Democracy Building and Party System in Nepal
Contribution to a Debate

Dev Raj Dahal

Introduction

The innovation of universal franchise has provided the citizens to express their political preferences through political parties. With the transformation of democracy from bourgeois and representative to participatory one, the functions of political parties to build and sustain the interest of citizens in politics have gone a substantive transformation. Political parties are vital arms of the state, intrinsic components of legislative process and shaper of public opinion and democratic will-formation. They put together issues, ideologies and interests and make them intelligible for citizens. Similarly, they offer alternative program, provide a mechanism by which citizens can aggregate, articulate and communicate their interests and opinions and build civic competence of citizens through political socialization and social mobilization. Political parties equally inform the citizens about the needs of political priority in certain areas of public interest, such as foreign policy, security, federalism, economy, environmental protection and nation-building while maintain differences on other issues, such as education, irrigation, marriage, decentralization, etc. In a transition country like Nepal veering to establish a welfare state Nepalese political parties are engaged in a pro-active, open and penetrative roles (Almond, 2002:49) and redefining the relationship between the state, statesman and civic institutions through constitutional debates. State-building task of parties are crucially important to erode primordial loyalties of citizens, develop their national attachments and enable to set up responsive rule.

Party is a part of society, not the whole in pursuit of human beings for good life. In this sense, a modern political party is defined as a group of persons organized to acquire and exercise political power through constitutional means and defend popular sovereignty and national interest which they have agreed in common. In all multicultural societies, political parties play key roles in political integration of citizens of diverse social origins and provide them some kinds of access to the institutional services of the governing institutions. "The function of the party is to organize participation, to bring together separate interests, to serve as the link between social forces and government" (Huntington, 1968:67). The logic of politics is the periodic alteration of political parties in the governmental power through elections ensuring the circulation of elites and peaceful change of society. Multi-party system has become successful in those societies where property and power-sharing arrangements have been already settled and parties have developed stable consensus on the rules of governance.

In transitional countries like Nepal,[1] aspiration-fuelled politics and ineffectual compromises have become obstacles to political stabilization, democratic consolidation and social transformation. Nepal's major political parties still face crisis tendencies as social relations are undergoing major change and new social movements of lower classes and their aspiration for social democratization are deconstructing and decomposing the established leadership and demanding the fulfillment of their social wants. As a result, the basic values of constitutionalism have not taken roots in the Nepalese society and personalized authoritarianism stays with impersonal institutions of the state, political system and the governance. It is

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[1] The formation of Nepali state is entirely an outgrowth of an indigenous process. Political parties and rights-based civil society inspired by the ideals of democracy and human rights have emerged as a middle class revolt against the injustice of aristocracy. Dynamic social forces organized into parties challenged the agrarian-feudal order and pushed the ideals of democratization, modernization and constitutionalization of new economic and political arrangements. But, the fission and fusion of Nepalese parties, factionalism, fragmentation and discontinuity have weakened them imposing them difficulty to perform key party functions and contribute to the creation of a civic political culture which is rationalistic, humanistic and supportive to democratic values and institutions.

widening a gap between traditional politics of patronage and the rising aspiration of young and lower middle class citizens constituted as critical mass of change agents. The implications of Constituent Assembly (CA) discourse, state restructuring along federal lines, mixed election system and the form of head of state will be enormous to party-building in Nepal. Now, all the mainstream political parties of Nepal are facing inherent tension arising out of the opposing conceptions of political good (Saward, 1998:56), such as nature of state, polity, federalism, head of the state, economy, election system and identity. One can obviously extrapolate that given poor tax base of the state it would be difficult to fulfill expanding concept of citizen rights, sustain 74 political parties of various sizes and hues registered with the Election Commission (EC) and continue the open-ended nature of politics for long. The nature of election often determines the number parties. For example, in the plurality system of CA election of April 10, 2008 only 9 political parties have established their presence in the CA election while in proportional election system 25 parties have secured their seats. Multiplicity of political parties in Nepal has offered the Nepalese people enormous opportunities for the expression of their diverse political preference but they do not differ substantially on economic policies as the process of globalization has harmonized their policies and perceptions.

Emergence of new parties, such as Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJAF), Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party (TMLP) and Sadbhavana Party (SP) marks the relative decline of old parties, such as Nepali Congress (NC), Communist Party of Nepal Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), Nepal Sadbhavana Party (A), Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), RPP-Nepal and Rastirya Janashakti Party (RJP). Decline of old parties is largely caused by the anti-systemic social movements, demand of various social strata, such as women, Madhesis, Dalits, youth, indigenous people and ethnic groups for wider representation in political structure and their inability to include them in party framework. The CA election has provided opportunities for these groups to be elected and helped to expand the social base of political power in Nepal. But, the production of fractured mandate with no parties garnering simple majority has the potential to create unstable government if civic culture of compromise is not entrenched in national politics. One can already see the possibility of dangerous political polarization between the left and the right political parties. This paper describes the main functions of political parties, inner party democracy, types of political parties and presents a brief conclusion.

Main Functions of Political Parties

Nepal's democratic evolution now stands at a turning point. The fusion of People's War of CPN (Maoist) and ruling parliamentary parties have helped restore democracy through a mass movement of April 2006. But, they have not been able to institutionalize democratic system rooted in popular sovereignty, inclusive state and durable peace. Their struggle reflects deeply embedded sub-cultures and divisions of society. A democratic party satisfies a number of criteria such as rights to organize, protest and defend one's worldviews, values, interests and aspirations. They are what political scientist Thomas Meyer calls, "two-way transmission belts," linked to the everyday life of the people as well as system of state power and facilitate their mutually reinforcing feedbacks. He says that they transmit information about interests and values from the society into the government and inform about projects, policy alternatives and decisions from the government back into the society. Failure to link the two would create legitimacy deficit and force the people to look for alternative party or organization. Political parties differ from civil society and social organizations in terms of "political functions" they perform. Through these functions they prevent discontent, alienation and resignation of citizens from politics and promote regular democratic renewal. The tendency of voters to stay out of political participation and voting weakens democratic institutions and the system of accountability, transparency and responsiveness. There are some critical roles of political parties in a democratic polity:

Socialization of citizens and recruitment of political officials.

Political parties offer course on civic and political education and transform multiple identities of people into citizens and citizens into deliberative public. Smooth functioning of political parties requires continuous role socialization because it improves their civic competence and enables them to occupy role in the parties and law-making institutions. Only by recruitment of socialized personnel a party can connect local, district and national elected bodies and orient them to the goals of the political system. In Nepal, however, due to poor socialization citizens and cadres are shuttling from one political party to another reflecting a lack of civic culture. Many survey researches reveal that citizens found Nepali politics too complicated to understand because political leaders often maintain a manifest gap between their political programs and ideology and adoption of opposite public policies. Most of Nepal's political parties are deviating from their historically-evolved ideologies and identities and transforming people into consumers and classes rather than fostering the equality of citizenship. These tendencies have weakened the political life of the nation.

Aggregation, mobilization and integration of interests.

Political parties integrate the wider social interest through many auxiliary organizations. Integration of a number of interests, opinions and views of society helps to establish their strong social base, provides the citizens a number of choices and leverage to come to power. In Nepal the discourse has expanded the social base of political representation through inclusive measures. The British Labor Party could not do this for a long time because it was dominated by class interest of trade unions. Aggregation of new interests by Tony Blair helped him to achieve resounding victory. Chancellor Shroeder of Germany and Tony Blair invented the "third way" or a new labor and tried to make their parties broad-based and representative of larger interests of the nation. Nepal's mainstream parties have to work hard to ensure a sense of justice in politics at social, gender and intergenerational levels and professionalize auxiliary organizations and civil society so that they can autonomously serve the interest of ordinary public.

Tie the bottom with the top of society.

Openness of political parties towards society is essential to integrate multiple social strata and communicate those interests into institutional channels of the political system. Democratic parties, according to Meyer, "mediate between societal interest, values, opinions, aspiration and the governmental process with its ultimate goal to create binding rules, norms, regulations and laws for the society as a whole" (Meyer, 2001). Political parties present their opinions and programs to the citizens to attract them to party affiliation. Without this voting does not contribute to civic competence of citizens. Mediation helps to address discrimination on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, religion or region. Nepal's election and the party system do not promote the autonomy of political leadership in policy formulation. In Nepal, like in Germany, the relationship between representatives and their parties remains alive throughout their terms of office.

Political opinion and democratic will-formation

Democratic politics is based on the consent of governed. Therefore, political parties exaggerate their programs to address the concern of politically significant each and every group of society. But, such aspiration fuelled programs do not create stability of regime. When incumbent leaders face numerous demands they tend to bend or modify rules of the game as they wish in favor of those who finance the party and candidates in the election. Debates and critique about party financing, ideologies and competing policies and programs stimulate the critical consciousness of people and help them to shape informed public opinion and choice about public affairs. To become strong, political parties should present in the everyday life of citizens, perform educative, representative, oversight and mobilization functions and reflect their needs in public policy making. This helps in the legitimization of political power. Public

opinion thus contributes to the rationalization of society, limits the state power and helps in citizenship building.

Political communication

Political communication is essential not only for public opinion and will-formation but also for socialization and mobilization of citizens for collective action. "Everything that establishes a link between difference and communication—all forms of discussion, understanding and respect for the other—contributes to the building of a democratic culture" (Touraine, 1998: 196). Enhanced communication increases the likelihood of flexible cooperation between the party and diverse groups of society and emancipates them from false consciousness, consent manufacturing, indoctrination and instrumentalization. It serves the function of political integration of citizens into the state, averts or resolves conflicts and strengthens inner party democracy by opening multiple political spaces. In a media-mediated society political communication holds enormous significance for national political integration as it given them a sense of belonging to a political society.

Inner Party Democracy

A constitutional state cannot be governed by political parties without democratic credentials in both structures and political culture. In developing countries despite the formulation of progressive party laws individual members have little possibility to bring their influence on the functions of political parties. In this context, inner party democracy helps to democratize their functions and enables a mechanism for every one have a voice and visibility. Without this, political parties will have no legitimate foundation for the roles they perform in a political system. The central tenets of inner party democracy are: they must have statutes, a coherent political program, organizational networks and regular elections to select party leadership. National conventions provide opportunities for individual members to contribute to forming the political will of political party, observe the organizational dynamism and debate about new policies and programs. Inner-party democracy thus articulates the voice of politically committed citizens within the party for reforms and restructuring and bridge the gap between the party leadership and its district and local level party functionaries. The absence of inner party democracy easily fosters cult of personality, factionalism, patronage and conflict and tears the political public sphere. Democratic ends cannot be met by undemocratic application of means.

The institutional structure and rules of a polity define who can participate and who are excluded in the political processes. Inner party democracy means the acceptance of policy and personnel alternatives and mustering consent from the party rank and file. These elements are essential to perform all the above party functions as well as to achieve other tasks: inclusiveness, decentralization and commitment to rules and procedures of party operation. Inner party democracy helps to control the undemocratic behavior of leaders. Democratic ideals of peace, freedom, social justice, human and ecological rights and solidarity foster a culture of tolerance. In the absence of ideology and principles, factionalism becomes the norm and political parties fail to function politically. The dominant interest groups of society then capture the government, political system and the state itself. This disables the power of the government to serve public good as it fosters authoritarianism.

Inner party democracy motivates the party cadres to strengthen their ties in society through party networks, auxiliary organizations, civil society and professional groups and allow them to exert influence on top party echelon. Only in a competitive environment, leadership selection becomes fair and effective and transformation of authoritarian leader-party into mass-based parties becomes possible (Meyer, 2007). The paradox of Nepali politics, however, is this: despite vibrant press and civil society, democratization of public institutions is pathetically low. This may be attributed to the deinstitutionalization[2] of political

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[2] According to Robert A. Scalapino "Political institutionalization is a process whereby a political structure is made operational in accordance with stipulated rules and procedures, enabling regularized, hence

parties and institutionalization of patrimonial culture in the state and public sectors. This system "favors incumbent officials who are well-known and can use the resources of their office for the special benefit of their constituents" (Peters,1992:104). The core problem of political parties in Nepal is how to create legitimate authority and use it properly. Similarly, how to enthuse in then the ethics of responsibility, the "idea that politicians had to assume responsibility for the consequences of the causes and goals they advocated, whether these consequences were intended or not" (Almond, 2002:67). It helps to balance the resolution of personality variables in party, structural conditions and their ideological propensities for social transformation.

Types of Political Parties

Political parties are identified with certain political ideologies for voters' recognition during elections. For example, most of left parties are associated with progressive policies based on social justice; conservative parties are largely associated with the defense of public order and liberal parties with basic freedoms. Left parties are social democratic, socialist or communist parties. Parties largely based on religion and traditions are mostly conservative. Ecological parties are single issue oriented and are called Green parties. But, globalization and the changing nature of state-society relations have eroded this tight ideological compartmentalization. Political parties are also learning from each other and adopting others' good policies. This has created a fusion in the programs of political parties and helped to remove the fundamentalist gaps that they are the best and the rest of the parties the worst. Political parties can be defined according to their three principal orientations: according to the form of organization parties are either cadre-based or mass-based. Mass parties have larger members and more open to various social interests than the cadre-based though the latter have better hierarchy, organization and discipline. According to ideology and program parties can be labeled as conservative, reformist and radical. And according to class basis they can be called high class- based, middle-class based or lower-class based. Due to breakdown of old stratification based on class and growing plurality of societies, political parties are trying to integrate as many interests of society as possible and prevent the radicalization of social forces. Principally there are five main types of political parties:

Liberal Parties

Liberal parties are an assembly of high up individuals who oppose state intervention and defend free markets and free trade. In such parties, voters and members are mobilized during elections only. Party organization is weak. There is little room for inner party democracy. Communication and decision making is top down. There is scope for only elite, not the ordinary citizens to come to power. Their links with the society are diffused. Conservative parties accept the role of state and traditional morality but oppose the extension of rights to lower social strata and the counter-culture of an alternative society based on political choice. Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), RPP-Nepal and Rastriya Janashakti Party (RJP) in Nepal claim themselves as liberal parties. Despite their claims they are more engaged in leadership struggle for power and have demonstrated their willingness in frequent change of the governments. Their history of exclusion of minorities, youth, women and workers have rendered them ineffective in electoral politics. These parties also sought to infuse religious ideology of Hinduism into legal and political institutions and their long association with the institution of monarchy has set their identification as monarchist parties. These parties are, therefore, contesting with NC for liberal political space. All non-left political parties of Nepal have a common interest for the autonomy of bureaucracy, police and army as a means to prevent the rise of radical forces in politics.

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predictable, patterns of political behavior, minimal trauma in power transfer, and a foundation for the effective development of policies as well as application of justice." According to him "successful political institutionalization enables a movement away from the high dependence on personalized rule and also makes orderly, evolutionary change possible" (1986:1).

Ideological Parties

Orthodox Marxist-Leninist parties are ideological parties. The structures of these parties are so closed that only those persons can become members who conform their ideology, strategy, organization and political action. In such a party bureaucracy dominates its politics. Elections within the parties are artificial. The structure of political communication and decision making is top-down and its ability to learn from society and innovate is weak. Social democratic parties seek to extend the rights to workers. Radical ideological parties aim to abolish competitive election or even try to create one-party state. The communist party of North Korea is a case in point. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) calls itself ideological party. But, due to mass support and international legitimacy it gained through CA election, it is aggregating diverse interests of society and transforming its wartime structure, ideology and goals to become a competitive democratic party. Jamate-Islami parties of South Asia represent Islamic ideology. Sometimes, parochial political parties play negative role in the political process and instrumentalize the racial, social, cultural and religious cleavages of society for their narrow purpose and weaken a sense of national identity.

Catch-all Parties

Catch-all parties do not have values or enduring agencies of interest aggregation, but only interest to come to political power. They are basically vote and seat-maximizer in politics. Leaders in such parties make theatrical performances through media, rallies, symbols, speeches, etc. This kind of game leads to the de-politicization of public life. Bill Clinton, Gerhard Schroeder and Tony Blair used these tactics to win votes. Media, not programs, play a great role in such parties. In India and Italy, the old mass parties shaped by industrial culture continue to decline under the weight of disaffection of voters brought by information revolution. In catch-all parties, there is communication without values. It creates vacuous political culture. Due to erosion of ideology, many mainstream political parties of Nepal are becoming catch-all[3] types and facing erosion of their cadre base. Inability of the parties and parliament to co-opt and accommodate new forces has strengthened the extra-party and extra-legislative opposition in Nepal and birth of regional parties like Sadbhavana Party, Madhesi People's Rights Forum (MPRF) and Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party (TMLP) grounded in Madhesi identity. The formation of these parties in opposition to NC, CPN-UML and RPP suggest the deinstitutionalization of party politics in Nepal. If institutional base of parties are not consolidated in Nepal it will allow mushroom growth of parties and undermine the long-term political and constitutional stability of the nation. But, there is an urgent need to democratize the leadership structures of these parties and enhance their potential to become representative of social diversity.

Mass Democratic Parties

Social democratic parties integrate various segments of society through democratic structures and basic values. It thrives on bottom-up process where party acts in two ways--it brings influences from the society

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[3] Nepal's society in general is highly pluralist as there are many centers of power and authority. As a result, its political sphere is also highly fragmented, factionalized, regionalized and columnized along caste, ethnicity and territorial lines. These factors have often inhibited the possibility of political stability. There are 74 political parties registered with the Election Commission to contest the CA elections. In Nepal major changes have often been heralded by mass movement led by political parties and factors of modernity, such as education, economy, technology, organization and leadership have adapted to this change process. Each mss movement in Nepal 1950, 1979, 1990 and 2006 broadened the base of political consciousness and participation but there is a lack of corresponding political institutionalization to absorb the new social forces into politics. This has triggered unstable political change in Nepal.

to the party and also influences the functioning of society. It has a high degree of social responsiveness and communication to the society is very high. Decision is made on the basis of majority democratic formula. They combine values and communication. Media helps the leaders to become active and flexible but the action and policy are decided by the party platforms. To change society, effective and coherent party programs are essential. Democratization of whole society is necessary to give power to the people. Nepali public is expecting the transformation of personalized, authoritarian parties into mass-membership parties so that downward accountability shapes the leadership development, leaders talk more among themselves to sort out their differences than to the media and develop an ability to break deadlocks that have often trapped Nepali politics into immobility.

Single Purpose Parties

Single-issue parties are those parties which are based on a single issue or regional in scope. The Green Party of Germany, minority party, communal or ethnic parties come under this category. Single purpose party has small following, less inner party democracy and loose form of organizations to cohere social interests. Until recently, Nepal Sadbhavana Party was single issue party as it was concentrating on the question of citizenship. Now, it is focusing on Madeshi identity and trying to emulate Seven-Party Alliance's fusion of hard and soft option of politics to stage a comeback in power. But, single-issue and small parties borne out of the proportional election system can play influential role in the emerging coalition politics. One can also say that they are more like promotional groups.

Conclusion

The dilemma of Nepalese political parties is this: if they are exclusively confined to society they cannot come to power. If they stay only with the state power, they will lose popular legitimacy and support. A democratic mass party must maintain a balance between these choices and open itself to various groups of society for continuous civic renewal. This is important to make political power proportional to social representation and garner more and more votes in election. Nepal should also debate about the financing of political parties so that the cost of election can be limited. Inner party democracy is important for the growth of civic political culture. Democracy provides scope for cooperation, compromise, consensus and conciliation. Basic consensus on constitutional rules of the game among the political parties of various ideological spectrums is essential so that they do not develop a tendency telling citizens that if it stays in power democracy is protected; if others come to power it is endangered. Legitimate opposition is a key to democracy otherwise, like in Nepal, it can provoke the emergence of extra-parliamentary, extra-constitutional and anti-systemic opposition and hobble the performance of governance. Nepal's main challenges are to provide space for legitimate dissent, remove the fallacy that advent of peaceful opposition is a threat to democracy, adopt constitutional behavior and shape policy outcome in the interest of public.

      Political parties need to compete on peripheral policies while develop consensus on core public issues of national importance, such as security, economy, health, education and basic public goods. It is not possible to establish total consensus in politics. Only under dictatorship total consensus is possible because disagreements are eliminated by the use of force. Political culture of a society changes slowly, but institutions change fast. Therefore, in democracy building of post-conflict society like Nepal's passion, tolerance, social learning, reconciliation and attitude change are very important considerations. Timely and periodic change provides institutional resources to new groups for social mobility and political participation and makes conflict unnecessary. De-politicization of citizens leads to subject political culture while active political engagement of citizens promotes civic culture[4]. This means citizens

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[4] "Civic culture theory is a democratic equilibrium theory, a theory that democratic stability tends to be sustained when processes and propensities are in balance—when the heat of political conflict does not exceed or fall below a given temperature range" (Almond, 2002:200).

should take a number of initiatives and actions to determine policy and political decisions. Democracy brings a tension between subject and participant political culture and popular sovereignty and constitutionalism. Democratization of political parties is possible by means of civic education to party cadres and leaders, value-based political communication, making democracy efficient to deliver goods and services without undermining human values and contribute to the evolution of a democratic and tolerant culture that de-legitimizes the use of violence from society.

In the United States of America and United Kingdom, two-party system has been institutionalized. In Nepal, India and Germany a multiplicity of parties exists. The system of election also determines the functioning of parties. Proportional election system provides space for a number of small parties and functional groups of society. In many authoritarian states there is a single-party system. In a system of single party power, representation and societal guidance is manipulated by that party. Generally first-past-the post system of election is conducive to two parties based on class division but well regulated by constitutional system.

In developing countries like Nepal this system of election has not become socially integrative and inflicted a sense of injustice and alienation of political minorities. This is one of the reasons to adopt mix election system combing it with proportional system to guarantee a better chance of representation in the CA election. It has offered opportunities for more parties to come to power, even smaller parties than the plurality system. Responsiveness in this electoral system is greater but there is difficulty in the formation of a government. It requires a strong coalition culture, a culture of compromise and coexistence. The responsiveness of Nepal's party politics requires their mass-orientation, strongly program-based approach and responsiveness to ordinary public rather than their orientation towards charismatic, pathological, transitory and father-figure leaders. Democracy grows with companionship of leaders with citizens in which modern political parties play crucial roles.

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