

Local dynamics of conflict and the political development in Nepal: A “New Model” for conflict transformation.

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In this paper my discussion is about the local dynamics of conflict in general and Nepalese political development in particular. The paper aims to give an overview that the conflict led by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) was nothing other than an emergence of a “new ideology” as a part of social process. The conflict was overlooked for almost a decade and was conceptualized in such a way which forced the differing ideology (CPN-M) to be discarded from the “whole”, the social and political process though not possible in reality. But after a decade, the way the conflict has been transformed, at least to a certain degree, can be a new approach to handle differing ideas in different societies in order to practice a “genuine democracy” and promote peace. This is the main message of this brief text.

Complex socio-political structure: foundation for emergence of conflict

Nepal, a small country bordering India on three sides and china in one side on the north is economically, politically and geographically sandwiched. Nevertheless, she has a glorious history because of her independency. It was a tough time for Nepal to remain uncolonized while her southern neighbors India, Bangladesh and Pakistan were British colonies. Instead, Nepal had to fight with the British troops in those days. The brave, courageous Nepalese soldiers’ contribution to protect Nepal from colonial power still has a good remark.

In Nepal, around 40 % population is still illiterate. The current CBS (2004: Pp 61-79) report explains that male and female literacy rate is 63% and 39% respectively. Nepal Living Standard Survey (1995-96) indicates that around 50 percent population lives in poverty. The situation probably has not changed to better due to the conflict that emerged in 1996. Furthermore, Nepal is a multilingual, multiethnic and multi religious country with around 23.15 million population (CBS, 2001). Hindu is the leading religion (85%), Buddhist (11%), Muslim (4.2%) and others like practitioners of indigenous animist religion and Christian (3.6%). Nepali is the national official language which is spoken by only 60 % of population and there are 61 different nationalities. Within such diversity, feudal system, unjust socio-political structure and political instability played a vital role for the emergence and accelerating of the conflict (1996-2006).

For a background, let us look at the Nepalese political history also in brief. There was a family rule of Ranas for 104 years which lasted until 1950 wherein Kings were just a

rubber stamp. Nepalese people introduced multiparty system in 1950, for the first time in the history and palace was offered a better space in Nepali politics. It was our unfortunate that the multi-party system was hijacked by King Mahendra, the father of the present King Gyanendra in 1960 and loaded Party-less Panchayat System (PPS). Since then political parties were banned but due to growing civic consciousness, pressure from people and parties in exile, the King had to face a referendum in 1980 between Improved Panchayat System (IPS) and Multiparty System. Unfortunately, the result was announced in favor of the IPS. Nevertheless, debate on multiparty system kept on continuing. The changing global politics, peoples' growing awareness on civil rights and widening gap between poor and rich, once again brought people on the street in 1990 which hammered the Party less Panchayat System. The PPS fell off thereby bringing multiparty system back for the second time in the history of Nepal. This was, however, an important time for a reformulation of a new system so as to restructure Nepal socio-politically, culturally and economically.

1990s political change and the emergence of People's War (PW) in Nepal

The victory of Janaandolan (1990 People's movement) ended autocratic Party-less Panchayat System and new challenges emerged in the changed context. It was an important time for the leadership to be aware of the people's sentiment and the voice of the time. The infant democracy was in need of proper care for its natural development which the then political leadership did not realize. Nepal, a semi-feudal society was in need of a grand reengineering of socio-economic structure in order to quench the thirst of huge bulk of poor people in the remote and rural areas. On such a pretext, most often there emerged intra-party and in-party conflict thereby spreading seeds of further conflict creating a fertile ground for an emergence of "new-ideology" as a part of social process. CPN-M happened to lead this ideology. They conceptualized that in order to make people 'relatively equal' in terms of their access to resources and to make people sovereign in reality. To achieve this, there was a need of drastic structural changes. For this, CPN-M drafted a plan and forwarded a 40 point agenda (for details see Hutt, 2004 P. 285-87) in 1996 to the government of Nepali Congress led by Sher Bahadur Deuba.

Their proposal was not received positively which forced them feel "segregated" from the "whole" the social and political process. Although the 40 points agenda looked quite big and complex it was in fact the response of time and the context which captures very fundamental requirements in order to restructure unjust Nepalese society. Further ahead, in such a situation they also conceptualized that the "bourgeoisie democracy" (in their words) could not meet people's need, hence needs to be restructured entirely. Restructuring of such a feudal and complex society was definitely not an easy project. Also they realized that the main political enemy was palace which leads the feudal structure. Therefore, their political goal became "republicanism" as a model for transformation of Nepalese society. Where as, other major political parties had accepted monarchism and multiparty parliamentary democracy as principle in their party statute. Hence, there appeared three different forces, palace, parliamentary parties and CPN-M in the theater of Nepalese politics to play their respective roles.

As a result of the refusal of the demand to restructure Nepalese society forwarded by CPN-M, they determined to launch an opposition, that too, militarily and politically. They

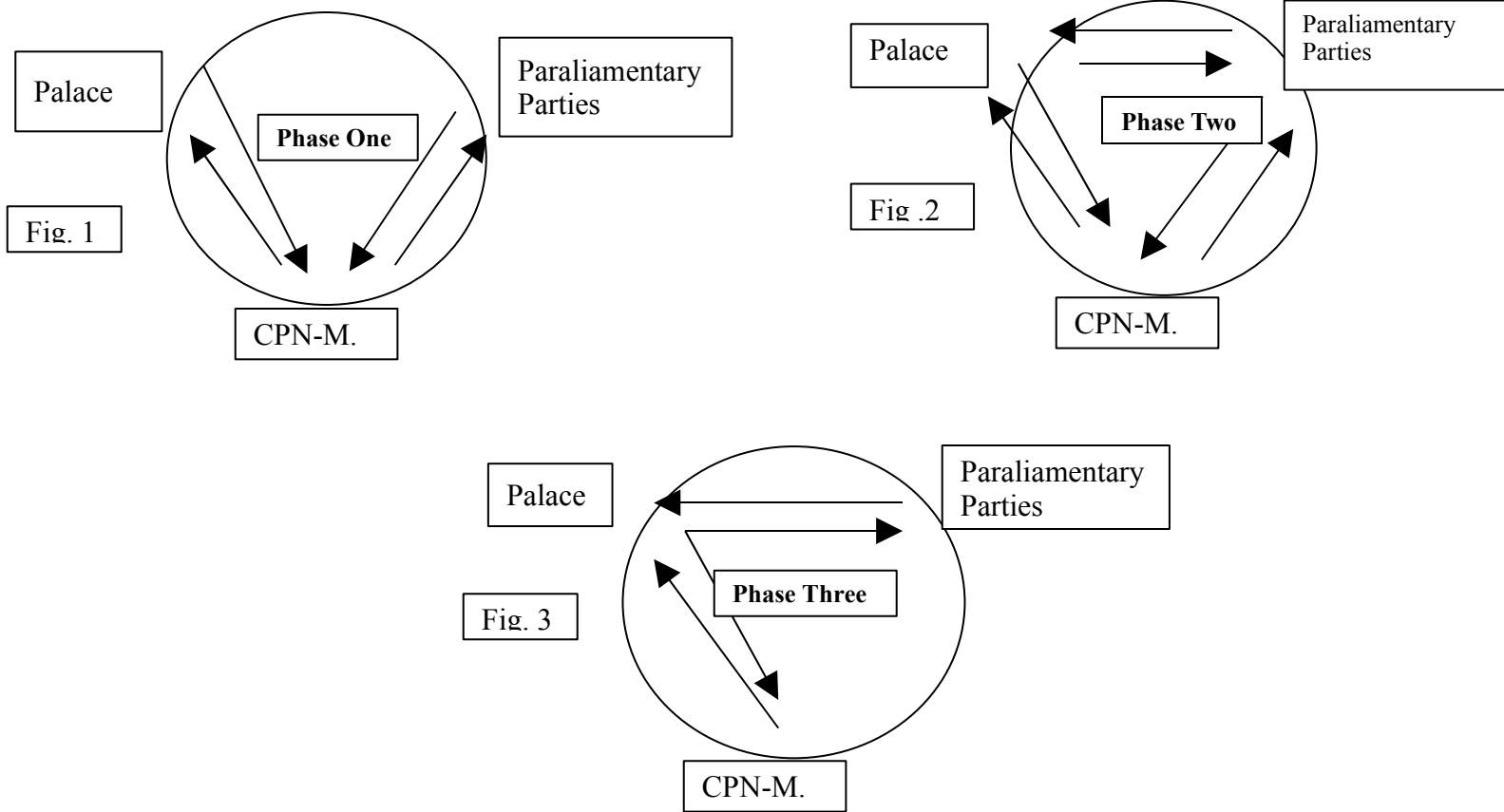
announced People's War (PW) on 13th Feb. 1996 attacking several police posts. They say, they began PW with one 303 rifle which was donated by some one. In a short period they proved themselves a powerful force to attack Royal Nepalese Army and even to seize their weapons. There had been many attacks by the CPN-M to RNA during the period 1996-2006. During this period they collected sophisticated weapon to foil RNA's attack. During this period of a decade more than 12000 Nepalese have lost their lives and many people are reported missing.

CPN-M launched People's War flourished in an organized manner which caught international attention as well. They also started mobile radio stations to air their activities. Increasing military force and their grounding in the villages had immense impact and control over more than 80% of the country. In many districts people felt "absence" of government. Maoist control over villages pressurized the parties, enlarged their influence and contracted parties' activities and their presence. Parties were compelled to remain solely in cities and capital. Therefore; they could not function in a normal way. Such a paralyzing situation inspired the king Gyanendra to show his presence in politics. On top of that, the sad, unexpected bloody night (1st June, 2001) swept away relatively popular former King Birendra and his relatives leaving behind the present King Gyanendra¹ and his family untouched. Let us not ponder into the reality of this incident. However, it would be wise to argue that this incident opened up a "highway" whereon King Gyanendra might have imagined that he could enjoy the feudal marathon thereby bypassing major political parties and Maoist. He also might have speculated that the poor people still could be manipulated if portrayed himself as an incarnation of God.

It might be that on the basis of such motivation King Gyanendra sacked the elected government on Oct.4, 2002 led by Sher Bahadur Deuba blaming him as an incompetent Prime Minister. He formed another government but was heavily opposed which compelled the King to reappoint Deuba as Prime Minister in June 2004 but later the King did a coup on Feb.1, 2005 in a dramatic way by home arresting all ministers and Prime Minister Deuba at midnight. After such a palace coup the King himself led the government. His hand picked Vice chairmen and ministers advocated this step "a necessary one" and also said that it was in favor of people, democracy and peace. They tried to pretend the world that the King's step was an acceptable act for Nepalese. This step however forced the major parliamentary parties to rethink and re-conceptualize the context in a broader way to understand the reality and protect the nation from a shock of unbearable political catastrophe. This is how the conflict in Nepal has come through three different stages. In the first phase the political parties advocated in favor of palace and therefore, conceptualized CPN-M their major enemy. In the second stage mainly after the Prime Minister Deuba was sacked for the first time till the end of 2005 there was such a confusion that all these three forces seemed to be enemy of each other. It was a time of confusion. This was a "confused state". But after the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with CPN-M in Delhi, the capital city of India, the whole political scenario changed and palace was conceptualized as the major enemy and main cause of Nepal's underdevelopment. The figure² below illustrates the dynamics of Nepalese conflict and power shift in relation to People's War in Nepal.

¹ King Gyanendra is the middle brother. Birendra is the eldest and Dhirendra the youngest who was also killed in the same night.

The dynamics of power shift in Nepal



By looking at such a dynamics of conflict at the local level, it is arguable that societies are transforming in different dimension wherein new thoughts and ideas emerge. Hence, it also would be realistic to say that emerging new thoughts and ideas definitely do contradict with the establishment as it has been experienced in Nepal which is a process of further conceptualization in the whole in order to build up a new collective awareness. New ideology that has spirit to benefit majority can be termed as good force³. Hence, all differing ideas and thoughts in the whole definitely are not considerable as “good force” though they are products of the social process at a particular time and place. On such a conceptual understanding conflict is not something that is to be conceptualized as some thing completely “avoidable” kind of phenomena in a society. Coser (1956:39) argues that conflicts clear the air, eliminate the accumulation of blocked balked disposition by allowing their behavioral exposition. In the same way, Agerback (1996:27) argues that;

² This figure was first published in an article: Armed conflict and migration; A threat for development and peace. Available at: http://www.nepalresearch.org/publications/keshabprasad_bhattacharai_2006_02.pdf

³ For details see http://www.nepalresearch.org/publications/keshabprasad_bhattacharai_2006_02.pdf

...any dynamic human system is by nature a conflicting one, encompassing the play of opposing interest. The crux lies in how much conflict is managed. So long as the social and political processes provide channels for dialogue, participation and negotiation, conflict plays a constructive role. Where such channels are blocked, and yet basic needs unmet, then the resentment and desperation build up. The outcome is protest, repression and violence (1996:27).

By this view it is convincing that conflict as such is not a negative phenomenon in the “whole” rather it is our capacity to read and respond them that makes a difference and helps to change the course of conflict which determines the dynamics of conflict. Therefore, conflict is a “disagreement” over “others”. It is a sign of imbalance in the whole which forms a clear demarcation between “I” and “You” and “We” and “Them”. This is a sign of segregation and discard of the minority in the whole which compels them to further solidify their sense of being in the whole and inspires even to raise arms if not managed it in advance.

Practice of inclusiveness, a “genuine democracy” and the importance of local dynamics of conflict.

I believe that it would be possible for us now to conceptualize the emergence of CPN-M as unavoidable phenomena in the social and political process in Nepal to facilitate for re-conceptualization reality in order to benefit majority. The probability of minimizing intensity of conflict was ignored as the essence of “dialogue” which is a base for imagination for peace (Lederach, 2005) was undervalued by the then governments. It is also mentionable here that everything is in a motion, is transforming in different dimensions as per time and place. Everything is maintained in such a way that even a small change in the whole does have an influence in the total system yet some are not noticeable. The same concept is applicable to the conflict in Nepal. Hence, the way the emergence of CPN-M and its essence in the whole was undermined and devalued; it changed the course of the conflict. The essence of the emergence of CPN-M was realized when the conflict reached the third phase which has been explained in the figure above. This is all because of the dynamics of conflict which is highly influenced by the international phenomena and the local dynamics of gradual change and transformation.

On this background, one must accept that the local dynamics of conflict is complex and should be understood differently in different contexts. Now, let us discuss why PW in Nepal can be an example of conflict transformation as a “New Model”. We have already argued that new ideas and thoughts that emerge during social and political process with an aim to benefit majority should not be ignored. Sadly, it happened in Nepal. The differing ideology i.e., CPN-M, was segregated from the system. Finally, at the third stage of the conflict, it has been realized that CPN-M actually was not something “avoidable” therein in the whole because it had raised the issues⁴ already in 1996 which have been considered positively recently by the major political parties. Not only that, they even have inspired to change the party statue for new political setting. Such an

⁴ They raised issues like constitutional assembly to form a new constitution by people’s representatives. Royal Nepalese Army must be under parliament not under palace. King should be under constitution. They also have raised many issues related to land reformation, economic policies, education and health policies which seem to be in favour of majority.

understanding opened up possibilities for re-conceptualizing social and political process in Nepal in order to practice a “genuine democracy” where differing ideas and thoughts are respected and regarded a part of a social and political process. Yet, there is much to happen in reality. The so called super power led by US regarded such a process in Nepal as “unnatural” after major political parties, united under Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and signed a 12 point Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with CPN-M on November 22, 2005 in Delhi, India. Rather, they were suggested to make an alliance with Palace which is the central of feudalism. The reason might be that CPN-M carries a socialistic approach and is one of the leading leftist forces in the Nepalese political society.

We must thank the alliance for their commitment because it was a necessary in the context of Nepal. After the alliance between the SPA and CPN-M they announced peaceful people’s movement commencing on 6th April. King’s government announced curfew order to foil the people’s peaceful movement. The flood of people defied day and night “shoot in sight” curfew in the capital and in other major towns for more than two weeks. The 19 days long curfew order was avoided. Everyday the movement got supported and added thousands of people each day in the demonstration. Such an organized people’s peaceful movement faced brutal baton charge, tear gas shells and even bullets. This was however the final brutal and inhuman action from the King led government. 21 people died so far and thousands severely injured. Some have lost their eyesight. The peaceful movement led by the SPA and supported by CPN-M shows the local dynamics of conflict and its essence which finally compelled the autocratic rule to accept the power of “people’s movement” which is never defetable by any means, even by sophisticated weapons. Finally, the unavoidable local dynamic reality compelled the super power to accept “the unnatural ties” as they termed earlier. The parliament was reinstated on 24th April by the King and recently the parliament has decided go for constituent assembly, a major demand of CPN-M from the beginning of People’s War.

People are always powerful. Autocracy, be of whatever form falls apart at a certain point of social process when it proceeds ahead in the complex dynamism of conflict in a social and political process. People’s sentiment of “democracy” and “freedom” can never be defeated. Nepal’s successful movement is a live example on the dynamics of conflict for the rest of the world.

Conclusion

Differing ideas and thoughts that emerge at certain point of social and political process should not be ignored if their intention is to benefit majority. The conflict in Nepal (Nepalese People’s War), the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the SPA and CPN-M and the down fall of autocratic Monarch in Nepal is such an example that portrays the importance of local dynamics of conflict. It also gives a message that inclusiveness is as a “New Model” and “dialogue” is the point of departure for conflict resolution which can be applicable in rest of the world.

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