

# Nepali Politics: Political Parties, Political Crisis and Problem of Governance

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Usually an organization is created to perform one particular function. When that function is no longer needed, the organization faces a major crisis. It either finds a new function or reconciles itself to a lingering death (Huntington, 1965).

Nepali politics is in a state of transitional flux. The initial transition phase, backed by the spirit of the 1990 popular movement and restoration of multi-party system in April 1990, promulgation of a new Constitution in November 1990, general elections 1991 and local elections 1992, was smooth in demolishing partyless panchayat structures and setting up democratic institutions. The stability of the obtaining democratic structures is ensured by the Constitution providing for popular sovereignty, constitutional monarchy, multi-party parliamentary system, and fundamental rights of citizens as unamendable (Constitution, 1990). The avowed commitment to the fundamental principles of the Constitution by both the rightist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and several leftist splinter groups, irrespective of their different ideological stands in the past, showed how the first phase of transition was successful in setting up democratic structure and in assimilating major ideological and political forces into the mainstream of parliamentary process. The first phase of transition came to an abrupt end with the defeat of the ruling Nepali Congress (NC) in the 1994 mid-term elections (Kumar, 1995).

Nepali politics has entered into the second phase of transition towards consolidating democracy. But contrary to expectations, democracy in its functional attributes, overwhelmed by power centric intra-party and inter-party conflicts, is widely perceived as eroding. It has manifested in the instability of the government since the emergence of a hung parliament after the 1994 mid-term elections. In the last five years (November 1994- May 1999), Nepal had experienced 8 governments of different types and nature, chronologically: 1) Communist Party of Nepal, Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML)' minority government (November 1994-September 1995), 2) NC led Center-Right coalition government with RPP and Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP) (September 1995-March 1997), 3) RPP led Right-Left government with UML and NSP (March 1997-October 1997), 4) RPP led Right-Center government with NC and NSP (October 1997-April 1998), 5) NC' minority government (April-August 1998), 6) NC led Center-Left government with Communist Party of Nepal, Marxist-Leninist (ML), a new splinter party out of the UML, and NSP (August-December 1998), 7) NC' minority government (December 1998) and 8) NC led Centre-Left government with UML and NSP (December 1998- May 1999).

The frequent change in the government has proved the degenerating nature of Nepali politics into a naked power struggle. In recurring plots of government making and unmaking, the power contenders spare no foul tricks i.e. bribe, horse trading, blackmail, abduction of some unreliable incumbent ministers and law makers, conspiracy, manipulation of constitutional loopholes etc. The use of such nefarious means in power politics leads to political and constitutional crisis that surface in more than one ways: the court's political intervention to curtail executive power and prerogative in favour of constitutional monarchy; confrontation between executive

and judiciary and also between executive and legislature; blatant violation of parliamentary norms and values by parliamentarians themselves; flouting the spirit of party system with several records of defiance of the party's whip in parliament leading to split some major political parties, UML and RPP; decline in moral standard of the power elite because of excessive manipulation of power or *Lucknowi loot* of state resources for personal benefit (Sharma, 2000); and widespread public apathy and disillusionment regarding politics, government, political parties and leadership. In sum, democracy in Nepal has suffered from the weakening of norms and value based politics, erosion in leadership quality, power centric intra-party conflicts, unhealthy inter-party competition, cynical manipulation of constitutional provisions, instability of the government, incompetent governance, excessive political intervention particularly in bureaucracy and educational institutions, pervasive corruption, and mismanagement, irresponsibility and unaccountability in the public sphere.

The crisis emerging with hung parliament is expected to end by the result of the 1999 general elections since it brought back a two-party system- similar to the post-1991 elections- with NC' majority government and UML as the main opposition in parliament. The contesting parties, NC and UML in particular, during their election campaigns, projected "a system of majority government" as panacea to all problems facing the country. Besides, they stressed for majority government considering it as indispensable for political stability, good governance and development (Khanal & Hachhethu, 1999). But, the NC government led by Krishna Prashad Bhattarai was accused as incompetent to govern the country and on this ground he was compelled to resign after holding the post of prime minister for ten months. Girija. P. Koirala succeeded Bhattarai as the prime minister of the Congress government in March 2000. But the return of Koirala to the highest post of the government makes no substantial difference in the style of governance. The national crisis emerging since the time of hung parliament remains standstill and even escalating over time.

This paper will try to explore the problems of transitional politics in Nepal with the perspective of party politics prevailing since the restoration of democracy in 1990. Beside the fact that political parties are like steersmen in the multi-party system, party politics has been considered as the main instrument of analysis with the assumption that "One of the most difficult obstacles facing the new democracies in their efforts at democratic consolidation is weakly institutionalized party system" (Mainwaring, 1998). The first section of this paper deals with the nature and character of Nepali political parties after they transformed from the movement parties into competitive parliamentary parties. The second section will try to establish certain correlation between the problems of party building and the emergence of political and constitutional crisis impeding a smooth and healthy democratic transition. The third section briefly assesses the problems of governance.

### **Transformation of Political Parties**

The restoration of democracy through the 1990 popular movement was a landmark for party transformation. Previously, parties existed as symbol of opposition since they originated in the late 1940s on the eve of the 1950-51 armed revolution against the century old Rana oligarchy, and these evolved as movement organizations against the partyless panchayat system for the last three decades between 1960-1990. With the reinstatement of multi-party system, the role and functions of political

parties changed from that of illegal organizations to legitimate power contenders. Theorists of party change stipulate that the development of the party from birth to maturity appeared with marked change in the party's goal and activities (Michel, 1968; Kirchheimer, 1966 and Panabinaco, 1988). The transformation of Nepali political parties from the phase of movement organizations into competitive parliamentary parties appears to be characterized by 4-Ds: Development, De-ideologization, Disintegration and De-linking.

*Development:* Nepali political parties during their movement phase had weak organizational base. In the post 1990 period, the NC and the UML appeared successful in expanding their support bases among different sections of society. NC's "active members" increased from approximately 30,000-32,000 in the early '1990s (Khatri, 1992) to around 121,000 at the end of 1999. The UML's "organized members" recorded 85,000 in February 2000 (Luintal, 2000). Both parties have developed their organizational strength intensively and extensively, constituting the party's formal units on spatial lines down to the grass-roots level all over the country and creating several affiliated organizations from most caste, community, class, occupation and professional groups. Besides, with the realization of organizational growth and role multiplication, each of them has diversified their own organizational structures based on division of labour and functional specialization. In addition to the party's main structure and affiliated organizations, both NC and UML have a variety of sub-structures, i.e. party in public office composed of the party's elected representatives only, coordination committee constituted by a mixture of the party office bearers and the party's elected representatives, several area based departments/committees, each dealing with areas of their own jurisdiction i.e. party organization, research, training, publicity, foreign affairs, etc.

Unlike in advanced democratic countries where parties tend to attract the people through the formulation of attractive policies and programmes, Nepali political parties seem to rely more on maximization of party members and supporters and thereby naming it organizational development. This idea of party building has temporary appeal, however, reverse trend has started over time. The people's enthusiasm for seeking party affiliation and association, that appeared immediately in the aftermath of successful people's movement, has now turned into people's apathy towards and disillusionment of the parties and their leaders. The parties' rank and file leaders show no interest in party building. One of the major reasons behind the apathy of the people and the partymen's lack of motivation to involve actively in party politics is the erosion of ideology.

*De-ideologization:* Most of Nepali political parties originated along ideological lines. A party's ideology is a composite frame of its faith in certain kind of political system, its goal, its policy and programme, and norms and values it sets up for collective behaviour. Looking back to the principle doctrine enunciated by each party at the time of their formation, the major parties at present represent three different ideological groups: the NC symbolizes the multi-party system; the UML professed one-party communist system; and the RPP is popularly considered as a party of former panchas with their political background of being ardent advocates of partyless panchayat system. A major ideological breakthrough was made by each of the UML and the RPP giving up their initial faith in one-party system and partyless system respectively in the changed context after they emerged as power contenders under

parliamentary democracy. It is understood that a party aspiring for power can not continue as doctrinal party. But the change of the party's goal from ideological persuasion to power quest has primarily worked as a catalyst for de-ideologation process in the parties. The case of the UML could be cited here. As much as its prospect of gaining power under the existing system brightened, particularly after its emergence as the major opposition party after the 1991 parliamentary elections, its tactical and qualified support to the newly achieved multi-party democracy have been transformed to its commitment to the fundamental principles of liberal democracy since the party's Fifth National Congress, held in February 1993, passed the resolution of *Janatako Bahudaliya Janbad* (People's Multi-party Democracy, n.d). Nevertheless the ideological ambiguity is characteristic of the UML as it still retains its stand in relation to the republican system as its goal and anti-India and anti-West coloured nationalism. Such official stand had no doubt been abandoned later by a pronouncement of its General Secretary Madhav Nepal in early 1996 when the party was looking for the Palace's backing and neutralization of external factors in its strategy to regain power through making a coalition with a faction of the RPP against the then incumbent Centre-Right government led by NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba. Despite change of political equation from a hung parliament to the majority government of the NC after the 1999 elections, the UML has somehow maintained political alliance with the Palace and former panchas. It was manifested by the UML' backing to Ramesh Nath Pandey's (King's nominee) unsuccessful bid for the Chairman of National Council in 1999. Later, the UML' members of National Council voted to Mohammad Mohshin (a leader of RPP) who was elected as the Chairman of the National Council of the parliament.

Despite the abandonment of their original doctrines, each party's separate identity remains alive in the mind of the people: the NC as liberal and centrist; the UML as leftists and progressive; and the RPP as rightist and conservative. Such identities remain unchanged by the way they present themselves before the people. With its pet slogan "peace, stability, democracy and development" the NC has built up its separate identity different from that of other parties. The UML has retained its revolutionary image with the communist jargon, "bread for hungry, work for the unemployed, land for the landless, and shelter for the homeless." The RPP projects itself with its leaders' past experiences of governance, its faith in monarchy and its nationalist propaganda against India. But such differences have not been backed up in terms of policy and programmes, particularly while they were/are in power. Rather, the distinct identity of each of the given parties has constantly eroded in different ways after the restoration of democracy. The NC no longer remains as a political forum of social democrats since its open door policy for party recruitment has been defended with its quest for new credential, defining the party as "an ocean where all rivers can mingle" (NC National Conference, 1991). The NC thrust for its expansion to become a "broader political platform" instead of an "ideological family" has been rationalized with its quest for vote maximization. The UML too, for its electoral interest, initiated its alliance with the RPP a number of times, more distinctly at the time of local elections in 1992 and in 1997, nevertheless it officially treated the RPP as "reactionary". The politics of hung parliament gave further impetus to de-ideologization considerably as politics of compromise dominated the political scene. Thus a critic observes, "What was left in the "Left" party was easily diluted when the undivided CPN (UML) accepted the leadership of a former panchayat Prime Minister (Lokendra Bahadur Chand) and other compromises made for grabbing power at the

cost of its identity” (Baral, 2000). Almost all parliamentary parties have, time and again, abruptly disregarded their own distinct political identity for the sake of power. The quest for power cuts ideology and identity of these parties, as witnessed in coalition building of parties with distinct identities during the second parliament (1994-1999). One could therefore conclude that Nepali political parties, from the onset of transformation from movement into parliamentary parties, appear as power seeking organizations whose primary goal is to attain and retain power even at the cost of party ideology and identity.

*Disintegration:* De-ideologization of Nepali political parties, in the course of their transformation from movement to parliamentary parties, meant the emergence of power as the single most determining factor in party politics. The potential of a party to be in power not only helps in expanding its support base beyond its ideological clientele it also some times served for integration. The power element is one of the factors which has saved the NC from major breakdown, once helped the UML to expedite its development as the mainstream of left forces, and paved the way for the unity of two separate RPPs in 1992. However, power is, after all, a source of conflict and ideology the source of unity. In this context as power replaced ideology as the predominant factor in party politics after the restoration of democracy, the political parties have turned into conflict-ridden organizations and each of them is suffering from major or minor splits. Thus, as a scholar has rightly observed, "In the period of transformation, there is an inevitable process of disintegration" of political party (Brass, 1965).

In the late 1994 when the unity, cohesion and discipline in the NC party was completely disrupted, a small group of people left the party and formed a separate political platform in the name of *Jaana Jagaran Abhiyan* under the inspiration and patronage of late Ganesh Man Singh, one of the founding leaders of the NC. This split was a culmination of a series of internal power conflicts among the party troika leaders (the then prime minister Girija P. Koirala, party President Krishna P. Bhattarai and party Supremo Ganesh Man Singh) and factions led by each leader. The internal crisis of the NC was a prelude to differences arose among its top leaders in regard to political appointments in the early phase of the NC government. It was later aggravated one after another by subsequent developments i.e. cabinet reshuffle in December 1991 by prime minister Koirala solely on his own discretion, candidacy of the then party president Bhattarai in the February 1994 by-elections aiming to dislodge Koirala from his position as prime minister, defeat of Bhattarai as a consequence of *antarghat* (sabotaging) by the Koirala faction, the absence of NC' 35 members of House of Representatives (HOR) at the time of voting on the government's annual policy and programmes leading to the collapse of the Koirala government, dissolution of the HOR abruptly and the call for mid-term poll by prime minister Koirala completely ignoring party leaders, and the contest in mid-term polls by rebel Congress candidates in several numbers against the party's official candidates.

After the defeat of the party in the 1994 mid-term poll, the NC has gradually regained some unity in the party. But the unity in an organization without strong backing of ideology or competent leadership will always be fragile. NC's top leaders Krishna P. Bhattarai and Girija P. Koirala are no longer unchallenged and undisputed in the party. In consideration of the massive erosion in the quality of their leadership,

their positions appear to have degenerated from that of leaders into that of bosses who command the organizations by virtue of their control of the party resources, particularly in patronage and ticket distribution. The reacquisition of party unity in a different sort was exposed time and again. A serious problem arose when a coalition government led by Sher Bahadur Deuba collapsed in March 1997 due to the betrayal by NC' two members of the HOR by their abstaining in a vote of confidence, in which the government received only 101 votes, sort of 2 votes for the required number of 103 in the total 205 members of the HOR. The party unity was once again put into jeopardy in December 1997 when the former president Krishna P. Bhattarai threatened to split the party (*Deshantar*, 1997) on the ground that he felt he had been ignored by president Girija P. Koirala in taking a number of important decisions. The NC, however, managed the problems preventing the party from split through maintaining a balance among the influential leaders and major factional groups. Girija P. Koirala's public announcement of Krishna P. Bhattarai as the NC candidate for prime minister could be seen, in one perspective, as a strategy to pacify the factors of internal dissension in the 1999 parliamentary elections.

But soon after Krishna P. Bhattarai became the prime minister, power centric internal conflicts resurfaced in the NC. Reacting to the question of the Bhattarai government's performance, Girija P. Koirala responded, "No work is good work" (*Nepal Press Digest*, September 13, 1999). This was supplementary to his observation, "Despite its majority in the parliament, the government has created an environment of ominous silence instead of infusing enthusiasm among the people" (*Nepal Press Digest*, September 20, 1999). Accusing the Bhattarai government for its incompetence, Girija P. Koirala cultivated his influence among the majority of the NC' MPs which ultimately forced Bhattarai for his resignation from the post of prime minister on March 16, 1999. With a majority of 69 against 43 votes of Sher Bahadur Deuba among the NC members of the HOR, Girija P. Koirala became Leader of the NC' Parliamentary Party. But from the day Koirala took oath as new prime minister many speculate that he will soon have to face the same faith of Krishna P. Bhattarai. This speculation is likely to turn into reality since the power equation in the NC' Parliamentary Party is, reportedly, changing in favour of the anti-Koirala faction. These events suggest the lack of strong and cohesive leadership in the NC. So, the party unity and cohesion at present largely hangs on a weak device, its ability in maintaining balance in sharing of power among the party's influential persons and factions. The situation in other political parties is no different.

As a consequence of the failure of the UML to maintain a balance among its heavyweight leaders, it suffered from a major split in March 1998 with the formation of ML. Had not the party undergone de-ideologization, perhaps it could have prevented the split as it had successfully resolved a number of serious internal crisis in the past. In aftermath of the restoration democracy, internal factions based on differences on the party' ideology (People's Multiparty Democracy versus Refined People's Democracy), on its official stand on Integrated Mahakali River Treaty with India (1996), on the question of making coalition with the RPP, and on several other issues had surfaced. But as much as the UML expedited towards the direction of becoming a "catch all party" to capture power, ideology and issues had become peripheral and instrumental in power-centric personality clash among its top leaders. Nevertheless, for public consumption and rationalization of the party split, the newly split ML has tended to raise the strident communist rhetoric of achieving *Janatako*

*Janabadi Ganatantratmak Vyabastha* (Kantipur, 1998) republican utopia and ultra-nationalist stand against India and the West. The roots behind the disintegration of the UML goes back to the time of the formation of its minority government when a demand for resignation of the then deputy-prime minister Madhav Nepal from the post of General Secretary of the party was put up unsuccessfully. The internal conflict deepened irreparably since the post of Deputy General Secretary, held by the party strongman Bam Dev Gautam, was scrapped.

Thus, due to the lack of a consensus leader in the UML, it could not prevent increasing divisive tendency in the party. The succession of late Madan Bhandari by Madhav Nepal as General Secretary of the party in May 1993 did not help bringing change in his image as a second fiddler in the minds of other leaders of the UML. The inconsistency in the behaviour of party president late Man Mohan Adhikari and some other junior leaders of the party Central Committee regarding their relations with the party's factional leaders further aggravated the ambitions of top leaders, particularly Bam Dev Gautam and Khadga Oli, aspiring for the post of General Secretary. With no consensus leader, a tendency of minority tyranny appeared defying party whips in parliament and disrupting the unity, cohesion and discipline in the party. The party's sixth National Congress, held at Nepalgunj in January 1998, proved a battleground in which the political and strategic programmes presented by the minority faction was defeated with its 242-244 votes against the majority faction's strength of 598-605 (*Pratipachiya*, January 31, 1998). Instead of observing general democratic principle of the rule of majority, the minority faction led by Bam Dev Gautam formally split the party in March 1998, invoking provision of Anti-Defection Act that a separate parliamentary party could be formed if 40 percent MPs agreed to disassociate themselves from their parent party.

A similar development had already occurred in January 1998 in splitting the RPP. After the defeat of Rajeshwor Devkota by Surya Bahadur Thapa, 391 against 818 votes, in the contest of the party president post in the party's National Convention, held at Birgunj in November 1997, the minority faction led by Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Devkota constituted a separate party. The RPP- initially appeared as two separated parties, each led by former panchayat prime ministers Thapa and Chand but united in 1992- is a most disorganized party. The weakest point of this party is that it was not formed on the basis of ideology, but on the ground of common political background and identity of its ranks and files as the erstwhile panchas. Nor the RPP had a consensus leader. The party was clearly heading towards disintegration since the day it received the opportunity to stay in power as a key balancing force between the two largest parties, NC and UML, under the politics of hung parliament. The revival of factional politics, one led by Thapa and the other by Chand, appeared over their differences in choosing coalition partner. Thapa's preference to NC against Chand's choice of UML was linked with their personal ambition to become prime minister and thereby control the party apparatus. Both Thapa and Chand succeeded to maneuver the most opportunist characters in the party to attain the post of prime minister. Thapa succeeded Chand as prime minister of the country through sabotage. The party, which had long suffered from mutual distrust and a complete disruption in organizational unity, discipline and cohesion, and *Ghat-anterghat* (sabotage after sabotage), came to its logical conclusion after a clear split.

The cost of party split was very high. The RPP's strength in the HOR reduced from 20 in the second parliament to 11 in the third parliament. The split in the UML prevented it to reach in power. The split had directly affected in losing 43 seats for the UML (Khanal & Hachhethu, 1999). If the votes received by the candidates of the break way group, the ML, add to the candidates of the UML, it would have received a comfortable majority of 112 seats instead of the present 69 seats in the HOR. The split proved counterproductive to newly break-way groups as well. Both ML and RPP (Chand) failed to obtain even a single seat in the 1999 parliamentary election. This, in turn, contributed to the re-strengthening of the parent parties. The RPP (Chand) merged to its parent party in the late 1999 and several ranks and files of ML rejoined to the UML. But the unity of these parties along with NC remains fragile because of the erosion of ideology and leadership in party politics.

*Delinking:* Nepali politics for the last few years has been overwhelmed by in-party fighting, and making and breaking of inter-party coalition. In such a power centric politics, the need and interest of the people has been grossly ignored. Though the party is conceived as a linkage institution between the state and society (Lawson, 1980), the Nepali parties appear to have largely failed to observe their basic duty of linking citizens preference with public policy. One obvious reason why parties are moving closer to becoming a part of state rather than consolidating themselves as 'people organization' could be found in the parties' rank and file's preference to accumulate property and pursue a luxurious life by all means, particularly through the manipulation of state machinery and resources. Besides, as a consequence of their failure to deliver "public goods" (collective incentive of identity, solidarity and ideology) to the masses, their mindset seems to be preoccupied with a new way of party building, though granting "selective incentive" (power, status, money, job, and other material rewards) to party clients. This idea has led the political parties to revolve around the circle of the vested interest groups. Since the party functionaries work for certain lobbies, particularly the business community and others, the parties' advocacy of general people's problems has been noticed through its absence.

The UML, during its minority government, tended to propel the party as an active and powerful state organization through party-run clientelism under the purview of the party's State Affairs Department. Its splinter group, the ML had carried out this scheme, while becoming a junior partner of the NC led coalition government, believing that it could expedite organizational building activities by being in power and thereby being able to mobilize state resources and machinery. But it soon broke coalition with the NC since it differed with prime minister Koirala's plan for early election to parliament. The UML and NSP joined the government in response to Koirala's call for an all party government to conduct the 1999 general election.

Other parties, like the NC and RPP, are not exceptions in using their position, while they were/are in power, for party building through granting patronage to the persons of their favour and their own party fellows in executive posts of state apparatus at all levels. One important reason behind the parties becoming increasingly state oriented was the likelihood of another snap poll since the 1994 election produced a hung parliament. Holding the polls while in power had been the prime target of all major political parties in the country. It means that the party in power will have advantage to use/misuse the state resources for election purposes. The local elections

of 1997 can be cited as an extreme example that one of the ruling partners of that time, the UML, was accused for its excessive manipulation of the state machinery for its landslide victory in the election. It beat all previous records of manipulating state mechanism for election purpose. All parliamentary parties, big or small, wanted to be in power at the time of elections which obviously means that they wanted to manipulate state power and resources to bring the election result in their favour. The 1999 general election, held by the NC led coalition government with UML and NSP, was not an exception. But, the more the party relies on state machinery and resources for party building the more the party is driven away from the masses.

### **Political Crisis**

The possession of 4-Ds characteristics by Nepali political parties in the course of their transformation from the movement into competitive parliamentary parties have some positive effect for the stability of democratic structures but more negative impact on transition of democracy at the functional level. The consensus building on the fundamental principles of the Constitution, the spread of the notion of political pluralism down to the grass-roots level, and political flexibility against the past ideological rigidity etc. are some remarkable developments that came up as the impact of party transformation. Each of 4-Ds has, however, separate and compound negative effects in generating political crisis in the country. Political crisis in Nepal at present can be depicted as BLEAK- bewilderment, leadership crisis, erosion, anarchy, and knavery.

*Bewilderment:* Democracy in Nepal has suffered from bewilderment of political parties. In the context of de-ideologization and decline of leadership popularity, each major parties is suffering from their inability to innovate new ways and thinking in regards to party building. In the advanced democratic countries, party formed on ideological line was later transformed into "policy seeking party" which tends to appeal the masses by innovating new principles, setting new goals and formulating realistic and effective policies and programmes. But the parties of extra-parliamentary origin as in the case of Nepali political parties- whose only one target in the past was to overthrow the partyless panchayat system- lacked policies and programmes to resolve the long standing social and economic problems of the country. A party potential to be successful has, sooner or later, to advance itself as people-oriented and policy seeking party. This character is not yet found in Nepali political parties. Of course, the advent of democracy has in its wake brought into focus a number of pervasive socio-economic problems of the country in different forms and shape i.e. gender issues, minority problems, grievances of the disadvantaged groups, unemployment, corruption etc. But political parties appear largely not sincere in addressing such emerging social and economic problems and to give realistic and pragmatic policy incentives. Power seems to be the single most important target of all parties. They fail even to rationalize their quest for power through appropriate policy commitment and implementation. The party in power, whichever that may be, tends to justify their position with the recurring rhetoric of "political instability", "democracy in danger."

The lack of vision to reorient parties in the changed context could be found among them in their pursuit of party reformation. Though each major parties- NC, UML and RPP- has developed and diversified its organizational structures, the

responsibility of most of the party structures and sub-structures is exclusively confined to the parties' internal affairs and or to look after the business of elected wing of the party. They still lack in such structures which would be directly responsible for public policy formulation functions. Such an "inward looking" approach of party reformation also reflects on the much vociferous demands for the norms and value based politics in each party's internal affairs. The demands obvious target is to overcome the problems of in-fighting, division, indiscipline, and against the increasing tendency of individualism, selfishness and opportunistic characters of the party's rank and file. Such "inward looking" approach of party reform could be said as renovation rather than innovation. The approach of party reformation should also have "outward looking" content relating to general people's concern. The changing times and situation demand that the party should advance with new perspectives, new vision, new outlook, with setting new objectives. The formulation of realistic and effective policies and programmes rather than ideological rhetoric and leadership cult could be a new source of strength for the parties in competitive politics. But, Nepali political parties hardly appear moving towards new way of party building. So the nation and democracy- governed by parties which lack clear principle, vision, goals, policies and programmes- have suffered from directionless drift.

*Leadership Crisis:* The directionless drift or transitional flux may also be seen as a byproduct of the leadership crisis. The image of the leaders of Nepali political parties, except those of RPP, has been build on the ground of their long struggle and sacrifice for the cause and principle. Their contribution in the early phase of democratic transition- notably in the restoration of multi-party system and transformation of sovereign power from the palace to the people- was highly appreciable. So the popularity of some parties' leaders, particularly NC' top leaders late Ganesh Man Singh (commander of the 1990 mass movement) and Krishna P. Bhattarai (PM of Interim government), and also UML's late General Secretary Madan Bhandari, attained a peak. In the changed context of the second phase of transition towards democratic consolidation, the party and the leaders have to prove their worth by their ability to lead and govern the nation effectively.

But the outstanding quality of the leaders is not reflected in their performance- in management of intra-party affairs as well as in administration of state and government' machinery. Rather their increasing tendency to seek the price of their past struggle and sacrifice in terms of power and position has tended to impede a healthy development of the party system and democracy. Consequently most of the parties have turned into conflict ridden organizations, overwhelmed by power and ego centric tussles among their respective party leaders, which would ultimately led them towards disintegration. Judging from the spillover effects of intra-party conflicts and stagnation of national development, instability of government, degeneration of political morale and standards, compromise of democratic norms and values, economic recession and stagnation of national development, one could say that the leadership power appears to be used more for destructive purpose than for constructive purpose. The incumbent leaders of most of the parties have become obsolete in their performance. But, the prevalence of an obsession that "once a leader would be the leader at all times," disregards the fact that different leadership needs to exist in different stages of party development (Harmel & Svasand, 1993).

The leadership of prime minister, though the highest post in parliamentary system, seems weak and circumscribed by the politics of hung parliament and power equation within the ruling party/parties. The personality of the post-1994 prime ministers was overshadowed either by a system of a high command of coalition parties (constituted outside the purview of the state apparatus but working as steering committee taking all important decisions of the government) or by dominant personality of the second man in the cabinet: deputy prime minister Madhav Nepal and Bam Dev Gautam during the government formally led by prime minister late Man Mohan Adhikari and Lokendra Bahadur Chand for instances. All governments under hung parliament was/is obsessed with survival crisis and the priority of all prime ministers was/is to retain the post as long as possible rather than consolidation of one's own leadership position through providing effective and strong government. This trend continues to exist despite the changed political situation after the 1999 elections. The authority of both former prime minister Krishna P. Bhattarai and incumbent prime minister Girija P. Koirala has been considerably eroded by intra-party factionalism in the NC. Moreover, the leadership of prime minister has further been weakened by disarming PM' prerogative to dissolve the HOR. Thus, parliamentary democracy as a Primeministeral system no longer exists in Nepal.

*Erosion:* The curtailing of prime minister's power and prerogative is one among several instances of erosion in the spirit of the 1990 mass movement and the Constitution. The 1990 *Jan Andolan* has brought out one crucial dimension of Nepali politics, i.e. palace versus people. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 limits the role of the King as constitutional monarch in contrast to his active and assertive roles as sovereign ruler in the past. But as much as the popular forces has weakened by intense intra-party and inter-party rivalries, the expansion of the palace's role in realpolitik has been continuously felt i.e. in nomination of members of National Council, in appointment of Ambassadors and other high ranking posts in particular (Hachhethu, 1995). It was in fact the parties and their leaders who have laid the ground for the palace's intervention in the power politics. There are records of major parties- NC, UML and RPP- defending the prime minister's prerogative to dissolve the HOR when they were the ruling party, but the same parties have actively solicited the constitutional monarch not abide by the decisions of the cabinet whenever they are in opposition. As the parties spared nothing to manipulate the constitutional provision for their short-term interest the palace has gradually regained its eminence and influence.

It is widely speculated that the Palace has revised its role as "king maker" but from the back door. An ex-pancha, "who is believed by many to be a hard-core, pro-palace, rightist ex-pancha" had become instrumental behind the coalition formation between the rightist Chand faction of the RPP and the leftist UML (Sharma, 1995). As this coalition came into being, NC leader Girija P. Koirala had attacked the Palace by implication when he repeatedly said that the problem of the country lie on the force which had worked as catalyst to join the extreme rightist Chand and the extreme leftist Bamdev Gautam. But, Koirala himself admitted that he had successfully replaced the Chand government by a coalition of the Thapa faction of the RPP and the NC only after the King gave a green signal to his (Koirala) repeated attempts to convince the King on its viability (*Punarjagaran*, February 17, 1998). The irony is that once Koirala himself led a coalition government with ML, led by Bamdev Gautam, and maintained an alliance with the splinter RPP, led by Chand, in the

parliament whom he previously blamed as stooges of the palace. The above instances suggest to what extent the parties and their leaders tend to violate the norms of constitutional monarchy and to what extent the palace's influences the realpolitik. Such development encourage the palace for direct and visible intervention in politics, as suggested by the King's refusal to abide by the decision taken by the then Thapa government to dissolve the HOR. Manipulating an ambiguous constitutional provision of Article 54 (in which the word "may" mentions instead of "shall") in regards to the King's role in dissolution of parliament, King Birendra had already indicated that he has right to prevent against the cabinet's decision on this matter despite his affirmative response to the cabinet' decision of dissolving the HOR by the NC government in July 1994 and by the UML government in July 1995. The Supreme Court, however, gave two contrast verdicts on the cases of dissolution of the HOR, affirmative to the decision taken by the NC majority government in 1994 but negative to the CPN-UML minority government in 1995. This further widens the ground for manipulation. King Birendra followed the advice submitted by the Supreme Court in February 1998 that the prime minister's power to dissolve the HOR was "limited and conditional"(Text of Advice Submitted by Supreme Court to King, February 1998). The palace, in fact, maneuvered the constitutional loopholes skillfully and took the legitimacy from the Supreme Court directly and from all parliamentary parties indirectly to equip the King with preventative power against the prime minister' prerogative to dissolve the HOR. The palace' intervention has been felt in another serious issues i.e. refusal to consent the cabinet decision to appoint Bishownath Upadhaya as Chairman of Human Rights Commission. Moreover, prime minister Girija P. Koirala was compelled to change his strategy, in dealing with Maoist "terrorist" activities, from his earlier stand for invoking constitutional provision of Security Council to negotiation with the Maoist party. The role of Security Council is exclusively confined to the use of army and by making a separate constitutional provision in this regard, the army is kept away from the executive power of the Cabinet. Taking these several instances as references, Bishownath Upadhaya (former Chief Justice and Chairman of Constitution Recommendation Commission) rightly remarked that there is dual rule in Nepal (*Nepal*, July 30-August 16, 2000). In fact, the article 35 (2) of the Constitution which binds the King to follow "the advice and consent of the Council of Ministers" is being constantly eroded visibly and invisibly. Minus effective enforcement of this provision, the present Constitution could possibly be relegated to the status of the 1959 Constitution. The implication of constitutional monarchy in the sense of the "King can do no wrong" is presently not applicable in totality in Nepal.

*Anarchy*: Has there been any positive impact of diluting prime minister's executive authority, the regaining of the palace's eminence could be considered as blessing in disguise. But the Supreme Court's verdict of August 1995 against the then prime minister Man Mohan Adhikari's dissolution of the HOR was a prelude to invite political uncertainty, instability and anarchy. The politics after this verdict had relegated into a number game of 205 members of the HOR, between the parties in the government and parties in opposition. In such a game of winning by a majority of 103, nothing was sacred to the contending parties. All means i.e. horse-trading, *ghat-antarghat*, floor crossing, defiance of party whip, paralysis of constitutional and legal provision of anti-defection etc. were adopted by completely violating parliamentary norms and behaviour. In fact, the morale and standard of Nepali politics has degenerated to the lowest ebb.

Sher Bahadur Deuba relied more on his appeasement policy and political maneuverability through horse-trading when he was the prime minister of a coalition government of NC, RPP and NSP. His political maneuver was wide open: the constitution of a jumbo cabinet of 48 ministers; increase in the perks and privileges of parliamentarians including the facility to import duty free vehicle; grant of state's resources to a number of power holders and power brokers (in the name of medical treatment and other relief measures etc.) and sending of five incumbent but unreliable ministers representing the RPP and one opposition member of the HOR abroad on the eve of voting on no-confidence motion against his government in December 1996. The UML concealed its aberrations through its strong and effective propaganda. But, once it was exposed it has been known that this party played the most dirty game of power politics. It did not hesitate to indulge in horse trading and inviting the business Mafia into politics and bribing other parties' MPs- Rs. 20 million in September 1995 for its unsuccessful attempt to keep intact its minority government, Rs. 5 million in June 1996 and Rs. 2.6 million in December 1996 for its desperate efforts to regain power. Besides, the supply of prostitutes to some MPs to bring them in track in the party's plot to capture power was also revealed. Moreover, during the UML' minority government, it was alleged that the party worked keeping close affinity with smugglers, commission agents, defectors of letters of credit and others involved in black market (*Jana Astha*, March 4, 1997).

Even in the changed context after the 1999 elections the politics of number game continues to exist in other form. Krishna P. Bhattarai resigned from the post of prime minister only after a majority of NC' MPs submitted a petition for his resignation. Girija P. Koirala succeeded Bhattarai but through voting among the NC's members of the HOR. Such a number game was seen as revival of *ghat-pratighat* (sabotage and counter sabotage) in the NC by outgoing prime minister Bhattarai (Bhattarai's speech to parliament, March 16, 2000). The power contenders are still looking active in search of space for the use of their evil designs in a recycling game of government making and felling. A unique game is prevailing in the political spectrum of the country in which foulers are not punished but rewarded with post, position and power. The general drift of Nepali politics, particularly from 1995 onwards is characterized by chaos and anarchy.

*Knavery*: In the prevailing situation of political turmoil, the power elites have taken personal benefits even at the cost of people, democracy and nation. In a country where the number and percentage of the people below poverty line is increasing over the years it is ridiculous that the perks and privileges of the people's representatives have constantly increased. Even though, they devote hardly any time to the job for which they were elected as it was witnessed by the record of absentees in parliamentary business. The time they save by absenting themselves in parliament is hardly used for constructive thinking or work. Most of the ministers, parliamentarians and other influential politicians seem busy either to enhance their own personal benefits or to give patronage to the persons of their favour. Guided by their personal interest to be reelected next time, they strive more for providing services to the power brokers in their own electoral constituency. The way of granting and receiving favours brings to mind the tradition of the *Chakari* system and patron-client relations which now appear to have received a new lease of life in an altered format in the new constituency-oriented culture. The revival of patron-client relationship obviously

means the narrowing down of politics among the power holders and power brokers only. The very notion of democracy as people's participation in the government through organized parties has yet to flourish in Nepal. Some major ingredients of democracy i.e. people's representation, responsibility and accountability to the people hardly exist in essence.

### **Problems of Governance**

In a country where sovereignty lies in the people, the notion of governance should be equated with the goal of people's empowerment. "If sovereignty is understood as the source from where all state power emanates, citizens need to feel empowered beyond the role they play as voters in periodic elections" (Nepal: Human Development Report, 1998). But the people component is the most neglected part in the politics and government of Nepal. Viewing from another perspective of governance as the capacity of the government to "sustain legitimacy, promote socio-economic development, and maintain order without coercion" (Kohli, 1992), the finding is more disappointing. The non-existence of governance in the broader sense, "a process of political management, aims at maintaining order, ensuring popular legitimacy, responding to problems through appropriate mechanism and strategies, remaining neutral in providing basic human rights to people and developing both effectiveness and accountability in all activities undertaken at the state level" (Baral, 1993) is all too obvious. Nepal Development Partners also pin-pointed the lack of essential ingredients of good governance – efficiency, accountability, transparency and the rule of law – in the country (Memorandum presented to Prime Minister by a Group of Donors, May 15, 1988). Here the problems of governance in Nepal may be said in essence to be LOST- lack of political will, over politicization, spoil of professionalism and threat to democracy.

*Lack of Political Will:* Preoccupied by the party's plan to opt for snap polls, the UML's minority government- the first government after the 1994 mid-term election- fostered populism and propaganda instead of pursuing a sustainable policy and programme. Subsequent governments led by Sher Bahadur Deuba, Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Surya Bahadur Thapa respectively concentrated mainly on survival of their own beleaguered coalitions. One former prime minister told the author at a personal conversation that the governance, administration and management had become peripheral since he foresaw a serious threat to the survival of his government. Other prime ministers under hung parliament were not exception since they went for all sorts of compromises which impeded a smooth sailing of the government and administration. The return of Girija P. Koirala as the prime minister under hung parliament did not make any difference in the prevailing conditions in the country. Though the Koirala government had to its credit the withholding of much publicly criticized MP's facility to import duty-free vehicle, conducting local elections in some districts of the Maoist's strongholds, and passing newly amended Civil Service Act (which supposedly limits political intervention in bureaucracy) yet the general impression is that Koirala had come to power again just to hold the 1999 general election and to manipulate state resources to serve the interest of the party he is leading rather than to provide an effective and strong government. This impression could be substantiated by referring to the qualitative difference of his working style from that of the past. As the first elected prime minister after the restoration of democracy, Kiorala appeared eager to rule the country effectively and so he used to

consult with experts frequently on all important issues and subjects. But this part was completely missing during his second tenure of premiership, as it was evident by the resignation of his hand picked official adviser Prof. Krishna P. Khanal on the ground that he could not find space in the prime minister's scheme of things. Citing the gap between the words and deeds in dealing with the Maoist problem as one of the solid instances, Khanal had come to conclusion that the government was there only in the leaders' words, speeches and promises and also in the so-called structure of the Central Secretariat but not in functional mechanisms and in will power (*Deshantar*, November 1, 1998).

The end of hung parliament after the 1999 general election has not brought a substantial change in the style of governance. The lack of vision of leader was clearly manifested when Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, just before taking chair of prime minister, said that cleaning of Kathmandu city and initiating Melamchi Water project for the supply of drinking water to Kathmandu valley were priority areas of his government. Failure of prime minister Bhattarai to give a clear direction to the nation was expressed by a minister of his own cabinet in these words, “ The need of reform and radical change in social, economic and political sectors of the country is obvious but these things are hardly discussed in the cabinet” (Dahal, 1999). A new team of the Congress government, under the leadership of Girija P. Koirala, has come with its 3-point agenda: good governance, resolution of Maoist problem, and reduction of corruption. But no substantial change has come to avert the deteriorating situations in the country except some decisions taken against political intervention in administration. Koirala, like his immediate predecessor Bhattarai, is preoccupied by internal problems of his own party that is aggravating to the extent of a threat against the survival of his government. Good governance does not seem a priority of the Koirala government.

*Over Politicization:* It is widely felt that the state and government machinery is heading towards collapse as consequence of over politicization of such institutions. The frequent change of the government is always followed by change in the executive posts at all levels not only in bureaucracy but also in other public institutions i.e. corporations, hospitals, educational institutions etc. This has led to create instability in public institutions which are generally considered as stable organs. The annual report of Public Service Commission clearly showed that a situation of disorder, indiscipline, aberration and anarchy is increasingly being felt in administration of the country as the impact of excessive political intervention and by a tendency of undermining the laws, rules and regulations from the persons holding executive power (*Kathmandu Post*, October 17, 1998). The impact of over politicization is most glaring in policy inconsistency and paralyzing state organs and functionaries.

One widely noticeable omission of the rule of law is the granting of political protection to the persons who have overstepped their authority. The several reports of Public Accounts Committee of the HOR, the Auditor General and Abuse of Authority Investigation Commission showed that the government hardly ever follows their recommendations to punish the guilty persons. The Regmi report found that the police and others representing different departments of the government who were assigned to check smuggling and other crimes at the Tribhuvan International Airport had served as number one ally of smugglers (*Deshantar*, September 27, 1998). Further, the Auditor General's report exposed the magnitude of economic irregularity,

mismanagement, corruption found in all sectors and levels, from that of the three branches (executive, legislative and judiciary) of the government to the public corporations (*Bimarsa*, September 11, 1998). These are the indications how corruption, irregularities, mismanagement, irresponsibility and unaccountability are increasingly rampant in public sector. Under the prevailing situation, governance in the country becomes a chimera.

*Spoils of Professionalism:* One glaring effect of over politicization can be found in the workplaces of intelligentsia and other professionals. The bureaucracy, corporations, university, schools, hospitals etc.– which are places where the largest number of Nepali educated persons are involved- seem defunct. Most of educated persons are divided along party lines. The alliance between the party and intelligentsia, which was built during the struggle for democracy in the past, expedited in euphoric phase of the post-1990 mass movement through the formation of the party's ancillary organizations in all types of occupational and professional groups, is now sustained by a strong system of party run clientele. As a consequence of excessive politicization and division of intelligentsia and other educated persons along party lines, most of them are unable to maintain their professional ethic and honesty. De-professionlization obviously affects the quality of service they provide to the people, nation and democracy. It should be remembered that the effectivity of state and government machinery will largely depends on the ability and quality of professionals working in such institutions. It is widely felt that professionals ethic and integrity is losing ground considerably among the intelligentsia of the country which could have far more enduring and far-reaching negative consequences to the country.

*Threat to Democracy:* As much as the parties, leaders, people's representatives, professionals and others involved in state power apparatus in different capacities fail to provide governance in terms of delivery of service to the people, the loss of people's faith and confidence is inevitable. A pre-1999 election survey, therefore, found “the activities of political parties and leaders” as the main source of threat to democracy in Nepal (Sharma & Sen, 1999). One should not overlook the fact that the authoritarian nostalgia is gradually taking place in different forms and shapes. Be its manifestation concretely with the regaining of the palace's eminence, or symbolically with rewarding to people like Chand and Thapa, prime minister s of the popularly disavowed Panchayat system, to the same post (from March 1997 to April 1998) under the democratic polity, or in open rallies demanding the restoration of active and assertive monarchy with partyless system, the old force is trying to show its presence. On the other hand, the violent activities of the Maoists are spreading. The perceived or the real threat to democracy from the extreme rightist and the extreme leftist is being increasingly realized since the people are losing confidence in the parties and the leaders. One can not deny the fact that the people's euphoria and enthusiasm awakened by the successful mass movement in 1990 has turned into indifference, frustration and disillusionment towards the political parties, the political leaders and the government in general. In the light of non-performance of the party and the government, one could just hope that democracy in Nepal will survive just because “Democracy is the worst system of government but is the best among the prevailing ones.”

The exclusion of people component in the party politics is the root cause of problematic politics prevailing in the country. This is seen in the parliament, in the government and in other state institutions and among state functionaries, as reflected by their non-performance in regards to delivery of services to the people. Moreover the governments and the parliament have been preoccupied by a mind-set tuned to the politics of making and unmaking of the government. Individuals and parties contesting for power have tended to expand their maneuvering capability by the use of money power generated through the manipulation of state resources or making alliances with political mafia. By its very nature the mafia usually works underground, uses the state and government tools for its interest and, at the same time, it paralyzes the state and the government machinery's potential to serve the people. Deeply affected by the complex factors of mafia politics, political corruption, leadership crisis, excessive use of aberrant means in the game of government making and unmaking, de-professionalizations, the whole state and governmental machinery have suffered from indiscipline, disorder, aberration and anarchy. Indeed it may rightly be suggested that there is the prevalence of "dysfunctional anarchy" in Nepal (Baral, 1998). In the absence of any indication of corrective measures being actively pursued in any quarter one may not be dismissed as being cynical while summing up the above discussion about the present situation in the country in the words of a scholar, Prayag Raj Sharma who said, "We are inviting a catastrophe" (*Deshantar*, May 24, 1998).

### **Conclusion**

Political parties of Nepal, since their inception in 1940s, have been perceived as instruments of change in social, economic and political spheres of the country. Their credential as change agent was established by their catalyst role in the 1990 mass movement and in framing the present democratic Constitution. But, they largely seem fail to consolidate newly achieved democracy. Erosion of ideology, exclusion of people's interest and internal factionalism remain the dominant trends of the party politics in Nepal. So the 4-Ds characteristics what they acquired after their transformation from movement organizations to competitive parties produced political crisis in the country, what was explained above in the phrase of BLEAK. While emerging political parties, NC and CPN-UML in particular, as contenders of power politics, they have suffered from the lack of clear vision, policy and programmes which are essential to expedite their declared objectives i.e. good governance, political stability and economic development. These stated goals have been sidelined since parties' leaders and workers are highly indulged for self-aggrandizement by all possible means. They are, therefore, more interested in the game of government making and unmaking, irrespective to the nature of government (minority, coalition or majority government) by all foul tricks, violating all norms and process in this regards. The intervention from the Palace in party politics has further complicated the situation, leading to political instability and anarchy. This shows a leaderless situation prevailing in Nepal. Along with erosion of ideology and intra-party factionalism, the lack of performance legitimacy causes the erosion in the leaders' authority.

Transformation of parties with 4-Ds characteristics and BLEAK political crisis have accumulative effects in creating problems of governability, explained above with LOST word. Obsessed by insecurity filling, the leaders of the government and party

paid least attention to the national problems. Politicization in bureaucracy, educational institutions and other areas have killed the professional ethics, impeding for democracy, governance and development. The lack of good governance has paved the way for escalation of terrorist activities by the Maoist party. The threat from the extreme rightist increases as well. Leaders are aware of increasing crisis but instead of looking for remedy of national crisis they have constantly indulged in power game. Recently in August 2000, dissidents of Girija P. Koirala exerted pressure for his resignation either from the post of prime minister or the president of NC. Prime minister Koirala seem preoccupied by his strategies to retain in power in both the party and the government apparatus. His 3-point agendas: good governance, resolution of Maoist's terrorist problems and reduction of corruption have been sidelined. The people and nation will be continued to suffer from the situation of non-governance in immediate future.

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