

# Nepal's Quest for Inner Party Democracy<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Modern political parties are the lynchpin of pluralistic democracy. As breeding ground of democratic aspirations they are also an engine of social transformation. They bring diverse sections of citizens into their structures and offer adequate electoral choice thus enabling them to exercise rights to choose leaders in governance. Political parties are also vital “instruments of winning and administering power and determining policy outcomes”(Criddle,2003:140). Effective functioning of democracy presupposes political parties to adopt democratic principles and activities in their internal life. Popular demand for inclusive or participatory democracy in Nepal has opened debates about the democratization of political parties and an improvement in their political structures, procedures and political culture for attaining “democratic responsiveness.”<sup>2</sup> Nepalese parties are formed largely on the heritage of political movement, rebellion and leadership split. The common ground, in relation to an inter-party collaborative platform, therefore, can be found in “*a political-economic regime of social democracy*” (Mishra, 2008: 14-16). Leaders of all the mainstream parties come from middle and upper classes of society. They require enhancing democratic character and transformation of small elite base at the top to become representative of the nation’s social diversity, majority of them fall into the economic bracket of lower classes.

The 12-point agreement signed by Seven-Party Alliance and rebel Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in 2005 assumes political parties a “guardian” of people. The Interim Constitution of January 2007 entails the parties to adopt “*transparency and accountability*” in their functioning. Sound internal book keeping, reporting to electorates and information disclosure to citizens are vital civic functions. Modernization of an in-egalitarian stratification of Nepalese society can increase poor citizens’ access to power and resources and enhance their confidence in the polity. These are also the solutions to the problem of growing *extra-party civic engagement of subsidiary identities* -- women, Madheshis, Janajatis, Dalits, Adivasis, backward classes, business, etc and balance *common interests of parties, public interests of citizens and national interests of the state*.

The inner party democracy is also a solution to the proliferation of armed groups caused by political closure and negation, lawlessness caused by factional fights and the corrosion of state power, alienation of youth and group-enclosed extra-party social movements in all types of democracy. Internal party democracy, dignified space for the opposition and resiliency of participatory democracy requires generations’ efforts in fostering inclusive transformation of the nation’s political culture. Left parties have sought to offer an alternative to elite oligarchy. But, Milovan Djilas, while analyzing a single communist party-dominated regimes found the formation of new ruling class within the parties just as selfish as previous oligarchy(Djilas, 1961). The paternalistic tendency of leaders often considering themselves most competent and cadres incompetent (Bhusal, 2009: 32) is universal many societies lacking civic culture. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, therefore, considered party democracy a crucial means to combat “group conspiracy.” V. I. Lenin allowed freedom of criticism within the limits of the principles of party so that reform and unity of party are achieved. All political parties of Nepal prefer high necessity of party reforms as they provide learning opportunities for the next generation of leaders and followers. The only question is when, how, how far and how fast?

Where is Nepal’s party politics heading in terms of laws, political structure and political culture? How is stability possible in the relations of political parties in Nepal so that they can collectively achieve national goals? Where are Nepal’s reforms for inner party democracy heading? How long does it take to reform Nepal’s political culture when highly personalized and fractious party leaders coexist uneasily

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<sup>2</sup> “Democratic responsiveness is a complex process, somewhat like a chain whose links are causally connected. It begins with the policy preferences held by citizens, and moves link by causal link through such stages as voting, election outcomes, the formation of policy making coalitions, the process of policy making between elections, and public policies themselves” ( Powell, 2004: 91).

with impersonal laws and institutions of the state? Can a strong sense of party identification of citizens so essential to their behavior endure when party leaders and party intellectuals themselves develop flexible tendencies in their loyalties? How to build the capacity of parties to reform and think beyond partisan interest for national vision and goals? This paper revolves around some of these questions.

### **Changing Party Functions**

The changing stratification of Nepalese society has produced highly mobile classes outside the institutional framework of party politics but well connected to national and international networks of values, struggles and collective action. The social mobility of under-classes of society from rural to urban areas and abroad continues to erode the traditional authority of feudal interests while entrepreneurial lower-middle classes have become an *elan vital* of democratic spirit, energy and expansion. The rational-choice behavior of political cadres and voters has weakened the voluntary spirit in political participation. While 12-point agreement sought to institutionalize parliamentary polity, Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the Interim Constitution have sought to bring “incoherence of political principles,” among the mainstream parties and made the boundaries between “plural left,” parties existing in Nepalese political landscape fluid and fluctuating. The outcome of CA election has changed power equation in favor UCPN (Maoist) as it emerged the single dominant party but short of simple majority to form its own government. The demand of non-Maoist parties to shift political game from consensus to competition has added new element in this fluidity as power struggle assumed primacy over drafting a new constitution. In the absence of a modicum of party discipline along the line of common values and common attitude and accountability to inter-party accords there is no guarantee that Nepal’s party system will restore law-governed regime, cohesive peace, progress and stability. The outcome is: “democracy has been transformed into a semi-anarchic regime” which has generated a fear of “the disintegration of the state” (Bobbio, 2002:298; Mainali, 2009:24-31).

The UCPN (Maoist) projects itself “anti-system” revolutionary party having belief in People’s Republic while other parties do not have courage to defend the existing system as they are torn between fear of “state restructuring” and challenges posed by “political status quo.” Nepali Congress (NC) and Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) are locked in an uneasy tension between “politics as usual” at the center and widening of socioeconomic revolution at the grassroots level. The swelling of NGOs, civil society, professional bodies, media and small parties signals a budding political pluralism, each checking the other’s power and authority and articulating the human rights of minorities.

Turmoil in inner-party democracy has resulted in clashes in CPN-UML, NC, Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJAF), Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and Nepal Sadbhavan Party between the parliamentary parties and the mass section of the parties causing vertical split though NC has uneasily shelved its discord and allowed cadres of both Koirala and Deuba factions to compete for general assembly members. A large chunk of CPN-ML drifted back to mother party latter on. The Madhesi parties too formed a Madhesi Democratic United Front to fight for a single Madhesh federal state and proportional representation in governance. The UCPN (Maoist) is seeking “unity, struggle and transformation” which is closer to the line of CPN-UML Chairman J. N. Khanal’s “reorganization, unity, struggle and transformation,” and even a possibility for either national consensus or the left unity government. The self-image of CPN-UML is moderate left in the middle between what it calls “conservative NC” and “left extremist UNPN (Maoist).” In contrast, M. K. Nepal and K.P. Oli of the same party, like leaders of *ancien regime*, feel comfortable for a collaborative action with the NC so long as UCPN (Maoist) is not transformed into a civilian party by returning the lands it seized during conflict to rightful owners, dismantling of para-military wing of Young Communist League and rehabilitation and integration of Maoist combatants.

The UCPN (Maoist) and Madhesi parties exhibit “movement tendencies” and maintain a very unstable relationship with society as their self-perceived image is a catalyst of radical change. Both parties also face conflict between soft and hard lines. But the class polarization sought by UCPN (Maoist) and territorial polarization by Madhesi parties frighten each other. The NC and CPN-UML, however, fear

both for their lack of interest in governability and converging interest on sectoral demands though they sharply differ on land reforms, political pluralism and identity politics. Politics of Nepal has thus become “overshadowed by both the desire for and the fear of expropriation” (Offe and Schmitter, 1995: 514). Changing functions of parties entail a search for the redefinition of identity based on current policies and bridge the disjuncture between their ideological brand and anti-ideological policies.

In a strong inner party democracy, political parties collect a variety of demands, opinions and interests of people, articulate to party committees, present competing policy packages and submit them to respective parliamentary committees for deliberation and consideration. Conversion of demands into public policy and feedback of citizens brings the system nearer to the life-world of citizens. Petty and personal demands of voters for small projects, job and problem handling are done through the links of party leaders to different agencies. Aggregation of citizens’ demand is managed by political parties while articulation is done through pressure groups, interest groups, civil society, media etc. Factions within political parties also aggregate and articulate those opposing interests into alternative policies. Sometimes competing and sometimes common interests are formed across the party lines for articulation. In order to perform input functions political parties should sufficiently maintain inner party democracy and cohere diverse public into enlightened understanding and democratic culture of cooperation based on popular sovereignty.

Nepal’s rural life is changing very fast with changing structure in gender roles, social stratification and migration pattern as new social mobility from rural to urban areas provided by remittance economy, decline in agricultural production, proliferation of NGOs and civil society and sharpening of social ferment are exerting pressure for restructuring of the state, political parties and property. The implementation of federalism, regional autonomy and devolution of power in Nepal is sure to incubate many regional parties in the future if the leadership of national parties will continue to remain within the historically *existing pre-capitalist traits (of paternalism where people look to the state for everything), feudal peculiarities rooted in patronage system and caste-bound prerogatives while vociferously posturing the language of Marxism, nationalism and liberalism to the public*. The politics of caste and gender homogeneity maintained at the top echelon of mainstream parties is incongruous for a democratic rule because it reflects the non-representative character of politics and de-institutionalization of party system. The weakness of political leaders to stabilize democratic initiatives is mainly attributed to eroding distributive capacity of the state at a time when leaders have themselves unleashed unrealistic expectations and trapped democracy in a partisan politics.

### **Party Convergence into a Catch-All Type**

The shift of Nepalese political parties from ideological formation to “catch-all” type, aiming to maximize supporters and members regardless of their commitment to party ideologies and programs, indicates their perception of changing electoral base as well as the *zeit geist*. But, they appear weak in exercising the will of people in governance and attain a new constitution by an elected 601-member Constituent Assembly, stable peace and structural reforms. All the parties articulate two kinds of interests—*functionally specific interests* of organized groups of society such as businessmen, trade unions, media and NGOs and the *interests governed by primordial loyalties* of families, caste, religion, ethnic and indigenous groups and Dalits. The interests of peasants and workers, who constitute major segment of Nepal’s population, are largely ignored as they are the most inarticulate, passive and unorganized group. As a consequence their voting behavior represents high volatility and gradually veering towards the left. The catch-all tendency also marks the decline in ideological orthodoxy and fundamental policy differences among the parties. This has affected their organizational dynamics and weakened the social base of partisan attachment of electorates.

Otto Kirchheimer, while studying the political tendencies of parties in the Western Europe, argues that social change, bureaucratization, secularization, growing influence of media and the decline of political ideology have weakened the links between political parties and society and transformed ideological political parties into catch-all type. Its effects are: erosion of influence of individual party members; de-emphasis by parties of special class or religious appeals in favor of attracting diverse voters

across population; autonomy of the leadership from internal checks and balances; and decline of ideology (Kavanagh, 2003:1). Due to the nation's social and cultural diversity, Nepal's political parties of all hues ingrain a tendency to mix class, gender, ethnicity, caste, region, age and other empirical components into their party programs to fit with the catch-all criteria defined above. In contrast to Western tradition, there is an unwillingness of leaders to accept political defeat in elections and accept "rules of the game." This has generated a crisis of democratic authority and legitimacy of governance.

The catch-all parties have a more unstable political constituency, no definite policy focus and present a message that though carefully crafted, aims to combine as many disparate propositions as possible so long as they do not come into direct conflict or contradiction (Williams, 2006:2). The psychological wounds of fission and fusion of the Nepalese parties have not disappeared. Proliferation of factions in each party continues to affect vertically at the local level of party committees causing the erosion of trust between the factions. As a result, an individualized relationship of leaders with voters is becoming stronger than the general outreach of parties in society. This is causing the de-politicization of electorates and increasing frustration of voters. The catch-all tendency and political interest in building grand coalition government in Nepal with all kind of political combination has shifted contradiction from horizontal to vertical level-- between the leaders and the masses and allowed the birth of identity politics—the politics of difference—and claim for the allocation of power and position accordingly. The center-periphery and hill-Tarai cleavages have also deepened due to the tendency of party leaders and many civil society groups to use cultural differences of the nation for the expansion of political base. Electoral campaigns have already become multi-channel media-mediated rather than door-to-door canvassing and the leaders have developed a strong interest in executive power than production of good legislation. As a result, political parties have less power to mediate conflicting claims about common good.

The legitimacy of democratic parties comes from their representative character and the support they command from diverse citizens. Those who don't listen to the voices of citizens wither away. The politics of "difference" maintained by social groups, recently institutionalized group rights for women, Madhesi, ethnic and indigenous groups and people of remote areas by Nepal's political system and their assertion for "social representation" has taken precedence over political representation. Similarly, the demand for "*participatory democracy*" is contesting the boundaries of "*representative democracy*" sustained through party politics as channels of political participation have also become too diverse—extra-constitutional (militant wings of parties and ethnic groups), extra-parliamentary (distributional movement of social classes), extra-party (across the party caucus group) and anomic (109 armed groups). Twenty social minorities who do not have representation in the CA and ignored by parties are demanding a constitutional and political system that includes them in the future.

### **Political Modernization and Inner Party Democracy**

Political modernization is a process of transmutation of pre-modern, caste-based and patriarchal authority and legitimacy of parties to post-traditional, rationalistic and electoral authority capable of broadening the political structures for mass participation and resolving conflicts to attain societal goals. Obviously, constitutionization of political parties and policy coherence among them can achieve rule-governed behavior and a semblance of political stability but it requires abolishing the culture of impunity for powerful political classes in the country. Institutionalization of party system equally demands the existence of robust party organizations independent of individual leaders (Hartlyn, 1996: 174) but supportive of state impersonality in the implantation of laws.

A defective democracy which lacks unitary legal order of modern state does not guarantee inner party democracy with adequate checks and balances in its internal life as it does not have sufficient political will to abolish the state of nature and enforce rule of law. So long as Nepalese leaders stick to multiple worldviews the crisis of rule of law in the country will continue and political socialization of citizens will be steered in multiple directions, some even in militant way. Militarization and radicalization of politics in Nepal have already hobbled the system of constitutionalism and strained efforts for recovery from conflicts. Various political parties of Nepal hold dissimilar views about the transformation of party

democracy as the representation of particular interest to general interest of public and remove the disharmony between ideological brands espoused by parties and actual program contents.

The main cleavages among them are the class, caste, ethnicity, religion and region, not ideology. As a result, costs of cooperation between citizens and leaders have increased. The inner life of Nepal's left parties are generally governed by "democratic centralism," a concept which provides the freedom to members of political parties to discuss and debate matters of policy and direction, but once the decision of the party is made by majority all members have to follow that decision. The latter represents centralism. By contrast, in inner party democracy party members are allowed to engage in the shaping of ideological, institutional and leadership competition as well as their continuous engagement in program formulation and implementation. Non-left parties are less cohesive in term of ideology, discipline and organizational affiliation. The socialization, mobilization and decision making functions of parties tend to resolve both adaptive and integrative problems in society and transform intra-party sub-national loyalties into national identity.

### **Democratizing Ties with Ancillary Organizations**

Horizontal expansion of political parties with ancillary organizations and vertical decentralization of authority to local units increase popular participation, deepen the tentacles of party in society, tie the bottom with the top leadership and broaden the cycles of reforms. In Nepal, the historical relationship between political parties and their ancillary organizations is marked by unequal patron-client ties. The leadership recruitment of party cadres for intra-party functions also indicates patronage politics. Ancillary organizations are now demanding their own representation in the party's various committees. As a result, political parties are now facing a tension between the accommodation of ancillary organizations' demands without visible representation and ancillary organizations' assertion in representation.

Trade unions have formed Joint Trade Union Coordinating Committee (JTUCC) and seeking autonomy from party politics as they have discovered that their continuous "infantilization" and "subordinated role," for long has compromised their legitimate interests in social security, codetermination of public policy, free collective bargaining and domination-free relationship in society so that they can also cooperate with other trade unions. Women, Dalits, indigenous people, ethnic Janajatis and Muslims have also formed cross-party caucus groups, common curricula and struggling for group interests than general political interests. So long as political leaders mobilize the poor during elections and demobilize and desert them after the elections to shift to business interest, it would be difficult to inject more democracy in the parties as leadership opportunism thwarts the conversion of social power into political power. The important side-effect of this process is that when money talks the voice of civil society is subdued and the interest of cadres is compromised. This shows that party reforms driven by factional competition do not make them responsive to electorates unless civil society, media and public-interest groups apply external pressure for strong constituency service and renew democratic discourse. Transparent selection of candidates, regular organization of committee meetings and decentralization of power to them can strengthen democratic practice (Saud, 2009: 54-60).

### **Active Listening and Debate**

Nepalese people and party cadres at the local level want their leaders to listen to their legitimate concerns and help resolve their problems. A culture of active listening by leaders opens the possibility for reducing the cycles of violent protests and brings dissident forces into constitutional bounds of dialogue, negotiation and compromise. Conversation on contending ideas, principles and practices by members helps evolve new concepts which are important to handle concrete contextual problems. Nepalese political parties cannot really grow without the creation of a trusting and communicative action between the leaders and cadres and peacefully resolve the conflict of divided societies. The leaders must come out in front of people, be honest about the situation and invite a few questions that require immediate response. The leaders' style of response defines the nature of relationship between cadres and the rulers. Open-ended dialogues and participation of cadres in various party committees give them ownership in the program, build confidence for future leadership and help solve the problems through deliberative means.

Ironically, most of national conventions of parties in Nepal are hurriedly organized where delegates and cadres have little time to discuss about ideology, organization, policy, programs and leadership questions. Authoritarian leaders do not encourage the habits of political debate because party schools' orthodoxy deprives them to learn multiple perspectives and adopt a culture of social learning. Regular meeting of party officials and leaders for intermeshing of perspectives based on communication about party policies and activities provide for a new system of rules to emerge (Habermas, 1997: 347).

### **Party Ideology and Policy Making**

In Nepal, a small group of Kathmandu-based closed circle of elites steer politics from top without consulting the affected at the grassroots level. Only democratization process can enforce the party leaders to go to electorates, ideologize the cadres and balance the interest of interest groups within the party vying for influence on public policy and the interest of ordinary citizens (Prasai, 2009:5). Erosion of ideology has made strong party affiliation and policy debate difficult. Nepal is largely a “consumer” of public policy, political system and development paradigms. Planners, party leaders and parliamentarians lack intellectual capacity to “indigenize” policy and feed the social and contextual learning into its process. As a result, parliament is not a place where national policies are made by national reflection, guided by public opinion and public interest of sovereign citizens. The self-consciously organized civil society, NGOs and cause groups are, however, better engaged with the policy community of the state, Finance Ministry and donors for projects and increasingly compete with the state, political society and societal institutions though they themselves are fragmented, weak and largely group-enclosed. Little impact of agricultural and informal sectors on public policy demonstrates skewed development of Nepal while patronage-based ethnic and territorial bargaining remains strong within the parties. Previous model of modernization integrated urban areas to global modernity, now huge migration of rural workers to global capital market, 300,000 out of 400,000 youth entering into global labor market every year is shifting both voting behavior and social transformation of agrarian, rural areas from feudalism to capitalism. This electoral change bears consequences for party reforms and party building.

### **Resolution of Factional Fight**

The struggle of Nepal's political parties of all hues is the *history of struggle of political factions' fight and split in leadership* which are too numerous to document here. This affirms the thesis about the “iron law of oligarchy,” according to which society is governed by a “small self-perpetuating elites at the center (Michels, 1968:15). To him, masses are intrinsically weak to govern their organizations and democratically control their leaders owing to their educational, cultural and technological conditions. In Nepal, local leaders argue, “people have to follow leadership,” except in the case of elections and agitations. *The solution of the problems of parliamentary politics is not possible by extra-parliamentary means. Nor violent extra-constitutional change can stabilize civic culture.* In Nepal, the tendency of top party leaders to bypass the party, parliament and government is evident from their “non-participation” in the parliamentary committees while generating interest in the creation of a High Level Political Mechanism outside the parliament for conflict resolution. Creation of flexible avenues of negotiation outside parliamentary framework to settle sectoral demands has eroded the authority of parliament and capacity of parliamentary leaders of parties to embed them in the daily life of general public.

The negotiation of semi-militant Madhesi, ethnic and Tharu movements and labor-capital often takes place outside the parliament. The demand of various social groups for functional representation has replaced the role of parties and parliaments (Held, 1987: 218) and marks a shift from representative to direct democracy. Despite a number of coalition governments political parties have yet to learn a culture of coalition, negotiation and compromise for collective public and national interests. “The willingness and habit of the political elite to reach good compromises with anyone willing to participate in the interest of the country is an essential contribution to promoting a democratic political culture” (Mayer, 2007: 36). A culture of compromise and trust and non-violent resolution of conflict are expected to enable leaders to participate constructively in the political process. The cost of party factionalism in Nepal is too high as it has often produced a series of deadlock and restricted political parties to achieve collective goals.

*Regular inter party dialogues with independent intellectuals is expected to innovate ideas for common grounds appropriate for the resolution of factional fights.*

### **Leadership Style**

Joseph Schumpeter has reduced democracy into a process of competition for leadership selection and recruitment of personnel (1947: 269). Inner-party democracy is an alternative to the totalitarian and authoritarian “leader party because it guarantees the control of leadership, its selection and the participation of its members in decision making” (Mayer, 2007: 11). Political parties’ democratic character is judged by the degree to which they allow party members to select their candidates for leadership of various layers of committees in election. Nepal’s leadership is governed by sub-cultures and, therefore, critically lacks national vision and ability to communicate that vision beyond kinship, family and party politics though the mobility of cadres is stratifying Nepalese society and gradually shifting its political culture from introvert, closed society to extrovert one and traditional to modern attractive enough to generate hopes of democratic renewal. This will surely exert pressure on the central and district committees of parties to democratize and augment influence over party elites. The Nepali diasporas is also mounting pressure for the democratization of party leadership and a political culture of frank discussion in which party cadres, voters and even potential voters are encouraged to speak their mind and shape the agenda. The leaders’ tendency to substitute oneself with the party has bureaucratized most of Nepalese leaders, generated a contradiction between their actual democratic aims and undemocratic functions and opened the possibility of coalition government of any sort under the imperative of the doctrine of necessity. These leaders are mainly responsible for the erosion of the founding ideology, identity and organizational discipline of parties without sufficiently adapting to changing context, actors, issues and aspirations.

A move away from careerist to transformational leadership is central to foster responsive civic political culture. “Leadership has the threefold task of diagnosing the situation authoritatively, devising a course of action designed to resolve or alleviate the problem, and mobilizing the political community’s support for the leaders’ definition of the situation and their prescribed policy response” (Tucker, 1981: 31). Growing group-bound social movements in Nepal are eroding leadership’s traditional, charismatic and movement oriented legitimacy and the increasing autonomy and assertiveness of civic groups who demand leadership’s rule-bound accountability in performance. The leadership of a mass membership party requires the loyalties of rank-and-file members coming from various strata of population, sound inner communication and occupancy of achievement-oriented role in the party.

### **Party Politics and Democratization of Public Sphere**

In a culturally plural society like Nepal having 103 ethnic and caste groups, 7 religions and over 90 languages, deepening of political parties in society requires the participation and representation of these diversities and their contestation between formal constitutional equality and condition of inequality. *Nepal’s politics is less public and more partisan and personal.* As a result, it leaves little space for the autonomy of public sphere where critical debates about public issues allow the formation of public opinion, articulation of alternatives, democratic will formation, agenda formulation and enable citizens to make informed choice. Party leaders’ authority are often contested in media, institutional practices and everyday life by diverse social classes because kinship and family considerations are very strong in party politics than ideology and public institutions. The liberalization of society is considerably eroding the social base of feudal politics and the patrimonial leadership as well as its capacity to use the state to regulate economy, culture and disciplinary institutions. But it has also generated radical expectation of people beyond the ability of leaders to fulfill. The globalization process has injected cosmological consciousness and enlarging the level of participation. In contrast, an atrophy of civic institutions has veered Nepalese politics into an uncertain direction. The use of democratic means of struggle by women and under-classes of society has challenged the institutional closure practiced by both traditional and radical leadership while the existence of militant groups in the bigger parties has legitimized violence in politics. De-linking violence from politics requires continuous socialization of party cadres in human

rights code and civic education. Civic education encouraging critical thinking and values of democracy, development and peace are essential to the transformation of Nepal's predominantly rural societies.

### **Democracy Aid: Funding of Political Parties**

Financial contributions to political parties are important incentives to make them effective organizationally and functionally, enable them to mobilize supporters and voters, run successful campaign and conduct political activities. The tissues that link the citizens to state and respond to popular accountability requires inner party democracy. But, if the *money that influences party politics is "strings attached" they increasingly become responsive to the narrow webs of power and isolate the parties from democratic values and delivery of collective goods common citizens.* Ironically, party system in Nepal does not conform to an institutionalized system of agreed-upon rules as many of them are organized and run according their party interest, leadership, institutions and programs than *constitutional vision and principles.* This has made political sphere jarring, increased money's influence in politics, created unreasonable competition, soiled the wheels of corruption and impunity and reduced level playing field for weak actors—thereby making democracy a zero-sum game where opposition and powerless do not have any stake in it.

There is a strong interest shown by members of international community to work on party reforms in Nepal. At the empirical projects level donors are supporting their NGOs to promote the rights of women, Dalits, youth, Madhesis, trade unions, journalists, etc which have exerted bottom up pressure for party reforms but they are more connected to rights-based identity politics and less to citizenship building to deepen democracy in society and contribute to post-conflict reconciliation and peace building. Three areas are opened for international cooperation: first, many parties are affiliated with like-minded parties abroad and are governed by common values of solidarity. They together participate in regional and international forums and share each other's experience. Second, exposure visits and short-term trainings have also been provided to Nepalese leaders abroad. Third, there is an exchange of ideas and literature to brief each other, and finally, donors also support selective leaders of parties to foster clients in parties. Massive aid packages diverted to pre-political solidarity group, NGOs, civil society networks and consultants as a reconstruction strategy are creating parallel structures, weakening the representative value of parties and obstructing their authority and legitimacy. The need is to support the institutionalization of dialogue and increase leaders' willingness to cooperate across political divides and formulate necessary public policies to meet public needs.

### **Democratization of Inter-Party Relations**

Democratic political culture requires avoiding "fundamentalist fallacy," a term which describes an attitude of parties which fails to understand that democratic process requires both competition between parties and certain amount of consensus about some rules of the democratic frame, basic rights and some macro objectives for the entire polity (Meyer, 2001: 5). Fragmentation of Nepalese politics and introduction of proportional election system have made the future of Nepal's government coalition-based. This means without the democratization of relations among them for shared interest there is neither possibility for the formation of coalition government nor stability of regime. Trust building also requires sharing of common democratic values and ideological orientations. In Nepal, however, there is a disharmony between leaders' commitment to common values of human rights and democracy and expression of utilitarian instinct. This has created a tension between party ideology and identity and the reality of national politics. "Inter party dialogue can aim at identifying and overcoming common challenges in improving the functioning of the political system" (Angeby: 2005:8), seeking reasonable settlement of conflicting interests, ideology and identity and coordinating goals and actions in response to challenges. Nepal's political parties can perform better in competition with other parties if internal democracy contributes to cohesiveness and helps to maintain working relationship with other parties either towards the formation of government, undertaking public interest initiatives, achieving collective goods and resolving conflicts. Inner party democracy becomes stable when winners do not dictate the rules of game despite a decisive power advantage it enjoys.

### **The Election Commission**

Political parties in Nepal are required to register with the Election Commission (EC) for the legitimacy of their activities. Nepali laws prohibit undue financial influence on party politics and allow the EC to monitor financial transactions and flows including power to penalize the parties with the cancellation of election result or imprisonment for two years but this oversight function of the EC is largely ineffective. The autonomy of EC is questioned because election commissioners are selected on the basis of party loyalty. The institutional and legal frameworks can make political parties effective players in the polity. The EC has to frame strict rules to monitor political parties' commitment to democracy. This is especially important because decision-making is concentrated in a few elites, party discipline is weak and culture of impunity is strong. It is the responsibility of treasurer to do the accounting of party finance through external certified accountant, signed by him and submitted to the EC.

If political parties do not follow this practice, approved by themselves and the constitution, then one must find the rationale for it—either arbitrary character of leadership, weakness of EC or lack of technical and financial efficiency of the parties themselves. The treasurer normally does reporting of the financial activities during national conventions. Since national convention occupies the leaders and cadres about elections of new leadership the delegates and voters are more engaged in lobbying than discussing about the detail of finance. It is possible to increase the technical, financial and management efficiency of the parties from outside support and the standardization of book-keeping procedures. But, the control of arbitrary style must be done away with the internal democratization of parties. Corruption flourishes in the deinstitutionalization of the political system and an atrophy of civic life.

The denial by political parties to submit their annual income and expenditure statement to EC reflects the resiliency of old political culture of *Nepalese leadership to exercise power without accountability*. It has become easy to maintain because the symbolic fine of Rs. 100 is low compared to the cost in the preparation of all details. It also reflects weak law-enforcement will of the EC. Ensuring transparency is not without cost. There are too many party laws. The problem lies in the attitude of leaders as they do not find any incentive for their sincere implementation or face costs in non-implementation of laws. Big parties should set examples in insuring transparency for small ones to follow. If money dominates election campaign it will be less representative. Too much emphasis on corporate citizenship in Nepal has skewed power relationship in society thus enervating the self-correcting mechanism of democracy—circulation of new elites through elections thereby making every citizen stakeholder of the polity.

That none of 74 EC-registered political parties of Nepal have publicized their annual financial report to public has made electorates and civil society difficult to understand the legal and illegal patterns of donations. The fragile nature of the state has inhibited the state authorities to demand the parties to follow "rule of law." The articulation of the need to transform "autocratic hierarchy" of party leadership (Bhattarai, 2009) into transparent and democratic one with effective public oversight on its conduct is one remedy. The EC must set a mechanism along with watchdog agencies to enable citizens to obtain information and judge the merit of financial income and expenditure in a transparent manner. There is a need to strengthen Nepal's public sphere enabling it to organize informed debate and major public hearings including party's democratic and transparent operation.

### **Conclusion**

Despite pivotal roles played by Nepalese political parties in the modernization of state and society, the main challenges they encounter in the democratization process are: gaps between the ideology and policy, incoherence between constitution and constitutional behavior, weak-enforcement of party laws, unstructured political participation of citizens moving beyond party, parliament and constitutional system, exclusionary political culture sustained by politics of negation, lack of balance between individual, groups and human rights, absence of mechanism of inter and intra-party conflict resolution and a tradition of centralized leadership facing tension with the social groups demanding regional, social, gender and inter-generational representation.

Inner-party democracy bolsters general political democracy with democratization of parties as one of the political platforms to attract most supporters. Any attempt towards constitutional democracy helps to overcome democratic-centralism in the left as well as authoritarianism in the center and the right and address democratic challenge from social movement groups and non-democratic challenge from 109 armed groups. Among all the available solutions to problems of politics in Nepal, inner-party democracy is the most urgent and thus most promising way for Nepal's democratic future. First, it increases the social base of political parties. Second, it restricts anti-institutional social movements by means of inclusion and organized political participation in the life of society. Third, it fosters a culture of listening to the cadres and incorporates their demands. Fourth, it nurtures democratic ways of deciding public issues including the issue of leadership in the party. Fifth, it increases social responsiveness of leadership and abolishes hereditary privileges in public policy and public action by way of decentralization.

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