

The Role of the Political Parties in Deepening Democracy in Nepal¹

“Democracy is the most difficult of all forms of government, since it requires the widest spread of intelligence, and we forgot to make ourselves intelligent when made ourselves sovereign.”

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Introduction

Political parties are essential aspects of representative democracy. On the basis of a particular ideological worldview, political leaders organize their followers and ordinary people in the party, create opportunity structure for the redistribution of the cake between the classes (Parkin, 2002:104), coordinate their behavior, formulate strategies and programs, structure electoral choice, administer power, and exert pressure for desirable policy outcome. Nepalese political parties that mainly arose out of democratic struggle have assumed these functions and played a crucial role in coalition-building and political transformation. To mobilize and represent the heterogeneous social and cultural landscape of the nation, they have framed issues, nurtured civic and human rights, fired people with the imagination of human condition and initiated structural change of the state, polity, and economy through bellicose zeal.

Moreover, Nepalese parties have also carried out political modernization and democratization through political education, social mobilization, recruitment of leadership and aggregation, and articulation of public interest. By acting as a transmission belt and projecting societal interest into decision-making, they have performed effective communication functions between the political system and the citizens and demonstrated political will and cooperative action for the restoration of democracy. They, however, appear weak to maintain a democratic dynamic between the inputs and outputs of political system, stoked over-expectation of the people and consequently face rationality deficit in performance while in the seat of government. Similarly, their clientalist networks, based on neo-patrimonial structures, have produced tension for the representational system and the process of political mediation (Spiess, 2009: 25). They also appear feeble to consolidate the state, “a state in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Grimond, 2015: 29) and utilize its power to reduce poverty, income inequality and political conflicts, and increase the scope of livelihood. Defining a single universe of democracy, peace, and development in Nepal is another central challenge to transcend their competing partisan lens.

The elongated political transition in Nepal so far signifies that the mainstream parties—Nepali Congress (NC), Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML), United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-Maoist), and United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF)² – lack a shared vision, skill, and ability to steer rule-based governance, institutionalize and consolidate democratic gains,

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² United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF) is a constellation of six regional parties of the southern flatlands— Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (Democratic), led by Bijaya Kumar Gachhedar; Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum-Nepal, led by Upendra Yadav; Tarai-Madhes Loktantrik Party, led by Mahantha Thakur; Sadbhavana Party, led by Rajendra Mahato; Tarai-Madhes Sadbhavana Party Nepal, led by M. P. Yadav; and National Madhes Socialist Party, led by Sharat Singh Bhandari.

seek institutional stability, strengthen popular sovereignty through local governance, beef up the intermediary institutions of society, and meet the expectation of ordinary citizens for public good. Owing to the dysfunctionality of formal economy and inability to create youth employment, they are forced to migrate abroad to improve better living conditions. Similarly, the dispersal of power to the horizontal and vertical structures of local self-governance remains exceedingly scant.

The assertion of popular will is a key strategy of citizens to influence national politics, law-making, and development policies. Nepalese parties as the institutional safeguard of people can deepen democracy if their leaders are capable of protecting the freedom, security, and dignity of citizens and creating a rule-based easy-access order. Nepal has a tremendous potential to unlock its energy for development—strategic geography, diverse topographical landscape, demographic dividends, hydropower, tourism, and cultural diversity. Deepening democracy requires the optimal utilization of these potentials for welfare-oriented programs for Nepali citizens with special emphasis on the weaker sections of societies so that they feel a greater stake in maintaining and sustaining the democratic institutions and a civic culture of tolerance of diversity bestowed by national heritage. In Nepal, however, in the post-democratic moment, due to high power dynamics, ordinary people are mostly sidelined from democratic dividends. While the senior leaders fear party reforms as a risk to their authority and power, a process-driven boosting of local level committees and leaders can create a strong electorate for both deepening party democracy and leadership development.

Various national political movements organized by Nepal's parties in 1950, 1960, 1979, 1990, and 2006 have spread democratic ideas, expanded franchise, and brought previously immobilized groups into politics. Each time, institutional deterioration caused a problem for democracy consolidation. So long as the institutional integrity of the leaders is not established and democratic values, procedures, habits, and civic culture are not internalized in their personal and institutional life including those of the cadres and followers, deepening democracy remains an uphill task. These two functions are important for the political integration of diverse functional interest groups, social classes, and intermediary bodies into the party structures, "Institutions are seen as equivalent to progress and political effectiveness, they embody models of a good political order easy to recognize and emulate" (Siedschlag, 2008:2). Democratic parties are institutionally accountable to power because political power is a trust of people and requires periodic renewal through the election of parties, local bodies, and the national bodypolitik for its legitimate use. They, therefore, must operate transparently in response to the demands of the electorates.

Deepening democracy in Nepal requires democratization of the inner life of parties and the utilization of its historically evolved national ethos that supports social pluralism. It is important to foster a culture of inclusion, listening, deliberation, and negotiation of conflict of interests, ideologies, and identities. Politics is public realm because it helps to create a common ground for various partisan interests which tend to stratify the population in the binary code of "we" and "they." National politics democratizes the public institutions through the negotiation of a post-conflict social contract which means leaders and citizens cannot act arbitrarily against the laws of the land. The subordination of every aspect of life to the imperative of politics is authoritarian because it undermines the checks and balances of power. Promulgation of a workable constitution for diverse social and political groups by the second Constituent Assembly (CA) elected in November 2013 and renewal of the authority and legitimacy of the government are crucial indicators for putting a tab on social fissures and mobilizing the centripetal forces of society for nation-building.

The first CA elected in April 2008 having flunked endless opportunities collapsed after four years of political acrobatics. But it has offered sufficient learning opportunities to reflect and plan for the future

on the basis of accumulated experience. Nepal's parties have all shown a catch-all tendency. The catch-all is a term coined by German Political Scientist, Otto Kirchheimer, to denote those parties which aim to maximize party supporters and members regardless of their commitment to party ideology and program. In Nepal, this tendency has, however, created a disjuncture between the basic values of the parties during their origin and current destination and opening party membership to all kinds of Nepali citizens. Catch-all tendency is also eating away the conventionally-shaped images, ideologies, and identities sapping the glue that keeps Nepalese parties united with their cadres and voters. This may be good for power-sharing. But it does not construct common values as a background condition for the resolution of critical constitutional issues—federalism, form of governance, election system, citizenship, judiciary – and promulgation of a new constitution by the January 22, 2015 deadline. One can see a chronic trust deficit among the ruling and opposition parties, continuous paralysis of power, and extreme political polarization: the UCPN (Maoist)-led alliance of ethnic, federal, and regional parties versus the ruling NC and CPN-UML though they are part of the same post-2005 political establishment glued by the 12-point agreement, political agitation of 2006, Comprehensive Peace Accord 2006, and Interim Constitution 2007. As a result of these trends, the mainstream parties have failed to deliver their three promises: drafting a new constitution consensually, holding local government elections, and offering good governance.

The High Level Political Committee (HLPC) led by Maoist Chairman Puspa Kamal Dahal failed to mediate the opposing interests within the parliament and outside and, therefore, the top leaders of the mainstream parties have given discretionary authority to the chairman of Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee of CA Dr. Baburam Bhatarai to settle the issues and expedite constitution drafting through a fast-track process but have remained divided on the major issues. The coalition of 33 parties' alliance led by CPN (Maoist) leader Mohan Baidya had boycotted the CA election in favor of a roundtable dialogue, but refused to participate in it for lack of package deal from the government for power-sharing and settlement of issues. The tendency of the parties to stay in government by any kind of political coalition has alienated the opposition forces prompting them to resort to multiple forms of resistances—both constitutional and unconstitutional—and lowered the concept of volunteerism and social solidarity incentivized by political ideologies.

The key challenges for democratization of political parties and their role in deepening democracy in Nepal can be subsumed under the reforms in parties' functioning and adequate designing of party laws, system of feedbacks between leaders and citizens, strengthening of inner party democracy, and expansion of the social base of political parties based on the principles of democracy, social inclusion, subsidiarity, human rights, justice, and peace. Conscious adoption of these basic values, beliefs, and attitudes is crucial for deepening democracy in Nepal. Its political history bears a lesson that a constitution based entirely on power equation, not on the fundamental values of democracy and national culture, cannot last long.

Deepening Democracy Requires a Clear Focus on *Demos*

The word *demos* implies common rights-bearing citizens of a constitutional state regardless of distinct race, color, ethnicity, caste, gender, and region. The transformation of unequal tribal people of various identities, defined by age, caste, class, gender, ethnicity, occupation, region, and religion into equal sovereign citizens is the central task of civic and political education. It exposes citizens to a process of enlightenment capable of inducing the skills of self-determination in their private and public lives and exercise democratic choice. This is a kind of education which emancipates them from self-tutelage and enables them to exercise civil liberties. Life-long civic education, participation in public affairs, and

utilization of equal opportunity are a must to deepen democracy at the various levels of society and bridge their normative and empirical gaps by expanding the ecological, economic, social, cultural, and political bases of freedom. The public autonomy of citizens and their self-emancipation from various kinds of bondages and tutelages enable them to exercise their rights, perform responsibilities, and initiate constructive and peaceful change. Civil state is a political “community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values” (Ignatieff, 1993:6).

Democratic ethos is, therefore, important to develop a sense of one’s own political efficacy as self-aware active citizens, imbibe democratic habit, and protect the domain of popular sovereignty. A common democratic citizenship in Nepal can transcend the tribal, parochial, and primordial differences among the Nepali people and create a shared ‘background condition’ for judgment concerning values and interests. It can generate a common cause with other parties that are suitable for the peaceful resolution of personal, political, and constitutional issues. The bureaucratization of parties, however, creates obstacles for democratization. Max Weber argues that “Even revolutionary parties, upon assuming power, would soon be forced to come to terms with the stern and intransigent facts of bureaucratic life” (Frank, 2002:104). Nepal’s political parties of all shades have suffered this transformation and their leaders’ careerist instinct has distanced them from the general *demos* barring the time of general elections and political agitation.

Through constitutional patriotism, democracy provides self-determination and dignity to citizens and opposes personality cult, feudal privileges, colonialism, and imperialism. Democracy flourishes with the civic competence of citizens, their deliberative power, and the belief that their interests and actions affect the course of national politics. Civic competence is a key to increase the participation of Nepali people in every phase of public life and shape human development. Public opinion and fair elections are the sources of legitimacy to shape rule, power, and authority in the best tradition of society accepted by most of citizens. But the material basis of democracy can be provided by democratizing the ownership of the means of production and property in fulfilling the basic needs and fair distribution of public goods so that citizens are not manipulated by material incentives during elections and at critical junctures of the nation’s history.

Constitutionalization of Party Manifestoes

Nepal represents a diverse spectrum of political parties and multiple contexts. One can see that out of the 122 political parties which contested the second CA election only thirty of various hues and independent candidates could make their representation. The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 clearly states that parties operating against the letter and spirit of the constitution are not entitled to registration in the Election Commission. Similarly, it laid out a number of conditions for this: party statute and regulation must be democratic; elections should be held every five years for all office bearers; and the party committee at each layer should be representative of women, Dalits, indigenous, marginalized, and the suppressed castes. This entails the congruity of party programs with the spirit of constitution as this fosters a culture of consensus, prevents polarization at both the national and party levels, thwarts political radicalization of extra-constitutional and anti-systemic parties, and steers politics in the constitutional path. This, however, requires party schools to teach democratic curricula rather than just indoctrinating the party manifesto and ideology and enables the cadres and followers to think not only about their own parties but also outside the party lines. There is a need to discuss public policy and induce to the party a listening culture—listening to the voices of the local cadres of parties, ordinary supporters, and even the broader mass who can become potential supporters in the future.

Civil society, media, think tanks, and academic institutions can provide alternative ideas and autonomous leaders who can speak out against the unconscionable behavior of incumbent party elites who fear the consequences and risks induced in the deepening of democracy. The Election Commission and Judiciary have a critical role to play in the democratization of parties of Nepal making the electoral and party laws binding. The executive in Nepal has shown a propensity to interfere in the activities of the court, especially those related to the withdrawal of criminal cases and even circumvent judicial autonomy while judges are also subjected to parliamentary hearings. This has been caused by a loss in the boundary between law and politics robbing the ordinary citizens of access to justice. It is equally important to prevent the excessive corporate funding of parties for the promotion of special interest groups and wean politics off money's domination and its nexus with the instrument of violence. They do not dovetail with the grand principles of the Nepali state. Nepal also requires political parties' restructuring in terms of honoring promises leaders make to the people during elections, maintaining coherence between the agreements and decisions, including internal democracy, strengthening communication, and promoting inclusion (Gomar and Linares, 2008: 13). The constitutional behavior of citizens cultivates a common identity among them and their leaders.

Coherence of Individual Rights, Group Rights, and Human Rights

Recently, in Nepal, too-much party-mindedness has encouraged the people to fight for group rights than exclusively individual freedoms. This has fostered a sort of subsidiary identity politics. The CA has increased the representation of five groups of people— Dalits, ethnic groups and indigenous people, Madhesis, women, and backward regions—and created a kind of “differentiated citizenship” that goes beyond the common rights of citizenship (Murchland, 2009:133). It may be helpful to promote group parity but “group-specific rights” is at odds with the commitment to universal rights (Kymlica, 1995: 69). For many of these groups, agitations have become a convenient tool to be heard and heeded and break a certain group-enclosed leadership culture at the top and a kind of excessive party- mindedness of the mainstream parties. This group identity politics has ignored the representation of several micro minorities and built their uneven leverages in party politics. The resolution of tension between individual, group-based and human rights can maximize the benefits of governance, minimize their abuses and prevent the leadership's acculturation to neo-feudalism. The risk here is: a feudal nucleus would create permanent exclusion of the under-classes of society from political opportunities, except during the elections, party's shows of physical strength, and periods of confrontation. This has made it difficult to de-link politics from structural violence and formulate strategies to liberate the oppressed through reformist measures.

The Interim Constitution has expanded the social rights of people including the right to work, education, health, social justice, cultural and language rights beyond the capacity of the state to fulfill them. All communities must have the right to express their identity, so that the new constitution will be obliged to guarantee them. But the division of political power along ethnic, caste and territorial lines is a risky strategy for conflict-resolution as democratic politics is rooted in modern ideology rather than biology. It is relatively easy to resolve an ideological and interest-based conflict through understanding and negotiation for power-sharing, but ethnic conflict has the propensity to become emotionally charged which negates the existence of the other and refuses to respect others' legitimate interests in a country with overlapping values. The growing violence against women and recent ethnic and political agitations have been causing economic paralysis and constraining the nation's move toward a stable democracy that can deliver sustainable development and peace.

Reducing Extra-Party Political Participation

The political equation or power-centric approach of mainstream leaders devoid of democratic culture has provoked the emergence of pre-political solidarity groups, non-political or partisan bureaucracy, anti-political business community inclined to diminish the egalitarian effects of democracy, and free ride of armed non-state actors. Business community favors economic liberalization but it is aligned with political leaders to restrict political liberalization. Political leaders within the same parties share the same ideology but suffer from personal rivalries stoked by their group interests and have built sprawling networks with the leaders of other parties applying Kautilya's dictum— the enemy of my enemy is my friend. As a result, social movements in Nepal are bitterly divided along partisan lines and lack the capacity to channel and articulate ordinary citizens' voices and concerns. "The capacity of social movements to change the public mind still depends, to a large extent, on their ability to shape the debate in the public spheres" (Castells, 2008:87). The imposition of election candidates from above has bred factionalism and bureaucratic tendency in the leaders. The selection of candidates by local party committees by majority is central to making it transparent and enabling ordinary citizens to exercise their freedom of choice. Political participation through extra-political channels such as civil society, media, professional groups, primordial associations, and non-state actors is growing in Nepal as a result of the personalization of the political leadership, tendency of the top leaders to contest elections from two constituencies, control of party apparatuses even when defeated in elections, and fragmentation of political parties into organized interest groups following grievance-based politics.

In contrast, open communication between the party and society has been reduced to elections, social movements, participation in mediatized public sphere, and frequent political agitations. The old mode of one leader and many cadres communication has shifted to many leaders and many cadres communication. New technology and social media are changing the face of politics in Nepal as citizens can more directly communicate to their representatives rather than visiting the party offices. The old style politics that served the party well in a vertical chain through a narrow elite base is now fiercely contested by horizontal groups who enjoy expressing themselves through federations, societies, NGOs, community organizations, media, and caucus groups across the party formation. They are engaged in collective action with the changing frame of binary politics—friend and enemy—to address the challenges of new social stratification.

In such a context, Nepalese parties are seeking to reform themselves from their group-enclosed nature to open, transparent, and responsive institutions as they move into the future. This will democratize the left parties, socialize the non-left parties, and increase their internal ability for competition and politicization of the people into civic culture. Likewise, 'democratic centralism' will be transformed into 'democratic decentralization' in the organizational and leadership structures of the left parties as their common slogans of unity-struggle-transformation and secular, federal democratic republic reach the ordinary life of citizens. This will convert them into mass-based parties. The openness of parties to diverse society reduces undemocratic channels of political participation and helps to achieve political stability.

Enhancing Social Responsiveness and Accountability

Responsive rule is an open good. "It revolves around necessary correspondence between expressed citizen wishes and policy outcome" (Saward, 1998:79). Fair elections of the central committee (CC) and other party committees of various hierarchies provide legitimacy for informed democratic decision making. But when the party president has a veto power and the local party committees are only command-receiving subordinate bodies while the general assembly or national convention does not have enough time for

policy discourse, intra-party conflict becomes inevitable. How can a robust democracy be built as a bottom-up process and its values internalized in such a condition? The formation of party committee is associated with leadership selection. The level of mutual respect between leaders and cadres requires a sense of equality. Inner-party democracy strengthens the responsiveness of parties toward cadres, voters, and functional groups in society; enables the party organization to become flexible for cooperation with actors from diverse civil society, and prevents them from becoming exclusively authoritarian, government-oriented, and statist.

In normative terms, intra-party democracy is essential for the acceptance of ideology, civic, and moral renewal of organization, policy, and personnel choices as well as building ties of the parties with the lives and hopes of each generation of citizens. Inner party democracy accomplishes something which is one symbolic duty: it increases the international legitimacy of the parties. The right to information embedded in the constitutional law requires political parties to become transparent in election, finance and operation. This transparency in election is essential to know whether Nepalese parties are serving as a medium for channeling the citizens' aspirations in the governing institutions. Another role is fair selection of leaders with the ability to represent the people, use conscience, and shape relevant public policies. In pluralist societies, social responsiveness of parties can promote social cohesion and nation-building. Nepal's adoption of minimum wage, social protection, social analysis, targeting of under-classes, and gender budgeting have set up a link between equity and democracy. Yet, the pre-modern politics of divide and rule and instrumentalization of the cultural differences of the nation for the widening of electoral clout by the leaders continue to put strain on the process of deepening democracy's potential for social cohesion.

Representation of Social Diversity in Political Power

Nepal is a country of minorities except in the case of religion where over 80 percent of the people identify themselves as Hindus. It hosts 125 ethnic and caste groups, over 7 religious sects and 123 linguistic and cultural communities. The question here is: How can the adequate social representation of women, Dalits, workers, youth, indigenous groups, Madhesi, backward communities, and Muslims be enhanced when the District Committee, Electoral Constituency Coordination Committee, and Ilaka Committee have to get approval of its decisions from the super-ordinate committees? The central committees of the mainstream parties suggests that the representation of social diversity is highly skewed in terms of gender, class, caste, ethnicity, Dalits and indigenous people prompting many of these groups to organize their own parties, such as those of Madhesis, Janajatis, Newa, Dalits, Kahas-Chhetris, Muslims, Family, etc to escape from dynastic fatigue, filial connections, and cronyism.

The voter turnout in local elections in Nepal normally exceeded the one in national elections. The demographic makeup of those elected is diverse more because of the constitutional requirements of inclusion of women, weaker sections of society and marginalized than of political motivation. The lack of interest of political leaders in the local bodies' election is likely to fuel generational tension in the future. The winner-takes-all type of political culture, business financing of political campaign, and dominance of money politics create an unequal playing field for average voters and candidates and discourage meaningful political participation of ordinary citizens in the political sphere. Inner party democracy beefs up internal coherence between leaders and cadres, dynamism and deliberation of party rank and file and minimizes the degree of factionalism, conflict, and split that often threatens the very identity of party. Three key challenges to internal party democracy in Nepal are: the lack of uniformity in the election of

parties, weak status of lower level committees, and parochialism rather than democratic deliberation in national conventions (Prasai, 2008:12).

Social representation of diversity in the party structures enables parties to build connections with the diverse groups in society, deepens party's organizational roots, and fosters both social integration among various people on equal terms and system integration with the institutions of governance. This is important to override all sub-national loyalties in preference to a loyalty to the national polity. Only then Nepalese people can find a sense of justice in democracy and its infrastructures, such as legislature, political parties, and civil society. The stake for the democratization of Nepalese parties is growing higher with the mobilization of consciousness of grassroots people by primordial traditional groups and rational civil society and offering alternative channels for aggregation, articulation, and communication of public interests. "Democracy thrives when there are major opportunities for the mass of ordinary people actively to participate, through discussion and autonomous organizations, in shaping the agenda of public life, and when they are actively using these opportunities" (Crouch, 2008: 2).

Managing Factionalism

Intense factionalism and excessive partisan attachment have roiled the purpose of democratic politics in Nepal. All the mainstream parties in Nepal suffer from factionalism led by individuals in the commanding heights of party organizations and this factionalism percolates down to the grassroots politics and every day discourse. One can see three such streams in NC led by Sushil Koirala, Sher B. Deuba, and Khum B. Khadka; three streams in CPN-UML led by K. P. Sharma Oli, Jhala Nath Khanal, and Madhav K. Nepal; and three in UCPN (Maoist) led by Pushpa K. Dahal, Baburam Bhattarai, and Narayan Kaji Shrestha, each of them leaving only a tiny space for alternative points of view, though common interest in power subdue their split. The CPN (Maoist) and Madhesh-based parties also bear similar trends as they are hostage to special interest groups. Differences among leaders are largely personal, not ideological, as their interest in economic liberalization keep them politically homogenous lending a semblance of "collective leadership." Each of them increasingly judges the partners in other parties according to their opposition to their rivals and party affiliation is simply a crucial point for dissimilarity that does not go much deeper. And coalition politics in Nepal is organized more around what they oppose rather than what they are for. In this sense, they do not seem system-integrative. This renders national collective action complicated posing problems for national unity. Max Weber, comparing the dissimilar political systems of the world, says that only responsible leaders are capable of elevating national interests above petty, class or sectional interests (Frack, 2002:106) forestalling political closure.

The fear of demotion and interest in self-promotion have helped the leaders to organize clientele in supporters within the parties breeding intense factionalism, split or even bargaining for higher posts heaping scorn and disapproval from citizens. This factionalized tendency has caused political inertia, narrow-minded self-interest, exhaustion of strength, and deadlock within and across the parties. Managing this factional tendency through legitimate representation, deliberation, code-based conduct and ability to resolve problems can enable to act as modern political parties. But clan-based tendency in the NC, the problem of inclusive succession in the CPN-UML, rhetorical politics in UCPN (Maoist), and personalization of organizational control and leader-for-life in all other parties militate against such improvements. Democratization of leadership structure can reduce the temptation of leadership to divinize self, accept citizen equality and abide by constitutional and party discipline. "Leadership building and transfer is not only connected with individual change. It is about the structural continuity of party, its periodic renewal, certainty of future and development of new generation of leadership" (Gyawali,2013:

82). Good character of candidates for election can improve the quality of leadership. Democracy entails participation and shared responsibility, not exclusive dependence of citizens on leader to solve their entire problems.

Democratization of Organizational Structures and Communication

Organization of parties according to constitutional and democratic principles has a number of benefits—legitimacy of the party, building links with general supporters, financial support from the business groups, volunteer cadres for social mobilization of people, availability of candidates for the elections, strengthening policy position, and stability of democracy. Deepening democracy equally requires election of all the party-related institutions and members, limits on the term of elected leaders and opportunity for the women and marginalized for representation in the party apparatuses.

Political parties and cultural industries have a crucial role to play in the transformation process and rationalization of society by engaging grassroots people in the entire project cycle of development—planning, budgeting, administration, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and feedback, not just in voting, conducting assemblies, election campaign, political education, and shouting slogans in the streets for visible political attention. One can, however, see that the media are transforming Nepal's political parties as leaders communicate more to the media than among themselves. Autonomy and editorial freedom in the media are two crucial aspects for enabling journalists to become the real watchdogs of society contributing two other functions: creating a vibrant public sphere and contribution to a shared political culture. In Nepal, however, one finds a widening gap between the traditional politics of divide and rule and a socioeconomic and communication revolution spawning critical masses of society in every sphere of life who demand structural change through the redistribution of power, resources and recognition. Mass media are testing the promise of politics during elections made by party leaders and their performance and exposing the growing hiatus in political development.

The deepening of democracy has been deformed by the capture of democratic institutions by the elites of party bureaucracy and the deadly embrace of neo-liberal, finance-driven, and corporate-dominated public policy against the liberal spirit of social democracy (Greider, 2014) inscribed in Nepal's constitution. It means that Nepalese parties have either the alternative knowledge or the ability to defy the international policy prescription that is not suitable to national relevance. Their policy think tanks, like business consultants, do not have any interest in social learning and contextualizing policy issues. This is the effect of top-down network politics where political participation narrows around the key leaders instead of expanding its circuit to peoples' representatives, civil society, and attentive public (Braithwaite, Charlesworth and Soares, 2012:4). Every election in Nepal has, however, shown a clear mandate of the voters: removal of incumbent party from its dominant status. This marks the progress of the evaluative capacity of Nepali citizens and their unfailing appetite for appropriate political change.

Enlarging Institutional Base of Political Participation

In Nepal, the stake for the democratization of the internal life of parties has never been so high as now. Electoral participation has increased to over 70 percent. Mass mobilization of people and the rise of the level of political consciousness following the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections are challenging the hereditary, traditional, bureaucratic, and gerontocratic privileges of the leaders in favor of the elected, young, rational and dynamic ones. The top political leaders have, however, developed a propensity to stage their comeback through proportional election and continue with the same political culture due to their control on organizational power. In fact, Nepal's case has clearly shown that the closed list

proportional election system has made representatives “accountable to party bosses rather than voters and prevented the cross-party alliances necessary to address the specific concerns of women, youth or other marginalized populations” (Meisburger, 2011:11). The transformation of leader-oriented cadres into party-oriented ones is important in closing the psychological gulf between the cadres of the majority establishment and minority opposition in the same party.

There is thus a need in Nepal for the parties to expand the institutional domain to absorb the newly mobilized social groups and prevent political instability caused by high participation and low institutionalization of political process (Huntington, 1968:5). The voice for the inclusion of citizens in the key decisions and institutions and more democracy is becoming louder and louder among the rank and file of political workers. “People become public through the connecting process of deliberation. To deliberate means to weigh carefully both the consequences of various options for action and the views of others” (Mathews, 1994: 11). Genuine democracy in the party provides leaders to receive feedback, manage their grievances and problems, and maintain their downward accountability to voters and ordinary citizens. It also demands the principle of subsidiarity in leadership selection and recruitment of party officials from the diverse life of society.

There is, however, a need to arrest the proliferation of political parties through electoral reforms, as well as to discourage leaders’ tendency to split the party to become heads by negotiating the interest for internal adjustment, socialization on party acts and imposition of the threshold of at least 3 percent of a total votes for send representation in the parliament. This will reduce the number of parties in Nepal’s parliament. Predatory leaders, however, mobilize ethnic, racial, and communal tensions to expand their constituencies in their effort to redirect the frustration and resentment of their clientalist followings away from their own exploitative behavior (Diamond, 2001:12). The demand for ethnic-federal structuring of the state will also restructure the functioning of Nepali parties in the days to come.

Reconciliatory Style of Negotiation and Compromise

Nepal’s political parties need to abolish the politics of negation in favor of a more enlightened stance and negotiation and to avoid personal attacks that sideline issues and turn citizens’ attention away from real challenges to their life, liberty, livelihood, and property. It presupposes certain role of the civil society, think tanks, party intellectuals, and media as a countervailing force in communicating common ground, connecting political parties with the society and formulating a realistic agenda for consensus on the common issues. This would also help leaders to overcome their feudal authoritarian ego nurtured by media entertainment, consent manufacturing, and political indoctrination. A favorable constitutional and nationalist strategy to build trust is important. “The structural stresses offer parties and the public sphere as a whole less chance to conduct discourses centered on the standards of justice and basic social values” (Meyer and Hinchman, 2008: 77).

In spite of the operation of many coalition governments in Nepal, political parties have yet to acquire a culture of coalition, negotiation, and compromise for the promotion of collective public and national interests. The negotiation of political interests for power-sharing occurs outside the parliament, in the HLPC, which has eroded the authority of parliament and parliamentary leaders of parties and their capacity to embed their actions in the general life of citizens (Dahal, 2013:31). The party conventions should provide them sufficient opportunity for discussion on basic issues such as public security, food, health, education, sanitation, irrigation, management of local resources, infrastructural development, etc of local importance so that the trust of grassroots people will increase in the district and central party

leaders.³ The politics of negation can be better applied to deter the spoilers of the political system--corrupt, criminals, smugglers, human traffickers, authoritarian, and anti-social elements who often seek to capture party leadership through undemocratic means, and feed a collapse in the legitimacy of political system as a whole. The media, in this regard, can serve as a statutory nexus between the input and output functions of democracy to promote what Juergen Habermas calls "communicative action" (1995:130), essential nurture understanding at the political sphere to provide and accelerate national compromise and cooperation.

Mediation of Political Conflict

All the major parties of Nepal suffer from internal frictions due to personality differences among their leaders and a manifest gap between their ideological rhetoric and the reality of performance. Inner-party conflicts in Nepal are marked by leadership rivalry, control over opportunity and resources, ethnic and regional tensions, identity politics of diverse groups within the parties, strong legacy of hereditary and feudalistic elements, distortion of ideology and the impact of national and international power centers (Saud, 2013: 102-8). They are also encountering the post-conflict challenges from new parties such as the UCPN (Maoist), Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJAF), MJAF (Democratic), Tarai-Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP), Sadbhavana Party, CPN (Maoist) in all its hues, civil society, media, distributional social movements of critical masses, and the surge of over a dozen non-state armed actors engaged in extortion and violence. These forces themselves are facing a tension between fission and fusion of their organizational and leadership structures. The rational adjudication of competing claims above selfish point-scoring is essential in minimizing political frictions and conflicts.

One of the ironies of Nepali politics is that in a coalition government small parties enjoy disproportional share of power relative to their representative strength and often act as free riders while the mainstream parties suffer from the problem of personality cult, leader-oriented factionalism, and patronage. Political leaders must acknowledge the problems of society, find common ground, and democratize their organizational structures further by opening their parties to the diverse perspectives of the society for deliberation, and synthesizing the contesting visions clearly into a national framework. Communication at various levels of leadership, culture of informed deliberation in committees, management of dissenting voices, evaluation of cadres and leaders, and reconstruction of the broken relationship and infrastructures in such a context become essential components to mitigate conflict. Factionalism can be managed by upgrading the goals and means, adopting election and human rights codes of conduct, and a constitutional tradition of politics.

Otherwise, the politicization of ethnicity, caste, class and territoriality will continue to weaken the parties, inspiring the leaders to unprincipled competition than consensus and enhancing fundamental political polarization, and inter-and intra-party deadlock. In the party rank and file it is essential to address genuine demands, capture the resilience of Nepali society, foster unity and harmony between groups and promote the system's capacity to adapt to the demands of "public opinion." An inter-party conflict resolution mechanism is, therefore, needed to confine the parties to the political sphere of policy and law-making and steer the social welfare state in a clear constitutional direction.

Aiding Parties from Outside

³ Pre-election scenario revealed many authoritarian traits: ticket distribution to potential candidates was highly centralized; the top leaders of various parties contested from two constituencies giving the impression they have to win any way; many small parties did not maintain social inclusivity; and some parties with little commitment to democracy, inclusivity, responsibility, and peace also contested the election.

The situation also renders it crucial to understand the funding of political parties in Nepal who influences its representation, policy making, and decision making, to see whether leadership can stand above the dominant internal and external interest groups to arbitrate competing interests, opinions, and preferences or continue to skirt the rules of the game to degenerate Nepal's democracy into partiocracy. Under democracy promotion donors have funded a number of programs in the developing countries by financing free and fair elections, supporting effective political institutions (constitutions, courts, legislatures, local governments, and political parties) and through the sponsorship of nongovernmental civic and community groups like fraternal organizations, religiously affiliated associations, trade unions, media and professional societies (Mandelbaum,1999: 12).

The dominant approach to party assistance has been dubbed by Thomas Carothers "institutional modeling" (2006:112). This means "assistance providers adopt standard training programs drawn from their domestic party experience and then replicate the same programs in country after country" (Misburger, 2011:6) regardless of national significance. External support to Nepalese political parties extends to financing political leaders with exposure visits, material support, organization of dialogue, experience sharing, external advice, financing candidates during election, and supporting political party affiliated NGOs, consultants, federations, and professional organizations. Studies have found that under the "guise of good governance, massive programs of social, economic and political engineering have taken place in societies emerging from conflict and economic crisis" (MacGinty and Williams, 2015: 12). One can visibly witness these trends in Nepal also. Many leaders of Nepal's political parties are also in the close loop of donors who receive funding for their constituency development, scholarship for their children, business deal, and other project benefits.

But donors' support to parties' ancillary organizations has created institutional divides and spawning problems in the institutionalization of political parties. Some parties of Nepal have become victims of political engineering. Partly owing to the non-inclusive nature and partly due to the private ambition of Nepalese leaders, Nepalese parties have faced the emergence of caucus groups of subsidiary identities aided by the donors and social movements. The formation of social movements around global communication, incentives, and solidarity networks has caused the division of Nepal's national political sphere. "Global politics have turned into global domestic politics, which rob national politics of their boundaries and foundations" (Beck, 2006:249). This has provided opportunity for the donors to finance the non-state actors, and civil society organizations as "parallel institutions" rendering parties either dysfunctional or lacking the prospect of long-term reforms "without realizing that the most durable and appropriate political institutions normally evolve in response to specific local conditions influenced by factors as varied as history, culture, natural resource and climate" (Misburger, 2011:6).

Aiding parties to support the democratic values of those countries can mitigate the conflict while covertly subverting those values who oppose "institutional modeling" does not make democracy stable. Department of International Development conflict assessment report revealed that "donors were inadvertently channeling aid in ways that deepened social exclusion processes, thereby contributing to the continuation of the conflict. A major reorientation of the program contributed to evolve micro-level community development (DFID, 2009: 18), improve development effectiveness and promote positive change. Similarly, when power of money holds disproportional weight over the voters in the decision of parties it creates unequal playing field and tramples democratic values associated with social justice. Party assistance in Nepal can become reasonably successful if it increases the efficacy of Nepalese parties to serve Nepali citizens and strengthen their leaders' commitment to public and national interests. It cannot work if parties face pressure of international conditionalities and sanctions for economic

liberalization and suffer from the crisis of “output legitimacy with regard to economic and development policies” (Saxer, 2009: 89) as has happened in Nepal.

Conclusion

Growth of a dense network of intermediary institutions provides political parties an opportunity to engage citizens in various walks of political life and increase their stake in democracy. Factionalism, split, leader-for-life, dominance of hereditary elements, social and gender bias, network-based and vertical patron-client relationship characterize the political culture of Nepalese political parties. These trends have encouraged the emergence of regional, ethnic, indigenous and caste-based parties which play with the politics of difference and impose obstacles for social and national integration. The social, *generational and gender gaps* in the leadership especially of second and third generation failed to inspire the real commitment of youth in the party and institutionalization of political parties through “longevity, renewability and reprogrammability” (Emmerson, 1986: 149). The other missing element is the concept of social solidarity to reduce the cost of politics and liberate parties from the control of dominant interest groups. So long as decision-making prerogative remains with the top leadership, rather than stable institutions, it would be difficult to democratize and institutionalize Nepalese parties.

The remedy is the open deliberation in the party committees, internal cohesion of party and upholding positional accountability, democratization, re-socialization and decentralization of structural set up of parties. These processes require a fresh adjustment of ideas and behavior enabling the political parties to expand their social base and make leadership selection inclusive. A democratic leader never loses sight of the balance between four core elements: acquisition of power, maintenance of democratic ideals, promotion of social wellbeing of the people and constructive change in society which makes violent conflict redundant. Similarly, there is also a need for the party to look for leaders who can *inspire vision and sustainable change* than the father figures (patriarch) who lack vision of creating decent society, fear change including the change of leadership and fail to coordinate the behavior of cadres and voters. Nonperformance of incumbent parties led the voters to change their preferences in each election. Leaders of Nepal require studying the country before they govern, maintain strong feedback with the electorates and get the policy stocktaking of perils and opportunities of new time with the support of organic think-tanks. The coming battles among the factions of various parties for leadership in Nepal will inspire *democratic selection of leaders in the future through electoral means than charisma and tradition*. Media exposure and democratic awakening are providing normative basis for the social modernization of Nepalese parties and deepening democratic values and institutions in the economic and social life of the nation.

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