



US-Nepal Policy Research Center's (US-NPRC) 5th Policy & Development Conference

Crisis in Political Institutions & Electoral Reform in Nepal

Saturday, September 12, 2020

Conference Summary

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The Conference Summary

The US-Nepal Policy Research Center's (US-NPRC: <http://usnprc.org/>) fifth policy & development webinar, "Crisis in political institutions and electoral reform in Nepal," concluded on September 12, 2020. The conference's main objective was to comprehend and understand the crisis in institutions, including political institutions and Nepal's elections. Another aim was to provide a forum for open and scholarly discussions and highlight differences in opinions to trigger serious policy evaluation and make recommendations for improving political institutions and Nepal's election process. The webinar brought together policy analysts, academic faculty, researchers, political leaders, social activists, and other professionals in the related fields from Nepal and the United States. The conference was chaired by Dr. Rajan Pant, the President of US--NPRC. An executive member, Mrs. Jagdamba Adhikaree, delivered a welcome speech, and Dr. Suman Parajuli, USNPRC member secretary, provided a brief introduction about USNPRC. The webinar was streamed live on Facebook, which was watched by about 26,000 people worldwide.

Inauguration

Rt. Honorable Dr. Ram Baran Yadav, the first president of the Republic of Nepal

The webinar was inaugurated by the first president of the Republic of Nepal, Rt. Honorable Dr. Ram Baran Yadav. In his inaugural speech, he said Nepal is one of the oldest countries in South Asia, but political change happens quickly here. About five years ago, the Nepali people and his (president's) office had played an essential role in bringing out the constitution. Now the political institutions and leaders have the responsibility to put the "life" on it. He said, "Though we talk about good governance and democracy, it is impossible to ensure democracy unless the people of *Madhes*, and *Janjati* are empowered." He further added that only a free and fair election could bring the country out of corruption, ensure empowerment of the marginalized community, and convert Nepal into a real democracy. He hoped that a webinar like this would make political parties feel more responsible in achieving good governance and inclusive democracy in Nepal.



Plenary Sessions

The webinar was structured around two main plenary sessions: 1) Crisis in political institutions, and 2) Election Reform in Nepal. Dr. Surendra Devkota, a senior economist, presented the paper on the crisis in political institutions. Bhojraj Pokharel, a former chief election commissioner and former secretary of Government of Nepal, presented a paper on Nepal's electoral reform. Professor. Krishna Khanal, Political Scientist, and Honorable Mohana Ansari, a member of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, commented on Dr. Devkota's paper. The senior journalist and the editor of Deshsanchar.com, Mr. Yubraj Ghimire, commented on Mr. Pokharel's paper.

Session 1: Election Reform in Nepal

Mr. Bhojraj Pokharel, a former chief election commissioner and former secretary of Government of Nepal

Mr. Bhojraj Pokharel provided an impassioned argument backed by facts about why election reform is necessary for Nepal.

Unveiling his opinion on election reform, he said Nepal's mixed electoral system (first-past-the-post and proportional system) has helped to increase the representation of women, minorities, and the marginalized community. However, due to bad execution and bad user experience, both branches of the mixed electoral system have become controversial. The presence of two types of parliament members has increased the conflict between parliamentarians, he said. The election process has become awfully expensive and means of corruption. Candidates are spending many times more money, even NRs 30-40 million in the election than the amount capped by the Election Commission, which is NRs 2.5 million. As a result, the governance side has become very weak. Policy related corruption has increased. He cautioned that if the election process is not reformed, then Nepal's stability could be threatened.

He suggested two election reform options: 1) gradually improve the existing system, 2) change the system based on our experience. He also suggested several structural and process-related improvements in the election system as briefly discussed below, which could improve the election process:

1. Structural Improvements:

- 1.1 Reduce the number of parliamentarians and end the practice of having two types of parliamentarians.
- 1.2 Change the provision requiring that the minister/cabinet members must all be members of Parliament.
- 1.3 Focus on the role of making the parliamentarians responsible for making laws and supervising other bodies.
- 1.4 Make a provision that all bills except defense and finance go through Parliament.
- 1.5 Except in the case of a motion of confidence or no-confidence, make a system where the Party does not have a whip in Parliament.
- 1.6 Assist the political parties from the state treasury and examine their income and expenditure by the Auditor-General's Office.
- 1.7 Maintain good governance practices and political ethics in the parties. For this, make legal arrangements to monitor such practices.
- 1.8 Reduce the boundary of the relationship between the party and the government.
- 1.9 Legislate the boundary line between the party and the government.
- 1.10 End the practice of appointments to constitutional bodies or courts by the Constitutional or Judicial Council based on political recommendations or loyalty.
- 1.11 Bring the issue of corruption made in the name of a policy decision from the Council of Ministers under the purview of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority.
- 1.12 Make a provision for recall of elected officials.
- 1.13 Form a separate court to investigate election crimes.

2. Electoral System Improvements:

- 2.1 Elect the executive head by direct election. To be elected, a candidate must have an absolute majority. If the result is not obtained in the first round, then two candidates who get the most votes go to the second round.

3. Federal or Provincial Election:

3.1 Make a fully proportional system (maintaining two types of lists:- 1) list by province - which will represent the geography or population structure of the province), and 2) national list - to select from a limited number of seats (approximately 10%) to represent persons who have not been included in the provincial list but who could contribute to make the role of the Parliament effective and enhance the dignity of the Parliament.

Or

- 3.2 Make a multi-member constituency-based on the majority system (make the state a constituency with at least nine members). Manage proportional representation from these seats and elect those who get the most votes on a specified basis.

4. Local-level Elections:



4.1 At the local level, look at the possibility of conducting nonpartisan elections.

5. Other Procedural Improvements:

5.1 Conduct an extensive review of the current inclusion policy to end the status quo and include the most backward groups or communities in public offices.

5.2 Explain the basis of candidate selection in the law and consider going to primary in candidate selection.

5.3 Set the date of the election in law.

5.4 Make it mandatory to give direct candidature of women in proportion to the population.

5.5 Create an environment and arrange that all the voters in the country and abroad can participate in the voting.

5.6 Reduce the election campaign time.

5.7 Set up a system requiring the candidate to submit all his / her education, financial, criminal details while registering the candidature, and present those details to the Election Commission. Also, make such information public.

5.8 Set up a system requiring the candidate to submit the details of the source of her/his election expenses.

5.9 Provide civic education, especially moral education, from the elementary class onwards.

6. Management Improvements

6.1. Increase the role of political parties and local government in election management.

6.2. Handover all the work related to voter registration to the local level.

6.3. Increase the share of political parties in election security.

6.4. Allow the party to decide the candidature at the same level as the election.

6.5. Work together with the Election Commission, Prevention of Abuse of Authority Commission, Revenue Investigation, and Money Laundering Department, to monitor and take action related to the source and expenditure of candidate's election expenses.

6.6. Make a system of vote counting at the polling station.

6.7. Increase the role of local volunteers in conducting elections.

6.8. Link elections to technology but ensure that it is adequately prevented from foreign interference.

6.9. Discontinue the Parliament-targeted programs such as the Constituency Development Fund. Such programs create an unequal level playing fields between candidates.

However, he said, unless there is a change in attitude, the only change in character or individual will not bring any improvement in the system.

(Nepali version of the paper/presentation is available on page 29 in this document).

Mr. Yubraj Ghimire, Senior Journalist, and Editor: www.deshsachar.com

Mr. Yubraj Ghimire offered a thoughtful step-back analysis of the current institutional crisis in Nepal.

Commenting on the presentation, he said, about twelve years ago, Mr. Pokharel himself had said that one reason to adopt a mixed electoral system was that the desired change was not happening in the earlier electoral system. After twelve years, we are again saying that the current system is not working and could cause instability. It seems that crunch time has now come to determine whether the problem is associated with the process or character. If the situation has worsened due to the mixed election system, then somebody must take responsibility. Who would take this responsibility? He asked.

It is also critically important to think about whether we should reform or revamp the system. The current crisis is due to the failure to address the aspirations of the 2062/2063 people's movement, sensitively and democratically. Also, we cannot take the election process in isolation when discussing institutions' crises, he said. Even if the election is fair, but the judicial system is broken, it cannot lead Nepal toward stability. After 2062/2063 BS, democracy has been taken away by the Party leader rather than the Party. Giving an example of the nomination of the supreme court's sitting chief justice to lead the government in 2013, he said, a few prominent political party leaders unilaterally rejected the central committees' concerns and decision about not nominating the chief justice to lead the election government. Top few leaders persuaded the sitting chief justice to become prime minister anyway.

Similarly, after 2062/2063 BS, the tradition of honest debate in the parliament, which is the prerogative of liberal democracy, has broken. For example, the issues of secularism or federalism were not debated at all in parliament. There would have shared ownership of the achievements if there were a debate, which did not happen. He said our constitution has a decentralized character, but leaders have centralized character. Leaders seem to be on the verge of establishing the dominance of leadership. A lack of democratic culture among Nepal's political leaders is increasing.

Suggesting the possible reform, he said, The Election Commission itself can play an essential role in reforming the election process. Giving an example of 10th Election Commissioners in India, Mr. TN Seshan, during his tenure in 1990, identified many electoral malpractices and implemented reforms, including limiting candidates' expenditure. In addition to curbing several election-related malpractices, the Election Commission in Nepal could also closely monitor the Party's internal democracy. He also



suggested that a person who switches Party should not be given a ministerial position for at least one year of switching as practiced in India. Such a policy can, to some extent, minimize corruption. Similarly, moving away from the failed top-down approach of selecting candidates for political office, a bottom-up approach could ensure more inclusive and participatory democracy.

Session 2: Crisis in Political Institutions

Dr. Surendra Devkota, Senior Economist

Dr. Devkota cogently argued why Nepali Congress as a political institution is vital for democracy in Nepal, why it is going through a crisis, and offered creative solutions and recommendations for its revival.

He started his presentation by defining institutions, ranging from a family institution to civil or political institutions. The political Party is also one institution, he said. Every institution should abide by its constitutional and legislative rules, policies, guidelines, and norms. Any game is also an example of an institution that players abide by its "rules and norms". However, political players in Nepal are bending the rules of the game for their own advantage.

Focusing on the Nepali Congress (NC) party, he said NC's fundamental principles are freedom of speech, religious freedom, economic freedom, personal security, and freedom. In the last seventy years, thousands of people have sacrificed their lives for these causes or four freedoms. Lately, the Nepali Congress is deviating from these principles. For example, when the present government of Nepal Communist Party tried to suppress freedom of expression by mobilizing vigilantes against the singer and later to the press, Nepali Congress simply issued a press release. Further, he categorically challenged the NC while giving a yes vote to a security bill that does not guarantee individual liberty like telephone tapping without a court's order, which happens in a communist or authoritarian government.

Within the Nepali Congress, individuals are competing to become more powerful than institutions. After 2047 BS, what the Nepali Congress was supposed to do but could or did not do was institutionalize the democratic achievements, values, beliefs, and ideals of the 2046 (1990) people's movement. Neither could it establish these values within the Party nor in public or political institutions.

Regarding the issue of nationality, the Nepali Congress has made some historical mistakes. For example, there is no point personifying *Poush 16* (national mediation day)

as a deity while devaluing *Poush 27* (Prithvi Jayanti). Another mistake was that the 12-point agreement could not be made or reached within the Nepali soil. Some issues were included in the constitution overnight, which were not the mandate of 2062/2063 people's movement. Incorporating such matters into the constitution overnight means that the Nepali Congress leadership's policy of making decisions about the country were not transparent. Also, whether the decision to promulgate the constitution on 1st Asoj 2072 was appropriate because bloodshed was going in the Madhesh. The details of how the public's opinions were involved in the constitutional process are nowhere in the records.

In the context of democracy, there is a 180-degree difference between saying and doing in the Nepali Congress because of lack of "internal democracy." The Nepali Congress is also shifting away from the responsibility of informing to the people about the laws, regulations, plans, and policies formulated in the country. As a result, both social and political distances are increasing between the people and the Nepali Congress. For example, when Prime Minister Oli directly intervened in the parliamentary businesses and ended the ongoing parliament session abruptly for his own personal benefit, Nepali Congress resisted by merely issuing a statement. He raised a constitutional question - if the scope of the Parliament of Nepal is under the PM's executive authority then the present constitution of Nepal is not a democratic one. Is that people's sovereignty?

It seems that the democratic socialism of the Nepali Congress has fallen into a vicious circle. Market liberalization in 1991 opened new possibilities. However, the sudden marketization appears to have pushed the education and health sectors far beyond the general masses' purchasing power that further destroyed the rural economy. With the Democratic Socialist party ignoring the people's basic needs, globalization's whirlwind has just become Nepal's socialist rhetoric. For the 21st century, Congress must rewrite its politico-economics, because Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala had not imagined social democracy in vacuums. Nepal is entangled in crony capitalism under the communist rulers.

Furthermore, the Congress's leadership has pushed abstract socialism in the preamble of the constitution and has brought Nepal to become a socialist country like North Korea or Cuba. It seems that the Nepali Congress has lost its identity because the constitution has fully established the aspirations of the Communist Party.

The Institutional Dilemma in Nepali Congress:

1. Congress in the process of eroding its identity:

In the last 25 years, the Nepali Congress has made its principles and ideals merely a subject of the speeches. As a result of inaction, NC is losing its credibility among different sections of the society and failing to institutionalize the democratic values in the country.



2. Lack of dialogue with the people:

The scope of work of the top leadership of the Nepali Congress has been shrinking since 2046/2047 BS. The leadership does not seem to be communicating effectively and directly with the common people and the intelligentsia. Continuous interaction increases thinking, feeling, and belonging to the Nepali Congress. Therefore, there should be an open, honest, and regular intra-party dialogue and discussions at all levels (local-regional-central).

3. A lack of leadership development:

Since 2046/2047 BS, the new leadership development opportunity in the Nepali Congress has been more or less opaque, and those in the leadership seem to have grown up under the umbrella of individual factions or sub-factions rather than through competition.

Therefore, in order to develop new leadership in the Party from bottom to top, NC must change "structure at all levels" such as:

- Active Membership (What is the rationale of the so-called active membership?):

A provision of active membership is one of the main reasons for the Nepali Congress's lack of leadership development. The Nepali Congress is a mass-based party. The country is moving forward in an open political environment. Then there is no justification for active membership in the Party. At present, the central members are trying to secure their posts by taking out the list of active members from their pockets. The security of the Nepali Congress is the democratic culture, values, and beliefs. Therefore, to keep the Nepali Congress close to the people and transparently develop the leadership without depriving them of equal opportunities, the district offices should keep records, giving the entire responsibility of membership to the ward office.

- Efficacy of the Centralized Organization:

A tall structure is suicidal for any organization. At present, there seems to be a reluctance among central leadership to give local committees (i.e., the district committee) the rights and power to implement the programs. In a democracy, local bodies or governments of political parties are "political laboratories," and the next generation leadership groom locally. Since the country has moved towards federalism, it would be essential to make the district committees competent and decisive.

- End of Kleptocracy:

Extreme institutional distortion and corruption are rampant in Nepal today. Pre-paid or post-paid systems have been established as institutional distortions in all institutions.

The Nepali Congress must unconditionally implement meritocracy by ending the politics of partisanship to correct the institutional distortions taking place in the country.

- Culture of Policy debate and dialogue:

The Nepali Congress Party lacks a policy agenda suited to the present challenges. It is in a state of policy drought. Before 2045/2046, when the Nepali Congress used to respond, those responses used to be of national or international importance. At present, the reaction of the Nepali Congress is considered superficial by the common people. For example, the Nepali Congress did not engage with people despite several national issues Budhi Gandaki, Melamche Yojana, Media Bill, Educational and health policies, etc. Due to the lack of policy discussions on contemporary issues within the Nepali Congress, public trusts are eroding. Nepali Congress has a wealth of experts within and outside the country, and the Party needs to open up for dialogue with all stakeholders with the appropriate mechanism.

In the end, he said, ordinary citizens in Nepal still like the Nepali Congress established as an ideological and disciplined political organization. Therefore, it must be free from the current political vicious circle of personal gains and losses. In order to institutionalize democratic norms and values, accountability in the country, it must "restructure the party" and make leadership be accountable to the people and not to the central Chairperson.

(Nepali version of the paper/presentation is available on page 35 in this document).

Honorable Mohana Ansari, a member of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal

Hon'ble Mohana Ansari focused her comments on the election and human rights issues. She said she has some reservations and some observations on the issues of the electoral system and institutions. However, elections are a catalyst for change, she said.

Nepal is moving forward with the new system. When something new happens in South Asia, different things transpire. Often things get distorted. Thus, we must be proactive and correct the mistake and distortion early on. After 2015, Nepal made many laws. Typically, those laws and decisions were made hastily and without proper discussion in the parliament or public. In developed countries, laws or rules are made after a thorough discussion and consultation with an expert or the public. Therefore, these laws are matured and last longer.

After 2015, Nepal opted for a majoritarian system—first-past-the-post (FPTP). As a result, the votes of losing candidates do not matter, and the votes of the elected candidates usually do not represent the actual political, social, and economic interests of all voters.

There is a trend in South Asia during elections to make society highly polarized in religion, caste, ethnic minorities, orchestrating political violence.



In Nepal, the polls are being dominated by money and power. An election is the most expensive business these days. At the local and regional levels, elections are about promoting contractors. There is no transparency of parliamentary spending after the election. As the election is being dominated by money and muscle, it is eroding women's, Dalit, Muslim, and other marginalized communities' representation in political institutions. This is a symptom of a much larger problem.

Another limitation of our election system is that voter education never reaches the marginalized community. Voters' education is limited on TV or radio; poor people often lack these devices in their home. There is a need to strengthen door-to-door voters' education programs to reach the marginalized community. Voters should be educated while issuing or updating their voter's ID.

The current election process also lacks transparency. Only people closer to leaders are included in the proportional representation (PR) list. The PR list needs to be open to make the system transparent.

One of the reasons for institutions' weak performance is that most institutions lack professional people. Another thing is that the current system or policies bar the entry of young people in political institutions. For example, she said, "When I was appointed in the human rights commission, there was no age bar. Now there is an age bar."

There is also a lack of understanding about human rights in political leadership. There are no exception or exclusion clauses in human rights law. Rights are universal for all people everywhere. However, many leaders lack an understanding of such a fundamental principle.

Freedom of speech is a private matter. We must keep space for freedom of expression. Freedom of expression embodies innovative ideas. Freedom of expression must, therefore, be nurtured. It is the constitutional right of people to criticize people who hold public office. New laws are curtailing freedom of expression, stifling dissent and debate. Also, the human rights violation against Dalit and Chepang is on the rise. Recently, one member from the Chepang community was beaten to death while collecting natural resources in the forest. We must take care of their cultural and social rights.

Professor Krishna Khanal, Political Scientist

Professor Krishna Khanal passionately described why institutions, including political institutions like Nepali Congress, are failing in Nepal.

He started his presentation by saying, "This interaction is taking place at a critical time." With an almost two-thirds majority in parliament, the current ruling party/government has failed in many ways. The government barely talks about prosperity these days. It is busy creating an illusion to distract the public's attention away from the real issues. Sometimes it talks about Nepal as the birthplace of Lord Ram. Sometimes it talks about different things to deviate and address people's concerns over the state of Nepal.

We are beginning to see a crisis in all the institutions of Nepal, he said. Whether it is the university or the judiciary, all institutions are going through a crisis. If the reform and the right solution is not forthcoming, democracy could be in jeopardy.

The main reason for this crisis is that political leaders are incapable of designing, implementing, and enforcing the necessary reforms. Why am I saying this? The political party is in the driving seat, he said. When leaders are inept, the effects are felt in all institutions. Giving an example of the judiciary, he said it is not a sacred cow. The political parties have recommended many currently serving judges. The court often reconsiders the decisions made by its judges, which is unusual. The court usually reviews the legal principle but not general decisions. All the reviewed decisions by the court are related to transactions.

Strong political parties are essential to a healthy political system and democracy. If the Nepali Congress is in crisis, then democracy is also trapped. I see that the Nepali Congress's reputation is declining. There is no doubt that the Nepali Congress got more popular votes than the Nepal Communist Party. But it is a non-political argument to say that Congress has too many votes. Politics is all about winning.

Another challenge with the Nepali Congress is that it is no more agenda-setter now. The Nepali Congress party did not set the agendas in the present constitution. In the 2017 election, the people did not vote for the Nepali Congress though its slogan was, "We made the constitution, therefore, give us vote for its implementation." If we look at the macro-level results, it shows that Nepali voters are not weak. The popular opinion is reflected in the election, although there are many election-related challenges at the micro-level.

He said, "In my opinion, the reason for people to shy away from voting the Nepali Congress party is related to its attitude and reluctance to take ownership of 2015 constitution because people know that Nepali Congress still loves the 2047 constitution." However, irony is that even when the Nepali Congress was in the government during the time of conflict, it did not adequately justify the very magnanimity of the 2047 constitution.

"Politics is dynamic", he said. The Nepali Congress is not showing that dynamism. It did not and is not setting agendas. Congress never paid attention to how its demographics are shifting or have shifted over time. In the 2015 BS election, the Nepali Congress was everywhere in Madhes. It had the support of indigenous people. After the 2047 BS election, the Nepali Congress's distance with indigenous and minority communities



began to widen. After the Madhesh movement, it increasingly lost the confidence and support of the Madheshi people. In 2064 BS, the Nepali Congress lost the constituency in Madhes. Now in Madhesh, the grandchildren generation is closer to the Madhes Party. After joining the Madhesh movement, the grandchildren's generation seems to have wholly joined the Madhes party. For that reason, the Nepali Congress's slogans of socialism and democracy alone are no longer enough to win people's hearts and minds. The principles and slogans should also be connected to people/voters' needs, values, and sufferings.

Another reason for the decline of the Nepali Congress is its inability to interact with the voters. However, he said, Nepali Congress is still the flag bearer of democracy. The Communist Party has a crisis of ideology and identity. Congress does not have an identity crisis. The ideological content of the Nepali Congress: Democracy, Socialism, and Nationalism would never become old. There is no other party competing in this. However, the Nepali Congress must connect with the people.

Whether it is the Nepali Congress party or the Nepal Communist Party, they must connect with people. Today's irony is that the party's or government's higher leadership is spending its energy managing two or three leaders.

Responses from Political Leaders

Many senior Nepali Congress leaders, including Mr. Bimalendra Nidhi, Vice president, Nepali Congress, and Mr. Prakash Man Singh, Mr. NP Saud, Dr. Shekhar Koirala, Dr. Chandra Bhandari, Ms. Kamala Pant, Mr. Surendra Raj Pandey, Ms. Ratna Sherchan, Mr. Pradip Paudel, and Ms. Pramila Rai provided comments and suggestions to improve the institutions and reform the election process in Nepal, which are briefly discussed below.

Mr. Bimalendra Nidhi, Vice president, Nepali Congress

Mr. Nidhi agreed on the necessity of the reform of the current electoral system in Nepal. "I agree with Mr. Pokharel, he said; the electoral system has become too expensive in Nepal."

He stressed that there is a need to improve the voter education system and identify the roles/differences/limitations between voters and political leaders. Voters have set higher expectations for politicians- no matter how educated they are. Voters expect everything from the leaders, whether finding jobs, job transfer, changes in scores in the exams, and many others. But finding solutions or the equilibrium point of voters' expectations

and leaders' limitations have not been so easy. He urged academicians to study the responsibilities and roles of a leader and voters as a part of electoral reform. Or help find such equilibrium. Otherwise, there might be frustration on democratic system, he said.

He agreed on providing a short time interval, probably 3-4 days, between candidates' nomination and election day to make the election fair, as suggested by Mr. Pokharel.

He also stressed the improvement in the PR electoral system. There might be other better options, he said. However, he urged the public to accept the PR system to make the democratic system strong.

Mr. Nidhi also viewed that electoral reform and governance reform are related but different components. Which raises the question, "What should we reform first, the electoral system or governance system?" First, there should be governance system reform; the electoral system reform comes after that. There are different electoral systems in other countries, even though they have similar governance systems in the world. The beauty of Nepal's governance system is the respect of diversity (inclusiveness), he said.

Mr. Nidhi also shared his opinion on the institutional crisis. There are nine fundamental elements (nationality, democracy, socialism, republic, federalism, inclusiveness, mixed election, Secularism, and peace) in the constitution of Nepal. The Nepali Congress (NC) had raised those issues or agendas in different periods. NC is the first political party in Nepal to include inclusiveness in its manifesto. He further added, Secularism in the constitution means "religious freedom" as BP Koirala viewed (available on the handwritten document by BP Koirala). He explicitly mentioned that Nepal is a secular country. The crux of that secular system is religious freedom.

Regarding the institutional crisis, he said: The major institutional crisis is in the governance system, democracy, and constitution. We have to take ownership of those achievements and fight for them. We should not change the governance system in the name of electoral reform. We have to find a solution to reform the electoral system under the existing governance system, he concluded.

Mr. Prakash Man Singh, Senior leader, Nepali Congress

Mr. Singh highlighted the differences and similarities between intellectual exercise and ground reality. He said that when we discuss electoral reform and management of an institutional crisis in the intellectual forum, we should not ignore the ground reality.

Promulgating a new constitution by itself is an outstanding achievement, he said. Nepal's constitution is a compromising document between Nepali Congress (NC) and Communist parties. We should not undermine the fact that the first constitutional assembly was dissolved without producing a constitution in a given time since NC did not get a mandate from the people to take leadership in drafting the constitution.



When NC got an opportunity to take a leading role in producing a constitution in the second constitutional assembly, it completed responsibility on time. It was not an easy task to overcome the political crisis at that time. In the end, NC became successful in developing a democratic and inclusive constitution. Drafting a constitution is not like scientific research done in the laboratory. We had to incorporate NC's ideology, Maoist's ideology, and other political parties' thoughts. Some intellectuals are not satisfied with some provisions in Nepal's new constitutions that have also been reflected in previous presentations. I can understand that sentiment, he said.

He stressed that the constitution was drafted under the leadership of NC. But, now, at the time of institutionalizing the new constitution, Nepal Communist Party is in the government/leadership. NC did not get a mandate from people in the last election.

At present, the central government does not want to implement devolution-- the transfer of power from central government to province/local governments. The fact is that there are six out of seven communist governments at the province level and the majority of local governments.

The Communist government only provides sweet and attractive slogans, but its policy is out of touch with realities on the ground. For example, the government is not correctly handling the COVID-19 crisis or investigating big corruption scandals effectively.

After getting a mandate from the people, if the government does not show its integrity to implement the constitution's spirit, it is called a crisis in political institutions. As a result, people are dissatisfied, the intellectuals are also unhappy, and province/local governments are also dissatisfied.

There should be good governance to reduce the political crisis, he said. Such kind of crisis can be seen at the political party level as well. That happened due to incompetent individuals at the leadership levels. Overall, there should be corruption free, deliverable, responsive, and accountable government to reduce the crisis in political institutions, he concluded.

Dr. Shekhar Koirala, Senior leader, Nepali Congress

Dr. Koirala agreed on the necessity of reforming the electoral system, as suggested by Mr. Pokharel. However, he disagreed that the 'first-past-the-post electoral system is bad. He said the 'first-past-the-post' system promotes meritocracy.

Dr. Koirala pointed out that, in the PR electoral system, we can see nepotism and money playing a vital role in selecting candidates. Also, there are no representatives from some marginalized groups such as Madhesi Dalit. Such flaws in the electoral system need to be fixed, he said.

Moreover, due to the electoral system's limitations, the same group of people is repeating in parliament and political parties. So, there is less chance for other people to be selected from the marginalized groups. Experts need to work on this to maximize the participation of individuals from marginalized (minority, ethnic) groups.

The good thing is that, at least in NC's manifesto, there is a provision not to repeat the same individuals from the PR system in committees, but the implementation part is still weak.

Regarding the crisis in political institutions, he said, only political parties can make the institutions strong. However, they are on the path of making the institutions weaker. For example, NC is in opposition but seeking BHAG-BANDA (share in government). That is wrong. Let the ruling party decide what they want to do. If the government appoints unqualified candidates, then we should raise a question.

Politicians should be transparent, responsible, and accountable. The morality of politicians is a critical factor, he said. Our leaders, including BP Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, and many others, taught us moral education. But, these days, we hardly see morality in political leaders.

Dr. Koirala also stressed the need for check and balance mechanisms for constitutional bodies like AKHTIYAR to make those institutions strong. Political parties have to take initiation on that, he said.

Mr. NP Saud, Senior leader, Nepali Congress

Mr. NP Saud said the major reform, as pointed out by Mr. Bhojraj Pokharel, requires a constitutional amendment, and that wouldn't be a possibility at this time. He opined that while the proportional system promotes ethnic groups' identity, it doesn't promote competency. He stressed that the cluster constituencies for such groups are a possibility where the people of different identities participate, but the participation is through the election.

Dr. Chandra Bhandari, Senior leader, Nepali Congress

Dr. Chandra Bhandari underscored the possibility of apolitical elections for the local bodies and the indirect elections for the state assemblies. He stressed that the selection process for the upper house members is not healthy in practice and that weakening the constitutional bodies weakens democracy. Giving an example of social and racial unrest in the U.S., he mentioned that some troubles are obvious in an emerging democracy.



Ms. Kamala Pant, Senior leader, Nepali Congress

Ms. Kamala Pant said, “It’s the parliamentary supremacy that we have always been fighting for, and the current system is parliamentary supremacy”. It’s that some disloyal leaders made our electorate system expensive, and equality has not been promoted through proportionality. But the improvement is possible. She said that the lack of honesty among the leaders is the root cause at the moment but eventually the rule of law prevails.

Mr. Surendra Raj Pandey, Senior leader, Nepali Congress

Mr. Surendra Pandey opined that although we have had parliamentary democracy since 2047 B.S., we never strengthened the institutions. Also, he stressed on the rethinking of the current electorate system. He said this financially susceptible electorate system would not strengthen democracy, and therefore, a discussion on different modalities of elections is in need.

Ms. Ratna Sherchan, Leader, Nepali Congress

Ms. Ratna Sherchan pointed out that the current mixed electoral system has provided a platform for diverse participation, but the system has been distorted. She also opined that there could be proportional constituencies as an improvement. She concluded by saying that improvement is needed in the present system.

Ms. Sarita Prasain, Leader, Nepali Congress

Ms. Sarita Prasain opined that the present constitution is a compromised document, and therefore many things need to be done, however there is no need to panic. Things will move further with discussion and collaboration with experts. She pointed out that our electorate system's discussion should be based on the situation (ground reality), elector, and candidates.

Mr. Pradip Paudel, Leader, Nepali Congress

Mr. Pradip Poudel stressed on three main things. First, it's not the problem of the system itself; it's a problem of execution. He disagreed with Mr. Pokharel's point about going to the executive presidential system. He expressed that the current government has no less power than the executive president, but it fails to deliver. It's the rule of law that needs to be in place, not the change to the executive presidential system. And the third thing is the internal democracy of the political party needs to be strengthened, he said.

Ms. Pramila Rai, Leader, Nepali Congress

She stressed that the expensive electorate system is an obstacle to inclusiveness. She opined that a discussion on a transparent, clean, and balanced electoral system is needed. Failing to improve the system might result in less participation of marginalized communities and eventually fail to participate.

About US-NPRC

The US-Nepal Policy Research Center (US-NPRC: www.usnprc.org) was founded in March 2016 as a non-profit educational, economic, and social policy research center. It is based in the USA. It envisions to advance policy research to address some of the United States and Nepal's challenges. Most of its members are professionals and drawn from government institutions, private sectors, and academia.

The Executive Committee is responsible for the general administration of the organization. Simultaneously, the direction of the policies and programs is vested in the President assisted by the Executive Officer/ Member Secretary.

For the last four years, US-NPRC has been conducting research and discussions on the importance of strong institutions, the causes and effects of corruption in Nepal, and how



knowledge, innovation, and institutions could strengthen Nepal's inclusive socio-economic development.

This year, to continue debate and discussions on the importance of strong institutions for economic development, on September 12, 2020, it organized a webinar, "Crisis in political institutions and electoral reform in Nepal." This webinar was a continuation of the previous four conferences held in different cities and universities in the USA, as follows:

1. "The US-NPRC inaugural conference," 2016, Chicago
2. "Science and policy to accelerate the smart growth under the new constitution, newer institutions, and old leadership in Nepal." September 2, 2017, at Springfield, Virginia.
3. "Institutionalizing the Human Capital for Inclusive Development." August 25, 2018, at Harvard University, Boston.
4. "Technology for development, transparency & good governance." May 25, 2019, at the University of California, Berkeley.

Over the last five years, more than 300 people have participated in the conference. About 100 academicians, researchers, development practitioners, problem solvers, policy analysts, and politicians have given oral presentations of their work, relevant to Nepal.

In collaboration with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai Foundation, the US-NPRC has also organized a discussion series on institutions' roles for good governance and socio-economic prosperity in Nepal.

The US-NPRC maintains its position of neutrality. The publications or presentations should be understood solely by those of authors or presenters and should not be attributed to US-NPRC.

Program Schedule

US Nepal Policy Research Center: Fifth Annual Conference September 12, Saturday, 9:15 am EDT

I. Program Schedule:

1. Moderator: Bhagirath Yogi, senior journalist
2. Welcome speech by Ms. Jagdamba Adhikaree, US-NPRC Executive Member
3. Dr. Rajan Pant, President, USNPRC, will shed light on the goal of the program
4. Yogi Ji will start the program with the permission of president Pant
5. The first president of the Republic of Nepal, Rt. Honorable Dr. Ram Baran Yadav will start the program with his inaugural speech.
6. A brief introduction of USNPRC by Dr. Suman Parajuli, US-NPRC Member Secretary
7. Presentation on “Electoral Reforms” by Mr. Bhojraj Pokharel, former chief election commissioner and former secretary, Government of Nepal (15-20 mins)
8. Comments on Mr. Pokharel’s presentation by senior journalist Mr. Yubaraj Ghimire (10-15 mins)
9. Presentation on “Crisis in Political Institutions” by senior economist Dr. Surendra Raj Devkota (15-20 mins)
10. Comments on Dr. Devkota’s presentation by Professor. Krishna Khanal (10-15 mins)
11. Comments on Dr. Devkota’s presentation by Honorable Mohana Ansari, member, National Human Rights Commission of Nepal (10-15 mins)
12. General Observation on both presentations by Kedar Bhakta Mathema, former vice-chancellor of Tribhuvan University and former ambassador, Japan (10-15 mins)
13. Q & A –six questions (15 minutes)

II. Comments and Responses:

14. Mr. Bimalendra Nidhi, vice president, NC (5-10 mins)
 15. (5-10 mins for each speaker: leaders/ political/ social activists representing different generations/ gender/ ethnicity etc. The following leaders are expected to give their responses to the discussion theme. Mr. Prakash Man Singh, Mr. NP Saud, Dr. Shekhar Koirala, Dr. Chandra Bhandari, Ms. Kamala Pant, Mr. Dhanraj Gurung, Mr. Surendra Raj Pandey, Ms. Ratna Sherchan, Mr. Gagan Thapa, Mr. Pradip Paudel, Ms. Kiran Yadav, Ms. Pramila Rai (There can be some changes to this list of speakers)
- Concluding remarks on behalf of USNPRC (Names TBD)
-

III. Annual General Meeting (members only) September 12, Saturday (6 pm-8 pm EDT)



16. Committee update (membership, revenues, costs, balance, etc.)-Dr. Suman Parajuli (5 mins)
17. One or two presentations (one is confirmed) (10-20 mins)
18. Program evaluation/observation (we will have a breakout room to discuss two topics presented in the morning session, two groups will share their comments)
19. Future programs (will seek suggestions for the future)
20. Happy Hours (members can chitchat)

Press Release

09/12/2020

The US-Nepal Policy Research Center's (US-NPRC: <http://usnprc.org/>) fifth policy & development webinar, "Crisis in political institutions and electoral reform in Nepal." concluded on September 12, 2020. The conference's main objective was to comprehend and understand the crisis in institutions, including political institutions, Nepal's election process, synthesize experts' and participants' experiences and perspectives on policy options, and needed reforms to strengthen institutions' and elections process. The webinar brought together policy analysts, faculty, researchers, political leaders, social activists, and other professionals in the related fields from Nepal and the United States.

The webinar was inaugurated by the first president of the Republic of Nepal, Rt. Honorable Dr. Ram Baran Yadav. In his inaugural speech, he said Nepali people have played an essential role in promulgating the 2015 constitution. Political leaders now have to put the "life" on it. As envisioned in the constitution, he further added a free and fair election is a must to convert Nepal into a real democracy. He hoped that a webinar like this would help ensure achieving such practice in Nepal.

The webinar was structured around two main plenary sessions: 1) Crisis in political institutions, and 2) Election Reform in Nepal. Dr. Surendra Devkota, a senior economist, presented the paper on the crisis in political institutions. Bhojraj Pokharel, a former chief election commissioner and former secretary of Government of Nepal, presented a paper on Nepal's electoral reform. Professor. Krishna Khanal, Political Scientist, and Honorable Mohana Ansari, a member of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal had commented on Dr. Devkota's paper. The senior journalist and the editor of Deshsanchar.com, Mr. Yubraj Ghimire, commented on Mr. Pokharel's paper.

Many senior Nepali Congress leaders, including Mr. Bimalendra Nidhi, Vice president, Nepali Congress, and Mr. Prakash Man Singh, Mr. NP Saud, Dr. Shekhar Koirala, Dr.

Chandra Bhandari, Ms. Kamala Pant, Mr. Surendra Raj Pandey, Ms. Ratna Sherchan, Mr. Pradip Paudel, and Ms. Pramila Rai provided comments and suggestions to improve the institutions and reform the election process in Nepal.

The conference was chaired by Dr. Rajan Pant, the President of US--NPRC. An executive member, Mrs. Jagdamba Adhikaree, delivered a welcome speech, and Dr. Suman Parajuli, USNPRC member secretary, provided a brief introduction about USNPRC.

The webinar was streamed live on Facebook, which was watched by ~26000 people worldwide.



Appendix



US-NEPAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTER



Crisis in Political Institutions and Electoral Reform

5TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2020
8:15 AM US CENTRAL | 7:00 PM NEPAL

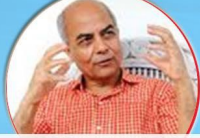
Conference Inauguration By:
First President of Nepal
Rt. Hon'ble Dr. Ram Baran Yadav

www.usnprc.org

 **[•LIVE]**

US-NEPAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTER

Presenter



Bhojraj Pokharel
Former Chief Election Commissioner
Former Secretary,
Government of Nepal



Crisis in Political Institutions and Electoral Reform

5TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2020
8:15 AM US CENTRAL | 7:00 PM NEPAL

Presenter



Dr. Surendra R Devkota
Senior Economist

Commentator



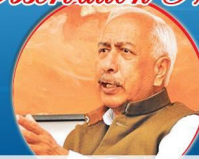
Yubaraj Ghimire
Senior Journalist
Editor: www.deshsanchar.com

Commentator



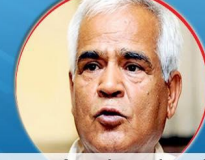
Mohna Ansari
Hon'ble Member
Nat'l Human Rights Commission of Nepal

Observation Note



Kedar B Mathema
Former VC, Tribhuvan University
Former Ambassador to Japan

Commentator



Prof Krishna Khanal
Political Scientist

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US-NEPAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTER



Crisis in Political Institutions and Electoral Reform

5TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2020
8:15 AM US CENTRAL | 7:00 PM NEPAL

Comments / Opinions



Mr. Bimalendra Nidhi
Vice President, NC
Chief, CPRTA

Comments / Opinions



Mr. Prakash Man Singh
Senior Leader
Nepali Congress

Comments / Opinions



Dr. Shekhar Koirala
Leader, NC

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US-NEPAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTER

Response



Ms. Kamala Pant
Hon'ble Former Minister



Crisis in Political Institutions and Electoral Reform

5TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2020
8:15 AM US CENTRAL | 7:00 PM NEPAL

Response



Ratna Sherchan
Leader

Response



Kiran Yadav
Leader

Response



Hon'ble Pramila Rai
Member, Federal Parliament

www.usnprc.org



(आन्तरिक प्रयोजनकालागि मात्र)

Election Reform: Few talking points

US Nepal Policy Research Center

September 12, 2020

पृष्ठभूमि:

विश्वमा प्रचलित तीन प्रमुख प्रणालीमा हामीले पूर्ण समानुपातिक वाहेकका वांकी दुई अर्थात पहिलो हुने निर्वाचित हुने (पहुनिहु) र मिश्रित निर्वाचन प्रणाली प्रयोग गरि सक्यौं। कुनै देशमा सयौं बर्षसम्म एउटै प्रणालीले काम गरेको छ भने कतिपय देशमा प्रणालीमा निन्तर परिवर्तन भएकोपनि देखिन्छ । पुरानो प्रजातंत्र भनिएका बेलायत, अमेरिकाले सुरु देखिनै पहुनिहु प्रणाली सफलतापूर्वक प्रयोग गर्दै आएकाछन् भने नर्डिक मुलुकहरुले सयौं बर्षदेखि पूर्ण समानुपातिक प्रणाली अंगालेकाछन् । तेस्तै, जापान, जर्मन आदिले मिश्रित प्रणाली प्रयोग गर्दै आएकाछन् ।

हामीले निर्वाचन प्रारंभ गरेदेखि प्रयोग गर्दै आएको बहुमतीय प्रणालीले प्रतिनिधित्वमा न्याय दिन नसकेको र निर्वाचित निकायहरु समावेशी हुन नसकेको अबस्था रह्यो । उदाहरणकालागि दलित र महिलाको स्थिति हेरौं । पहाडी ब्राम्हण र दलितको जनसंख्या करिव बरोबरछ तर २०६४ को पहिलो संबिधानसभाको निर्वाचन अगाडीसम्म संसदीय निर्वाचनमा दलितको प्रतिनिधित्व मुस्किलले ०.५ प्रतिशतसम्म पुग्यो भने ब्राम्हणको प्रतिनिधित्व ४४ प्रतिशतसम्म पुग्यो । तेस्तै, जनसंख्याका हिसावले पुरुषभन्दा बेसी भएपनि महिलाको प्रतिनिधित्व ५ प्रतिशतकै हाराहारीमा सिमित रह्यो । लामो रस्साकस्सीकावीच तैतिखेरको राजनीतिक शक्ति सन्तुलनको परिणाम स्वरुप २०६४ को संबिधानसभाकालागि मिश्रित प्रणाली प्रयोगमा ल्याइयो । यस प्रणालीले कमसेकम सिमान्तकृत समूहको प्रतिनिधित्व र उपस्थिति तुलनात्मक रुपमा बढाउन सक्यो । यही उपस्थितिले पछि परेका वा सिमान्तकृत समूह र बर्गको हक, अधिकार र प्रतिनिधित्वलाई शसक्त रुपले स्थापित गराउन संबिधानमा लिपिबद्ध गर्न सको ।

आम चासो र सरोकारका कुरा:

प्रतिनिधित्व तर्फ सुधारोन्मुख रहेपनि, प्रयोगको क्रममा हामी धेरै कुरामा चुक्ते गयौं । मिश्रित प्रणालीभित्रका दुवै हांगा प्रयोगकर्ताको कमजोरी र खराब निर्वाचन ब्यबहारले गर्दा ज्यादै विवादित बनेको अबस्था छ ।

पहुनिहु प्रणाली ब्यापारमा रुपान्तरण हुदैछ अर्थात टिकट देखि मतसम्म किन्नु पर्ने भयो भने, समानुपातिक तर्फको प्रतिनिधित्व पैसा र सम्पर्कले निर्धारण गर्नपुग्यो। प्रयोगमा चुक्नाले प्रणालीनै बदनाम हुन पुग्यो,



यतिखेर आम नेपालीलाई समानुपातिक प्रणालीको कुरा गरौं भने नाक खुम्च्याउने स्थितिमा पुर्‍यायो । संसदमा दुईखाले सांसदको उपस्थितिले सांसद-सांसदबीच द्वन्द्व निम्त्यायो ।

गतबर्ष नेपालका सातै प्रदेशका केन्द्र तथा केही स्थानीय तहसम्म पुगेर हालको निर्वाचनका विविधपाटोका वारेमा राजनीतिक दल, उमेदवार, निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधि, नागरिक समाज, सिमान्तकृत बर्ग र निर्वाचन अधिकारीहरूसंग गरिएका अन्तरकृयाहरूमा सहभागीहरूद्वारा व्यक्त केही टिप्पणी यहां संछेपमा राख्न चाहन्छु-

- निर्वाचन आयोगले तोकेको २५ लाखको खर्च सीमा हातिको देखाउने दांत जस्तै भयो, हातमा चार-पांच करोड नभए प्रत्येक निर्वाचनमा नगएपनि हुन्छ,
- टिकट देखि मत सम्म किन्नु पर्छ, अनि महंगो हुनेभयो भयो,
- "पैसा र सम्पर्क" नभए समानुपातिकबाट प्रतिनिधित्वको आसै नगरौं,
- चार-पांच करोड खर्च नगरी चुनावमा नगएपनि हुन्छ त्यो पनि हार्ने जीतने कुनै ठेगानछैन, बरु त्यो पैसा नेतालाई दियो, समानुपातिकमा परो,
- दल ले टिकट त दियो, तर म संग पैसा थिएन, टिकट फिर्ता गरें
- अन्तरघात हाम्रो निर्वाचनको अभिन्न अंग बन्न पुग्यो,
- आफ्नै दलका कार्यकर्ता किन्नु पर्ने अबस्थाछ, बिपक्षीभन्दा आफ्नैसंग डराउनु पर्ने भयो
- उमेदवारका वीचभन्दा इन र दाताका वीचको प्रतिस्पर्धा बढ्यो
- चुनावको अघिल्लो रातभर पैसावांडे सपथ खुवाए, अब जितियो भनेर ढुक्कसंग सुते तर मेरो पछि-पछि विपक्षीले तिनै मतदातालाई मैलेभन्दा वेसी पैसा वांडेछ, हारेपछि पो थाहा पाए,
- सांसदको अधिकांश समय - मंत्री हुन वा अन्य फाइदाकालागि दलको नेतालाई खुसी पार्ने; आ-आफ्ना निर्वाचन छेत्रमा योजनापार्ने वा मतदाताका ब्यक्तिगत समस्या सम्बोधनमा र गत निर्वाचनमा गरेको खर्च उकास्न र अर्को निर्वाचनको लागि चाहिने खर्चको जोहो गर्ने,
- निर्वाचन प्रणाली स्वयं सुशासनको बाधक बन्न पुग्यो, आदि ।

यी त केही प्रतिनिधि भनाईसम्म हुन, गुनासोको लिष्ट लामोछ ।

कुनैपनि प्रणाली एकदम राम्रो वा खराव होइनन्, मूल कुरा यसको प्रयोग, पालना र ब्यबस्थापन के कसरी गरिन्छ सो मा भर पर्ने रहेछ । मूल रूपमा मुलुकको सुशासनको अबस्था, राजनीतिक दलहरूको सुशासनप्रतिको प्रतिबद्धताको स्तर, शाखयुक्त दलको नेतृत्व नभएसम्म, आम मतदातामा मतको मूल्य र महत्वलाई बुझि तदनुरूप आफ्नो मतको प्रयोग गर्ने अबस्था नभएसम्म, वा निर्वाचन गराउने निकायले वांछित छ्यमता हासिलनगरेसम्म कुनैपनि प्रणालीले राम्रोसंग कामगर्न नसक्ने रहेछ भन्ने कुरा नेपाल लगायतका कतिपय मुलुकको अभ्यासले देखाएकाछन् ।

बर्तमान स्थितिले निम्त्याएको नकरात्मक प्रभाव-

- निर्वाचन प्रणाली, महंगो निर्वाचन, मंत्रीहुने लोभ, दलको हवीप र शासकीय रवैयाले संसद र सांसदलाई कमजोर बनायो, राज्यका सवै अंगलाई जिम्मेवार बनाउने भूमिकामा रहनु पर्ने संसद स्यवं नीरिह बन्यो, ब्यबहारमा सरकारको लाचार छांया जस्तो देखियो
- सरकारहरू नेपालको हुन सकेनन्- दल-गुट, र निर्वाचन छेत्रमा सिमित हुन पुगे
- निष्ठाको राजनीतिको अन्त्य हुनलागो, निर्वाचित निकाय अपराधीको पकडमा पुग्न थाले,
- महंगो निर्वाचन ठूला भ्रष्टाचारको श्रोत बन्न पुग्यो,
- कमजोर संसद, अस्थीर सरकार हाम्रा बिशेषता हुन पुगे
- युवा र सख्यमको प्रतिनिधित्व कमजोर रह्यो र प्रतिनिधित्वको न्याय फराकिलो हुन सकेन
- समुच्चमा सुशासनको पाटोमा हामी कमजोर बन्दैगयौं, नैराश्यता तीव्रगतिमा विस्तारिछ,
- Inclusive democracy को मर्मलाई समेट्न सकेन ।

यी अबस्था र ब्यबस्थाको सुधारमा तत्काल ध्यान दिनबाट चुक्यौं र यस्तै अबस्थाको निरन्तरताले अहिलेको ब्यबस्थानै खतरामा पर्ने संभावना देख्छु । ढिला नगरी यसको क्रमभंग गर्न जरुरी छ ।

सुधारको पाटो- के र कसरी

यस्तो अबस्था आउनमा निर्वाचन प्रणाली लगायतका चार कुरा जिम्मेवार छन् र तीनको समुच्च सुधार जरुरीछ- ती हुन्-

१. संरचना
२. प्रणाली
३. प्रकृया, र
४. प्रवृत्ति

उक्त पृष्ठभूमिमा निर्वाचन सुधार मुख्यतया देहायका लक्ष्यप्राप्तिमा केन्द्रीत हुनु पर्दछ-

१. निर्वाचन प्रणाली स्वयं द्बन्द बढाउन हैन द्बन्द नबढाउने हुनु परो,
२. निर्वाचनका सवै हिस्सेदारले अनुभूत गर्नेगरी निर्वाचन न्याय दिलाउने,
३. निर्वाचित निकायको सुशासन प्रत्याभूत गराउन,
४. निर्वाचित पदाधिकारीलाई जिम्मेवार बनाउन,
५. दल र निर्वाचन खर्च (दल वा उमेदवार, सुरख्या वा निर्वाचन ब्यबस्थापन) वांछीत सीमामा राख्न,
६. निर्वाचन ब्यबस्थापनमा राजनीतिक दल र स्थानीय तहको भूमिका बढाउन,
७. निर्वाचनमा सख्यम, इमान्दार र नयां पीढिको सहभागिता बढाउन,

८. निष्ठाको राजनीतिलाई प्रोत्साहित गर्न,
९. निर्वाचित निकाय- खासगरी संसदको भूमिका बलियो बनाउन ।

सुधारकालागि **दुई विकल्पछन्**- अर्थात्,

पहिलो- बिद्यमान **प्रणालीमा सुधार गर्दै जाने**, वा
दोश्रो- अहिलेसम्मको हाम्रो आफ्नै भोगाइका आधारमा **प्रणालीनै परिवर्तन गर्ने** ।

मेरो बुझाइमा अहिलेकै जस्तो दल र नेतृत्वको चरित्र रहेसम्म सुधारका जस्ता कुरा गरेपनि खासै परिणाम देला भन्ने विश्वास लाग्दैन । तेसैले, सामान्य परिवर्तन (Incremental change) भन्दा ब्यापकरूपमा फड्कोमार्ने गरी मुख्य प्रणालीमै परिवर्तनको खांचोछ । टालटूलले मात्र वांछित परिणाम दिन सक्ने अबस्था देखिन्छन् । प्रणालीमै परिवर्तन गर्न जरुरीछ तर यो कुरा तेती सरल, सहज र पाच्य नहुन सक्छ। हिजो आफूलाई जुन कुराले फाइदा दिएकोछ, तेसैको निरन्तरताको लागि जोडगर्ने शक्ति बलियोछन् ।

“प्रवृत्ति परिवर्तन नभै पात्र वा अन्य परिवर्तनले मात्र” सुधार संभव छैन भन्ने राम्रो उदाहरण हामीले राम्ररी महशूस गरेकाछौं । तर, प्रवृत्ति आजको भोली परिवर्तन गर्न सक्ने कुरा भएन जब सम्म सत्पात्र ती ठाउमा पुग्दैनन् र आफू भन्दामाथी उठी स्यवं रियलाइजेसन गर्दैनन् तब सम्म ती पात्रका प्रबृत्तिलाई संरचना, प्रणाली र प्रकृयाबाट नियंत्रण वा निर्देशित गर्न जरुरी हुनेछ । कुनै सत्पात्र जिम्मेवारीमा पुगिहाल्यो भनेपनि प्रणालीले उसलाई उठ्नै नदिने स्थिति बन्दैछ ।

संरचनागत सुधार

- सांसद संख्या घटाउने र दुईखाले सांसद रहने अबस्थाको अन्त्यगर्ने,
- सांसदबाट मंत्री नबनाउने, सांसदलाई बिधि निर्माण तथा अन्य निकायलाई जिम्मेवार बनाउने भूमिकामा केन्द्रीत गर्ने,
- रछ्या र अर्थ बाहेकका बिधेयकको श्रोत सांसदलाई नै बनाउने,
- विश्वास वा अविश्वासको प्रस्तावको अबस्थामा वाहेक संसदमा दलको हवीप नलाग्ने गर्ने,
- दलहरूलाई राज्यकोषबाट सहयोग गर्ने र दलहरूको आम्दानी खर्चको परिछ्यण महालेखा परिछ्यकले गर्ने ब्यबस्था मिलाउने,
- दलहरूको सु-शासन कायमकालागि राजनीतिक दल सम्बन्धी कानून कार्यान्वयन थप प्रभावी र बाध्य बनाउन यसका मापनकाआधार तोकी अनुगमन गर्ने कानूनी ब्यबस्था गर्ने,
- दल र सरकारवीचको अन्तरसंबन्धको सीमा रेखा कानूनतः कोर्ने,
- संबैधानिक वा न्यायिक परिषदले राजनीतिक अंशबण्डागरी संबैधानिक निकाय वा अदालतमा नियुक्तिगर्ने गरेको परिपाटीको अन्त्यकालागि नियुक्तिका थप आधार खोज्ने,
- मंत्रिपरिषदबाट नीतिगत निर्णयका नाममा हुने भ्रष्टाचारको बिषय अख्तियारको दायरा भित्र ल्याउने,

- उमेदवारीसंगै आफ्नो निर्वाचन खर्चको श्रोतको बिबरण बुझाउनुपर्ने ब्यबस्था गर्ने,
- नागरिक शिक्षा खासगरी नैतिक शिक्षालाई प्रारंभिक कक्ष्यादेखिनै दिने ब्यबस्था गर्ने ।

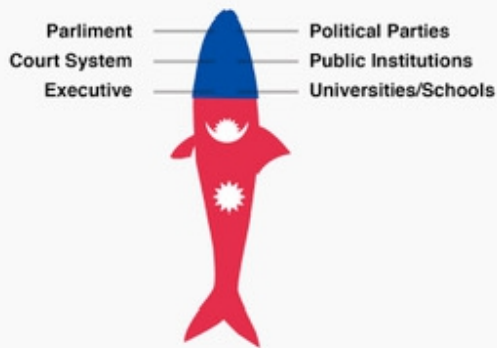
ब्यबस्थापनमा सुधार-

- निर्वाचन ब्यबस्थापनमा राजनीतिक दल, तथा स्थानीय तहका सरकारको भूमिका बृद्धीगर्दै लाने,
- मतदाता नामावली सम्बन्धी सवैकाम स्थानीय तहको जिम्मादिने,
- निर्वाचन सुरक्षायामा राजनीतिक दलहरूको हिस्सा बढाउने,
- जुन तहको निर्वाचन हो तेही तहको दलले उमेदवारी निर्धारण गर्ने,
- निर्वाचन खर्चको श्रोत र खर्च तथा अनुगमन र कारवाहीकालागि- निर्वाचन आयोग, अदुनिआ, राजश्व अनुसन्धान, मुद्रा निर्मलीकरण बिभागले सहकार्य गर्ने,
- मतदानस्थलमें मतगणना गर्ने,
- निर्वाचन संचालनमा स्थानीय भोलण्टियरको भूमिका बढाउने,
- निर्वाचनलाई प्रबिधिसंग जोड्ने तर वाह्य अतिक्रमण हुन नसक्ने प्रबिधि र सोको सुरक्षायामा विशेष ध्यान दिने,
- निर्वाचन छेत्र बिकास कोष जस्ता सांसद लक्ष्यीत कार्यक्रमले असमान वीच प्रतिस्पर्धा गर्नुपर्ने स्थिति ल्याएकोछ, तेस्ता विषयले निरन्तरता पाउनु हुन्न ।

हिजो कुन प्रणालीबाट आफू वा आफ्नो दललाई फाइदा हुन गयो भन्ने सोचबाट माथी उठी मुलुकको भलाई हुने दृष्टिकोणबाट सुधारलाई हेर्न राजनीतिक शक्तिहरूको सोच रहन जरुरीछ । सुधारका यी वा अन्य कुनै कुरामा संसारभर कुनै कुनामा रहेका नेपाली र नेपाललाई माया गर्ने सवैको महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका रहने छ । अझ हाम्रा कतिपय प्रवृत्तिलाई हेर्दा स्वदेशभित्रबाट भन्दा मुलुक बाहीर रहेका क्रेडिबिलिटी भएका ब्यक्तित्वको भनाई झनै वेसी सुनिन्छ र प्रभावी हुने विगतले देखाएकोछ ।

भोजराज पोखरेल

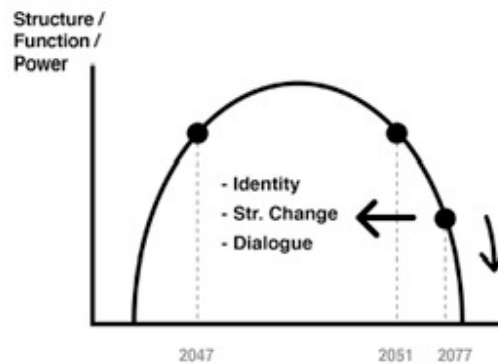
Institutional Crisis



“Institutions as systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions. Language, money, law, systems of weights and measures, table manners, and firms (and other organizations) are thus all institutions.”

- Geoffrey M Hodgson

Nepali Congress



- Freedom of:
- ★ self/individual,
 - ★ Speech Democratic Socialism
 - ★ Economic Nationality
 - ★ Religion Democracy

नेपाली कांग्रेसमा पुर्नजीवन

सुरेन्द्र राज देवकोटा

पृष्ठभूमि:

सन् १९१५ मा ४५ वर्षको उमेरमा भारतमा पुनः छिरेपछि मृत्युपर्यन्त बहुलवाद (Pluralism) र अहिंसा (Non-violence) का पुजारी महात्मा गान्धीलाई वाम पक्षीय क्रान्तिकारीहरू देखि दक्षिण पक्षीय बौद्धिक जमात एवं मध्यमार्गी उदारवादीहरू प्रायजसो मुद्दामा कुनै न कुनै आक्षेपहरू लगाई राख्दथे । जव गान्धीले १९२० को भारतीय कांग्रेसको कलकत्ता अधिवेशनमा प्रस्तुत गरेको "असहयोग सम्बन्धी प्रस्ताव" लाई मोतीलाल र जवाहरलाल नेहरूले समर्थन गरेका थिए भने मोहम्मद जिन्नाहा, मोहन मालभिया लगायतका कैयन पुराना कांग्रेसी नेताहरू समर्थनमा थिएनन् । भारतीय स्वतन्त्रताको आन्दोलनमा गान्धी मात्रै एउटा यस्तो व्यक्तित्व थियो जसले स्वयं लेख्दथे, बोल्दथे र सधैं घुमिरहन्थे अनि सत्याग्रहका विविध आयामहरू अवलम्बन गर्दै समाजलाई सत्य बाटो देखाउन कुनै अवसर बाँकी राख्दैनथे । सन् १९२० देखि आजको करिब एक सय वर्षमा भारतीय कांग्रेसको उचाई र अहिलेको रसातलबाट नेपाली कांग्रेसले सिक्नुपर्ने धेरै थियो र छ ।

वि.सं. २००६ चैत्र २७ गते कलकत्ता स्थित महावीर शम्शेरको टाईगर सिनेमा घरमा नेपाली राष्ट्रिय कांग्रेस र नेपाली प्रजातन्त्र कांग्रेसको संयुक्त अधिवेशनबाट पारित नेपाली कांग्रेसमा मातृका प्रसाद कोईराला सभापति, महेन्द्र विक्रम शाह महामन्त्री, विपी कोईराला, गणेशमान सिंह, कृष्ण प्रसाद भट्टराई, दयाशंकर मुन्सी, सुवर्ण शम्शेर, सूर्य प्रसाद उपाध्याय, महावीर शम्शेर र कुँवर भल्लु सिंहको कार्यसमिति र चारतारे भण्डा (वाक स्वतन्त्रता, धार्मिक स्वतन्त्रता, आर्थिक स्वतन्त्रता र व्यक्तिगत सुरक्षा र स्वतन्त्रता) को प्रतीक स्थापित ग-यो । आजसम्म त्यही चार स्वतन्त्रताको निम्ती विगत ७० वर्षमा हजारौं व्यक्तिहरू शहादत भए, कैयन लाख परिवारको कम्तिमा दुई पुस्ताले विना स्वार्थ नेपाली कांग्रेसको निम्ति तन, मन र धनले समर्पण गरेको तर पनि आज देशमा किन ती ४ वटै स्वतन्त्रताहरूको दयनीय अवस्थाबाट गुञ्जिरहेको छ ? आज कांग्रेस मात्रै नभएर समग्र Political Institutions¹ सकंटाग्रस्त छन् किनकी देशमा Institutions² भन्दा Individuals शक्तिशाली बन्ने होडवाजी देखिन्छ ।

¹ Political Institutions, (Klaus von Beyme, 2008, The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions Edited by Sarah A. Binder, R. A. W. Rhodes, and Bert A. Rockman, Oxford University Press).

² Institutions are the formal and informal rules that organize social, political and economic relations (North, D.C. 2006, Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance, Cambridge University Press).

नेतृत्वको संस्थागत विधीया:

जनताको निमित्त राजनीति गर्ने प्रजातान्त्रिक दलले जनताका आवश्यकता र आकांक्षालाई भन्दा नेता विशेषको चाहनालाई प्राथमिकता दिँदा भारतीय कांग्रेस सन् ७० को दशकमा पतन हुन पुग्यो, भलै ईन्दिरा गान्धी र राजीव गान्धीको हत्यापछि सहानुभूतिको भोटले त्यो दललाई थोरै जीवन्तता दियो । सम्भवतः सन् १९९१ मा यदि भारतीय कांग्रेसले आफूलाई बजारतन्त्रको ढोका नखोलेको भए आज त्यो दल र देशको स्थिति के हुने थियो र अहिले के छ ?

हिन्दुस्तानमा भारतीय कांग्रेसले आफ्नो दलमा नेतृत्व विकासको निमित्त अत्यन्त सानो चित्त राख्दा यति विधुन साना दलहरू उम्रे कि आज समस्त भारतीय राजनीति क्षेत्रियतावादमा अडकिएको छ । त्यो आफै कति टिकाउ होला, प्रश्न आफ्नै ठाउँमा छ तर भारतीय कांग्रेसको जुन नेतृत्वको यथास्थिति मनोवृत्ति (Status of quo/ inertia) थियो, ठीक त्यही पारा नेपाली कांग्रेसको नेतृत्वले २०४७ पछि अपनाउन पुग्यो ।

त्यसो त २०१५ सालको १८ महिनाको सरकार बाहेक २०४६/४७ सालपछि अहिले सम्ममा कम्तिमा १० पटक र चार जनाको प्रधानमन्त्रित्व र ३०० भन्दा बढी मन्त्रीहरूको धनी कांग्रेसमा चार ताराको आदर्श र तिनवटा सैद्धान्तिक आधारहरू (प्रजातन्त्र, समाजवाद, र राष्ट्रियता) खोपामा राखिने कुलदेवता जस्ता भएका छन् । २०४७ सालपछि नेपाली कांग्रेसले मूलभूत रूपमा गर्नुपर्ने तर गर्न नसकेको/नचाहेको/नजानेको पक्ष हो-२०४७ को प्रजातान्त्रिक उपलब्धि, मूल्य, मान्यता र आदर्शहरूलाई न त आफ्नै दलभित्र संस्थागत (institutionalize) गर्न सक्यो, न त सार्वजनिक राजनीतिक संस्थाहरूमा संस्थागत गर्न सक्यो । वरु एकपछि अर्को राजनीतिक संस्थागत विकृति र व्यक्ति सर्वेसर्वा हुने प्रवृत्तिहरू स्थापित हुँदै गयो । त्यसका निमित्त यो र त्यो भनेर अरुलाई दोष दिएर आफू स्वयं चाही चोखो ठान्ने मनोवृत्ति भन्नु मौलायो र अहिले आएर नीतिगत संवाद भन्दा व्यक्तिगत लाभका निमित्त कांग्रेसका आदर्श र सिद्धान्तहरू लिलाम बढाबढको स्थितिमा पुगेको परिस्थिति छ ।

वि.सं. २०४७ सालपछि नेपाली जनताले कांग्रेसबाट आफ्नो विगतको प्रजातान्त्रिक समाजवादका आदर्श र सिद्धान्त अनुसार अधिकतम जनताको आधारभूत आवश्यकताहरूमा गुणात्मक परिवर्तनको अपेक्षा राखेको थियो । सम्भवतः उदारीकरणको शुरुको भल शहरी क्षेत्रहरूमा राम्रैसँग बग्यो, तर अधिकांश ग्रामिण क्षेत्रहरू खाद्यान्न सुरक्षा, स्वास्थ्य र शिक्षा जस्ता न्यूनतम आवश्यकताहरूका बारेमा त्यतिखेरका मन्त्रीहरू पनि भाषण र शासनमा नै रमाउन पुगे । उदाहरणको निमित्त स्थानीय विकास सम्बन्धि ऐन ल्याउन देशले १० वर्ष कुर्नु पर्‍यो, जव की २०४७ को संविधान संस्थागत गर्न भन्दा पहिले नै २०५२ बाट माओवादी आतंककारी जनयुद्धको निशानामा कांग्रेस थियो । उता सन् ९० को दशकमा नेपालीको आर्थिक उन्नतिमा उल्लेखनीय प्रगति हुँदै थियो, संभवतः उदारीकरण/बजारीकरणको ढोका भारत सँगसँगै नेपालमा खुल्यो, तर त्यो उदारीकरणको रफतारले नेपालको समसामयिक अर्थ-राजनीतिक एवं सामाजिक संरचना र सार्वजनिक संस्थाहरू माथि पार्ने प्रभावहरूका बारेमा मनग्य विश्लेषण थियो/थिएन थाहा हुने कुरा भएन । यद्यपी, उदारीकरणको गति र नेपालको आन्तरिक बजार व्यवस्थाको स्थिती एवं प्रजातान्त्रिक समाजवादका बारेमा अलि गहन अध्ययन र संवाद भएको भए शायद अहिले परिस्थिति अर्कै हुनेथियो होला ।

वि.सं. २०५१ देखि कांग्रेस भित्र आफैमा संस्थागत विग्रहको अभ्यास शुरु हुन थाल्यो किनकी खेलको नियम मिच्दै व्यक्ति सर्वेसर्वा बन्ने प्रथा स्थापित भयो भने फेरी २०५२ बाट माओवादीहरूले देशमा कथित जनयुद्ध एवं आतंकको विजारोपण गरे । सत्तामा भएर पनि त्यतिखेर कांग्रेस अत्यन्त नाजुक स्थितिबाट गुञ्जिरहेको थियो, किनभने कांग्रेसमा एकातिर आन्तरिक विग्रह र कलह मौलाउँदै गएको थियो भने बाह्य तवरमा माओवादीहरूको पहिलो शिकार नेपाली कांग्रेस नै थियो । हुन त माओवादी सँग वार्ताहरू हुँदै थिए, सम्भवतः त्यतिखेर दरवार र अन्य दलहरूसँग पनि आत्मीय छलफलहरू हुन सक्थे सकेन इतिहासमा नै छोडौं, तर त्यसको एउटा छनक पनि सार्वजनिक भएना उदाहरणको निमित्त २०४७ को संविधानमा के कस्तो सुधार गर्न सकिन्थ्यो, त्यसका बारेमा खुला संवाद हुन सकेन ।

त्यसैबीच २०५२ देखि शुरु गरीएको अनिष्ट २०५८ मा राजा वीरेन्द्रको वंश नाश समेत हुन पुग्यो । सरकारको नेतृत्व कांग्रेसको थियो, परन्तु राजदरवार त्यो रहस्यमयी हत्याकाण्डको समेत वैज्ञानिक अनुसन्धान नभएपछि विज्ञान र प्रविधिको ज्ञान प्रयोग गर्न चुकेको हो ने.का. को नेतृत्व ।

विगत २५ वर्ष यता नेपाली कांग्रेसको नेतृत्वले गरेका केही ऐतिहासिक भूलहरू छन् र त्यसबाट अहिले एवं भविष्यको पदाधिकारीले सधैं मनमा राख्नुपर्ने केही तीतो यथार्थहरू यस्ता छन् ।

- (क) राष्ट्रियताका बारेमा भएका केही अराष्ट्रिय पक्षहरूको सन्दर्भमा नेपाली कांग्रेस नेतृत्व/पदाधिकारीहरू मौन बस्न सुहाउँदैन ।
- (१) नेपाली कांग्रेसको सरकारले पौष २७ को पृथ्वी जयन्तीलाई पूर्णतया अवमूल्यन गरेर राष्ट्र निर्माता पृथ्वी नारायण शाहको योगदानलाई तिरस्कार एवं दानवीयकरण गर्दै पौष १६ को देवत्वकरण गर्नुको कुनै अर्थ छैन किनभने पौष २७ लाई निषेध गरेर पौष १६ को औचित्य कसरी स्थापित हुन्छ ?
- (२) २०६१ सालमा माओवादी सँगको दिल्लीमा भएको १२ बुँदे सम्झौता नेपालकै भूमिमा हुन नसक्नु दुःखद घटना हो र त्यसपछि १२ बुँदेमा नभएका विषयवस्तु, अनि २०६२/०६३ को जनआन्दोलनमा समेत नउठेका विषयवस्तुहरूलाई रातारात संविधानमा मिसाएपछि अर्थको अनर्थ लाग्ने नै हुन्छ । त्यसले ईंगित गरेको अन्य पाटो भनेको नेपाली कांग्रेसको नेतृत्व पंक्तिमा देशका बारेमा निर्णय गर्ने परिपाटी/तरिका गलत छ ।
- (३) २०७२ असोज १ गने संविधान जारी गर्ने उपयुक्त दिन थियो वा थिएन, किनभने तराईमा रगत बग्दै थियो, त्यसका बारेमा कांग्रेसभित्र के कति छलफल भयो, त्यसको विवरण सार्वजनिक छैन । तर संविधान घोषणा भए लगत्तै भारतले शुरु गरेको अघोषित आर्थिक नाकाबन्दीलाई नेपाली कांग्रेसको सरकार एवं केन्द्रिय समितिले त्यो नाकाबन्दीको कुटनीतिक प्रतिवाद गरेको सन्देश नेपाली जनताले प्रत्यक्ष थाहा पाएनन् ।

- (४) त्यसरी नै नागरिकताका बारेमा कांग्रेसको सरकारले एकदमै हल्का नीतिहरू लिई वडा वडाहरूमा गएर नागरिकताको पसल खुल्न समेत पुग्यो, जुन अत्यन्त गलत तरिका थियो। अर्थात् नागरिकता लगायतका विभिन्न राष्ट्रिय सवालहरूमा कांग्रेसको आफ्नो नीतिगत अनुसन्धान र तथ्यगत विश्लेषण गर्ने संस्था/संयन्त्रको कमी हिजो पनि थियो र आज पनि भन्नु बढ्दै गएको छ।
- (ख) प्रजातन्त्रका बारेमा कांग्रेसको भनाई र गराईमा १८० डिग्री कोणीय फरक देखिन्छ। एकातिर प्रतिपक्षमा रहेर देशमा लोकतान्त्रिक मूल्य र मान्यताहरूलाई कसरी संस्थागत गर्दै जनतामा पुग्ने भन्ने चुनौति छ भने अर्कातिर नेपाली कांग्रेस स्वयं लोकतान्त्रिक संस्कारबाट विमुख हुँदै गएकोमा आम नागरिकहरू चिन्तित देखिन्छन्। किनभने लोकतन्त्र/प्रजातन्त्रलाई संस्थागत गर्नका खातिर देशमा बल्ने हरेक नीति, योजना, ऐन, नियम र कार्यक्रमहरू पारदर्शी एवं सहभागितामूलक प्रक्रियाहरू अवलम्बन हुनुपर्ने हुन्छ। तर वर्तमान परिदृश्य त्यस्तो देखिदैन किनभने सत्तापक्षले जसरी अपारदर्शी ढंगबाट ऐन कानून बनाउँदैछ, त्यस्ता हरकतहरूको पर्दाफास हुनुपर्दछ। संसदमा भनाभन एउटा दर्शकीय पक्ष होला तर मुलुकमा निर्माण भैराखेका यावत संस्थागत प्रयत्नहरू जस्तै कानून, ऐन, योजना एवं नीतिका बारेमा जनतालाई सूचित र सहभागी गर्न गराउने जिम्मेवारीबाट पन्छिए पछि कांग्रेसको जनता सगको “सामाजिक दुरी” मात्रै नभएर “राजनीतिक दुरी” बढ्दै गएको छ। भर्खरै नेकपा प्रधानमन्त्रीले व्यवस्थापिका संसदको अधिवेशन रातारात बन्द गरे। संसदको संवैधानिक महत्वमाथी प्रधानमन्त्रीको ठाडो हस्तक्षेपलाई नेकाले एउटा बक्तव्य निकाल्ने भन्दा बढी प्रतिवाद गर्न चाहेन, किन?
- त्यसको अलावा, कांग्रेस स्वयंले प्रजातान्त्रिक संस्कार मूल्य मान्यतालाई आफ्नो दलभित्र खुल्ला हृदयले आत्मसात गर्न सकेको/चाहेको छैन। २०४६/०४७ अगाडिको मनोवृत्ति र प्रवृत्तिले नेपाली कांग्रेसले अहिलेको नयाँ पुस्ता जो २०४६/०४७ पछि जन्मेका छन् तिनीहरूको भावना र आकांक्षा समेट्न सक्दैन। एउटा जनतामा आधारित दल (Mass based party) भएपछि आम नागरिक प्रति उदासीन अथवा जवाफदेही हुन सकेन भने Mass based party को अर्थ राख्दैन। तसर्थ नेपाली कांग्रेसको केन्द्र देखि स्थानीय समितिहरू जनताप्रति उत्तरदायी हुनुपर्ने हुन्छ न की केन्द्रिय सभापति प्रति। जनता प्रति जवाफदेही नहुँदा जनतासँगको सम्बन्ध टुट्दै गएर दल र जनताको विचमा ठूलो खाडल सर्जना भै राखेको छ। प्रजातन्त्रलाई आदर्श र सिद्धान्त ठान्ने दलले जनतालाई शासन गर्न भोट मात्रै माग्ने नभएर जनतालाई संविधान निसृत हक अधिकार र कर्तव्यबोध गराउन कांग्रेसले आफ्नो जवाफदेही र उत्तरदायित्वको आधार जनता स्वीकार्नुपर्दछ।
- (ग) नेपाली कांग्रेसको प्रजातान्त्रिक समाजवाद दुश्चक्रमा फसेको छ किनभने सन् १९९१ देखिको बजार उदारीकरणले नयाँ संभावनाको ढोकाहरू त खोलेको थियो, तर हठात

आएको बजारीकरणको भलले शिक्षा र स्वास्थ्य क्षेत्र आम जनताको क्रयशक्ति भन्दा टाढा पुगिसकेको देखिन्छ भने ग्रामीण अर्थतन्त्रको मूलभूत संरचना नै करीब करीब ध्वस्त भैसकेको स्थिति छ । खाद्यान्न असुरक्षा र अभाव सन् १९७० दशकमा थियो जतिखेर कृषिको उत्पादकत्व भन्द जनसंख्या वृद्धि बढी थियो, तर अहिले खाद्यान्न मात्र नभएर समुच्च खेति प्रणाली नै धराशयी भैसकेको छ । प्रजातान्त्रिक समाजवादी दलले जनताका न्यूनतम आधारभूत आवश्यकताई गौण राखेपछि विश्वव्यापीकरणको भूमरी नेपालको समाजवाद भाषण गर्ने विषयवस्तु मात्र बनेको छ ।

अब जिल्लैपिच्छे विपी कोईरालाको शालिक वा प्रतिमाहरु खडा गरेर न त कांग्रेसको समाजवादी व्यवस्था आउँछ न त विपी प्रति नै आदर । तर पनि केही कांग्रेसलाई प्रतिमा प्रति मोहलाई चित्त बुझाउने हो भने २००७ साल देखिका केयन होनहार व्यक्तिहरु पनि प्रतिमा योग्य छन्, तर त्यसको लेखाजोखा समेत गर्न खोजिएन । के सुवर्ण शम्शेर, सुन्दर राज चालिसे, महेन्द्र नारायण निधी, भीम बहादुर तामांग, दिवागसिंह राई जस्ता व्यक्तित्वहरु शालिक योग्य थिएनन् वा छैनन् र?

त्यसको अलावा, कांग्रेसको नेतृत्वले संविधानको प्रस्तावनामा अमूर्त समाजवाद टाँसेर नेपाललाई उत्तर कोरिया अथवा क्यूबाको जस्तो समाजवादी मूलक उन्मुखको हाराहारीमा पु-याएकोमा कुनै अपसोच मानेको देखिदैन । त्यसो त उत्तर कोरियाको संविधानमा मानवीय नैसर्गिक अधिकारहरु पूर्ण भएको लेखिएको संविधानविदहरु भन्दछन् । संविधानमा समाजवाद लेख्दमा समाजवादी देश नहुने तर्क होला तर प्रश्न, कांग्रेसले आफ्नो परिचय गुमाएकोमा हो । त्यसको अर्को पाटो भने कम्युनिष्टको अभिष्ट संविधानमा ज्यूँदो रहने तर कांग्रेसले आफ्नो मौलिक पहिचानमा लत्तो छोडेको ठहर्छ । अन्यथा २९ औं शताब्दीको निम्ति नेपाली कांग्रेसले आफ्नो आर्थिक सिद्धान्त पुनलेखन गर्नु जरुरी छ किनकी उच्चमशीलता विनाको समाजवाद विपीले कल्पना गरेका थिएनन् भने अहिलेको कांग्रेस market capital (western), crony capital/kleptocracy (Russia), state capital (China) मा रुमलिएको देखिन्छ ।

संस्थागत विग्रह:

२०४६/४७ देखि यता नेपाली कांग्रेस सत्तामा होस् अथवा सत्ता बाहिर, त्यसको नेतृत्वले लिएको नीति र व्यवहारहरुलाई समष्टिगत ढंगले केलाउँदा कांग्रेस भित्र अहिले प्रमुख तिनवटा विकृति र विग्रहले डुँढेलो लागेको छ । जसले गर्दा आज कांग्रेसको चार ताराको आदर्श, तीन खम्बे सिद्धान्त अनि २०६२/६३ साल वा सो भन्दा अगाडि देखिका हजारौं/लाखौं परिवारहरुको विना स्वार्थको योगदान के का लागि प्रश्न सोध्न थालेको छ ? अहिलेका वा भविष्यका कांग्रेसका नेताहरु एवं कार्यकर्ताहरुले विर्सन नहुने इतिहास के पनि छ भने त्यो दललाई २००६ साल देखि जीवन्त राख्नेहरुको योगदानलाई

एउटा/दुईटा नेता विशेषको शालिक/प्रतिमाले समेट्न सक्दैन । तसर्थ स्थानीय देखि केन्द्र सम्मका यावत अशियारहरूले सोच्नुपर्ने केही तिता यथार्थहरू निम्न छन् ।

(क) कांग्रेसको परिचय/पहिचान के हो ?

२०४६/४७ पछि जन्मेको व्यक्तिले कांग्रेसका चार ताराको आदर्श र तिनवटा सैद्धान्तिक आधारहरूलाई कसरी चिन्दछ ? तिनीहरूले वस्तुगत ढंगबाट कांग्रेस र नेपालका कम्युनिष्टहरू सँगको तात्त्विक अन्तर खोज्दै जाँदा के कति नीति र सिद्धान्तगत फरक देख्दछन् ? २०४६/४७ भन्दा अगाडिको इतिहासको व्याजले नेपाली कांग्रेसलाई कतिसम्म दिगो राख्दछ ? विगत २५ वर्षयता नेपाली कांग्रेसले आफ्नो सिद्धान्त र आदर्शलाई भाषणको विषयवस्तु मात्रै बनायो तर आम नागरिकबाट तिनीहरूको सदासयता (Heart & mind) दुवै गुमाउन थाल्यो, किन? उदाहरण हेनुस्, एउटा २५, ३० वर्षे युवक जो भर्खर आफ्नो पढाई सक्यो त्यसले नेपालको संविधानमा लेखिएको “समाजवाद उन्मुख” शब्द देखेपछि कांग्रेसलाई सम्झन्छ की कम्युनिष्टलाई ? ईमानदारीपूर्वक सोच्नुस् त नया पुस्तामा कांग्रेसको पहिचान कसरी स्थापित भैराखेको छ।

(ख) जनतासँग प्रत्यक्ष संवादको अभाव

नेपाली कांग्रेसको माथिल्लो नेतृत्व (केन्द्रिय सदस्य र सांसद) को कार्यक्षेत्र (Scope of work) २०४६/४७ पछि भन् भन् खुम्चिँदै खुम्चिँदै गएको छ किनभने त्यो समूहले कांग्रेसलाई जनता सँग वढी भन्दा वढी अन्तर्क्रियाहरू गर्नुपर्ने हुन्थ्यो र छ, तर त्यसो भैराखेको छैन । उदाहरणको निमित्त प्रतिपक्षमा रहेको कांग्रेसको यतिखेर सरकारले संसदमा पेश गरेका सम्पूर्ण विधेयकहरूका बारेमा दलभित्र र बाहिरका बौद्धिक जमातसँग सम्वाद गर्नुपर्ने थियो र छ । त्यसरी नै कांग्रेसका आफ्ना भावी रणनीतिका बारेमा "सडक छाप आन्दोलन" का धम्की भन्दा अगावै यावत् सरोकारवालाहरू (दल भित्र र बाहिर) सँग अन्तर्क्रियाको आवश्यकता थियो तर भएन । जनतासँगको नियमित अन्तर्क्रिया एवं संवाद, जुन औपचारिक ढंगबाट हुनुपर्दछ भन्ने छैन, ले तिनीहरूको कांग्रेस प्रतिको सोच, भावना र अपनत्वमा वृद्धि ल्याउन सक्दछ । तसर्थ कांग्रेसमा हरेक तह र पदाधिकारी एवं केन्द्रिय सदस्य र सांसदहरूको एक सूत्रीय संवाद कार्यक्रम (open dialogue) नियमित किन हुन सकेको छैन ?

(ग) नेतृत्व विकासमा खडेरी

२०४६/४७ यता नेपाली कांग्रेसमा नयाँ नेतृत्वको अपेक्षाकृत विकास हुन सकेको छैन, र जे जति भएको देखिन्छ त्यो पनि प्रतिस्पर्धा भन्दा पनि व्यक्तिगत गुट/उपगुटको आडमा अथवा छत्रछायाँमा हुर्केको देखिन्छ । त्यसो त नेपाली कांग्रेसको केन्द्रिय समिति/पदाधिकारीहरूमा आफूलाई केन्द्रमा राख्ने मनोवृत्ति, अनि गुटगत जोड घटाउ गर्ने

प्रवृत्ति स्थापित भैसकेको छ र त्यस्तो दुश्चक्र, गलत संस्कार र प्रवृत्तिले न त असल नेतृत्वको विकास गर्दछ, न त नयाँ नेतृत्वको आकर्षण नै । तसर्थ, कांग्रेसमा नेतृत्वको विकास किन भैराखेको छैन, हेरौं केही उदाहरणहरू :

(१) सक्रिय सदस्यता प्रथाको औचित्य:

२०४६/४७ अर्थात् खुल्ला राजनीतिक परिवेश पछि यदि दलको नीति नियमहरूलाई सही ढंगले पारदर्शी भएर व्यवस्थापन हुन दिएको भए सक्रिय सदस्यताको औचित्य खासै थिएन र छैन। अहिले सक्रिय सदस्यता केन्द्रिय पदाधिकारी र नेतृत्वलाई बढी चाहिएको छ न की आम कार्यकर्तालाई । यदि कांग्रेस (Mass-based party) जनतामा आधारित दल हो र खुल्ला राजनीतिक परिवेशमा देश अगाडि बढ्दै छ भने सक्रिय सदस्यताको औचित्य के छ ? अहिले कांग्रेसको सक्रिय सदस्यताको प्रावधानले वास्तवमा कांग्रेस संस्था स्वयं नै असुरक्षित भै राखेको छ किनभने कांग्रेस सुरक्षा भनेको प्रजातान्त्रिक संस्कार, मूल्य र मान्यताले गर्दछ र ती अवयवहरू आम नागरिकले अनुभव र अनुभूति गर्न पाउनु पर्ने हुन्छ । तर जब कांग्रेसले आफूलाई आम नागरिकमा आश्रित राजनीतिक दल नबनाएर केही व्यक्ति विशेषको गिरोहमा विकसित गर्दै लगेपछि सक्रिय सदस्यता औचित्यता कांग्रेसको सुरक्षाको खातिर नभएर केही भ्रुण्ड व्यक्तिहरूको पदीय सुरक्षाको लागि प्रयोग भै राखेको छ । तसर्थ कांग्रेसलाई जनस्तरमा नजिक भन्दा नजिक राख्न एवं पारदर्शी ढंगले नेतृत्व विकास गर्ने समान अवसरबाट बञ्चित नगरी जनतामा आश्रित खुला राजनीतिक दलको रूपमा स्थापित गर्न सदस्यता सम्पूर्ण जिम्मेवारी 'बडा कार्यालय' दिँदै जिल्ला समितिहरूले प्रत्येक साधारण सदस्यको अभिलेख राख्नुपर्ने हुन्छ । एकातिर कांग्रेस आफूलाई प्रजातन्त्रको पर्याय ठान्दछ, भने अर्कातिर नेपाली कांग्रेसको केन्द्रीय सदस्य/समितिले आ-आफ्नो खल्तीबाट कथित सक्रिय सदस्यहरूको नामावली निकाल्दै आफ्नो पदीय सुरक्षाको चाँजोपाँजो मिलाउदछ; अनि सामान्य प्रजातान्त्रिक अभ्यास सम्म गर्न नचाहने नेतृत्व वृत्तले कसरी आन्तरिक प्रजातन्त्रले भरिपूर्ण भएको दल भनेर भन्न सक्दछ । यदि एक जना सक्रिय सदस्यले ५ वटा भोट पनि ल्याउन सक्दैन भने त्यसको औचित्य के हुन्छ ?

(२) केन्द्रीकृत संस्था:

प्रजातन्त्रमा राजनीतिक दलका स्थानीय निकाय वा सरकारहरू “राजनीतिक प्रयोगशाला” हुन् र त्यसको नेतृत्व त्यहीदेखि नै खारिन्छ । अब कार्यकर्ता अटाउन र माथिको निर्देशन जारी गर्ने उद्देश्य छ भने त्यसमा खास केही भन्नु छैन । तर स्थानीय तह अर्थात् जिल्ला समितिलाई यदि कांग्रेसले काम गर्ने अधिकार दिन चाहेन वा सकेन भने जनताबीच राजनीतिक दुरी भनभन् टाढा हुँदै निस्सीत छ । तसर्थ जिल्ला समितिलाई सक्षम र निर्णायक संस्था बनाउन ढीला भै राखेको छ किनभने कुनै पनि संस्थामा अग्लो संरचना आत्मघाती हुनेछ । देश संघीयतामा रुपान्तर

भएता पनि राजनीतिक दल भन केन्द्रीकृत संस्थामा परिणत भएपछि जति अग्लो संरचना बनायो त्यतिकै अनुपातमा असक्षमता र प्रभावहीनता बढ्दै जानेछ ।

(३) Kleptocracy (लूटतन्त्र):

अहिलेको नेपाललाई चरम संस्थागत विकृति र भ्रष्टाचारले निस्द्वै छ । सरकारी अड्डा/मन्त्रालय देखी अख्तियार, विद्यालय/महाविद्यालय/विश्व विद्यालय, प्रहरी, सेना र अदालतहरूमा Pre-paid वा post-paid प्रणाली संस्थागत विकृति को रूपमा स्थापित छन् । अब भोली सरकार/व्यक्ति परिवर्तन हुने वित्तिकै सबै चीज/संस्थाहरू दुधले घोईदैन । तसर्थ कांग्रेसले मुलुकमा भैराखेको यस्ता "संस्थागत विकृतीहरू" (Institutional distortions) सुधार्न भागवण्डाको राजनीतिको अन्त गर्दै meritocracy लाई निशर्त कार्यान्वयन किन नगर्ने ?

(घ) नेपाली कांग्रेसले किन नीतिगत बहस गर्न चाहदैन/सकदैन ?

नेपाली कांग्रेसले आधुनिक नेपालको राजनीतिलाई सँधै आफ्नो गुरुत्वमा राख्ने गरेकोमा, २०६२/०६३ पछि त्यो राजनीति गुरुत्व कांग्रेसबाट टाढिदै गएका परिदृष्यहरू प्रशस्तै देखिन्छन् । एकथरी कांग्रेसलाई लाग्दो हो की "सरकारमा नभएको बेलामा के को नीतिगत छलफल, प्रतिक्रिया दिए भै हाल्छ" भने अर्काथरी ठान्दछन् "जब सरकारमा पुगिन्छ तब सब ठिक भैहाल्दछ" । वास्तवमा ति दुवै सोचहरू यथास्थिति मनोवृत्ति (Status of quo/ inertia) अथवा नीतिगत दरिद्रताको स्थिती हो । राष्ट्रिय विषयवस्तु एवं अन्तराष्ट्रिय सवालका बारेमा ने.का.लाई कसरी सहयोग पु-याउने भनेर अहिले विज्ञहरू चिन्तित छन् । ने.का. को नेतृत्वले त्यस्तो अपार स्रोतलाई पूर्णतया बाहिर राखेर अथवा तिनीहरूको ज्ञान र प्रविधिलाई ने.का. ले देशका हरेक सवाल/मुद्दाहरूमा प्रयोग गर्न खोज्यो भने कांग्रेसमा नीतिगत अस्पष्टता/तदर्थवाद हट्ने मात्र नभएर आम नागरिकले समेत विश्वास गर्न सक्ने वातावरण बन्ने थियो । चाहे नागरिकता होस् अथवा संघीयता, जलस्रोत वा हरित गृहीय प्रभाव, ने.का. लाई सहयोग गर्न चाहने विज्ञहरू देश विदेशभरी छरिएका छन् तर त्यसलाई कसरी भित्राउने भन्ने सोच ने.का.को नेतृत्व वर्गको हो । उदाहरणको निम्ति केन्द्रिय पदाधिकारीको नेतृत्वमा यसलाई नियमित गर्न नसकिने होईन ।

हिजो २०४५/४६ भन्दा अगाडि ने.का. को स्थिती प्रतिक्रिया दिने भए पनि हरेक प्रतिक्रियाको राष्ट्रिय एवं अन्तराष्ट्रिय महत्व राख्दथ्यो, परन्तु अहिलेको प्रतिक्रियालाई आम नागरिकहरू सतही ठान्दछन् । किनभने त्यसमा नीतिगत गम्भिरता एवं बैकल्पिक सोचहरू हुँदैनन् । विरोधका लागि प्रतिक्रिया दिनु र नदिनुको परम्पराको खासै अर्थ राख्दैन । उदाहरणको निम्ति वर्तमान सरकार सत्तामा आएपछि भएका के कुकर्महरू जस्तै बुढी गण्डकी आयोजना चलखेल, मेलम्ची योजना, गुठी सम्बन्धी,

प्रेस र शिक्षा नीतिका बारेमा ने.का. को प्रतिक्रिया भन्दा पनि आम नागरिकहरूले नितिगत गुह्यताको अपेक्षा राख्दछन् तर सामान्य छलफछ समेत भएन ।

उपरोक्त पुष्पमूमिमा नेपाली कांग्रेसलाई नितिगत यथास्थितीबाट बाहिर निस्कन एवं मुलुक प्रति जिम्मेवार दल बन्नका खातिर ने.का. प्रति आस्था राख्ने एउटा ठूलो समुह मुलुक बाहिर स्थापित छ । त्यस्तो समुह जसले नेपालका हरेक जसो विषयमा दक्षता, विज्ञता एवं अनुभव हासिल गरिसकेका छन् भने कांग्रेसले त्यस्ता विज्ञहरूको ज्ञान र सीपलाई उपयोग गर्दै मुलुकलाई नयाँ दिन सक्दछ ।

उदाहरणको निमित्त अमेरिका स्थित US- Nepal Policy Research Center (usnprc.org) ले विगत कैयन वर्ष देखि नेपाली विज्ञहरू बीच नेपालकै सम सामयिक विषयहरूमा अनुसन्धात्मक विश्लेषणयुक्त विवेचना एवं संवाद गर्ने गरेको छ । सम्भवतः नेपाली कांग्रेसले त्यस्ता विज्ञहरूको समुह वा अन्तरक्रियाबाट प्रशस्तै नितिगत अवधारणाहरूका बारेमा खुलस्त सँग संवाद गर्न सक्दछ । त्यसको निमित्त ने.का. को केन्द्रीय पदाधिकारी सहितको एउटा स्थायी समिति मार्फत स्वदेशी एवं विदेशी विज्ञहरूको समुह सँग नितिगत विषयहरूमा नियमित अन्तरक्रिया गर्न नसकिने होईन ।

उप संहार:

भारतमा भारतीय कांग्रेसलाई महात्मा गान्धीले एक सय वर्ष अगाडि दिनुभएको उर्जा आज सकिएको जस्तो छ किनकी त्यहाँ गान्धीपछि संवाद भएन, पहिचान के हो पत्तो भएन र नयाँ नेतृत्वको उदय हुन पाएन । नेपाली कांग्रेसमा अझै पनि अलि अलि उर्जा बाँकी देखिन्छ, तर गलत प्रयोग भैराखेको छ । अंग्रेजीमा एउटा उखान छ- **तिमी दगुर्न सक्दछौ तर लुक्न सक्दैनौ** । अहिलेको कांग्रेस विगतका कमी कमजोरीबाट डराएर भाग्ने प्रयत्न गर्न खोज्यो भने भन् आत्मघाती हुनेछ ।

महात्मा गान्धीको अथक परिश्रमबाट स्थापित भारतीय कांग्रेस आज प्रतिक्रिया दिदै परम्परा निर्वाह गर्न सीमित भएको छ, किनकी त्यो दलले नेतृत्व विकासमा आधार (जनता) भन्दा पनि सिर्फ टुप्पो (माथि) को ध्यान दिन पुग्यो । यता नेपाली कांग्रेसमा २०५१/०५२ देखि शुरु भएको संस्थागत क्षयीकरण पूर्ण विराम दिदै **नेपाली कांग्रेसको विकल्प कांग्रेस** मात्रै हो भन्ने मान्यता स्थापनार्थ जनताको विश्वास आर्जन गर्न ढीला हुँदै गएको छ । जनता प्रति जवाफदेही नहुँदा, यथास्थिति मनोवृत्ति (Status of quo/ inertia) अथवा गतिशीलता (Dynamism) मध्ये कुन विकल्प लिने?

नेपालमा आम नागरिक वर्तमानको व्यक्तिगत लाभहानीको राजनीतिक दुश्चक्रबाट उन्मुक्त प्रजातान्त्रिक मूल्य, मान्यता, संस्कार र अभ्यास संस्थागत भै स्वावलम्बी, उत्तरदायी र जिम्मेवारीपूर्ण नेतृत्वको विकास एवं आदर्श समाजका निम्ती **नेपाली कांग्रेस विचार प्रधान एवं अनुशासित राजनीतिक संस्था**को रूपमा स्थापित होस् चाहन्छन् । नेपाली कांग्रेसले देशको केन्द्र देखि स्थानीय स्तरमा **याबत राजनीतिक एवं सार्वजनिक संस्थाहरू कसरी जनताप्रति उत्तरदायी र जवाफदेही हुनुपर्ने हो**, त्यसको स्पष्ट मार्गीचित्र खिच्ने कोशिश गरौं जसले गर्दा राष्ट्रमा कम्युनिष्टतन्त्र स्थापित नहोस ।