

"Inner Party Democracy"

Paper presented by
Khagendra Prasai
principal@smcollege.edu.np
21st December, Nagarkot

on Seminar

"Democratization of Political Party"

FES/CeLCAR/SM College

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, multi-party democracy is increasing becoming popular system of governance, which, however, has suffered many setbacks and alienated from 'demo' in considerable part of the world for several reasons. The structure and function of government, system of election, rights and duties of citizens and the like have received considerable attention since long. But, only recently has the issue of inner party democracy begun to receive some recognition and attention, though not to a degree and scale it ought to. In this paper, some attempts will be made to throw light on several aspects associated with inner party democracy.

The part 2 of the paper presents some fundamental justification for inner party democracy. The part 3 constitutes an attempt to identify some provisions which tend to handicap the fuller exercise of democracy in the parties.

The part 4 presents and discusses some principal elements fundamental for the practice and growth of democracy in political party. The part 5 gives justification for the constitutional and legal regulation of political party along with how such regulation have been incorporated and enacted in the constitution of some democratic nations.

The part 6 shows the difference between democratic and undemocratic leadership and also describes how inner party democracy provides opportunities and favorable condition for the development of popular and competent leadership. The part 7 presents summary of the paper.

2. WHY INNER PARTY DEMOCRACY?

Many prescriptions have been made on how real democracy can be built and strengthened. These prescriptions and associated issues have been widely debated and discussed. The major prescription includes transparency, accountability, inclusion, strengthening of civil society etc. But we have several good reasons to contend that inner party democracy is of the supreme importance for our project of building and strengthening democracy.

Firstly, in multi party competitive political system, parties are key to and major actor of political power. All political activities, from attainment of power to exercise of power, in which parties are involved as actors, must be adequately democratic in their content, process and objective. The political process of making and running the government can be democratic only when the parties as actor are internally adequately democratic. Only those parties and leaders can give democratic character to the content and process of the state which practice practicing democracy in the entire process of all their party affairs and business. History of some counties provide us evidence that some parties and leaders attained political power in democratic system through democratic method but exercised it in authoritarian and totalitarian manner, to a lesser or greater extent, and adversely

affected the development of democracy¹. The fundamental reason behind this was that these parties and their leaders were not committed to the fundamental principle, method and ideals of democracy and hardly practice these in their inner party business creating political culture of authoritarianism.

Secondly, political parties are the primary structure and forum for the formation of political will of citizens and mobilization of their political actions. The process of formation of will and carrying out of action, in democracy, must be sufficiently democratic. In order to ensure democratic method of will formation and mobilization of action, the parties which initiate, coordinates, synthesizes and conducts them must follow and practice fundamental principles of democracy in conduction of all their internal business. The use of undemocratic method for these purposes, which may give some short-run advantages to the party, establishes a political culture of militancy and authoritarianism and slows down or even retards the process of democratization of state and society at large.

Thirdly, democracy does not function automatically. Nor do the principles and ideals laid down in the constitution and document of political parties come into action spontaneously. Democracy and constitution provide us opportunities and framework. Everything depends on overall competence of citizens, in general, and of political parties in particular. The future of multi party democracy depends not on charismas, wisdom and commitment occasionally shown by a few leaders but primarily on qualities such as skill, knowledge and virtue political parties and their members possess, demonstrate and use. This being the case, in what kind of party does presence and development of such qualities become essential as well as possible? In what kind of party can members have adequate opportunities to develop these qualities and demonstrate them? The answer is: in the party which internally practices fundamental principle, method and ideals of democracy.

Finally, democracy is not just about periodically electing leaders and public office-bearers. It is set of social norms that govern our conduct and behavior. Therefore, fundamental principles, method and ideals of democracy must be practiced, without exception, in all social and public life which alone can contribute to democratization of society, state and public institutions. In democracy, political parties are the chief agent and practitioner of such principles and method. Only the leader and members of parties trained and socialized in democratic political culture can make some contribution to this end.

Therefore, we have good reason to assert that inner party democracy is of utmost importance for building a democratic society and state.

Does Inclusion Help?

Nowadays, there is a widespread cry for inclusion. Several bases of inclusion have been suggested; ethnicity, region, gender, social backwardness etc. Even if inclusion is

¹ Hitler in Germany, Indira Gandhi in India, Alberto Fujimori in Peru, Boris Yeltsin in Russia can be taken as example.

perfectly ideally carried out, it will not, in itself, contribute to democratization. If parties function and exercise power undemocratically, inclusion will make no difference, create elites within parties instead. This means sharing of power by few not the democratization of power. Faces will change but the system will remain intact. But, if parties exercise fundamental democracy, they open opportunities and incentives for the party members to raise and discuss a great many social issues. Consequently, these issues will find increasingly greater place and importance in political debate sensitizing and preparing party and public for political action. Therefore solution lies not in ensuring the inclusion of some new faces in party with undemocratic method and structure but in transforming party structure from authoritarian to democratic which effect real democracy.

3. PROVISION IN CONSTITUTION OF NEPALESE POLITICAL PARTIES:

It has arguable been contended that 'democratic' political parties in Nepal are not democratic to the extent they ought to be. A scientific study is much demanded to investigate into this issue. I have tried to make a small effort in this direction. On reviewing the constitution of some political parties which claim to be democratic, some problems relating to inner party democracy have been noted some of which have been mentioned below:

One serious problem can be seen on formation of various levels of party committees and their office-bearers, executives and members. In all political parties, **nomination** is prevalent. For example, in Nepali Congress; 50% of the members and key position of various levels of party committee are nominated by the president of the committee; some representatives for national conference are nominated by central president etc.² In CPN (UML) up to 5% representatives for national conference are nominated by central committee; the elected central committee can nominate to it up to 15% of its number, most of the members of zonal committee are nominated by central committee etc.³

The second problem is concerned with the authority of various levels of committee. In most, if not all, cases, the lower committees are group to follow the direction from above and are statutorily subordinate to them. For example, In NC, one of the major duties laid down for committee is to follow the instruction given by higher level of committee. Even worse than this, the working committees do not have significant authorities, all rests with the president who has decisive vote in the committee.⁴ In CPN (UML), district committee, election area coordination committee, *ilaka* committee must get their decisions approved by respective higher committee. Some lower committees need to take the approval from higher committees to fill in vacant positions.⁵ Such system of subordination and super-ordination is more of bureaucracy and less of democracy.

² See *Nepali Congress ko Bidhan, 2017* (Amended and Modified in 2051, 2054, 2057)

³ See *Nekapa Amaleko Bidhan*

⁴ See *Nepali Congress ko Bidhan, 2017* (Amended and Modified in 2051, 2054, 2057)

⁵ See *Nekapa Amaleko Bidhan*

Thirdly, democracy entails open debate; open discussion and deliberation constitutes the fundamental element of lively democracy. The conferences of different levels of parties seem to be more ceremonious than real forum for democratic exercise. The number of party members participating as representatives and time duration allocated for discussion in conference do not allow meaningful discussion and deliberation on agendas.

4. MAJOR ELEMENTS OF INNER PARTY DEMOCRACY

If inner party democracy is of supreme importance in democracy, its method, content and process must be of prime concern and value. Some principal measures to be introduced into and practiced by political parties are discussed below.

(a) Constitution of Party Committee & Selection of Leader

All levels of committee and executive position must be formed entirely through the process of election. Nomination must be put to an end. Complementary to this, there should be certain mechanisms with which party members can supervise the performance of leaders and committees. One such mechanism is **periodic meeting** of party members in which members can have open discussion on performance of leaders and other related subjects and propose and carry out action as they judge to be democratically necessary and appropriate. It can be reward or punishment or criticism or feedback. **Recall** can be another effective measure which can be practiced by elector committees and members to call their leaders and representative back any time if they deem so appropriate and necessary.

These measures contribute to making leaders accountable to members; creating conditions conducive to alleviation of toadyism to a great extent; and making the entire party and its members constantly rather than seasonally active in the life of party and hence of democracy.

(b) Ideology & Policy Formulation

The ideology and policy of the party must be formed through the informed and qualitative participation of maximum numbers of its members rather than by a clique. The ideology and principal policies of party must be formulated by direct participation of all members rather than by their representatives in conference. This can be like general election or census in parties.

Decision on policies of different concern must be taken through the process of wider discussion among the members of the concerned party committee. Members must be encouraged to understand issues in depth and make their position on them before entering into discussion and decision. Open discussion and **deliberation** must be established and maintained as 'party culture'.

Such measures have substantive advantages: For one thing, it makes party member sovereign. The entire party and its members become the maker of ideology and policy, the real master of their political decision and activities. Secondly, it works as an effective mechanism for resolving differences of opinion. The party members get reasonable opportunity to express and assert themselves which will undermine factionalism. Even the dissenters are likely to consent to and support the implantation of decisions.

(c) Identification of Candidate:

Parties have been adopting apparently undemocratic method such as selection of candidates by central committee or high command and have often been criticized by their members. A democratic party must demonstrate democratic character in all its business including identification of candidate for election. Two measures can be adopted and practiced: One, candidates can be selected by direct voting of all party members from the concerned constituency which is called **primary election** and is constitutionally mandatory in some countries. Second, candidate can be selected by party committee of the concerned constituency. These measures can contribute to democratization of party by ensuring the participation of all members in selection process and also put an end to hand-picking, toadyism and favoritism.

(d) Transparency in Decision Making

All decision and decision-making process, except required rationally, must be absolutely transparent and must be made accessible to members and people. Transparency brings some important advantages: Firstly, it provides members concrete democratic opportunities to study the party leaders; make their judgment and position on them; and pass on decision accordingly. Secondly, it provides opportunities for potential leaders to express themselves before the entire party. Thirdly, it makes party 'public' in true sense and helps put an end to conspiratorial politics.

(e) Scientific Mindedness in Members

In addition to the aforementioned organizational arrangements, which are essential but not enough to give democratic life to political parties, democratization of party demands some specific type of mindedness in the individual members of party some of which are mentioned below:.

I. Inquisitiveness to be informed: For an effective and quality participation of members in his or her political party, he or she needs to be objectively informed on national and international issues; policies of parties; ability or inability of leaders, their outlook and activities etc. Only constantly informed members can demonstrate reasoned commitment to what they believe and cherish. Ill-informed or uninformed citizens can neither be sovereign, nor master of their fate. How can an individual's participation in decision making process be meaningful unless he or she is adequately informed on the issue in question?

II. Open Mindedness: Open mind is always ready to listen others' ideas and argument without biases and prejudices and also demonstrates a tendency to accept those ideas which are logically and objectively superior. Such mind has a tendency to give up ideas to the extent they are proved to be illogical and unsubstantiated by fact. The discussion in party can be meaningful and free only when members demonstrate such tendency. Unreasoned fixation on some ideas hinders open discussion and deliberation.

III. Critical Mind: Critical mind is a questioning mind.⁶ It is said that question that an individual raises reflects his cognitive ability. In fact, questions are the forces that empower our thinking and cognition. New ideas are the outcome critical thinking.

Critical mind does not instantly accept or reject other's position and ideas. It makes its position only after careful examination of the ideas and opinion. It is not stampeded into accepting some views because others accept them. A critical mind closely examines claims and assumptions; carefully evaluates existing evidences; and cautiously assesses all conclusions.⁷ Therefore, only the members with critical mind can give life to party.

'Soldier', 'devotee' and 'follower', which normally are the type of member leaders of political parties prefer and favor, can not contribute to the democratic life of party. These types of members do not suit Democratic Party.

Does Term Limit Help?

One measure that is widely suggested as an effective check to corruption of power, is limiting of term of the head of the party, which arguably, does not constitutes the solution. The term limit does not challenge party structure with significant inequality within. In such structure, head of the party is all-powerful and the party committee is of little power. Such all-powerful head may exercise power considerably undemocratically and despotically even for short or limited period of time handicapping the exercise and fettering the growth of democracy in the party. The important question is not how long a person remains in power, but, how he or she exercises power. Therefore, solution consists, firstly, in restructuring party committee system and reforming party statute in such a way that power is exercised collectively by all members on equal footing and executive of party committee are made responsible to the committee ; secondly, in adopting and implementing, without exception, the fundamental principles of democracy in all cases of exercise of power.

5. CONSTITUTIONAL OR LEGAL PROVISION OF INNER PARTY DEMOCRACY

⁶ Introduction to Psychology

⁷ Introduction to Psychology

Almost all democrats agree to the idea that party's business must be governed by fundamental democratic principles. But some of the advocates of inner party democracy do not support the idea that there should be constitutional and legal regulation of party. They contend that inner party democracy is internal affair of party not be subjected to regulation from outside. Some regard party as volunteer organization, therefore not subject to legal inspection. But, some good reasons can be forwarded in favor of constitutional or legal regulation of inner party democracy. **Firstly**, any relation, interaction and organization between individuals in democratic society must be governed by fundamental universal principal of democracy; therefore, constitutional regulation is equally attracted in political parties as they are the most public association of citizens. **Secondly**, decision and activities of political parties are of public concern and importance, therefore, are not 'private affairs', unlike argued by many. Thirdly, in democratic system, no institution is above constitution, this applies to party without exception. For these and other many reasons, party law which requires parties to practice the fundamental principal of democracy in all their business, is essential for promotion of democratic culture and habits in the parties.

Some countries have made very definite provision of inner party democracy in their constitution and related laws which requires parties to observe and practice democratic principle in the matter of membership, selection of candidates and leaders, decision making process etc.

In **Germany**, provisions on political parties have been defined in Basic Law of Federal Republic of Germany,⁸ the article 21 (1) of which requires parties' "internal organization to conform to democratic principal". According to article 21(1)⁹ of *Federal Electoral Law* ", a person may only be named as candidate of a party in a constituency if he or she has been selected for this purpose in an assembly of party members for the selection of a constituency candidate or in a special or general assembly of party representatives". And according to 21 (3) "the candidates and the representatives for the assemblies of representatives shall be selected by secret ballot."

Likewise, the Constitution of **Spain**, article 6 requires that internal organization and function of political parties must be democratic.¹⁰

The Constitution of **Portugal** (Article 51 (5) requires that "political parties shall be governed by the principles of transparency, democratic organization and management, and participation by all their members."¹¹

In **Finland**, *Act on Political Parties, 1969*, prescribes that "internal structure and management of political parties must be democratic".

⁸ http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/parliament/function/legal/germanbasiclaw.pdf

⁹ <http://www.iuscomp.org/gla/statutes/BWG.htm#ToC24>

¹⁰ http://www.servat.unibe.ch/law/icl/sp00000_.html.

¹¹ http://www.parlamento.pt/ingles/cons_leg/crp_ing/index.html

Electoral and Other Acts Amendments Act 2002 of Queensland (Australia) prescribes some measures to be observed by political parties some of which are concerned with rules of amendment of constitution, accepting and ending membership, management of internal affairs, selection of office-bearers and party candidates- local as well as parliamentary and internal election procedures. The Act requires parties to abide by "general principles of free and democratic election" in pre-selection ballot.¹²

The Interim Constitution of **Nepal** 2006 requires that "constitution and by-laws of must be democratic" and also that "office bearers of all levels of party must be elected"¹³

In conclusion, inner party democracy has received ample importance in constitution of many democratic nations and is increasingly becoming an important issue of democracy.

6. LEADERSHIP AND INNER PARTY DEMOCRACY

6.1 Democratic VS Undemocratic Leadership

Democracy demands some definite characteristics in leaders and definite process of leadership. Only those leaders who are democratic in thought, behavior and work style can make some contribution to the democratization of party and to of state and society. Therefore, it is important to identify the fundamental differences between democratic and undemocratic leadership.

Firstly, a democratic leader makes decision and establishes them not through the use of 'command' and 'force' but through wider discussion & deliberation and through logical explanation of the position. Such leader ensures the participation of as many as possible and creates a condition for voluntary acceptance of decisions by members. Contrary to these, an undemocratic leader makes decision himself, gives direction to subordinates and listen little to others. He or she regards open discussion and dissension as anarchy, indiscipline and inaction. Democratic leader generates or synthesizes citizen's aspiration whereas undemocratic ones impose them on citizens.

Secondly, a democratic leader tends to create and develop reciprocal and egalitarian relationship between leaders and other members of the party, while undemocratic leader maintains one-sided relation based on inequality. Democratic leader regards other members as co-workers and equals, whereas, undemocratic leaders regard members as subordinate and assistant; the relationship is based on subordination and super ordination.

Thirdly, democratic leader makes his position, planning and action public as they have nothing to hide. In contradistinction, undemocratic leader often uses secrete game, clandestine plot, conspiracy. Moreover, an undemocratic leader uses bargaining technique more and rational persuasion less.

¹² See Bennet, Scott. 2002. "Australia's Political Parties: More Regulation" in <http://www.aph.ove.au/library/pubs/rp/2001-02/02rp21.html>

¹³ See Article 142 of the Constitution of Nepal

6.2 Development of Leadership and Inner Party Democracy

The future and effectiveness of democracy largely on quality and competence of leaders not on the charisma which people believe they demonstrate occasionally. The establishment, development and continuity of competent leaders depend on internal party democracy for some important reasons: **For one thing**, only in adequately democratic structure, party members have ample opportunity and freedom to express their competence and ability and to be elected as leaders. Secondly, only in party with democratic structure and culture, members have unrestricted freedom to choose the leaders without undue influence from 'above' or 'anywhere'. Only in a truly democratic party, since it requires the informed and active participation of **ALL** members in the life of party and politics, the development of knowledge, skill and virtue in the members becomes necessary as well as possible. Only the informed and competent members can identify and choose competent leaders. Only the competent and virtuous leaders, on their part, encourage members to be competent and create condition conducive to the development of competence, intellect and virtue.

Thirdly, leadership, in other words, is the ability to mobilize the efforts of group. The mobilization or participation of members becomes effective only when the members are informed and competent. The effectiveness of discussion and deliberation among members comprehension and voluntary acceptance of decisions by members, depend on their intellectual and political competence. Hence inner party democracy makes the leadership effective by enhancing the intellectual and political competence of the entire party.

7. CONCLUSION

Inner party democracy is, arguably, of utmost importance in democracy. Some of the principal problems relating to democracy in parties are rampancy of nomination, underdog position of lower committees and ritualism in conference rather than true exercise of democracy.

There are some important measures that need to be introduced and practiced to democratize political parties. Firstly, all committees and leaders must be elected. Secondly, ideology and policies of the party must be formulated through the participation of all party members. Thirdly, the candidate for election must be chosen democratically by members of concerned constituency. Fourthly, all decision making process and decision must be absolutely transparent unless rationally required. Fifthly, party members must possess scientific mind and must be governed in their political activities, in general and discussion and deliberation, in particular, by fundamental principal of science.

Some democratic nations have incorporated provision of inner party democracy in their constitution and laws. Political parties are public organization and their decision and actions affect and therefore are the concern of everyone. Business of such organization

must be governed by fundamental principles of democracy and must be constitutionally regulated.

Inner party democracy creates condition conducive to the development of competent leadership. It gives reasonable opportunities to party members to express themselves and influence their party. It also provides opportunities to the members to develop their skill, knowledge and virtue necessary for the smooth working of democracy and party. Only informed, skilled and virtuous members can elect and defend competent leadership.

In conclusion, inner party democracy constitutes one of the most important issues to pay and give importance to which demands immediate attention and implementation.