

## Political Turmoil in Nepal: Monarchy to Democracy

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### Abstract

Democracy is the most widely admired political system but the most difficult to maintain. There has been a greater urge for opening up the space for participation and competition in a state like Nepal which has a long history of monarchical domination. Since the fall of Rana's authoritarian regime in 1951, democratic process has travelled from one partial and incomplete 'revolution' in 1951 to another in 1990. In the present study, an attempt has been made to analyse the circumstances and challenges which created hurdles in democratic process. In 1960, the Panchayat system under the direct control of king was established which continued for 30 years. Though there seems stability but people had no democratic rights. In 1990, due to the increasing demand for political reforms People's Movement was started which brought an end to absolute monarchy and eliminated the Panchayat System. It was the beginning of constitutional democracy. Later, different groups and political parties having disputes with each other derailed the democratic process in the country for their own interests. In between, interim constitution 2007 was accepted and in the election of 2008 for Constituent Assembly-I, United Communist Party of Nepal emerged as the largest political party which abolished the 239 years old monarchical institution and declared Nepal a Republic. However, contrary to the expectation of a new constitution, political turmoil continued. Despite repeated extension, CA-I failed to draft a new constitution and was dissolved in May 2012. After the elections of CA-II, Nepali Congress leader Sushil Koirala became the Prime Minister on 11 February 2014. With his efforts finally the present constitution was promulgated on 20 September 2015 amid protests by Madhesis and the ethnic groups in southern lowland. The game of toppling and forming the government still dominates the national political scene which is evident by the change of the government on 3 August 2016. The frequent changes in the government have badly hampered the Nepal's development and economic growth. Nepali democratic system is still facing several challenges. To strengthen democracy and diffuse political crisis, serious efforts have to be made by the political parties. They have to display maturity and flexibility to end different types of crisis through dialogue.

**Keywords:** Monarchy, Democracy, Turmoil, Constituent Assembly, Republic

### Introduction

Nepal is a landlocked country having an area of 147,181 sq. kms. and a population of 29 million. It shares a border of over 1850 kms. in the East, South and West with five Indian states- Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and in the North with the Tibet, an autonomous region of People's Republic of China.

The Political system of Nepal did not remain the same till today. Time and again there was a tug of war between monarchical institutions and democratic forces to gain supremacy over other. Nepal have enacted several constitutions including 1948, 1951, 1959, 1962, 1990, 2007 (interim constitution) and the present September 2015 constitution.

The study of political system of Nepal traces back to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when there were about 50 states in Nepal. The situation was completely chaotic as these states were fighting with each other to expand their territory. However, Prithvi Narayan Shah from Gorkha wanted to save Nepal from the hands of British India and therefore he started the process of unifying the small states. In 1768, Shah Dynasty begins after Prithvi Narayan Shah conquers Kathmandu and lays foundation for a unified kingdom of Nepal. He expired in 1775 and thereafter his son Pratap Singh Shah ruled the country. He expanded his territory from Tistha to Kangada and from Kashmir to Sikkim by 1810 which became double in area than its present size.

### End of Autocratic Ranas' rule and Experiments of Democracy

Ranas' dynasty ruled Nepal from 1846 to 1851 when Jung Bahadur Rana takes over as Prime Minister and established hereditary rule of the Ranas' as Prime Ministers which lasted for over a century. Shah kings were reduced to figure heads with no authority. During this period Nepal has been a feudal state in which authoritarianism dominated the political scene. In 1946, the Nepali Congress Party was established and Nepal's first ever constitution the Government of Nepal Act was promulgated in 1948. This document introduced limited democratic elements but the experiment was not successful due to the misgivings of the Rana rulers to give away power.

However, a breakthrough was made in 1951 when the political power was shifted from the 104 years old Rana regime to monarchical institution led by King Tribhuvan along with the democratic political parties. An interim government was formed under the leadership of King Tribhuvan followed by promulgation of interim Government of Nepal Act 1951.

It strengthened the authority of the king and introduced relevant reforms such as the creation of the Supreme Court and the inclusion of fundamental rights and socio-economic goals to be pursued by the state. As it was a coalition government consisting of several political parties and therefore could not work in harmony. In this changed situation, there has been a continuous power struggle between the authoritarian powers and the democratic forces to gain supremacy over other.

In 1955, after the death of king Tribhuvan, the throne was succeeded by King Mahendra who found that political situation of the kingdom was deteriorating. In the state of political instability, King Mahendra tried to control the situation of the country in his own way. He constituted an Advisory Board under his leadership which was opposed and criticized by democratic parties. So, King Mahendra decided to delegate the powers of administration to the representatives of the people. He tried to bring a number of reforms in the political atmosphere of the kingdom and finally conducted a general election in spite of certain hindrances throughout the kingdom.

King Mahendra promulgated the constitution of the kingdom of Nepal on 12 February 1959 which was framed by a drafting committee under the chairmanship of Bhagvati Prasad Singh. The constitution was based on parliamentary democratic system of government having two houses of parliament, fundamental rights, supreme court, public service commission, auditor general and the emergency powers of the king. In accordance with the constitution first general election was held on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1959 in which Nepali Congress Party got the landslide majority. The government was formed under the leadership of B.P. Koirala but his government could not bring any substantial change in the country. The widespread lawlessness was not controlled. In such a situation King Mahendra on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1960 took a bold step and arrested the leaders of the Nepali Congress including B. P. Koirala and dismissed parliament, suspended the constitution, banned all political parties. King formed a cabinet under his chairmanship and Dr. Tulsī Giri was appointed as Prime Minister.

### **Introduction of the Panchayat System**

After the dismissal of B. P. Koirala government in 1960 in a military coup, the Panchayat regime under the direct control of the king was established in the country till 1990. It was based on self-governance, historically prevalent in South Asia. On December 1961 King Mahendra appointed a council of five ministers to help in running the administration. Several weeks later, political parties were declared illegal. At first, the Nepali Congress leadership propounded a non-violent struggle against the new order and formed alliances with several political parties including the Gorakha Parishad and the United Democratic Party. Early in 1961, the king had set up a committee of four officials from the central secretariat to recommend changes in the constitution which would abolish political parties with a substitute of a 'National Guidance' system based on local panchayat led directly by the king.

After two years of the dissolution of the government, the new constitution of December 16, 1962 created a four tier panchayat system. At the local level, there were village assemblies (gram sabha) and at the highest level National Panchayat or Rashtriya Panchayat in Kathmandu. In addition, there were class organizations at village, district and zonal level for peasants, youth, women, elders, labourers and ex-soldiers who elected their own representatives to assemblies. The National Panchayat of about 90 members could not criticize the royal government, debate the principles of partyless democracy, introduce budgetary bills without royal approval or enact bills without approval of the king. King Mahendra was the supreme commander of the armed forces and had the power to appoint or remove members of the

Supreme Court. He could appoint the Public Service Commission to oversee the civil services and could change any judicial decision or amend the constitution at any time. Thus, within a span of 10 years, the king had in fact reclaimed the sovereign power exercised by Prithvi Narayan Shah in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Founded on the idea of having a system 'suitable to the soil' by King Mahendra, the panchayat polity was marked by a partyless system that emphasized decentralization while class coordination was to be implemented 'only through active and dynamic leadership of the crown'. The first election to the National Panchayat was held in March-April 1963. Although officially political parties were banned and the major opposition parties publicly refused to participate, about one-third of the members of the legislature were associated with the Nepali Congress. King's rule was supported by the Army and bureaucracy. Real power came from the King's Secretariat while in the countryside influence rested in the offices of zonal commissioners and their official staff or the parallel system of development officers.

### **Political Turmoil**

In 1972 after the death of King Mahendra, his son Birendra ascended to throne. In 1980, a referendum approved a modified version of the Panchayat system and direct parliamentary elections were held in 1981. During 1989-90 the demand for political reforms inflamed. The People's Movement in 1990 was a multiparty movement in Nepal that brought an end to absolute monarchy and also eliminated the Panchayat system. It was the beginning of constitutional democracy. The movement was marked by a unity between the various political parties. Not only various communist parties group together in the United Left Front but they also cooperated with parties like Nepali Congress which resulted in the formation of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist – Leninist). In 1990, the two groups, the Nepali Congress – a pro-democracy group and the largest illegal political party in the country and the United Left Front, a coalition of communist and leftist parties, joined to launch a campaign to achieve multiparty democracy in Nepal. The people's movement officially started on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1990 which is known as 'Democracy Day' in Nepal. In order to stall the movement, the government arrested national and district level leaders on 17 February 1990 and banned all opposition newspapers. The movement became increasingly large and dangerous. It has called bandhs that quickly spread across the country.

Over the course of several days, police shot and killed dozens of people as protesters blocked streets, taunted police officers and paraded flags demanding the restoration of the multiparty democratic system of 1950s. At the climax of the protests, people surrounded government buildings, urging the king to accept their demands. The King under pressure removed the ban on political parties on April 8, 1990. He dissolved parliament and in April 1990, the opposition formed an interim government. A new constitution was framed with constitutional monarchy and bicameral legislature consisting of House of Representatives and a National Council. This constitution came into force on November 9, 1990. It has guaranteed the freedom, dignity and economic well-being of the people. The constitution forced King Birendra to handover decisions of government to the Nepali people. Through rallies

and protests, king was convinced to enforce a new constitution of the people and identifies the people as the source of political legitimacy.

Multi-party legislative elections were held in May 1991 in which Nepali Congress won the elections while communist party remained in the opposition. The political parties too reached to an agreement that the monarchy would remain to enhance political stability and provide an important symbol of national identity for the culturally diverse Nepali people. The king will exercise limited powers including the right to declare a state of emergency in the event of war or revolt with the advice and consent of Council of Ministers and Prime Minister. According to the constitution, the King's declaration of a state of emergency must be approved by two-third majority of the lower house of parliament.

Meanwhile, the government lost its parliamentary vote and therefore Communist Party of Nepal and Unified Marxist and Leninist formed minority government. It was the first communist led monarchy in Asia with Man Mohan Adhikari as Prime Minister.

The parliament was dissolved once again due to certain disputes in Nepali Congress Party in mid of 1994 and the elections were held in November 1994. Unfortunately, none of the political party got majority which led to unstable coalition government for several years.

In 1994 Samyukta Jana Morcha (SJM) was split in two fractions. The militant fraction renamed itself the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). They labelled the government forces as 'feudal forces' and included in his accusation was the monarchy and the main stream political parties. Maoist launch an armed struggle to try to tumble the monarchy with simultaneous attacks on remote police stations and district headquarters. Initially the Nepali government mobilized the Nepali police to contain the insurgency. The Royal Nepali Army had no involvement in direct fighting. Furthermore, controversy grew regarding the army not assisting the police during insurgent attacks in remote areas. The popularly elected Prime Minister resigned due to the refusal of the Royal Army to take part in the conflict.

In February 1996 Maoist started violent insurgency in more than 50-70 districts in which about 13000 police staff, civilians and insurgents have been killed in the conflict. However, the political scenario took a dramatic turn following the royal massacre on June 1, 2001 in which King Birendra and his family members were killed. Gyanendra became the king of Nepal. In July 2001, Prime Minister Sen Bahadur Deuba announced a ceasefire with the Maoist. In return, Maoist observed ceasefire too as part of an effort of government to seek negotiated solution to the conflict, but failed. Even after the meeting with the government, intimidation and extortion continued from both sides and the talks were held in August-September 2001.

King Gyanendra took several steps to derail the democratic system. He dissolved the parliament along with the local bodies like the District Development Committees, Village Development Committees and Municipalities in 2002. He declared fresh elections amidst political confrontation on the issue of extending the state of emergency. In 2005, he assumed absolute power and direct control to crush the Maoist and later lifted the emergency after three months under international pressure. The freedom of expression and people's power was largely curtailed. He suspended the

parliament on 1 February 2005 and appointed a government led by himself and enforced martial law. His argument was that the civil politicians were unfit to handle the Maoist insurgency. Communication system was shut down and several high profile leaders were detained. Many of the Maoist leaders were provided safe havens in Indian territory. Also, the Indian Government stopped supplying arms and ammunition to the Nepalese Army. It facilitated coordination between the seven political parties of Nepal and the Maoist with the objective of peace, democracy, prosperity, social advancement and a free and sovereign Nepal. On 22 November 2005, the SPA and the Maoist agreed on a historic and extraordinary 12 point memorandum of understanding (MOU) for peace and democracy. Nepalese from various sections of people and the international community regarded the MOU as an appropriate political response to the developing crisis in Nepal. India also supported the democratic movement in Nepal. There was growing hostilities between the monarchical institution and the political parties which led to a countrywide revolution for Loktantrik Andolan in April 2006. It lasted for about nineteen days. All political forces including civil societies and professional organizations actively organized the people. This resulted in massive and spontaneous demonstrations and rallies across Nepal against King Gyanendra autocratic rule. During the movement many people were killed which were estimated as 18000 by Maoist and the security forces. People's participation was huge, historic and persistent that frightened the king of being overthrown. King Gyanendra was compelled to give up power and historically reinstated the old Nepal House of Representatives on 24 April 2006 and called upon the SPA to bear the responsibility of taking the nation on the path of national unity and prosperity. The SPA accepted the proposal and declared that G. P. Koirala would lead the government. The new parliament will hold elections for a body that would write a new constitution.

Initially the Maoists rejected the move and their demand was the formation of a constituent assembly with the abolition of monarchy. But later they accepted the democratic process. On May 2, 2006 Koirala announced the cabinet of new government with four ministers. The most dramatic move of the government came on 18 May 2006 when the parliament unanimously voted to curtail much of the King's powers and eliminated the kings' position as the Supreme Commander of the Army. This Act was described as a Nepalese Magna Carta which declared Nepal a secular country instead of a Hindu Kingdom. Therefore May 18, 2006 has been called as 'Loktantrik Day'.

Although, the interim constitution 2007 was accepted, it was always intended to be temporary. G. P. Koirala after been sworn as Prime Minister began talks with rebels and sign a peace deal with rebel chief Prachanda to end a war that resulted in deaths of more than 13,000 people.

On 23 December 2007, an agreement was made to abolish monarchy and the establishment of a federal republic with Prime Minister as head of the state. Soon uprising begins in the ethnic minorities (Madhesi population) in Southern population of Nepal in favour of inclusion of federal system, new delimitation of electoral constituencies in constitution and greater inclusion of Madhesis in all government bodies and formation of autonomous Madhesi state.

In the election for CA-I in 2008, United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) emerged as the largest political party.

Consequently the Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda became the Prime Minister of coalition government. He promised to introduce radical economic reforms with a view to making 'New Nepal'. Soon, the CA-I abolished the 239 years old monarchical institution and declared the country a Republic in May 2008. Ram Baran Yadav became first President of Nepal. It was hoped that under the new political dispensation, the CA-I would write a new constitution to strengthen the democratic system. CPN and UML joined the government but Nepali Congress decided to sit in the opposition. The government agreed to enact a constitution replacing the interim constitution by 2010. Soon the country's situation started to deteriorate and political turmoil continued. Prachanda fell into a dispute with the then Army Chief Rookmangrat Katwal and decided to relieve him from his duties. But President Ram Baran Yadav as the Supreme Head of military power revoked this decision. Prachanda and his party quit the government to operate as the main opposition of the government.

The government then was led by CPN-UML and its co-partner Nepali Congress. Madhav Kumar Nepal who had lost 2008 election became the Prime Minister in May 2009. However, this government too could not last long due to non-cooperation and power oriented behaviour of the political parties. He resigned on 30 June, 2010 under pressure from the Maoists in a row over the control of the army and the integration of former fighters into regular forces. Mr. Nepal was running a caretaker government and there was not a functioning government till February 2011. The deadlock was finally resolved when the Maoists, the largest single party decided to withdraw their own candidate and to support Jhala Nath Khanal, the chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal and leader of the constituent assembly parliamentary party of the CPN. Jhala Nath Khanal was elected new Prime Minister in February 2011 after more than seven months of stalemate. His immediate task included the preparation of new republican constitution by May 28, 2011 deadline and negotiating the future of some 20,000 Maoist combatants. In the beginning he gained good popularity due to some of his works. He decided to use Mustang Jeep made in Nepal rather than using expensive foreign vehicles. He initiated a new system of direct communication with public through e-mails. He has his own website to keep track of his work. He started long pending road extension work in Kathmandu which make him more popular.

On the contrary, forced closures or bandhas were increasing and new political parties and groups were emerging with various demands. Political leaders tried to end the turmoil but none of the talks became successful. Rising inflation, economic downturn, poverty, insecurity and uncertainty were the major problems prevailing in the country. But Jhala Nath Khanal during his seven months rule had no effective government and therefore failed to reach compromise with opposition on new constitution and fate of former Maoist fighters. Therefore, in August 2011, parliament elected Maoist Party's Baburam Bhattarai as Prime Minister. After assuming office, he promised to put together a cross-party consensus over the new constitution and the Maoist fighters conundrum. Despite repeated extensions CA-I failed to draft a new constitution for two important reasons : one was the delineation of the states under the federal structure and the other was the issue of empowering either the President or the

Prime Minister. Therefore CA-I was dissolved on May 2012 and called elections. Nevertheless, Nepal created a new milestone when the Maoist fighters who were living in the cantonments either took voluntary retirement or were integrated with the Nepalese army. A political deadlock prevailed in the country until the Chief Justice of Nepal's Supreme Court, Khil Raj Regmi was made head of the interim government of Nepal with the objective of conducting elections for the second Constituent Assembly (CA II). He successfully conducted the elections of CA II on November 19, 2013. As no political party got majority and political deadlock took place, political power was transferred to Nepali Congress leader Sushil Koirala as Prime Minister after seeking coalition support on 11 February 2014. But even several months after the elections of CA II, it did not take full shape as the requirement for nominating 26 members did not fully completed and the controversial issues such as state restructuring and the form of government had not been addressed. However, CA II had been agreed to make a beginning for the issues that were left unresolved. In CA I, the Maoists and the Madhesi parties were dominant advocating an identity based federation like India while in CA-II there is dominance of moderate political parties like the Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal and Unified Maoist Leninist which were not in favour of ethnicity based federalism. They want to maintain status-quo by restructuring the federal states more on the north-south axis and by and large against the formation of 'One Madhesh, One Pradesh'. Another important issue for the CA-II to decide on whether the country should be declared a Hindu State or remain Secular as declared in 2008 at the initiative of radical forces. This was as far back as in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that Prithvi Narayan Shah, the king who unified Nepal and called Nepal the real 'Hindustan'.

However, the task of constitution making was not easy in Nepal which has a population of 29 million with 125 ethnic groups, 127 spoken languages, dozens of castes and three different eco-systems. In the 601 members CA II abstentionism was most pervasive which have made mockery of Nepalese democracy. Usually, not even one-fourth of the total number of CA II members were present. Along with this the executive head of the nation, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala was suffering from cancer and was known for his indecisiveness, inactiveness and lack of accountability. However, the constitution dialogue and consensus committee of CA II submitted its report to the chairman of CA II Subhas Chandra Newbang on September 7, 2014 with a list of both settled and unsettled issues in the new constitution. There had not been any consensus on such crucial issues as- the federal structure of government, judiciary and election system of the country within the deadline by September 6, 2014.

Nepal's CA II promulgated constitution on 20 September 2015 amid protests by Madhesi parties and other ethnic groups in Southern lowland- Madhesis, Tharus, Janjatis, Dalits and some others, seeking more territory and devolved rights under newly adopted federal constitution. In such circumstances Khadga Prasad Oli, leader of Communist party of Nepal (Unified Marxist – Leninist) assumed office as the eighth Prime Minister of Nepal since the formation of CA-I in 2008 on 12 October 2015 under the newly adopted constitution of Nepal preceded by Sushil Koirala with President Ram Baran Yadav. After seven years long exercise, the first democratic

constitution was finally passed. It was a historic step for the nation that has seen a war, a palace massacre and devastating earthquakes since a campaign to create a modern state began more than 65 years ago. President Ram Baran Yadav promulgated the charter intended to unite the country. It creates 7 states in a secular federal system but is opposed by some groups who wanted to re-establish Nepal as a Hindu nation and others who feel it unfavourable to people in the plains near India.

Demonstrations in the lowlands were met with a tough response from Kathmandu. The views of government were that an imperfect document is better than nothing and the constitution can be amended to reflect the aspirations of dissenting groups. Several governments have come and gone in the interim constitution period since 2008.

However instead of using his political authority to push through the necessary amendments and get the alienated Madhesis on board, he dug in his heels. He blamed India for backing the Madhesis agitation and imposing an economic blockade on Nepal which resulted in serious difficulties in the country making serious efforts to recover from the devastating April 2015 earthquake. The Madhesis agitation could be called off but there was simmering discontent and unrest across the Terai. In this atmosphere of political uncertainty and a dysfunctional government, Nepal's reconstruction efforts have suffered.

Though the constitution has been said to be the most progressive in Asia guaranteeing equal rights to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and providing representation for the same in government mechanisms. Yet there are a number of criticisms of the constitution. Groups of traditionally marginalized people fear that the constitution will work against them. The major grievances from the different stakeholders on the constitution are as follows:

- Lower percentage of parliament members 45% being elected by proportional representation compared to 58% in the interim constitution. The higher proportion meant more representation from the marginalized communities in the parliament.
- Madhesis are demanding withdrawal of army deployment from their regions, greater autonomy and representation, a separate state for Madhesis and election constituencies based on population.
- Low percentage of dalit population in various forms of government bodies should be corrected through proportional representation based on positive discrimination.
- Janjatis are not satisfied as the constitution does not provide for identity based ethnic states and it does not recognize their community's rights.
- Women's rights activists have criticized the constitution as patriarchal with provisions 'couples have equal rights to family property' but excluding access to inheritance for unmarried women.
- In the constitution Nepal has been declared as secular state, its laws are being interpreted as mere oriented towards Hindu religion. For instance – the criminal code has a maximum sentence of 12 years for killing a cow, though cows are required for cultural practice of some groups.

There have been massive protests since the constitution was passed in CA-2 with almost 90% approval. Both within and outside the country new constitution was welcomed by one community and criticized by other. Even after 100 days of the promulgation of constitution, a series of protests, especially in the Terai Madheshi region of Nepal continues as they labelled it discriminatory. However, immediately after the promulgation of the constitution the ruling political parties including Nepali Congress and CPN-UML celebrated 'Diwali' while the Madheshi political parties and Thamhat struggle committee observed it as a black day. The Madhesis and Tharus were sidelined in the entire constitution making process due to the prevailing distrust towards them among the mainstream political parties. Consequently, none of the major Madheshi based parties signed the constitution which has serious flaw. The new constitution has a provision for a 165 members' parliament but the constituencies have been demarcated in such a way that the people of the hill and mountain region would get 100 seats despite the fact that their share in Nepal's total population is less than 50 percent. On other hand, the Terai region constituting over half of the country's population has been allocated only 65 seats.

After one year of devastating earthquake on 14 April 2015 in Nepal, Kathmandu rocked political tremors. Prime Minister Oli barely managed to stave off a looming crisis at his coalition partner Maoist – UCPN (M) who threatened to withdraw support. On May 4, 2016 Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahl 'Prachanda' has given vent to his unhappiness with the government's performance on post earthquake reconstruction and lack of progress on the constitutional amendment process and announced that the Maoist were withdrawing support from the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist – Leninist) UML led government. However, his real source of unhappiness was that the cases registered against the Maoist cadres during the insurgency had not been withdrawn despite repeated assurance of Prime Minister Oli. Mr. Prachanda have already got assurance from Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba and the likeminded groups to form the government.

In such circumstances, Prime Minister Oli was ready to handover power if the parties agreed to form a national consensus government. However, it was not possible at that moment and this was also favourable to Prime Minister Oli. The people of Nepal also wanted the continuance of Oli government for the implementation of various agreements on development.

Though once again, opposition parties made efforts to topple the Oli's government as no confidence vote was tabled against Prime Minister Oli by 254 members before the Parliament Secretariat on July 13, 2016. Prime Minister Oli sent his resignation to the President to avoid no confidence vote. His resignation have plunged the country in a fresh turmoil. President Bhandari called on all the political parties on 25 July 2016 to elect a new Prime Minister based on consensus to end the political instability in the country. CPN Maoist President Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachand' was elected on 3 August 2016 as Prime Minister by the Parliament. He has the support of largest political party Nepali Congress, the Madhesis and other fringe political parties. He assumed office on 4 August 2016 with the promise to lead the nation towards development while working as a bridge between communities following protests over constitution.

However, doubts have expressed by various groups and media about the stability of the government, as there is no agreement between parties on the basic agenda for the country. They have only agreed for convenience and there is already a deal to change the Prime Minister after nine months.

The frequent changes in government in Nepal have badly hampered the country's development and economic growth. Even after the promulgation of new constitution, there is no sign of political stability in Nepal. The game of toppling and forming the government still dominates the national political arena.

With the forgoing discussions on the political turmoil in Nepal and several ups and downs for the democracy in Nepal, it becomes clear that Nepal's democratic system is in its embryonic stage which is facing several challenges from various fronts.

### Challenges to Democracy in Nepal

First and most important challenge is that Nepal being traditional and pluralistic society, the participation of different minority groups in governance and decision-making process is an important aspect in this direction. A few caste groups exercise excessive domination in all important spheres of national life. Hence, it has become imperative that major reforms in political institutions must be carried out in view of the inclusion of marginalized ethnic groups proportionately in the political process.

The role of monarchy is another significant issue. History shows that democracy and the role of monarchy in Nepal have become contradictory and hostile to each other. Now, on the question of monarchy, the disagreement persists among the masses which must be addressed properly. Similarly, democratization of Nepalese army is another important task to be tackled. Apart from this to decide mode of devolution and demobilization of the Maoist cadre and reintegration of the politically trained People's Liberation Army (PLA) with the national army is the most challenging aspect of democracy in Nepal.

Despite the fact that the political parties are the backbone of multiparty democracy, the people of Nepal have accused the leaders of political parties for the constant erosion of democratic norms and values. They think that political parties are mostly power oriented and responsible for political instability. Intense power struggle, rampant corruption, favouritism and nepotism, monopoly and abuse of power are some fundamental challenges which need to be addressed for strengthening democratic ethos in Nepal.

Rising expectation of the people and international community is also a serious challenge before the democratic government. The first step to end the old order, the state has to implement a sustainable economic agenda that addresses widespread poverty and massive unemployment, severely skewed resource distribution patterns and centrally controlled planning and resource allocation system of development.

Last but not the least, demilitarization of Maoists is another worrying factor in democratic consolidation. The commitment of Maoists to come in open and competitive multiparty politics is a significant development. But the most challenging task is to get the Maoists to give up their arms.

### Conclusions

After the promulgation of constitution, there was an expectation among the people that Nepal would embark on a journey of political stability resulting in economic growth and development. But these expectations have been trashed as political parties are still first and foremost vying for power. Due to the lack of political stability economic growth has completely stalled, triggering unemployment which pushed millions of youth abroad for jobs. With this political situation foreign investors are reluctant for investments in Nepal and domestic industries are too facing a lot of challenges. Alongwith this Nepal is yet to heal the wounds of earthquake.

However if the government and the main political parties are really serious about defusing the present crisis and strengthen democracy, they should accept it as a political problem. They should take steps to unite all ethnicities including Madhesis and the Tharus and develop faith in the new constitution by initiating a dialogue with such groups. An effort should also be made to address some of the genuine demands put by these groups. Their main demands are as follows:-

- Formation of two autonomous states in the Terai, one extending from Jhapa to Parasa to be called 'Mithila State' with Janakpur as its capital and the other from Chitwan to Kanchanpur to be called 'Buddha State' with Lumbini as its capital.
- Reservation of seats for the Madhesis and the Tharus in administrative, security, judiciary and diplomatic services on the basis of their population.
- Adequate representation of the Madhesis and the Tharus in the decision making process in all constitutional bodies including public service commission at the central and state level.
- Formation of an independent commission to investigate the excesses committed by the security forces and punish the culprits and provision of adequate compensation for those killed and injured during the agitation.

For the success of democracy in Nepal an adequate care must be taken to accommodate the genuine aspirations of a substantial cross section of people otherwise the ongoing crisis may deepen causing trouble for one and all in Nepal.

Despite the challenges, the massive advances have taken place in the Nepalese constitutional development. Nepal has moved from constitutional monarchy to republic, from unitary system to a federal one and a secular state from a Hindu nation. Along with these, there is a mixed electoral system, affirmative action, additional fundamental rights and a one-third guarantee of women representation in the federal parliament. The present constitution is flexible to amendments and therefore will continue to reflect the desires of the Nepali nation. However, it is necessary for all the political parties to display restraint, maturity and flexibility to end the recent crisis and ensure that the dialogue will benefit for the proper implementation of the historic charter.

Unless the major political parties come together, there cannot be progress on addressing the key issues facing by the country- rebuilding after earthquake, implementation of constitution, economic growth and developments. The leaders have difficult task to make the roots of democracy deepen in the Nepal's social system.

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