

Major Political Transformations and Its Implications in Nepal: An Analysis

Rehnamol P R

PhD Scholar, Centre for Inner Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Abstract:

The political landscape of Nepal has been characterized by fluctuations and instabilities in ruling regimes and governmental mechanisms. Nepal has witnessed various systems of government right from the dynastic rule to ruling democratic regimes. The political transformations in Nepal have been tremendous ever since its establishment as a modern state with enormous implications on its polity and society. The conversion of Nepal into a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state from a Hindu dominant country was intertwined with the political realities and complexities existing in Nepal. The perpetual democratic reforms and the constitution formations also reflect the continuing anxieties among the political stakeholders in Nepal. In this context, this paper would thoroughly analyse the major political upheavals which Nepal had undergone over the decades and its implications over society and polity.

Key Words: *Politics, Transformation, Implications, Nepal.*

1. Introduction

Nepal is a country which is known for its political instabilities and changing political systems. The introduction of democracy and the subsequent democratic reform of the political structures in Nepal invited more attention from the scholars and academicians across the world. The constitution formulation and its associated issues have been the central focus of news in current day Nepali politics. Thus the political dynamics of Nepal has always been in the constant fluctuations and changes. Levi says that Nepal had been an independent country. However the people in Nepal have never been free as

they were subjected to exploitation by the changing political regimes. In the early years, there were some small attempts to bring democracy into the political domain. For example, in 1852 Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana introduced parliamentary cutchery to connect the people more with their government. But it couldn't become successful [1]. In another attempt, an elective system was created in 1918 for the municipality of Kathmandu. This was also failed. Paradoxically, it was Jung Bahadur Rana who established a feudalistic system of government in Nepal which lasted over one hundred years. Since then, the office of Prime Minister became hereditary and the successive prime ministers were brothers and the male cousins in the Rana family. It was lasted till 1951 [2].

During the Rana regime, the political leadership was mainly remained in their hands. The king lived in seclusion all the time. He did not have any say in the public affairs. Thus Nepal was under the despotic rule of Rana with the King as the head of the government. The legislative, executive and judicial powers were in the hands of the Prime Minister who remained a member of the Rana family all the time. There was a growing resentment against the despotic rule of the Rana regime. Agitation against the Rana system of government began in 1927. However, it reached its zenith only in early 1950s when there was a sudden break of protests under the leadership of

Nepali congress. The following section would deal with the events which led to the fall of autocratic rule of Ranas and the subsequent changes which occurred in the political landscape of Nepal [3].

2. Ebbs and Flows in the Newly Democratic Experiments in Nepal

In the year 1950, Nepal had witnessed the beginning of a major transformation in its political field. There were attempts to replace the traditional absolute rule of Rana Regime. The King Tribhuvan had sympathy for the opponents of the Rana Rule. The King had escaped to India from his Rana rulers and made a compromise which facilitated his return to Nepal in February 1951. The King formed a cabinet in which both the representatives of Rana and Nepali Congress were included. The King proclaimed an interim constitution and promised a Constituent Assembly election in 1952. Still, there was uneasiness between Ranas and Nepali Congress which resulted in more difficulties to settle the political life of Nepalese [4]. However, Gupta argues that the Rana-Congress coalition left a durable impression on the politics of contemporary Nepal [5]. Even though the end of Rana Rule had increased the hopes of democracy, Nepal was still under the surmounting pressure of political dissensions [6].

Democracy had not taken its roots even in five years after the fall of Rana regime. During this period, the economic and political conditions in Nepal had further been deteriorated. King was not exempted from criticisms. Due to the inability of the politicians and the failure of democracy, people began to think that democracy couldn't bring the expected results

and they wish if they could get back the rule of Rana during which life of the people was at least peaceful. On March, 1955 King Mahendra took over the government in Nepal after the cabinet had resigned [7]. Substantial changes had been incorporated in the administrative structures in Nepal by the beginning of 1955 [8]. In 1956, Tanka Prasad Acharya was appointed as the new prime Minister of Nepal [9]. However, the political instabilities and dissensions continue to dominate the political domains of Nepal which culminated in the emergence of Panchayat Rule under the King.

3. Rule of Panchayat Democracy

In December 1960, King Mahendra ended the multi-party system by staging a coup and introduced a partyless Panchayat Rule under his leadership. The Panchayat Constitution of 1962 declared Nepal as a Hindu state [10]. The justifications given by the King for the dismissal of the government were the inefficiency of administrative machinery, misuse of powers, corruption, lack of law and order etc. Many Nepali Congress leaders and workers were arrested immediately. King had appointed the army officers to the key positions in the civil administration. The army was used to consolidate his power. The king declared himself as the supreme Commander-in-Chief. In 1972, King Birendra came into power. With the passage of time, the public resentment started resurfacing in the public spheres in Nepal. There were strong student agitations in Nepal against the ineffective administration. There were also demands to make appropriate amendments in the constitution of 1979. As a result of this, the king declared a

national referendum which was held on 2 May 1980. The king won the referendum in which 54.7% of the Nepalese chose to remain with the Panchayat Rule and only 45.21% voted for multiparty system. After the national referendum, the King decided to amend the constitution for the third time in December 1980 which gave him more absolute powers [11]. The administrative structure under Panchayat Rule was reminiscent of the Rana rule. It was characterized by the formal allegiance towards hierarchy and the informal allegiance towards the feudal power brokers. The Panchayat Rule was proved unfavourable for the lay man and other political parties in Nepal. As a result Nepal had witnessed a pro-democracy movement in 1989. In 1990, political parties with the overwhelming support of the people had overthrown Panchayat system of government in Nepal [12].

4. Democratic Movement and the Era of Multi-party Democracy

A multi-party democracy was established in Nepal in 1990 [13]. Under the new constitution of 1991, the sovereign power was transferred from the king to the people [14]. People's movement had over thrown the thirty years of Panchayat rule in Nepal. The people's movement not only brought democracy but also helped to address the grievances of ethnic communities in Nepal [15].

The post 1990 era in Nepal witnessed the emergence of democracy. However, one could see a dismal picture of parliamentary politics in Nepal. There was unprecedented instability in the political structures after the advent of multiparty democracy. Hachhethu

states that in post 1990 Nepali politics, parliamentary elections were held four times [16]. There was a weakening of democracy in the post 1990 Nepal. The frequent change in the governments, political instability, erosion of ideology and declining credibility of political parties are some of the reasons for the weakening state of democracy in Nepal [17]. There was a growing discontent among the people in Nepal. The instability and crisis which were existing among the political parties in Nepal created growing resentment in the minds of the people. The sheer inefficiency of the government ultimately led to the emergence of Maoist Movement (People's War) in Nepal.

5. People's War in Nepal

Maoist Movement or People's war in Nepal was started in 1996 [18]. In Nepal, Maoist insurgency was designated as "People's War". The conduct of the "people's war" was mainly characterized by the theories of guerilla war. Maoists had expanded their number and gained the support from the people who later joined their military formation. Kumar argues that the Maoist struggle in Nepal can be considered as a case study of government failures. The Maoist struggle was mainly a reaction to the failure of the government to provide security, welfare and representation to the people. During their Struggle the Maoists declared people's government in the areas they dominate. The implications of Maoist insurgency in Nepal are enormous. The political effects it had caused were quite unexpected [19].

Another major political event which occurred in Nepal was the royal take over in October 2002 and February 2005. As a result of this, Nepal had again become a monarchical state. Thus the armed struggle between the Government in power and the Maoists was converted into a triangle clash among monarchy, political parties and Maoists [20]. The poor record of multiparty democracy from 1990 to 2002 evoked the political ambitions in the minds of King Gyanendra [21].

One of the shocking incident in Nepal was the Royal Massacre in June 2001 in which King Birendra and his all other family members were killed. After this incident, King Gyanendra was succeeded into thrown. Gyanendra made maximum efforts to promote Kingship as a principle Hindu ethos. In October 2002, King Gyanendra dismissed the elected government under the Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba by projecting the incompetency of the political authority in Nepal. Subsequently, King Gyanendra formed a government through nomination. However, in February 2005, he dissolved his own nominated government [22]. The Royal action in 2005 further deepened the crisis of representation of monarchical institution [23]. King Gyanendra's seizure of power compelled all political parties to be united in Nepal.

6. The Political upheaval of 2006

There was an effort to counter the King Gyanendra's move to dissolve the parliament. There was an attempt to reestablish democracy and a sustainable peace in Nepal which resulted in the signing of a 'Twelve Point Agreement' between CPN (Maoist)

and the Seven Party Alliance in November 2005 [24]. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in November 2006 between the government of Nepal and the Maoists [Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists)]. This has raised new hopes for a peaceful and inclusive Nepal [25]. Under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the CPN (Maoists) agreed to respect the democratic norms and values and the principles of human rights. They also agreed to stop their armed struggle and follow rule of law. This agreement had allowed a good environment to have deliberations on peace building process in Nepal. The agreement facilitated the transfer of power to the people and the restoration of the dissolved parliament. The agreement also included the consensus to hold Constituent Assembly elections to formulate a new constitution. The interim constitution declared Nepal a federal democratic country. Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) the chairman of United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist became the first minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal in 2008. However, later on, due to the opposition from the militant sections in his party, Prachanda had resigned from his position as the Prime Minister [26].

7. Efforts of Constitutional Reforms

The months following April 2006 was not peaceful, even though it was comparatively violence free [27]. The elections to the Constituent Assembly were delayed twice due to the tense and unstable politics in Nepal. The ideological differences between Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) and the Seven Party alliance further increased the political turmoil



in Nepal [28]. However, an interim constitution was promulgated in 2007 by which the constitutional monarch was replaced by the ceremonial president. Through its first amendment in April 13, 2007, Nepal was declared a federal democratic country. There were many differences between major political parties in Nepal which obstructed the smooth functioning of Constituent Assembly. Debates in CA were resumed on 7 January 2009 after three weeks of hiatus [29].

After the long struggle and incessant efforts, a constitution was promulgated in Nepal in 2015 which established Nepal as a federal democratic republic with secular values. Ram Baran Yadava, the president, had officially promulgated the constitution of Nepal 2015. The people celebrated their first ever full-fledged constitution [30]. However, the post constitution promulgation, many protests were erupted many places within Nepal, especially in the Tarai region. The Madhesis protested against the promulgation of new constitution as they argued that the new constitution is highly discriminatory in nature. They demand for a more inclusive federal structure in which everyone is adequately represented. Madhesis argue that the state machineries are having discriminatory approach and attitude towards them and other ethnic minorities. They have been marginalized by the upper caste hill Brahmins of the state machineries. The Madhesi problem has been a burning issue in Nepal ever since its establishment as a modern state. However, the issue has more been fuelled by the discriminatory provisions in the newly promulgated constitution of Nepal. The Madhesi and other ethnic minority issues

have more intense political connotations in Nepal. These burning issues could create political turmoil and instability. It is important to note that, earlier, Nepal was struggling to consolidate its democratic ideals with the varying political regimes and other political instabilities. Now it seems, in the context of Madhesi and ethnic minorities, that Nepal is struggling with building up a inclusive democratic mechanisms. It is essential for Nepal to address the problems of various communities in the country uniformly and adequately. The responsibility of which mainly lies with the government authorities and other stake holders are also having a pivotal role in it. If the newly emerged societal and political problems are not resolved properly, it would lead to more political chaos and turmoil in the country which would obstruct the development and progress of the country and its people.

8. Conclusion

Since its establishment as a modern state, Nepal has gone through several political changes. The beginning of Nepal as a modern state was under the full control of Rana rulers. The hereditary rule of Rana had lasted for over hundred years in Nepal. The growing resentment against the Rana Rule culminated in the advent of elected governments under the leadership of the King. However, the political dissensions existed in the country paved the way for the change in regime. The inefficiency of the political parties and their mutual conflicts led to the emergence of Panchayat Rule under the king Tribhuvan. The Panchayat rule existed in Nepal for thirty years. This led to the emergence of the first

mass democratic movement in Nepal in 1989. As a result of this, a multi-party democracy was established in 1990. Along with this political movement, constitutional mechanism was also adopted in Nepal. However, the multi-party democracy in Nepal was failed due to several reasons. The resulted resentment paved the way for People's war or Maoist insurgency in Nepal. The period between 1996 and 2001 was full of turmoil in the political history of Nepal. It seems that democracy has still remained as an unfinished business in Nepal's political history. There were attempts from the part of the monarchy to take over the power. However, those attempts were dismantled by the newly emerged political unity between the political parties. The agreement signed between the Maoists and other political parties created new hopes of peace and prosperity in the country. However, the events which occurred after that are not desirable for an inclusive society and state. The issues related to constitution and Constituent Assembly became graver in Nepal. Many attempts to form a Constituent Assembly and constitution were failed again and again. Most recently, the promulgation of new constitution caused instability in the country. The issues of various ethnic communities were not addressed in the new constitution. The recent developments in Nepal reflect the possibilities of an unstable polity and society in future which need to be curbed by the political establishments. This again connotes that the mercurial character of the political establishments in Nepal has colossal implications on the polity obstruct the prosperity of the country in its entirety.

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