity boundaries' (Chhetri 2012). Cumulative campaigns of political-civil society and lobby make greater difference on national policy formulation and implementation particularly in marginalized communities in Nepal.

The weakest communities (Scott 1985) –socio economically marginalized groups- have come out from private sphere to public sphere. James Scott, in his seminal work *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985), argued that socio economically weak people mostly applied hidden or 'off stage performance' to resist against marginalization. Theoretically, I refute his argument by presenting the case of the Musahar, a highly marginalized Tarai Dalit caste group of Nepal who seem to largely use public or 'on stage performance' to resist against marginalization. Location and source of power in Nepali society has been changing from caste landlord to political cadre and civil society. The Musahars were bonded labour of landlord before 1990s. They (total population 172434) have been closely attached with land for their livelihood but unfortunately 96.67% of them are landless wage labour (CEDA 2007). Their adult literacy rate (7.3%), female literacy rate (3.8%), life expectancy and position on human development indices are the lowest (Dahal 2010). They have been conducting various campaigns to resist marginalization since 2000.

After 2006, they have been engaged in a campaign of identity transformation from Dalit to ethnic group. They organized the first national conference of Musahars to make unanimity of caste ethnic identity and agendas to put forward in parliament in 2010. Besides this, they have been engaged in campaigns for achieving land rights, higher wages, access to education, changes in attitudes and behaviors and special rights in the new constitution. I argue that social movements plays a significant role to generate social capital for the empowering process among the marginalized communities in Nepal.