

NEPALI CONGRESS: 1990-1999

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "Nepali Congress: 1990-1999" submitted by Pramod Kumar in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) of the University, is an original work and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this University or any other University to the best of my knowledge.

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Dedicated
to
my parents

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Preface

Political parties are the lifeline of modern political system and plays an important role in the development of a country. However, in an authoritarian state, its role is nominal and has limited functions to perform. Nepal has had a history of monarchy and therefore political parties existed only for the namesake until democracy took over the political system in 1991.

Nepali Congress, the largest political party in Nepal has played an active and decisive role in Nepal's political development.

The dissertation entitled "Nepali Congress: 1990-1999" aims to analyse the evolution, working and performance of the Nepali Congress particularly during 1990s. The study is divided into five chapters.

The first chapter is an introductory chapter which would briefly discuss the concept of political parties in general and its functions in a country. It would also analyse the role of political parties in general and that of Nepali Congress in particular in politics of Nepal.

Chapter two analyses the evolution of Nepali Congress as a national political party. This chapter would examine the background and circumstances

which led to the formation of Nepali Congress in 1946. This chapter would also analyse the role of Nepali Congress, which it was in government in 1951-52 and 1958-59 and its role during the Partyless Panchayat System till 1990.

Chapter three analyses the performance of Nepali Congress in all the three general elections held in 1991, 1994 and 1999. This chapter also analyses the reasons for its good and bad performance in these elections. The Nepali Congress manifesto of all the three election is also analysed in this chapter.

Chapter four gives the organisational structure of Nepali Congress. It also analyses, role of the leadership has played in the performance of Nepali Congress during various elections. It is found that leadership has close causal link with the performance of Nepali Congress. Finally the chapter fifth brings out the major findings of the study and would draw conclusions on its internal dynamics as well as its performance during 1990s.

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

NC	-	Nepali Congress
CPN	-	Communist Party of Nepal
ULF	-	United Left Front
UML	-	United Marxist Leninist
NDP	-	Nepali Democratic Party
ML	-	Marxist Leninist
UPF	-	United People's Front
NWPP	-	Nepal Workers and Peasants Party
NSP	-	Nepal Sadbhavana Party
RPP	-	The Rashtriya Prjatantra Party

Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Nepal has had a long history of monarchy yet political parties have played a significant role in the politics of Nepal, specially the Nepali Congress, has played an important role in the political development of the country. Though it got majority in 1991 election, it could not complete its term. Even in 1994 general election, the Nepali Congress did not come to the power. But after the Nepali Congress resigned from the power in 1994, the later period (i.e. 1994-May 1999) was marked by political instability as six governments were changed during this period. These developments of the coalition governments were not suitable for Nepal's political system. As the people and the political system of Nepal desperately wanted stability, the Nepali Congress was seen as the only alternative available (in absence of any other strong political leader) having a powerful leadership under Krishna Prashad Bhattarai. Thus in May 1999, Nepali Congress came to the power, under the Prime Minister of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. This development by many political scientists have been regarded as a glaring example of people's mandate for change.

This chapter aims to review, in historical perspective, the political developments of Nepal, particularly in the context of political parties. Besides of brief introduction, this chapter will also have a brief write-up on the role and functions of a political party in the political developments of a country in general and particularly in Nepal. The methodology used for the analysis would be historical, analytical and descriptive in nature and the secondary data sources which include published and unpublished research work.

Nepal is a land locked multinational, multilingual, multicultural and multireligious country. The Royal Proclamation of 8th April 1990, inaugurated a new era on political parties and allowed a multiparty democratic system, lifted ban on Political parties and allowed a multiparty democratic system to operate. On Friday 9th November 1990, King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah “using powers inherent in ourselves”, proclaimed Nepal’s fourth constitution in three decades. The constitution of 1990 marks a watershed in the political history of Nepal. The sovereignty has been transferred from the crown to the people and constitutional monarchy together with parliamentary government has been provided. A multiparty system has been guaranteed. Elections were held in April 1991, in July 1994 and again in May 1999. A popularly elected government is in office at present.

The establishment of parliamentary democracy in Nepal is something to be rejoiced as it has been the result of prolonged struggle spread over decades. It brought to an end of 30 years of authoritarian panchayati rule. The Nepali Congress and the Communist struggled hard for years, braving all odds and their first success came when an interim government under the premiership of K.P. Bhattarai assumed power and final triumph arrived in May 1991 when a democratically elected government came to hold the reins of power. As a result of this election, democratic sentiments finally found a potentially stable expression in Nepal’s governing institutions.¹ But much remains to ensure the survival of this nascent democratic system which has yet to overcome many formidable obstacles. The present government headed by G.P. Koirala, has an uphill task to make the roots of democracy to go to the deep into political fabric of Nepal. Above all, it has to ensure the support of

people belonging to different regions, in the absence of balanced development, growing regional disparity, leading to dissatisfaction may cost a gloom over the system.

The Nepalese monarchy is one of the oldest surviving monarchies in the world. It is also a monarchy which is trying hard to adapt itself. The deposed king of Egypt, King Farooque was once asked as to what he thought about the future of monarchy in the world. He replied that in future there would be only five kings four in playing cards and one in England. Of course, there were kings in many other countries and king Farooque was aware of their existence. What Farooque meant that kingship was likely to survive only in the form, in which it existed in England, namely, constitutional monarchy in which the king has no powers but to advise, to encourage, and to warn his ministers. The later driving their authority from popular support. To a great extent Farooque's prophecy has proved true. Nepal is perhaps the only country in the world, in which the king has not only governed recently but also scored a significant victory over his detractors in a nation wide referendum in June 1980. In Nepal, except perhaps for the brief period of 1959-60 when the political system of Nepal seemed to function as a system of parliamentary democracy with the king as the constitutional head, elected representative of people did not wield much power till 1990.

Physical Factors

Nepal has been described as an "independent, sovereign and indivisible Himalayan Kingdom". Situated on the southern slopes of the mid-Himalayas in central area, it is located between 26⁰12' and 30⁰27' North latitudes and 80⁰4' and 88⁰12' East longitudes. It covers

an area of 147,181 sq. km. The Mechi River separated the country from Sikkim and State of West Bengal in India and the Mahakali river separated it from Uttar Pradesh of India. Nepal is a land locked country. Calcutta in India, the nearest Sea Coast is 1120 Km away. The country can be divided into three main geographical regions – (a) Himalayan Region, (b) Mountain Region and (c) Tarai Region. Total population of the country, census 1991- 18462,081, (9241,167 females), population density 1992 – 125.4 per sq. km.

The official language is Nepali, which was spoken by 58.4% of the population in 1981. Other languages include Maithili (11.1% in 1981) and Bhojpuri (7.8%), 89.5% of the population professes Hindu 5.3% are Buddhist and 2.7% Muslim. The Christian number about 50,000.

Prithvinarayan Shah, the founder of Nepal's present greatness, who laid the basis of this policy, pointed out that his Kingdom was "sandwiched between two giant powers" and advised his followers not to develop intimate relations with either of them. Thus, Nepal's geographical position accounts, in a large measure, its prolonged isolation as well as the fact of her slow political progress, economic immobility and social backwardness.²

Historical Outline

Nepal is an ancient land inhabited by the ancient people. As a political entity, it appeared as a part of ancient India in the context of its Himalayas borderlands. Nothing definite can be said about the origin of the name "Nepal". According to the Vamshavalis, the genealogies of Nepal, long centuries ago, water submerged the Nepal valley. According to a Brahmanical legend, one *ne Muni* of

India entered the Nepal valley, bringing with him a prince. He commanded great respect, so much so that the Nepal valley came to be known after him as *Ne pal*, "protected by Ne". There is also a Buddhist legend according to which Manjushree created the land of Nepal by draining the lake southwards. Up to the eighteenth century, up to 1769 exactly, the name Nepal had been merely a geographical expression, denoting the Nepal valley only. The name applied to the territory constituting present day Nepal only after Maharaja Prithvinarayan Shah of the little Kingdom of Gorkha, about 50 miles west of the Nepal valley, subdued it and annexed it to his Kingdom in 1769. Since then the Nepal valley has been known as the Kathmandu valley and the entire country as Nepal.³

The foundation of the modern state of Nepal was laid by King Prithvinarayan Shah of Gorkha in A.D. 1769. Before the Gorkha conquest, the Kingdom of Nepal consisted mainly of the Kathmandu valley which was ruled by three Malla Kings with their respective capital at Kathmandu, Bhatgaon and Patan. The riches of the Kathmandu valley, its natural bounties and the wealth of the Malla Kings, who minted coins for Tibet in return for a huge profit⁴, constituted a source of great temptation of the rugged hill men of the smaller states which congregated in the western part of Nepal. The Chiefs of some of these states were descendants of the ruling families of Raputana who had fled to Nepal at the time of the Muslim invasion. By the middle of the eighteenth century these states were roughly divided into loose confederacies called the *Baisi* and the *Chaubisi*, according to their approximate number 22 and 24 respectively.⁵ The rulers of the Baisi and Chaubisi States, especially those of *Gorkha*, *Tanahu* and *Makwanpur*, made several attempts to wrest the Nepal valley from the Malla rulers. Later, the chaotic rule

of the Malla kings and their continuous warfares created great dissatisfaction among various sections of the nobility, the merchant, and princely classes who sought the help of these adventurers from the hills to oust their rulers. It was at this time that Prithvinarayan Shah of Gorkha embarked on his scheme of conquering the valley and, after several abortive attempts defeated the three Malla Kingdoms in A.D. 1769.⁶

Age of Gurkha Expansion

With the victory of Prithvinarayan Shah, the history of Nepal turned over a new leaf. The insularity of Kathmandu where the drama of the Malla had hitherto been enacted gave way to the insatiable land-hunger of the Gurkha soldiery. The rabble which had gathered round Prithvinaryan Shah was organised into a regular army which was sent to conquer new territories in all directions. By A.D. 1775, the Gurkhas over-ran the whole of the *Kiranti* land east of Kathmandu, Morang in Tarai, and Han touching the borders of Sikkim. After Prithvinarayan's death, Gurkha conquest was pushed further by Bahadur Shah who acted as the Regent of his nephew, King Rana Bahadur Shah (A.D. 1777-1799). After winning over the Raja of Palpa by a marriage alliance, Bahadur brought under control the *Baisi* and *Chaubisi* states and sent his forces as far west as Kumaoun. In the east Gurkha arms penetrated into Sikkim and even threatened Bhutan.⁷ Emboldened by these victories, the Gurkhas began to cast a longing eye on Tibet. The prospect of winning the rich lamaseries of Tibet itself constituted an inducement to the Nepalese army to move northward. Further, the refusal of the Tibetans to accept Gurkha coins on the same basis as that of the debased Malla coinage not only disrupted the old trade between

Tibet and Nepal but deprived the new rulers of a lucrative source of income. It was therefore, partly to satisfy their avarice and partly to teach the Tibetans, a lesson, that the Nepalese invaded Tibet in May 1788. The war, after a brief internal, continued till A.D. 1792 when the Tibetans with the help of a Chinese army defeated the Gurkhas and pursued them as far as Jeetpur Phedi inside the Nepalese territory. Forced by this defeat, the Nepalese Darbar sued for peace which the Chinese granted on condition that Nepal would accept Chinese suzerainty and send presents to China every five year in token of "*Filial love*".⁸ The Nepalese, in their turn, got the right to carry on trade in Tibet and received an assurance from China that she would help them "if Nepal be ever invaded by a foreign power".⁹

Setback to the Policy of Expansion

The humiliation which the Gurkhas suffered at the hands of the Tibetans caused a violent shake-up in their political set-up. A regime which squarely depended for its sustenance on an army, raised on a "war-footing", could not sit at rest until it found new avenues of territorial expansion. Hence, failing in the northern region, the army was sent to push the frontier further south—a policy which culminated in the Anglo-Nepalese war of A.D. 1816-17. After a protracted period of mountain warfare in which the Nepalese "fought with the greatest gallantry", a *treaty was signed at Sagauli on 4th March 1816* by which Nepal lost her possessions in Sikkim, Kumaoun and Garhwal. To the South, Nepal was compelled to cede western Tarai to the Kingdom of Oudh, and eastern Tarai to the British a portion of which was, however, returned to her in the same year. By the same treaty the Nepalese Darbar agreed to receive a British representative at Kathmandu. Thus by 1816, the political

boundaries of Nepal were finally settled which, with a few minor adjustments and alterations, have remained in tact to the present day.

Politics During The Pre-Rana Period

Tracing their origin from the royal family of Chittor, the Shahs of Gurkha established a political system in Nepal which was essentially military and despotic in character. As sovereign, the king wielded supreme authority in both civil and military affairs of the state. Monarchy was a hereditary institution and every monarch, on his accession, assumed the title of *Sri Panch Maharajadhiraja*. For the purposes of administration, the King employed ministers and Bharadars from higher caste noble families with whom he had intimate contacts. These ministers and Bharadars were given lands called Jagirs and Birtas in "Payment" of the services they rendered to the King. The Birta lands were mostly granted in the form of reward to military chiefs and others who had distinguished themselves in war, and these lands were not taxed by the government. As these grants, excepting a few cases, were granted to the chiefs and noble on a hereditary basis, this system raised, in course of time, a feudal oligarchy which became the strongest political force in the country next only to the monarch.¹⁰ Among the nobility, some important families came to enjoy hereditary right to the highest offices of the state even during the reign of Ram Shah (A.D. 1606-33), an illustrious ancestor of Prithvinarayan.¹¹ These families were the Pandes, the Aryyals, the Khanals, the Ranas and the Boharas who, according to the Gurkha Vamsavali had helped Ram Shah's predecessor, Drabya Shah, to capture Gorkha in A.D. 1559. Some of these families and the Royal collaterals, called the Chautarias, played an important role during the campaign of

Prithvinarayan Shah and, in recognition of their service, received further confirmation of their hereditary titles.¹² At the same time, Prithvinarayan acknowledged the Supreme position of the Brahman in the Social order. He declared Nepal to be the “true Hindustan with 4 castes and 36 varnas”. He distributed tax-free lands called *Birta* and the *Guthi* lands for exclusive religious purposes among the Brahmans and granted them total immunity from capital punishment. In a way, therefore, the victory of the Gurkhas encouraged the ascendancy of Brahmanic orthodoxy in Nepal.¹³

The prevalence of a powerful feudal nobility side by side the hereditary monarchy brought new complications and tensions in Nepalese political life. When the king was a minor or proved to be a weak king the nobility grew too powerful. The contest began during the minority of King Rana Bahadur Shah when his uncle Bahadur Shah and mother, Queen Rajendra Laxmi raised for the possession of the Regency. As they clashed with one another, the nobles also got divided into two parties to the support of their respective leaders. But the untimely death of the queen in A.D. 1786 left Bahadur Shah unchallenged in the field. With the help of his associates, Damodar Pande, Abhiman Singh and Gajraj Misra – a Rajguru, Bahadur Shah sought to become the actual ruler of Nepal, but when Rana Bahadur Shah was murdered in 1806, then there ensued a frantic struggle for power among various factions of the nobility led mainly by the Pandes and the Thapas. Finally the Bhimsen Thapa emerged as the strongest man of the kingdom and dominated the arena of politics for the next thirty years (A.D. 1806-37) as Mukhtiyar (Prime Minister) of Nepal.

Bhimsen established a political system in which the monarch was reduced into a figure-head while all real power belonged to the Prime Minister. Queen Tripura Sundari Devi, who acted as the Regent during the minority of Rajendra Bikram Shah, Bhimsen also found a sympathetic friend who was willing to help him further to his political designs. But a section of the army and even certain members of the Bhimsen Thapa family got dissatisfied with the manner in which Bhimsen conducted his office. The combined efforts of all these factions and Parties led to the downfall of Bhimsen in A.D. 1837.¹⁴

But Bhimsen's fall only set in motion the forces of political disintegration. Almost immediately old family disputes, dissensions and violence returned to politics. In view of the ambitious of rival factions of the nobility, King Rajendra Bikram Shah failed to reassert the authority of the Crown. On the other hand, none of the families or their chiefs proved strong enough to restore stability in the administration. For that, the next eight years, "the people let the rival hobbles kill each other, and obeyed whichever faction for the time being spoken in the name of royalty.

For a time though the process of disintegration was checked by Matabar Singh Thapa, Bhimsen's nephew, who was made Mukhtiyar and Commander-in-Chief by the King in November 1843. The end came soon when 17th May 1845, Matabar Singh was treacherously murdered by his nephew, Jang Bahadur. After the death of Matabar Singh, a coalition ministry was formed with Fateh Jang Chautaria at the head. Finally the house of Jang Bahadur, later known as the Ranas, replaced the noble families of old.

Politics and Political System under the Ranas

Like the Bhimsen Thapa, Jang Bahadur also proceeded to crush his opponents at the beginning. By massacring, hounding and exiling them out of the country he crushed for all time their chances of recovery. At that time, Jang Bahadur realised that without securing the goodwill of the British government of India, it would not be possible for him to consolidate his position. To this end he applied himself with the thorough going finesses of a diplomat and soon secured British recognition of the new arrangement he had effected after the kot massacre. Another event favoured Jang Bahadur's fortune at this stage. In 1847, he forced King Rajendra Bikram Shah to abdicate in favour of his son Surendra Bikram Shah, a fact which was endorsed by 370 officers and Bhardars created by Jang Bahadur himself.¹⁵

The two important objectives, with which Jang Bahadur began his office were, first, to entrench himself in power as permanently as possible and, second, to pass on the prime ministership as well as other important offices of the state to his brothers and descendants in perpetuity. In order to achieve these goals, he forced the monarch to retire into his palace and take as little part in the administration as possible. Secondly, he procured from king Surendra Bikram Shah, in 1856, a Lal Mohar (royal order) granting him the title of the Maharaja and the rulership of Kaski and Lumjung which was to pass from him "to his offspring to offspring".¹⁶ He was further invested with powers to exercise rights over life and death of the Nepalese subjects throughout the domain, to appoint or dismiss all public servants, to declare war or conclude peace or sign treaty with foreign power, to inflict punishments on offenders and to repeal or

amend or frame laws of the country.¹⁷ By the same Lal Mohar it was fixed that the succession to Mukhtiyari would pass from Jang Bahadur to his brothers and then to his son Jagat Jung. These extraordinary powers were reaffirmed, in 1857, by another Lal Mohar and a copy of it, attested by four brothers of Jang Bahadur, was sent to the Governor-General of India.¹⁸

Thus by obtaining the highest legal sanction of the country, Jang Bahadur avoided the mistake which has cost Bhimsen Thapa, his life. He also raised the social status of his family by securing from the king the elevated "caste of the Ranas" and, later, he began the policy of contracting marriages with members of the royal family which none of his predecessors had thought of doing. These marriages, as his own son suggests, "were downright political treaties",¹⁹ which raised the social standing of the Ranas at par with the members of the Shah family. Again, knowing well the immense political influence of the Brahmans and the position they held in society, Jang Bahadur bestowed liberal favours on them. He preserved their ancient rights, granted them land and Birtas and in general, promoted their economic interests. Similarly, though he advocated certain reforms like abolition of the *Sati* and *Slavery*, he left untouched the civil and criminal laws based on the Hindu Dharmasastras (religion code). This attitude reflected Jang Bahadur's anxiety to show, notwithstanding the violence which attended his rise to power, that he was not unwilling to follow the rules and precepts of caste and society as laid down by the Brahmans. It was the same motive which prevented Jang Bahadur from upsetting the existing system on land or essentially military structure of the government. The Ranas continued to preserve older institutions like the granting of Jagirs and the practice of Pajani by

which the services of all officers of the state from the downward was reviewed, renewed or terminated.

The event of the Rana regime did not usher in an era of revolutionary change in the social and political life of the country. The administration was made hereditary property of the Ranas whose ranks and positions were determined on the basis of their seniority of birth. At the head of the family was the Maharaja's Prime Minister, who centralised in himself all civil and military powers. The scope of his jurisdiction, executive or legislative, remained mostly undefined and he ruled the country more or less like an absolute despot. Below the Prime Minister was the Commander-in-Chief who was the next senior most general of the army holding both civil and military authority in four different parts of the country. The appointments to other successive posts were made on the basis of seniority among the various families of the Ranas. In the army, also the Ranas who held military titles from the very moments of their birth filled top officers. Apart from getting their regular salaries, the Ranas also received grants of *Birtas*, commissions on revenue collection, *Nazarana* and other feudal dues from their tenants.

As a result of the Rana rule the incessant struggles for power among important Ranas reduced the government to a state of perpetual flux and anxiety. In the view of the uncertainty about the future, every person, from the Maharajs to the petty officers, got busy in accumulating for himself as much wealth as he could. As a result in later stages, the Rana administration became an instrument of systematic loot and oppression. The system of granting *Birtas* to the Ranas and their dependants, on the other hand, raised a class of

big landowner who represented the ruling aristocracy of the country. Between them and the masses, consisting mainly of the peasantry, there was hardly anything in common. The only intermediary class which grew up under the Ranas consisted of merchants, zamindars, small Birta owners,²⁰ priests and petty officials who remained completely dependant on their feudal benefactors. As servants of the Ranas, the fate of these men was closely interlinked with that of their patrons. As such they adopted in politics an attitude which only helped in preserving the Rana rule.

Further, the prevalence of feudalism or the land and servant relationship prevented growth of an independent middle class which, in the long run, might have exerted its influence against the continuation of an autocratic regime. During the later phases of the Rana rule, it became an article of faith with the rulers to suppress the growth of an educated intelligentsia. The right to higher education was strictly limited to the members of the ruling family, while the acquisition of knowledge by ordinary citizen was regarded as an act of sedition.²¹ Further, in order to prevent the growth of new ideas among the people, the Ranas kept the country rigidly shut off from all outside contacts. Those of the non-ruling families, who dared to leave the country in search of education or other matters, were deprived of their properties and received additional punishments when they returned to the country.

Thus, the survival of the Rana rule mainly depended on its capacity to suppress the growth of political awakening in the country. Yet, notwithstanding the oppressive character of the regime and social and economic backwardness of the country, the urge for change began to gain momentum in a section of the people. Some

families in Nepal Tarai, who came in greater contact with India than with Kathmandu, got imbued with ideas of social and political reforms as generated by the Indian nationalist movement. Similarly, some members of the lower class civil servants left Kathmandu to settle permanently in India. At a still large stage, some 'C' class Ranas migrated to India where they received higher education and such knowledge as could allow them to participate in commercial enterprises. It was from these three types of emigre Nepalese families that opposition to the Rana rule came in the shape of political movements.

Origins and Evolution of the Anti-Rana Movement

The Rana government took enough precaution to prevent the outbreak of any organised movement in the country. At first, the only form of opposition which it faced came from among the members of the old nobility – The Thapas and the Basniats, who wanted to avenge the wrong done to them and to their ancestors. Sometimes, the Chautarians, the non-Rana Bharadars and even the king himself joined these men to conspire against the Rana Prime Minister. In the prevailing conditions of factional intrigue among the ruling Ranas, the formation of such secret plot became not only easy but frequent. But, more often than not, these conspiracies were motivated by the idea of better government or popular rule. These absorbtive -attempts to overthrow the Rana regime set the stage for the rise of popular movements in Nepal.²²

With the beginning of the twentieth century there developed a movement for religious and social reforms which threatened to impair the hegemony of the Brahmans and the priestly groups who also formed a section of the land owning classes in Nepal. Though

this movement was speedily suppressed, it broadened the social basis of opposition of the Rana rule. By the thirties, some young men who drew inspiration from the activities of terrorist groups in India began to form secret political societies in Nepal. When the secret societies failed, the Nepalese residing in India began to make preparation for fighting the Ranas from outside. In 1947, they launched an organised non-violent movement in Nepal Tarai which forced the Rana ruler to declare a limited measure of constitutional and political reforms. But in view of the growing popular disaffection against the rule, and especially in the context of great political changes in India, these reforms failed to make any impression. Finally, the anti-Rana forces led by the Nepali Congress decided to enter their country with a liberation army which culminated in the revolt of 1950 and the fall of the Rana.

The beginning of social and religious reform movement in the nineteenth century from India, embraced the teaching of the Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. One of them Madhav Raj Joshi returned to Nepal to begin a series of discourses on the Hindu Sastra. In 1896, he started an office of the Arya Samaj at Kathmandu. The threads of his teachings were picked up by the younger generation of the Arya Samajists who began to spread out among different sections of the people. In 1920, these Arya samajists came under fire for the second time when some of them leaders were arrested and thrown into prison. Though the movement suffered a temporary eclipse, the Samajists carried on their work under different names. At this stage, the non-cooperation movement of Gandhi also began to make its influence felt upon a section of the Nepalese people. Thus, by the twenties, a new social consciousness began to develop in Nepal under the guidance of a new set of

leaders. Among them Subba Devi Prasad Sapkota, Krishan Prasad Koirala and Dharani Dhar Sharma were the most outstanding.

By this time, the idea of nationalism also began to spread in Nepal. The writings of Krishna Prasad Koirala and Dharamidhar Sharma's *Naivadhyā* had 'ushered in the twilight of modernity'. This helped the process of development of nationalist sentiments among the new generation of literate Nepalese.²³ A number of young men who escaped to India to receive higher education returned to Nepal by the end of the thirties and started social and educational movements on new lines.

During the thirties, a new organisation called the Nepali Nagrik Adhikar Samiti was set up at Kathmandu with Pandit Sukra Raj Sastri, son of Madhav Raj Joshi. The Samiti worked on a purely socio-religious plane. The Samiti's exclusive concern with spiritual aspects of life made some of its younger members very restive. Finally, at a big meeting held under its auspices, a Newari youth named Gangalal started hurling abuses on the Rana rulers which produced a great sensation in the city. This was perhaps the first political speech ever delivered in Kathmandu. But this incident led to the arrest of both Sastri and Gangalal and thus the Samiti's work came to an abrupt end.²⁴

The impracticability of organising even normal, social activities brought home the conviction to a section of the Nepalese that only underground terrorist activities could succeed in Nepal. Hence, as early as 1931, a handful of men founded a secret society called the *Prachanda Gurkha* which wanted to establish democratic rule by ending the Rana system. But even before this club could begin functioning its members were arrested and thrown into prison.

But the sense of utter frustration and urge for revenge drove another extremist group to found in 1935, under a thick cloak of secrecy, the *Praja Parishad*, in the very heart of Kathmandu. Some leading members of the Parishad were Tanka Prasad Acharya, Dasarath Chandra, Ram Hari Sharma and the physical instructor of the king Dharma Bhakta. The Parishad's aim was to end the *Rana Sirkar* (Government) and to establish a democratic government under the aegis of the monarch. The Parishad decided to function at two levels, first, to educate the people in political movements and second, to assassinate some important Ranas to bring a swift change in the government²⁵

The Praja Parishad, could not work for long. In 1940, through betrayal or vigorous police investigation, the Ranas came to know the name of its organisers. By October 1940, about 500 persons were arrested and after a brief trial Dharma Bhakta, Dasarath Chandra, Gangalal and Sukra Raj Sastri were executed, and other leaders were awarded long terms of imprisonment. But in spite of its failure, the importance of the Praja Parishad movement cannot be minimised. It infused new courage and confidence in the anti-Rana elements. It set the stage for successive struggles on a larger scale. Its activities became a part of the modern Nepalese legends.

Political Parties

Before we analyse the role and functions of political parties of Nepal, it would be relevant to examine the major functions performed by a political party of a country. According to Gilchrist a party may be defined as an organised group of citizens who profess to share the same political views and who by acting as a political units, try to control the government. Thus four things are required

for the formation of a political party – organisation; principles, policies and programmes; desire for power; and lastly, the object of national interest. In a democratic country the political parties pursue their programmes through peaceful, and constitutional means, through press, platform and other means for propaganda.

Political parties are the lifeblood of democracy. The conception of democracy is rule of the people for their own welfare. But in a big nation where the number of voters is very large, every voter cannot express his views on vital political issues. Nor is an average voter intelligent enough to understand and comment on political problems. The political parties mould public opinion and create an order out of the chaos of individual opinions. People generally curse political parties but they probably do so because of their ignorance. They do not know that democracy cannot deliver goods in the absence of political parties. It is only under autocratic monarchy or ruthless military rule that the political parties are not allowed to come up. One party system leads to fascist rule. In communist countries like Russia, Hungary, China and other, no opposition groups are allowed to raise its a head. The consequences are well known. There is no check on the arrogance of the communist party. Hence the successful functioning of democracy requires the presence of at least two political parties in the country – one to rule and other to act as watchdog; without political parties democracy degenerates into totalitarianism, as Maclver says, “There can be no unified statement of principle, no orderly evolution of policy, no regular resort to the constitutional device of parliamentary elections, nor of course any of the recognised institution by means of which a party seeks to gain and maintain power”.²⁶

The political parties in a democracy serve very useful purposes. They enable the masses to choose their rulers. The party whose ideology and programme secure the approval of the voters at the election, forms the government. Secondly, the party in opposition give timely warning to the ruling group against following a particular policy. The political parties have also performed the similar kinds of functions in Nepal. The political parties in Nepal are the recent origin. The historical roots may be traced back, at the most, to the past five decades. The problems of analysing different aspects of political parties in Nepal is compounded because during the last five decades Nepal has experienced not one but many form of political systems. Starting from Ranacracy it moved to what may be termed as the period of protective monarchy with unstable coalition governments. It experimented with one and a half years of multiparty democratic system before entering into roughly thirty years of partyless Panchayat System. Finally in 1990, consequent upon a popular mass bass movement it adopted multiparty system.

Among the numerous parties and political groups which grew up in Nepal during 1950-60, those which played a prominent role in politics were the Nepali Congress, the Gurkha Parishad, the Samyukta Prajatantra Party and the Nepal Communist Party. Ideologically, in their compositions these parties were different from each other. The Nepali Congress was a large and loosely-knit organisation in which various sectors and classes of the Nepalese society, ranging from the rich Ranas and land-owners to poor peasants, found a place. Ideologically, the Nepali Congress claimed to be a socialist party which sought to establish a socialist society through peaceful and parliamentary means. The Gurkha Parishad, on the other hand, represented the conservative elements among the



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Ranas and stood for defending the traditional values in the name of nationalism. Dr. K.I. Singh's Samukta Prajatantra Party was composed of a hybrid group of dissatisfied political workers, and some Ranas and agricultural labourers of western Tarai. It did not follow any particular ideology or programme and remained, in the main, dominated by the personality of a single man. The Nepali Communist Party recruited most of its members from among the lower middle class salaried and business groups in the cities and poor peasants. It practised rigid methods in organisation and tended towards political extremism in its policies. Thus, it could be said that among the four major parties of Nepal, the first was a moderate socialist party, the second was conservative and nationalist, the third was a personality party and the last was extremist. As these four parties represented four different trends and types of party-formations in Nepal.

The Nepali Congress was originally born on foreign soil, it accomplished the biggest revolution in Nepalese history by overthrowing the family rule of the Ranas. Among all the political parties, the Nepali Congress alone played an important role in influencing the developments of Nepal during the post-Rana period. Nepali Congress was formally founded in Calcutta on 9th April 1950, its origin goes back to the eventful years preceding the attainment of Indian Independence. The origin of Nepali Congress, its role and performance will be discussed in chapter II.

The Gurkha Parishad owed its origin to the outbreak of widespread violence and political disorder which came in the wake of the armed revolt in 1950-1. As the revolt was mainly organised by the Nepali Congress from India, under cover of nationalist slogans, the extremist section of the Ranas organised a new party called the



Gurkha Dal and attempted to overthrow the Rana-Congress coalition government. In 1952, the leaders of the Dal held a conference at Kathmandu and decided to form a new party under the name of Gurkha Parishad. They adopted a manifesto which stated that the Parishad was formed in order “to save the country from armed upheavals on the one hand and near dictatorship of the party in power, on the other.” It claimed that nationalism was an inborn quality of the Nepalese and as such the Gurkhas Parsishad was a “Party of nationalists”.

In 1956, the Gurkha Parishad held its third conference at Rautahat where it adopted new manifesto and a new Constitution. The Constitution stated that the party followed four objectives. (1) To guard Nepal’s independent sovereign status; (2) to establish a democratic system of government under the aegis of constitutional monarchy; (3) to achieve economic independence of the people through better means of production and just distribution of the national wealth and (4) to educate the people in the exercise of their democratic right and duties through all possible means of constitutional agitation.²⁷

The Samyukta Prajatantra Party, which was a personality party formed by Dr. K.I. Singh in October 1955. In the lengthy manifesto, the party described how “selfish” and “opportunist” politicians had brought about an atmosphere of apathy and distrust among the people. Asserting that in Nepal it was the only democratic party, the manifesto underlined the following programmes:

- (1) to strive for all-round development of the country on the basis of a monarchical system of government;
- (2) to abolish birta land of the zamindari system; to provide land to the cultivators and to nationalise forest and excess lands;

- (3) to exploit national resources to the maximum for national goods and services;
- (4) to establish a new society based on equality and communal harmony, and
- (5) to keep Nepal away from the power blocs, and to build friendly relations with other countries on the basis of mutual benefit and equality.²⁸

Obviously, in this programme there was nothing particular to distinguish the new party from other groups or factions. The only thing on which the manifesto was more explicit was that it envisaged a system of government in which the king occupied the highest authority, with a Cabinet to work under him and to remain responsible to an elected parliament.

Nepal Communist Party, which had an ideology of extremism formed in 1947, when India became free, some India-trained communist were reported to have become active in certain parts of Nepal in organising revolts and strikes among peasants and workers. Though these communists were working on purely individual initiative, it seems that among a section of the Nepalese youth, then studying in India, a conviction was growing that only communist methods were suitable in the Nepalese conditions to solve her outstanding political, social and economic problems. Inspired by the Indian Communists, these young intellectuals soon came to believe that a class struggle in Nepal was imminent and that some foreign imperialist powers were conspiring with the Ranas to convert their country into a military base. Following the tactical line of the Indian communist party about the "collaborationist" character of India's national leadership, they also feared that the free government of India was harbouring expansionist schemes in Nepal.

With these convictions deeply imbedded in their minds, some Nepalese met at Calcutta on 15th September 1949 and founded the Nepal Communist Party.²⁹ The new party set before itself the task of organising Nepalese peasants and workers into militant bodies and starting a peace movement in Nepal as a part of the communist directed world peace movement. Other than these four major parties some small groups or faction around some issues or individual leaders who played, at one time or another, some important role in politics.

The Nepal Praja Parishad of the forties was revived by Tanka Prasad Acharya after his release in 1951. By disposition Tanka Prasad was more sympathetic towards the Communists than towards the socialist oriented Nepali Congress leaders. As such he declared that the aim of his party was to establish a "classless society" by ending all kinds of social and economic exploitation. For sometime, during 1951-52 the Praja Parishad worked with the Nepal Communist Party in the so-called people's democratic front.

In 1955, Tanka Prasad's Praja Parishad, B.K. Mishra's Jana Congress and Bal Chandra Sharma's faction in the Rashtriya Praja Party (RPP) merged to form the new and larger Nepal Praja Party (NPP). The reason for this merger seem to have been the common desire of these three leaders to pull their strength together with a view to replace M.P. Koirala's government by an alternative one.

D.R. Regmi's "Nepali Rashtriya Congress" originated out of a split in the Rashtriya Congress in 1947. As a group leader Regmi had a limited following in the country, but with his comparatively higher educational attainments it was not difficult for him to get important position in the government for a long time. In 1954, he became a minister in M.P. Koirala's cabinet and for sometime he managed to maintain the reputation of being one of the top leaders

of Nepal. In 1957, he joined the Democratic front with the Nepali Congress and the Praja Parishad to demand for the formation of a constitutional assembly.

The Nepal Prajatantrik Mahasabha was started in 1957 by Ranganath Sharma, an old political worker of Nepal. Sharma held for sometime the post of a minister in Tanka Parsad's expanded Cabinet. Later, he was financed by some wealthy Ranas to start a party of his own. But the failure of Sharma in the election proved that financial subsidies from the Ranas were not enough to make a party leader popular in Nepal.

The Nepal Tarai Congress, unlike the personality parties wielded real influence in certain parts of the Tarai, organised in 1951, at soon grew up into a regional party to champion the cause of the oppressed people of the Tarai against the unjust policies of the central government. The political problem of the Tarai had been such as to give the new party an immediate boost. The separatist nature of the Tarai Congress prevented it from becoming a national organisation. The absence of a strong and dynamic leadership also limited its popular appeal which became one of the reasons for its failure in the general election. But the history of the Tarai Congress proves that in a country where society is divided into numerous castes, tribals and regional groups, divisive and parochial tendencies in politics are apt to be more accentuated.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁶ For detail see Regmi, n.5, p.39.
- ⁷ Anirudha Gupta, n.2, p.4.
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- ¹¹ Regmi, n.5, p.20.
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- ¹³ Anirudha Gupta, n.2, p.7.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p.10.
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- ¹⁶ Satish Kumar Agarwal, Political System under the Ranas, 1846-1901 (Thesis, Indian School of International Studies, New Delhi, 1961), pp.236-8.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p.237.
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- ¹⁹ General Padma Jung Bahadur Rana, Life of Maharaja Sir Jung Bahadur of Nepal (Allahabad, 1909), p.171.
- ²⁰ See Mahesh Chandra Regmi, Some Aspects of land Reform in Nepal (Kathmandu, 1950), pp.2-4.
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- ²² Anirudha Gupta, n.2, p.19.
- ²³ Krishna Chandra Singh Pradhan, "Trends in Modern Nepali Poetry", United Asia (Bombay), 12 (1960), p.155.
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Chapter II

NEPALI CONGRESS EVOLUTION AND PERFORMANCE TILL 1990

Nepal had by 1950, completed over a century of the autocratic Rana rule. Throughout the period, Nepal, governed by an autocracy, was almost in isolation from the external world and, as a result, unaffected by international realities.¹ The century was divided into various principalities before 1769. The Gorkha ruler, King Prithvinarayan Shah had unified it in that year. For certain circumstances, in 1846, the Ranas came to establish their pre-eminent position in the administration except that the Ranas could not occupy the throne.²

Ten Ranas ruled the country in succession. The Ranas obviously, had no love for their democracy of any liberal administration. It was inconceivable to organise any political group or party or to ask for any reform worth the name in the despotic political system. In the literal sense of the term, the Ranas had little love for their country or their subject. It is curious to note that though they had got power from the King, they were not responsible to him, much less to the people. The Ranas perpetuated extreme economic backwardness in the country. The significant part of the country's property had been turned into Birta (rent free) land.³

The British, who ruled India, they treated Nepal almost like a sacred cow and showed no inclination to intervene or even suggested to Ranas the need to bring about the country's democratisation. The British received the support of the Ranas to maintain their empire. Nepal was, by and large, treated by the British as a semi sovereign state and was not allowed freedom in forming its foreign policy.⁴ The Ranas, on the other hand, benefited from the sort of servility to the British in many way. It gave them a sense of security against any foreign aggression-real or apparent. Any kind of political or even

socio-cultural movements of the Nepalese in India could not survive for long. Such type of movement were suppressed by the British in India.⁵

Within the Rana family, the sub-groupings in the Rana family labelled as 'A' 'B' and 'C' according to the caste of the mother. The most important post including that of the Prime Minister was attributed to 'A' Group and very rarely to group 'B'. In the long run this division became fatal for the Ranas as the 'C' class Ranas and some 'B' class Ranas being deprived of these posts, actively contributed to the formation of political parties.⁶

The formation of political parties in Nepal began in mid-thirties. Two factors contributed of this development. First, the Indian nationalist movement which encouraged the Nepali youths in India to form their own political party. The second, factor was the support and cooperation of the 'C' class Ranas. The first political organisation was the Praja Parishad, formed in 1935. This organisation largely contributed towards raising the political awareness among the masses and increased the Prospects for organised mass upsurge during the following years.⁷

Till 1950 Court Politics was the only form of politics that prevailed in Nepal. It was reduced to flattery and loyalty to the Ranas who had completed over a century of autocratic rule by that time. As observed by Parmanand: "It was inconceivable to organise any political group or party or to ask for any reform worth the name in the despotic political system. Political discussion, much less strike and demonstrations, were foreign to Nepal."⁸

A large number of the Nepalese politicians came to identify themselves with the struggle against the British launched in India. The active participation of several Nepalese in the Non-Cooperation Movement, Quit India Movement and Indian National Army of Subhash Chandra Bose, Anti-Rana Nepalese were further inspired by the Indian Socialist leaders, like Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia. These incident further brought the Nepalese leaders closer to the Indian Socialist leaders and later blessing was that the Nepalese politicians in exile later organised a political party.⁹

The Indian national movement had a profound impact on the course of politics in Nepal. A large number of Nepalese, who either had their education in India or lived, they were greatly influenced by the national movement, launched by the Indian National Congress. A large number of Nepalese leaders were arrested during the Quit India Movement, (1942) launched by the Indian National Congress. Prominent among them were: B.P. Koirala, K.P. Upadhaya, D.R. Regmi, Hari Prasad Pradhan and Udairaj Lal.¹⁰ These were leaders inspired by the Indian freedom movement who organised Political Parties in 1946-47.¹¹

Formation of the Nepali National Congress

In October 1946, B.P. Koirala, by now an influential member of the Congress Socialist Party, issued a statement from Patna to organise a movement against the Rana regime in Nepal. As the son of the "Nepali Gandhi", K.P. Koirala, and because of his association with the socialist leaders of India, his appeal was destined to have an enthusiastic response. B.P. Koirala's imprisonment on several occasion during the Quit India Movement also stood him in a good stead. As a result of his appeal, an organisation called the Akhil-

Bhartiya Nepali Rashtriya Congress (All-India Nepali National Congress) was set up in Banaras on 31st October 1946. Apart from B.P. Koirala, other who encouraged the Nepalese in India to form an organisation of this nature included the Indian socialist leaders, Jayaprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia.¹²

This organisation was largely composed of students. But even among the students there were two groups: (a) those students who maintained regular contacts with Nepal and used to go home during the holidays and (b) the elderly ex-students who had already settled in India.¹³ In order to decide on the structure, function and principles and the mode of functioning of the organisation a conference was convened in Calcutta on 25-26th January 1947. In this conference, recommended the dropping of the words "Akhil Bhartiya" (All India).

The main objectives of the Nepali Rashtriya Congress were to lend cooperation for the achievement of freedom for India and the establishment of a representative government in Nepal under the Constitutional leadership of the King after deposing the Ranas from their seat of power. The party adopted non-violence as the means to achieve its objectives.¹⁴

The Party Splits

The major factors behind the split was the leadership rivalry between B.P. Koirala and D.R.Regmi. D.R. Regmi was elected new acting President in July 1947 following B.P. Koirala's arrest in March 1947. But when B.P. Koirala was released in September 1947 he challenged D.R. Regmi's election and asked to step down in his

favour. Regmi, refused and later formed his own faction of the Nepali National Congress.¹⁵

In August 1948, yet another party called the Nepal Prajatantrik Congress (Nepal Democratic Congress) came into being. This was set up by Suvarna Shamsher and Mahabir Shamsher, two 'C' Class Ranas living in India. Like the Nepali Rashtriya Congress, it also aimed at overthrowing the Rana regime. But unlike the Rashtriya Congress, the Prajatantrik Congress believed in and preached violence as the means to achieve its end.¹⁶

Merger of the Parties

Compelled by the circumstances, both the parties merged together to form the 'Nepali Congress' on 9th April 1950 in Calcutta. The reason for their merger is not far to seek. The Nepal Prajatantrik Congress, by then, came to realise that mere violence could not achieve the objective without mass support which it lacked. The Nepali Rashtriya Congress, despite a large number of dedicated workers and mass following after its role in the Biratnagar strike of March 1947, lacked financial resources. Thus, both these parties needed each other. Such a complementarity was the main reason for their merger.¹⁷

Soon after its establishment, the Nepali Congress Party challenged the Rana Government by launching a movement for political rights. The late king Tribhuvan was favourably disposed towards the movement. The Rana government decided to suppress the Nepali Congress Party, and its movement. The king, fearing that he might also be arrested by the Rana Prime Minister, escaped to the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu. He later flew to India. The sudden

departure of the King from the political scene triggered off widespread antigovernment agitation. The Ranas installed King Tribhuvan's grandson to the throne but agitation continued. The embarrassment of the Rana Prime Minister was India's support to the Nepali Congress Party's agitation and refusal to recognise the new king. The Indian posture at this stage proved decisive. The Ranas had to negotiate an agreement with King Tribhuvan, which provided for the return of the king to Kathmandu, formation of a coalition government comprising the Ranas and the Nepali Congress Party, and some liberalisation of the political system.

The new coalition government, formed in February 1951, was an odd combination of the two groups (The Ranas and the Nepali Congress Party) who had been each other's arch enemies in the past. By November 1951, tension between the Ranas and the Nepali Congress Party's members created a deadlock in the Cabinet. The Prime Minister and other Rana ministers resigned on November 2nd, 1951. The king called upon the Nepali Congress Party to form the new Government. The Nepali Congress Party nominated M.P. Koirala (half brother of B.P. Koirala) to be the Prime Minister. This marked the end of the Rana domination of Nepal's politics. For the first time in the Nepalese history a political party which promised to democratise the political system, obtained control over the levers of political powers.¹⁸ The formation of the Nepali Congress Cabinet gave a fillip to political activity in Nepal. A high degree of optimism pervaded the educated and politically active group that Nepal would soon shape into participatory democracy.

However, the political parties failed to provide stable and effective government capable of pursuing modernisation and

democratisation of the political system. During 1951-59, Nepal had six different cabinets. This was in added to the direct rule by the king which had to be imposed thrice during this period. Table 1 shows different Cabinets and direct rule by the king.¹⁹

Era of Party Politics: 1950-60

The Delhi Agreement ushered in an era of party politics for the first time in the history of Nepal. Till May 1959 when Nepal's first and so far only general elections were held, political instability and confusion reigned supreme. In the absence of a visible democratic culture the political parties soon proved themselves to be quite inept, both in the matter of organisation and running of the administration. The Nepali Congress, according to Rose and Scholz, was "too unorganised and too internally divided to set up a stable regime in Kathmandu".²⁰

Table 1

Cabinet in Nepal 1951-59

Prime Minister	Political parties represented	Period
M.P. Koirala	Nepali Congress Party and Independents	Nov. 1951-August 1952.
King's Advisory Government with the King himself as Prime Minister		Aug. 1952-June 1953
M.P. Koirala	National Democratic Party and an Independent	June 1953-Feb. 1954.
M.P. Koirala	National Democratic Party, Nepali Rashtriya Congress, The Praja Parishad and the Jana Congress	Feb. 1954-March 1955.
Tanka Prasad Acharya	Nepal Praja Parsiad, Nepali Rashtriya Congress, Jana Congress Praja Prashid (old liners)	Jan. 1956-July 1957
K.I. Singh	United Democratic Party, Independents and a dissident of the Nepali Rashtriya Congress	July 1957 – November 1957
Direct Rule by the King		Nov. 1957-May 1958
Subarma Shamsher (Care Taker Govt.)	Nepali Congress Party, The Gorkha Prashid, Nepali Rashtriya Congress The Praja Parishad and Independent	May 1958-May 1959.

Source: Hasan Askari Rizvi, "Party Politics in Nepal" in Verinder Grover (ed.) "Encyclopaedia of SAARC Naton", vol.5, Nepal, New Delhi, 1997, p.213.

Elections and Parliamentary Democracy

In 1951, the king Tribhuvan promised to grant a constitution in Nepal and hold elections on the basis of adult franchise. This promise was repeated by the King in 1954. After his death, his successor, king Mahendra, reiterated the Crown's promise to make necessary arrangement for a regular constitution for Nepal. All political parties had been demanding a 'democratic' constitution for Nepal.

The permanent constitution, popularly known as the 1959 constitution, was prepared by a constitution commission appointed by the king. The Constitution attributed sovereignty to the king, guaranteed fundamental rights to the people and set up a bicameral legislature and an independent judiciary. The Cabinet, headed by the Prime Minister, was responsible to the lower house. The upper house was partly elected indirectly and partly nominated by the king. The lower house was elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.

The first general elections were held from February 3rd to 12th April 1959 for 109 seats of the Lower House. There were 768 candidates, out of these 500 were put up by 9 political parties and 286 were independent. All the nine political parties issued their manifestos and programmes which were quite similar. The difference was only in emphasis on different issues. This was the first occasion that the political parties made serious and repeated efforts to extend their support-base by involving more people in the political process.

Table -2 shows the election results.

Table 2

Party Position in the 1959 General Election

Political Party	Seats Contested	Seats won
Nepali Congress Party	108	74
Gorkha Parishad	86	19
Samyukta Prajatantra Party	86	5
Nepal Communist Party	47	4
Praja Parishad (Acharya Group)	46	2
Praja Parishad (Mishra Group)	36	1
Nepal Tarai Congress	21	0
Nepal Rashtriya Congress	20	0
Prajatantrik Mahasabha	58	0
Independent	268	4
Total	786	109

Source: Hasan Askari Rizvi, "Party Politics in Nepal" in Verinder Grover (ed.) "Encyclopaedia of SAARC Nation", vol.5, Nepal, (New Delhi, 1997), p.218.

This election shows the Nepali Congress's emerging as the largest political party, capturing 74 of the total 109 seats.²¹

B.P. Koirala, leader of the Nepali Congress Party, was invited by the King to form the new government. The new government announced by King Mahendra was by far the largest cabinet established in nine years of political experimentation. The ministry comprised eight Ministers and eleven Deputy Ministers.²²

The Nepali Congress Party used official patronage to secure support of the cross section of population. As a large number of people were trying to get on the bandwagon, the Nepali Congress Party, already suffering from internal discord, became more faction ridden. Each faction was making an all out effort to out manoeuvre its rival faction in the party. These problems made it difficult for the government to pursue its social and economic policies seriously. The land reforms designate to contain the power of the landed aristocracy and help the peasants to implement these properties.

The oppositional political parties formed a National Democratic Front to act as an effective opposition to the Nepali Congress Government. Other powerful interest groups, i.e. the landed aristocracy, the Ranas, joined hands with the opposition political parties. This gradually isolated the government and made it vulnerable to a political assault by these disaffected and opposition sections of population.

There were three major incidents of law and order and open defiance of the authority of the government in April, October and November 1960, in different parts of Nepal. There were heavy losses of human life and property in these incidents. The government was able to control the situation but not before exposing its indecisiveness and weakness to handle such delicate situation. The opposition parties started demanding resignation of the government. On top of all this, a number of leading member of the Nepali Congress Party defeated and demanded the dismissal of the government by the King.

Dismissal of Nepali Congress Ministry

By December 1960, Nepal was gradually drifting towards chaos. The Nepali Congress government was badly shaken by touch opposition,

factionalism within the party and the lack of will power to handle political crisis, including open revolts. King Mahendra, who never had good opinion about these political parties, decided to put an end to political uncertainty and confusion by suspending the constitution on December 15th, 1960. The Cabinet and the Parliament were dismissed. Prime Minister B.P. Koirala, a number of his colleagues and some politicians were arrested. In his proclamation of dismissal of the government, the king charged the Nepali congress party of misusing authority to serve the party's interests, dislocating and paralysing government authority, imperilling the national unity, failure to introduce economic reforms on the basis of scientific analysis and factual study of the objective condition.

After the dismissal of the Nepali Congress ministry and the dissolution of parliament on 15th December 1960, a ban was imposed on all political parties and non-government political activities in the Kingdom. The quick developments following the royal coup was suggested that main aim of the king to eliminate the Nepali Congress as a political force in the country. Indeed, it was the worst hit. It lost most of its top leadership through imprisonment, voluntary exile and subsequent desertion. With only a few exceptions, all the party leaders inside Nepal either suffered imprisonment or pledged their loyalty to the royal regime. Immediately after the royal take-over, the Nepali Congress found itself in a quandary. Political activity in the country was banned and most of its leaders had been arrested. But with the appointment of the council of ministers on 26th December it became clear that the parliamentary democracy would not be restored soon. Therefore, at this time, the Nepali Congress started opposing the new regime.

The end of parliamentary democracy under the King's proclamation did not face any serious challenge. The opposition parties were generally

happy over the dismissal of the Koirala government. A good number of leaders of the Nepali Congress Party who escaped arrest, slipped across and borders to India. However, all of them were released immediately after their arrest, after they pledged themselves to support the royal action.²³

On 26th December 1960, the King appointed a council of ministers. The council was meant to help him to run the administration. On 5th January 1961, King Mahendra banned all Political Parties functioning in the country. Thus the quick political development that followed the royal take over suggested the King's main aim of eliminating the Nepali Congress as a political force in the country.²⁴

All this give credence to B.P. Koirala's observation that "... the coup in 1960 was not against me.... This confusion spread all over the world that it was a fight between the Prime Minister and the King and the king got the better of it. It was not that. The King's enemy was the Parliamentary system, democracy, he wanted to finish that. Because I was the representative of the democratic system, the most important person since I was Prime Minister, he decided to hit me. He also dissolved Parliament; he arrested all the members of the parliament; he dissolved all the political parties; he arrested all the members of political parties".²⁵

Policy after the Dismissal

Initially, the Party's opposition to the royal regime was rather mild, its main objective being the restoration of parliamentary democracy through non-violent means. Such means included persuasion, petition and protest. In the beginning, the party seemed busy in making a two-fold bid to achieve its objectives. On the one hand, it tried to register its protest against the action of the King; the other, it made all possible efforts to strengthen its rank and file. The former process was facilitated by a number

of statements by Nepali Congress leaders against the King's policies, the demand for the restoration of parliamentary democracy, and above all, the release of B.P. Koirala. The party's rank and file were strengthened by the merger of various political parties with the Nepali Congress.

The Nepali Congress, which had launched an armed struggle in 1950 to restore the monarchy, again to restore the armed struggle after a decade, but this time, against the monarchy.

The system of Panchayat democracy was formally opened in April 1962 and was made an integral part of the new constitution introduced by the King in December 1962. The 1962 constitution vested sovereignty in the King and made him the source of legislative, executive and judicial powers. The Prime Minister was appointed by the King from among the members of the Rashtriya Panchayat. The Rashtriya Panchayat was the highest tier of the Panchayat system and enjoyed very limited powers.²⁶

The ban on political parties did not put an end to their role in the political systems of Nepal. Their mode of operation was changed. The Nepali Congress Party spearheaded opposition to the King from Indian soil. It succeeded in securing the support of other Nepali political leaders residing in India for its demands for the restoration of democracy, the withdrawal of ban on political parties and the release of all political prisoners. They operated against the government of Nepal from India either by launching armed attacks on the boarder villages of Nepal or by working in collaboration with the underground anti-government elements in Nepal. Later, the Indian government on protest from Nepal, discouraged the exiled Nepalis from launching armed attacks on Nepal's territory. But it did not deny facilities to those exiled leaders for political activities against the government of Nepal. This was mainly because India's first Prime Minister Nehru and several important political leaders of India were sympathetic

towards the leadership of the Nepali Congress Party and their Political demands.

The Congress not only survived but also prospered. Its years of distress and self-isolation gave it the halo of martyrdom. In self-penance the Congress gained a new image which attracted younger generations of a better-educated, economically mobile and politically articulate new middle class. But around the middle of 1970s, the central issue in politics riveted round a single theme viz. autocracy versus democracy. This subjective change must be kept in view to understand why a badly injured Nepali Congress was pushed to the forefront in 1979, when students of Kathmandu were in a dramatic protest against the Panchayat regime. The idea of democracy not only evoked larger, popular response; for the first time it also found a social base in the support of an emergent middle class. As a result, the Nepali Congress was dragged into leading a mass democratic movement.

King Mahendra's successor, the young King Birendra, perceived this change. In his message of 16th December 1979, he announced his intention to hold a referendum on the Panchayat System with a set of reforms guaranteeing:

- (a) Universal adult suffrage
- (b) Appointment of the Prime Minister on the Legislature's recommendation and
- (c) Collective responsibility of the Cabinet to the Legislature.²⁷

King announced the referendum and ordered to release B.P. Koirala and other political leaders. The referendum was held in 1980 in which 66 percent of 7.19 million voters participated in the referendum. The result

favoured the partyless system by 54.5 percent as against 48 percent of the voters who said 'no' to the system. Yet notes Rishikesh Shah, the victory of the establishment by not quite 10 percent was not very impressive; "After all despite one sided hostile propaganda against the multiparty system over a period of 19 years, accompanied by constant praise of the partyless panchayat system through every means of propaganda at the government's command, 45 percent of the voters voted for the multiparty system". In a democracy, add Shaha, "It is not practical or wise to impose the view of 55 percent on the remaining 45 percent".²⁸

The verdict was a major setback for the Nepali Congress and particularly for B.P. Koirala. The party suffered another setback when its general secretary, Parshu Narayan Choudhari joined the panchayat mainstream soon after the 1981 panchayat election. At the same time the referendum had also divided the panchas into those who favoured the multiparty system and those supporting the partyless dispensation under the guidance of the king. By the time B.P. Koirala died in July 1982, cracks were clearly visible in the panchayat camp.²⁹

The referendum was followed by general election in May 1981. The Nepali Congress boycotted these polls (held on non-party basis) and launched a Satyagraha in 1985, which did not succeed. The 1986 general elections were boycotted by the party again. But by that time divisions within the panchas had become very sharp. In the 1986 election nearly two-thirds of the seats were won by the newcomers "on the one point programme of remodelling of the system".

Victory at Last

The opportunity to launch the final assault on the panchayat system was provided by the India-Nepal dispute over trade and transit in early

1989 and India's subsequent economic blockade of landlocked Nepal in March 1989, following the expiry of the agreements on trade and transit. The Nepali Congress Central Committee at its two-day meeting (June 18-20, 1989) in Kathmandu held the panchayat system responsible for the hardships faced by the people as a result of this dispute. The resolution adopted at the meeting also demanded abolition of the panchayat system and formation of a national government lifting of the ban on political parties and holding of party-based elections.³⁰ The meeting also appointed Ganeshman Singh as the "Supreme leader" of the party to take such concrete steps as necessary with the support and co-operation of the people of Nepal and all such political elements who believe in the immediate restoration of democracy in Nepal.³¹ It was also reported that talks were under way between the Nepali Congress and other democrats and leftists on a joint strategy "to bring about a change in the present political system" and that many panchayat leaders also supported the Nepali Congress resolution of June 1989.³²

The decision to launch the movement was taken at the 3-day conference of the party in Kathmandu on January 18-20th, 1990.³³ On the eve of the meeting, seven leftist parties formed a United Left Front on January 16th, 1990, which declared that the foremost need of the day is the abolition of the panchayat system and the establishment of a multi-party democracy.³⁴

The movement launched on February 18th, 1990 soon engulfed the entire kingdom and demonstrations and rallies were held across the country for the restoration of democracy. Scores of people died in police firing and thousands were arrested. The turning point came on 6th April, 1990, when about 300,000 to 500,000 people held a mammoth rally outside the palace in Kathmandu, demanding democratic reforms. The Palace guards, in panic, opened fire killing some 150 people and wounding many more.³⁵

The same day the king sacked Prime Minister Marich Man Singh and his cabinet and appointed Lokendra Bahadur Chand as the new Prime Minister whose main job was to open a dialogue with the movement leaders. Following talks with the leaders of the pro-democracy movement, King Birendra agreed on 8th April to remove the word “Partyless” from the Constitution as well as the ban on political parties. He also accepted the demand for the setting up of an interim government to hold party-based elections and constitution of a panel to draft a new constitution.³⁶ On 14th April, king Birendra invited the leaders of the movement, the Nepali Congress and the United Marxist Leninist (UML), to form an interim government charged with:

- (a) Framing a democratic constitution and
- (b) Holding general election within a year’s time.

The panchayat was dissolved on 16th April and the new interim coalition government of the Nepali Congress and ULF was sworn in on 19th April, 1990, headed by the acting president of the Nepali Congress, *Krishna Prasad Bhattarai*.

In November, the new constitution was accepted and promulgated by king Birendra to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. In its preamble, the constitution vested “sovereignty in the people of Nepal”, and accepted parliamentary system of government, constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy, and Nepal to be “a mutli-ethnic, multi-lingual and indivisible Hindu Kingdom”.

The legal expression of multiparty democracy, as incorporated in the constitution, went far beyond anything even the Congress had envisaged. It required that all political organisations must

- (i) adhere to the norms of democracy,

- (ii) provide for election of their office bearers every five years and
- (iii) have at least 5 percent women of the total number of candidates, they put up in any election.

The New Statute

The run up to the new constitution has not been smooth. Differences emerged between the Nepali Congress and its coalition partners over some of the clauses. The setting up of the constitutional commission kicked up a controversy King Birendra. Unilaterally set up the commission on 15th May 1990, it was reconstituted on 30th May. With the consultation of Prime Minister but headed by the, Justice Biswanath Upadhyaya. The statute was promulgated by the King Birendra on 9th November, 1990.

Some salient features of the new constitution:

- (a) Nepal has been declared a multi-ethnic, lingual, democratic, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu, constitutional monarchical kingdom with Nepali as the national and official language. All other languages spoken as the mother tongue would be the languages of the nation.³⁷
- (b) The King, who was the fountainhead of all state power till 8th November, 1990, with the country's sovereignty vested in him, is now "the symbol of Nepalese nationality and the unity of the people of Nepal". Under the new statute all acts performed by the crown, except those exclusively within the King's domain, will now be performed only with the advice and consent of the council of ministers.

- (c) The new statute guarantees fundamental rights to every citizen, the protection of liberty, consolidation of multiparty democracy, constitutional monarchy and an independent judiciary.
- (d) Nepal will have, under the new constitution, a House of Representatives of Lower House comprising 205 elected members and an upper house (National Council) of 60 members. One third members of the later will retire every two years.
- (e) The King may declare a state of emergency in the event of a threat to the nation by war, foreign aggression, civil unrest or economic depression “through such a declaration may be made only on the advice of the council of ministers and must be supported by the lower house within three month.

The Nepali Congress Camp was jubilant over the proclamation of the new constitution. Ganeshman Singh welcomed it, saying “it has opened a new era with vast possibilities of political, social and economic development of the country.” He also called for “close cooperation between political parties and the King”. An elated Bhattarai said, “The constitution will now ensure that there can never be one-mass rule in the Kingdom.” Quite interestingly he also observed that the statute will also “increase the King’s popularity”.³⁸

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Chapter III

ELECTION DURING THE NINETIES: PERFORMANCE OF NEPALI CONGRESS

The General Election 1991

In Nepal a multiparty parliamentary election was held in May 1991, the first in 32 years. The Constitution had ordained major organisational changes in the electoral framework and had provided for nearly twice as many elected representatives (on a per capita basis) as the earlier regime. Election districts were deemed to be the existing administrative districts, and each one had a minimum of one constituency and a maximum of six, according to population size. Election Commission went to great lengths to update voter's list, as the voting age had been lowered from 21 to 18 and to ensure the registration of all eligible parties. A total of 44 parties were registered, but only 20 of these were willing or able to field candidates for the elections; there were 397 independent candidates.¹

The most prominent political theme of the United Marxist-Leninists (UML) was the introduction of a new democracy – allegedly a more progressive form of conventional democracy. It called for a struggle for radical change while protecting the gains achieved by the movement. *The Nepal worker's and peasants party and united people's front* went beyond the confines of the constitution to propound the formation of a people's republic. They also pointed out to the voters about the danger, that the Nepali Congress Panchayat collusion might obstruct the political process. The Nepali Congress pulled a centrist democratic line with a learning towards democratic socialism, but with clear recognition of the recent global economic trends towards a more liberal order.

The Nepal Sadbhavana Party championed equality at the end of discrimination, mainly to the people of the Tarai. Allegations and

counter allegations were common features in all the manifestos, and the Panchayat system was every Party's target for criticism.

The National Democratic Party (NDP) (Chand) also flayed the interim government, citing the rise in prices, corruption, and its generally pro-Indian stance, as reflected in its acceptance of the terms "Common River" and "common currency". The NDP (Thapa) campaigned by touting its experience and expertise in statecraft.

Policy and Programme

On the economic and social front, the policies and programmes enunciated by the major parties did not differ significantly. Rhetoric about the need for foster economic development, removal of existing socio-economic inequities, alleviation of poverty, etc. formed the standard package. Even the most hard-line left parties openly advocated a role for the Private Sector, including welcome multinational corporations in order to promote development and technology transfer. The fate of communist regimes in Central Europe and the general openness adopted by leftists else where seem to have brought the left parties towards the Centre of Nepal as well. Even the Nepali Congress, which stuck to its earlier manifesto professing socialism, changed its direction from 1959 by advocating a mixed economy with a significant role for the Private Sector.²

The campaign, by and large, was open and peaceful. There were few untoward incidents and many allegations but going by the standards of the region and the fact that this was the first multiparty election in three decades the conduct of parties can be said to have been within reasonable limits. One disconcerting feature, however,

was the open and free participation of government employees. The politicisation of the civil services, which began in the people's movement, was allowed to degenerate further during the elections.³

Despite gloomy predictions of violence, nearly 7.3 million people, (65.15% of the registered votes) turned out to cast their ballots. After the polls closed, a 64-member international team stated that "the elections were generally conducted in a manner fair, free, and open, enabling the full expression of the will of the people". In spite of later claims and counter claims of fraud among contesting parties, it can be said that these elections were among the fairest that any third world democracy had conducted in recent years.⁴

Seldom has an election with such pessimistic prospects produced a clear verdict for change and support for a multiparty system, providing dramatic testimony to a reasonably sophisticated electorate. The Nepali Congress obtained a workable majority, and the UML emerged as a viable opposition party. Rightist Parties and independents, associated with the previous government, were severely trounced, as were almost all of the major parties. Even the potentially disruptive leadership issue within the triumvirate of Nepali Congress party official was clearly settled, as was the question of the dominant party among the leftist contingents.⁵

On 12th May 1991, after 32 years, the first ever-Parliamentary elections were held, 11 million strong Nepali electorates went to the polls to elect its new rulers. Under the multiparty system and a brand new constitution, the Nepali Congress forged ahead winning 110 seats and the United Marxist-Leninist became the largest opposition party with 69 seats.⁶

General Election in Nepal for Pratinidhi Sabha (House of Representatives)

Total Seats	-	205
Contestants	-	1346
Polling date	-	12 May 1991
Voters	-	11 million

Table 1 shows the number of candidate, seats won and candidate forfeiting security deposits.

Table 1: Result of 1991 Elections

Description	No. of Candidates	Seat Won	Candidates Forfeiting Security Deposits
Nepali Congress	204	110	Nil
UML	177	69	16
NDP (Thapa)	163	1	120
NDP (Chand)	154	3	85
NCP (Democratic)	75	2	18
Sadbhavana Party	75	6	46
UPF	70	9	36
NWPP	30	2	23
Janta Party (H)	28	Nil	27
Conservative Party	6	Nil	5
Independents	279	3	189

Source: Almeen Ali, "The New Constitution and Parliamentary Rule in Nepal", in P.D. Kaushik (ed.), *New Dimension of Govt. and Politics in Nepal*, 1996, p.84.

All candidates of ten other Political Parties which had also contested the elections forfeited their deposits.⁷

There were a total of 11,191,777 voters, among whom 7,291,084 (65.15 percent) cast their votes of which 95.58 percent (6,969,061 votes) were found valid.⁸

The percentage of valid votes polled by each party, as well as independent candidates and the number of seats won by them are given in Table 2. Twelve other political parties did not win a single seat, obtaining a total of 82,509 votes, that is 1.18 percent of the total valid votes (6,969,061).⁹

Table 2
Party-Wise Position of 1991 Election Results

Party Valid	Votes Valid	Percentage Valid Votes	Seat Won
Nepali Congress	2,752,452	37.75	110
Nepali Communist Party (UML)	2,040,102	27.98	69
National Democratic Party (Chand)	478,604	6.56	3
National Democratic Party (Thapa)	392,499	5.38	1
United People's Front Nepal	351,904	4.83	9
Nepal Sadbhavana Party	298,610	4.10	6
NCP (Democratic)	177,323	2.43	2
Nepal Workers and Peasants Party	91,335	1.25	2
Independents	303,723	4.17	3

Source: Almeen Ali, "The New Constitution and Parliamentary Rule in Nepal", in P.D. Kaushik (ed.), *New Dimension of Govt. and Politics in Nepal*, 1996, p.85.

The elections in Nepal had the familiar negative elements of elections as in India. There was money and muscle power of the old established troupers, matched by the impatience and arrogance of the new order, there were plenty of scopes for mischief in the name of caste, religion and ethnic differences, but unlike this country there is a refreshing enthusiasm about the future, belief in the system and that time will come out right.¹⁰

The National Democratic Parties led by the two ex-Prime Minister, Thapa and Chand ended up winning only four seats in all. The Chand Party won three seats and the Thapa party won only one.

The Communist Party's performance in the elections was surprising. Communist Party was strong in Eastern Nepal, Patan, Kathmandu and Bhakatpur. Though overall the communists gained only 69 seats, but their performance was significant in the Kathmandu valley, where not only Prime Minister K.P. Bhattarai suffered defeat in Kathmandu constituency no.1 but the supreme leader of the Nepali Congress, *Ganesh Manshing's Wife and Son* also suffered defeat in Kathmandu constituencies no.3, and 4.¹¹

Nepali Congress obtained a clear majority in the parliamentary election. It secured 110 seats in the 205 seats of the House of Representatives. This lead of the Nepali Congress among voters was decisive. It won 38 percent of the overall vote, almost the same percentage as it did in 1959.¹²

In addition to the Nepali Congress, Nepali Communist Party (UML) and two Nepal Democratic Parties (NDP), one regional and several smaller parties contested the election. But none had sufficient resources to mount campaigns in more than one third of

the constituencies. The Sadbhavana Party with its roots in the Tarai region won 6 seats.¹³

The Sociology of Elections and Trend

The sociology of political parties, especially the composition of leadership of the mainline national parties, reveals the domination of the upper caste and the class character of the Nepali Congress, the UML, the SJP (Samyukta Jana Morcha) and the parties led by the two former panchas. Most political parties do not have a broad caste representation in their top leadership structure. They are basically of three main groups – Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar. The National Council consists of 28 members of whom 20 are Brahmins, four Chhetris, two Newars, one Rai and one Tharu. The caste-dominated structure of the UML leadership clearly shows that a single politburo member is from the Tarai or from the hill ethnic communities.¹⁴

The election returns and an analysis of the candidates by social class provide us with a picture of the composition of the political elite of Nepal.

Table III and IV show the participatory patterns of both house of parliament – The House of Representatives and the National Assembly.

Table III

Ethnic Representation in the House of Representatives, 1991

Caste	Members	Percentage
Brahmins	74	36.1
Chhetris	41	20.0
Hill Ethnic Groups (Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Magar, Tamang and Thakali)	34	16.6
Taraians	41	20.0
Newars	14	6.8
Other	1	0.49
Total	205	100.00

Source: Lok Raj Baral, Nepal, Problem of Governance, p.105.

Table IV

Ethnic Representation in the National Assembly, 1991

Party/Ethnic Composition	Brahmin	Chettri	Hill Tribals	Newar	Taraians	Other*	Total
NC	10	7	5	4	4	1	31
UML	5	3	1	4	2	1	16
SJP	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Sadbhavana	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Nominated	4	2	2	-	2	-	10
Total	21 (35%)	12 (18.3%)	8 (13.3%)	8 (13.3%)	9 (15%)	2 (3.3%)	60 (100%)

* Others include Kami and Sarki

Source: Lok Raj Baral, Nepal Problem of Governance, p.106.

Sociologically, the two major parliamentary parties – the Nepali Congress and the UML – are not dissimilar. Both reveal the Brahmin-Chhetri domination and the poor representation of women. The Nepali Congress fielded 11 women candidates in the 205-member parliamentary constituencies, and the UML had nine. Among the 80 women candidates put up by various parties, only seven were elected to the House of Representatives.

The major objective of the main political parties—Nepali Congress and NCP – was the abolition of the entrenched panchayat system, and they hardly paid any attention to the issue of balanced social representation in their organisations.¹⁵

The election commission did not recognise three political parties – the Nepal Rastriya Janjati Party, the Prontist Nepali Samaj and the Mangol National Organisation, as they allegedly had communal or ethnic overtones, a few organisations with similar biases went to the polls with a view to propagate an anti-upper caste campaign. The election results however showed that the people, belonging to various ethnic or tribal communities or regions, were not at all swayed by these appeals. On the contrary, the people showed an unprecedented political maturity by opting for mainline parties like the Nepali Congress, UML, SJM, Sadbhavana and other. Thus, the variations in voters, preferences were not characterised by communal or tribal alignments, but by a broad national partisan spirit. In western Nepal, the Nepali Congress capitalised on the gains from a wide spectrum of socio-political support-base, checkmating the influence of the communist.¹⁶

Main Features of the Election Results

The Nepali electorate demonstrated that they are as capable of deciding their fate as any other democratic society. All fear of violence and an uncertain outcome were belied with the clear mandate given to the Nepali Congress to rule for a full five-year term. At the same time, the people put the UML in the opposition bench by making it a constitutionally recognised party. This is a peculiar phenomenon because nowhere in the world the Communist Parties are so close to the power. In Asia, it is a new development in view of the dramatic transformation otherwise radical Left Party, whose ideological and strategic positions have not yet been clearly defined, despite of its repeated commitment to the establishment of multiparty democracy.

The Nepali Congress and the UML have emerged as the two national parties and in electoral terms, they are likely to dominate the future politics of the country. These two main political forces of Nepali politics have more or less the same support base. The presence of the Nepali Congress on a nation-wide scale and its multi-ethnic and multi-class composition seem to be its strength. From the national point of view, the Sadbhavana Party seems to be closer to the Nepali Congress.¹⁷

In the 1991 general election, the districts of Kathmandu presented the most interesting and unexpected scenario. Four of its five seats went to UML candidates, disproving the general view that the Communist Party was primarily rural based. K.P. Bhattarai though sitting premier and acting Nepali Congress President, lost his seat in the heart of Kathmandu to Madan Bhandari, a relative greenhorn in the political arena and a committed leftist. Bhattarai's

defeat had a far reaching effect, as it ended his dominance over the party and the government. In addition, the defeat of the two family members of G.M. Singh reflected adversely on the other senior Congress leader, and clearly the way for G.P. Koirala's uncontested election to head the party's parliamentary body. On 29th May, King Birendra invited G.P. Koirala to form the government and a 15 member cabinet was inducted into office.¹⁸ Nepal's elected government was sworn on 30th May 1991. Girija Prasad Koirala became the new Prime Minister of Nepal.¹⁹

The new Prime Minister's assurance was that, he and his government would concentrate on the basic issue confronting the nation in three major areas – Economy, Politics and Foreign affairs. The budget for 1991-92 was presented to Parliament by the Finance Minister Acharya. In December, the National Planning Commission issued an approach paper to the eighth plan. This outlined the overall development policy and guidelines for sectoral programme. Despite these efforts, the government failed to make a dent on Nepal's economic problems. The poor performance of the government led the Nepali Congress President to State "The people are dissatisfied because of pace of development has been slow."²⁰ The government also faced a number of problems such as object of poverty, absence of democratic culture, the legacy of Panchayat rule and corrupt administrative machinery loyal to the palace.

Much of Nepal's economic problems were a legacy of the Panchayat rule. It had to devalue its currency twice in Mid 1991 which resulted in inflation fuelled by high soaring prices of essential commodities, unemployment and corruption which were the reasons behind the political unrest in Nepal. Another major challenge before

the democratic government was the inability to fulfil the rising expectations of the people, together with the limited resources at its disposal to meet these expectations. This consequently led to the serious law and order situation. The foremost task before the government was therefore, of translating democratic pluralism into socio-economic egalitarianism.²¹ Since “democracy will not be valued by the people unless it deals effectively with social and economic problems and achieves a modicum of order and justice.”

Soon after its installation, the government was shaken by an unprecedented civil servant's strike which continued for two months, bringing the government to near collapse. The Nepalese bureaucracy has emerged as a potential threat to the fragile democracy. Unless political parties do not make a commitment, not to use civil servants as an instrument of their policies, depoliticisation of the Nepalese bureaucracy which remains a fundamental challenge to the government.²²

Strains among Troika

The internal strains among the troika of Nepali Congress were not a new development. In fact, when Bhattarai was the Prime Minister, Koirala was treated as a fluke, as Koirala himself admitted that he became Prime Minister. On becoming Prime Minister he made a statement that he has to “sweep away the garbage accumulated by the Panchayat and interim government”. This was bitterly criticised by some in the Nepali Congress.²³ The “dangerous difference in outlook within the troika on the conception of parliamentary democracy in Nepal”, aggravated the deteriorating personal equation of the troika. G.M. Singh was particularly sure as to why Koirala did not consult with him on important issues as

Bhattacharya used to do. He felt that he was being isolated from the decision making process, particularly after failing to persuade Koirala government in making some key political and diplomatic appointments. Koirala, on the other hand, was in favour of asserting the independent authority of the Prime Minister.

In September 1991, Singh threatened to resign from the party. He started saying "either G.P. Koirala should resign from Prime Minister's position or I will quit the party".²⁴ Singh declared a holy war on Koirala and Brahminism which was not liked by many. A major controversy arose when Koirala reshuffled his cabinet without consulting the other two members of the troika in December 1991 and dropped some of the ministers. On the day of reconciliation observed on 31st December 1991, there was hardly any reconciliation within the party itself.²⁵

In February 1992, K.P. Bhattacharya was elected unopposed President of the party. In the Jhapa convention of the party, in February 1992, itself while the ordinary members of the party expressed the need for unity among the troika to solve the urgent economic problems of the people, G.M. Singh burst out openly against Koirala. Koirala was offered to resign. On the persuasion of Bhattacharya, to maintain status quo for three months G.M. Singh could be pacified. This act of the party in forcing the hands of the government was adversely commented upon by newspapers.²⁶

While the internal dissension was going on within Nepali Congress, the leftist forces started agitation against the government, highlighting problems of the people. Koirala, a known hard-liner towards communists, forcefully suppressed the agitation. He made no secret of his hostility towards communists and their ideology.

Despite the problems within the party leadership, Nepali Congress won the local bodies election of 28th and 31st May, 1992 handsomely. It captured 64 percent of the total seats.²⁷

The death of Madan Bhandari, the Young General Secretary of UML in a Jeep accident on 16th May 1993 was used by the opposition as a convenient stick to beat the government. They regarded the death as an act of political murder and propagated it widely. Already, Tanakpur Agreement between India and Nepal had provided enough fuel to the opposition against Koirala government.

Byelection of 1994

The byelections in two constituencies which were held on 7th February deeply affected the politics of Nepal and also intensified groupism in Nepali Congress and clearly divided it into groups led by Prime Minister Koirala and Party President Bhattarai. Bhattarai was a candidate in this byelection from Kathmandu valley constituency and was defeated for the second time by CPN (UML) candidate Vidya Bhandari, widow of Madan Bhandari, whose death in a road accident necessitated the byelection. After this defeat Bhattarai and his supporters openly accused Koirala of "Sabotaging the party President's election campaign".²⁸

No Confidence Motion

CPN (UML) and the Samyukta Jan Morcha moved a no-confidence motion against Koirala government. This motion was defeated by 113-81 on 7th March 1994. All 113 members of Nepali Congress voted against this motion and 68 CPN (UML) with 10 Nepali Sadbhavana Party (NSP) and Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) member voted for it. Bhattarai faction voted with Koirala but

observers say that this was done because speaker, Daman Nath Dhunagama rejected the demand of dissidents for secret ballot.

Koirala was fully prepared to face the challenges of Bhattarai faction of dissidents of his party. In the meeting of Central Working Committee (CWC) held on 19th February 1994, Bhattarai joined others in demanding Koirala's resignation. Koirala replied "I would rather face the House... than resign at the behest of some members of the CWC who have been mounting pressure on me".²⁹

Mid-Term Election of 1994

The snap polls became necessary after the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on 10th July 1994, when he failed to get the motion of thanks addressed by King Birendra, passed in Parliament. 36 MPs of his party, left the House before the voting. The main opposition, the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), contributed to the process with the hope of coming to power with the help of the dissident Nepali Congress MPs.

To thwart the opposition more, Koirala submitted his resignation and recommended the dissolution of the Lower House and holding of election in November. Both were accepted by King Birendra. The King Birendra asked Koirala to be the caretaker Prime Minister till the election. The election took place on 15th November 1994.³⁰

The decision of Koirala intensified the rivalry between different factions. An ailing G.M. Singh said from the hospital that "this is a rape of the constitution". The dissident Nepali Congress leader Ghirinjibi Wagle said, "Koirala should be expelled from the Party". On the other hand Koirala strongly stressed his demand to

party president to take disciplinary action against the 'Group of 36' for their 'unnatural and unparliamentary' conduct. Koirala was still undaunted from the continuous attacks of opposition and his party dissidents. With a stronghold on the Party cadre at the grassroots level and Mahasamati of Party, the general assembly of the Nepali Congress, he started preparation for election. Koirala succeeded to get more tickets for his supporters. Many supporters of Singh or Bhattarai, whose numbers were approximately 79, fought against the official candidate in the election. The important point of this situation is that the party president Bhattarai neither expelled nor took any action against rebels.³¹

Programme of the Party

Koirala, the Prime Minister, in his election speeches emphasised stability and development. In its election Manifesto the party reiterated its commitment to the ideals of "multiparty parliamentary democracy and principles of democratic socialism". It pledged to root out hunger, disease, illiteracy, injustice and exploitation. Other points of manifesto included party's commitment to social and economic justice; continuance of liberal economic policy; protection of local industries; making privatisation policy more productive; providing safe drinking water to the people during the next five years; developing primary as well as technical, and vocational education and skills; creating new opportunities for employment. It set the target of making more than 2.5 million people literate. It talked of abolishing of dual land ownership and speeding up the conversion of Guthi lands into Raikar; using foreign financial assistance in a more balanced and careful manner. In the domain of foreign affairs, the party pledged to promote Nepalis image as a

peace loving democratic and independent nation by maintaining friendly relations with all nations on the basis of mutual goodwill and equality.

G.M. Singh Resigns

While the Nepali Congress was fighting to retain its power Ganesh Man Singh gave a call to the Nepali Congress workers to “defeat the corrupt Congressman by any means’ Singh appealed – a vote for such a traitorous person as G.P. Koirala, who has murdered democracy will mean the murder of our infant democracy itself.

“I appeal to you to visit the house of the people according to your conscience and persuade voters not to cast their votes for G.P. Koirala’s supporters”. He called upon the independent groups to “defeat G.P. Koirala by any means so as to prevent him from becoming another Jung Bahadur”. He called K.P. Bhattarai, the biggest traitor and political criminal in the history of Nepal. He held Bhattarai responsible for all the confusion and uncertainty in Nepalese politics.

The mid-term election was held on 15th November 1994 for the second time after the restoration of democracy. The elections were by and large peaceful. Repolling was held at 79 centres in 39 constituencies of 22 districts due to disturbances. The voters turn out in the election was 58 percent, against more than 65 percent in the 1991 election. The electorate comprised of 12,327,322 voters among them 7,625,348 (61.86 percent) actually voted. A total of 241,071 votes were declared invalid on different ground.³² Table –V gives the party-wise tally

Table V

Party-Wise Position of 1994 Election Results

Party	No. of Seats	No. of Votes	Percentage
UML	88	2,352,601	30.35
Nepali Congress	83	2,545,287	33.38
Nepali Democratic Party	20	1,367,148	17.93
Nepal Workers and Peasants Party (NWPP)	4	72,365	0.98
Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP)	3	265,848	3.00
Independents	7	456,348	6.18

Source: Almeen Ali, "The New Constitution and Parliamentary Rule in Nepal", in P.D. Kaushik (ed.), *New Dimension of Govt. and Politics in Nepal*, 1996, p.88.

Twenty-four political parties contested this time, with 1,440 candidates in the fray. The election results were certainly a blow to the Nepali Congress which secured 83 seats with 33.38 percent votes, which was around 3 percent more than the UML's 30.85 percent. Though some members of the party wanted to go in for alliance with other parties to form government, Koirala ruled out any such possibility.³³ He declared that he was committed to sit in opposition as the people's mandate had not favoured the Nepali Congress.³⁴ Shiv Bahadur Deuba, earlier Home Minister in Koirala

government, was elected the leader of the parliamentary wing in place of Koirala and became leader of opposition. The party played the role of opposition in the politics of Nepal. A no-confidence motion was tabled by Nepali Congress, the minority, UML government, but the Prime Minister pre-empted Nepali Congress's move by asking for the dissolution of the House. Nepali Congress's efforts to form an alternative government produced no result when the king, on the advice of the PM, dissolved the house and agreed to hold the election on 23rd November 1995.³⁵

A major issue in the election was the Nepali Congress Government's failure to curb the rise in prices of essential commodities. People tended to believe in slogans like – Nepali Congress chor, desh chhor (The Nepali Congress are thieves and they must leave the country). Many analysts believe that the Tanakpur controversy played a large part in Koirala's downfall. The Communists and NDP leaders condemned G.P. Koirala's government because of its "Soft Policies" towards India. Another factor was the open rivalry among three distinct groups in the Nepali Congress – led by G.P. Koirala, K.P. Bhattarai, and the Party's supreme leader, Ganesh Man Singh. These are the factors which were responsible for the defeat of the Nepali Congress in the election.

The 15th November 1994 election threw up a hung parliament with the UML winning 88 seats out of 205 members house. Article 42 (1) of the constitution of 1990, which provides that "if no one party has a clear majority in the House of Representatives, His Majesty shall appoint as Prime Minister, a member, who is able to command

a majority with the support of two or more parties represented in the House.³⁶

On 29th November 1994, Nepal's constitutional monarch, King Birendra appointed Man Mohan Adhikari, UML leader, as Prime Minister at the head of a minority government. The UML government (communist) assumed power at a time when communist rule has disappeared from the map of the world. Nepal had a constitutional monarchy, but power was in the hands of a political party and its leader, who believe in a different system. This was a new experiment for the South Asian Nation.

The Election and Issues of All Parties

In the election for a total of 205 members of Pratinidhi Sabha, as many as 24 political parties were in the ring. Of the total 1,057 candidates fighting for the House, there were as many as 385 independents. The ruling Nepali Congress, put up candidates for all the seats, the CPN (UML) put up 196 candidates, the RPP 202 candidates. The Sadbhavana Party, essentially a Tarai outfit, also set up candidates in all parts of the Kingdom. The campaign was on a low key, for the people were not enthused over making fresh choice only after three years and showed disenchantment with poll and democracy as also with politicians who could not give stable, honest and efficient rule.

The election manifestos did not evoke much response, , except for that of CPN (UML). While all parties promised stability, progress, socio-economic justice, jobs, better-education and greater women participation, CPN openly made a volte-face and expressed its faith in multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy. It

also promised genuine non-alignment, greater co-operation with all countries, revision of treaties with India, and greater emphasis on safeguarding of national interest. It also promised land reforms and distribution of land. The main plank of Sadbhavana Party was injustice, meted out to Tarai population in matters of citizenship and employment. This party wanted greater role for Hindi and closer ties with India. All the parties showed preference for open market economy, open trade and globalisation.³⁷

After the formation of the new government, Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari spelt out his government's priority to strengthen democracy in Nepal, and oriented its internal and external policies and economy towards strengthening national integrity, on the basis of national consensus.³⁸ He criticised Koirala and said that his attempts to sell off the Nepalese public sector units to Indian capitalists have harmed the country.³⁹

The Communist rule in Nepal was short-lived and the party was ousted out from power in the most dramatic way. Sensing the opposition coming to the communist rule by the Nepali Congress and the NDP during the budget session, Prime Minister Adhikari resigned on 9th June and recommended holding of fresh elections to King Birendra.⁴⁰ King Birendra accepted the proposal and declared November 23rd as the election date. Till such time, the communist party was asked to run the government.⁴¹

However, the other opposition parties took the matter to the Supreme Court questioning the validity of the Prime Minister's advice for the dissolution of the House.⁴² In August, a special session of the Supreme Court declared the recommendation of the Prime Minister for the mid-terms poll as "unconstitutional" because

of the unconstitutional dissolution of the House and reverted the status of the House under clause 42(2) of the constitution as prior to the dissolution. Accordingly, on 8th September, the leader of the main opposition party, Sher Bahadur Deuba, tabled a no-confidence motion against Man Mohan Adhikari under Article 51(2) of the constitution at the special meeting of the Lower House on charges of political and economic instability and communal disharmony. The government lost the no-confidence motion by 88 votes to 107. His majesty appointed Sher Bahadur Deuba as the next Prime Minister, having the support of 106 members of the House consisting of NDP and the NSP besides the Nepali Congress.

Soon after coming to power, the coalition government announced sweeping changes in the policies of the Marxist government. The government aimed at taking the economic back to the liberal free market from the welfare oriented secularist model and the Marxist populist "build your village yourself" programme.⁴³ Deuba asserted the maintenance of political stability, economic development and sound and impartial administration would be given preference by his government.

There was a continuation in the foreign policy of Nepal. Deuba reiterated the Nepalese demand to renew the 1950 Treaty of peace and friendship. He said that "the concept of security pact and security umbrella has gone with the end of the cold war and we would like to continue talks on what clauses are to be amended and how the treaty can be updated according to the new realities."⁴⁴ A joint working committee was set up during Nepalese foreign Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani's visit to India in August 1996 to find out modalities to monitor the common border between the two

countries. Prime Minister Deuba invited Indian entrepreneurs to invest in Nepal's capital intensive technologies, tourism and the hydro-power sector which has immense potential.

However, the inter and intra-party feuds affected the functioning of the government. Deuba found it difficult to appease the coalition partners. 15 out of 19 members of the NDP were given ministerial births in the government. However 5 NDP member from the Chand faction tendered their resignations from the coalition in March 1996 and accepted the idea of the no-confidence motion tabled by the CPN (UML) which had ordered to make Lokendra Bahadur Chand, the next Prime Minister. This was against the party stand, which extended support to the coalition. The motion was, however, defeated with the NDP men not joining the opposition in the special session of the parliament.

The story was repeated in December 1996 when the CPN (UML) again presented the no-trust motion against the government on charge of failure to maintain law and order, corruption and destroying the national economy and misusing the official media. This time, 9 NDP men from the Chand faction withdrew support from the government. The motion was defeated because of the abstention of the NDP and the left ally members of the NMKP. There were 101 votes in favour of the motion whereas 103 votes were required for the motion to be passed. Despite the political drama, Deuba adopted a conciliatory approach towards the dissenters and expanded the cabinet in which he not only gave ministerial berths to the rebel NDP men but also to Anis Ansari of the NSP and Bhakta Bahadur Rokaya of the NMKP, all of whom had voted against the government.⁴⁵ This infuriated the Nepali Congress

members who asked for Deuba's resignation. In the motion of confidence, Deuba could manage only 101 votes in his support. His defeat was ensured by two of his own party men who abstained from the House. Prime Minister Deuba resigned and another coalition headed by Lokendra Bahadur Chand from the NDP took over.

In the new coalition, both the faction of the NDP have joined hands to form the government, along with the CPN (UML) with 90 seats, NSP with 2 and NMKP with 1 member. Bam Dev Gautam of the CPN (UML) has been appointed as the Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal. Like his predecessors, Chand would find it difficult to keep the coalition under his control because of the ever present factions within the Nepali Politics. All the possible combinations and permutations of the political alignments have been tried

On 4th October 1997, the government lost a parliamentary vote of 'no confidence' (by 107 votes to 94) tabled by the Nepali Congress. A few days later, King Birendra appointed Surya Bahadur Thapa, the President of the NDP, to replace Lokendra Bahadur Chand as the Prime Minister. A new coalition government, comprising member of the NDP and the NSP, took office on the following day. On 9th October, the new coalition administration won a parliamentary vote of confidence (by 109 votes to 2- the UML abstained). In early December P. M. Thapa expanded the council of ministers in a reshuffle that introduced members of the Nepali Congress and a number of independents into the coalition. In January 1998 Nepal was once again faced with political upheaval when Thapa recommended to the King that he dissolved the house of Representatives and set a date for mid-term election. The Prime Minister presented the petition for fresh polls following a decision

by the UML and dissident members of the NDP (including Lokendra Bahadur Chand) to introduce a parliamentary vote of 'no-confidence' against the government. Uncertain as to how to act in this political impasse, the king referred the matter to the Supreme Court. (The first time a Nepalese monarch had ever done so). In early February, the court advised King Birendra to convene a special session of the House of Representatives to discuss a no-confidence motion against Thapa's government. Although the Supreme Court's advice was not binding, the King called the parliamentary session. The 'no-confidence' motion which was presented on 20th February, was however, defeated by 103 votes to 100. Meanwhile, in mid-January Chand and nine other rebel deputies were expelled from the NDP; they immediately formed a breakaway faction known as the NDP (Chand).

Under an agreement reached in October 1997, when Thapa assumed power, the Prime Minister was to transfer the leadership of the coalition government to the Nepali Congress within an agreed time frame. By early April 1998, however, Thapa appeared reluctant to relinquish his post and the Nepali Congress threatened to withdraw support from the government unless the Prime Minister resigned immediately. Thapa tendered his resignation on 10th April and the President of the Nepali Congress, G.P. Koirala, was appointed Prime Minister on 12th April. Koirala took office on 15th April with only two other ministers. After obtaining a parliamentary vote of confidence, by 144 votes to 4 on 18th April, the Prime Minister substantially expanded his council of ministers a few days later.

In August, in a seeming attempt to strengthen his own precarious administration and to encourage the UML's communist rivals, the Prime Minister invited the ML to join in alliance with the Nepali Congress and to form a coalition government. A new coalition administration was consequently established on 26th August (with the Nepali Congress retaining the most important ministries), giving Prime Minister Koirala a comfortable parliamentary majority. Meanwhile, the 'people's war' waged by the Maoist activists in the hills of West Nepal gathered momentum. In May, the government launched a large-scale police operation in an effort to curb the guerrilla violence, and in July the Minister of Home Affairs claimed that a total of 257 people had died as a result of the Maoist uprising (a figure that had risen to more than 600 by March 1999).

In mid-October 1998, the Speaker of the House of Representatives Ram Chandra Pandyel, a member of the ruling Nepali Congress, survived a parliamentary motion introduced by opposition parties, charging him with dereliction of duty in an attempt to oust him.

In early December 1998, the ML withdrew from the coalition Government, alleging that its ruling partner, the Nepali Congress, had failed to implement a number of agreements drawn up between the two parties and other political groups in August. On 21st December Prime Minister G.P. Koirala tendered his resignation, but was asked to head a new coalition council of ministers, which was to hold power in an acting capacity pending the holding of a general election. On the recommendation of the Prime Minister, the king appointed a new coalition administration, composed of members of the Nepali Congress, the UML and the NSP, and for the first time in

eight years, a nominee of the king, on 25th December. In mid-January 1999, the acting government won a convincing vote of confidence in the House of Representatives which was required in order to continue in power, and the following day the king dissolved the legislature in preparation for the general election, which was held in May 1999.

For the preparation of the general election, Prime Minister G.P. Koirala stunned his party colleagues on December 23rd when he declared that Mr. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the former president of the Nepali Congress would be the party's prime ministerial candidate in the forthcoming general election.⁴⁶ The surprise announcement was later greeted with relief in the party rank who said that the move would go a long way towards unifying a divided party. "The next Prime Minister of Nepal will be Mr. K.P. Bhattarai", he told stunned reporters and dozens of Nepali Congress lawmakers during a press meet at his official residence. He can choose any constituency from among the 205 in the country.

King Birendra, on the recommendation of Prime Minister G.P. Koirala, has fixed May 3rd, 1999 as the date to hold fresh election to elect the member of the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of parliament. The election commission has announced its decision to hold the forthcoming general election in two phases. First phase of election on the already fixed date and voting for the second phase will be within two weeks after the first phase.

Nepal Congress Manifesto: Focus on Good Governance, Social Justice

The Nepali Congress made their election manifesto publicly in Kathmandu on 20th March about peace, security, development and employment when it will be in majority government. Enumerating, the salient feature of the manifesto has been basically divided into three parts. First part, named as political agenda for the forthcoming election- includes issues as establishing political stability, norms and values, promoting economic development, eliminating corruption, introducing efficient and impartial administration and guaranteeing security in society.

The second part of the manifesto includes the evaluation of previous manifesto of the Nepali Congress that was made publicly in the past. The third part comprising the five year plan of the Nepali Congress on how will it govern after it is elected to power.⁴⁷

Main Agenda of Nepali Congress

The forthcoming elections are an opportunity for the people to do away with the anomalies and irregularities that have surfaced in the firmament of the nation's politics. The forthcoming election clearly shows that the people are against the violence and terrorism noticed in the nation's political scene. The people are for a majority government and not for a coalition government. They not only want to see a strong and majority government, but also a government that is committed to the development of the country as well as for the establishment of a government which is free from corruption.

The Nepali Congress will fight for political stability, a politics based on norms and values; continued economic development;

freedom from corruption and Mafia rule; impartial and efficient administration and for a social free from fear and insecurity.

Concerning societal security and cultural uplift, the Nepali Congress will allocate sufficient funds for the elderly, widows and the handicapped citizens; bring out programmes and institute scholarships for the uplift of the depressed section of society; bring the women in the mainstream of development by ensuring that all primary school employ one women teacher as well as provide monthly scholarship of Rs.25 to all the girl student in 15 districts where women literacy rates are very low. Similarly, party will provide full exemption in land revenues for farmers who had been given half exemption in land taxes. Likewise, the Nepali Congress will establish a rural bank and will forward loan at concessional rates to the deprived classes provide relief to the victims of earthquake and natural calamities; cut the price of salt by half in remote district; provide grants for gober gas, solar energy and small hydro-power station; give priority to regional languages; bring legislation to abolish dual ownership of land and transform Guthi and Raikar land; solve the problems of bonded labours and landless people and provide assistance to the families of the martyrs and political sufferers.

Concerning self-reliance schemes and the development of rural areas, the Nepali Congress will lay the foundation of economic self-sufficient as per the vision of Jana Neta B.P. Koirala by providing basic facilities for education, health, irrigation, drinking water, motorable roads, telephones and electricity in the rural areas. Furthermore, for the development of the villages, the Nepali Congress will forward a grant a 50,000 to them each year and will

increase the amount as per their needs in each year; establish a subhealth centre and post-office in each villages development committee (VDC) built school in the village and provide free secondary school education; provide drinking water to additional four million people.⁴⁸

NSP Reiterates its Objectives in Election Manifesto

The election manifesto of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP) has raised the party's off pronounced issues like federal system, citizenship, reservation for the Tarai people and women and decentralisation of the public service commission.⁴⁹

General Election of May 1999

The voting held in two phases because of a security threat that followed a sudden spurt of violent activities by underground Maoist extremists. The first phase, held on May 3rd, covered 92 constituencies, while the second, held on May 17th, covered 113 constituencies. The election result in Table VI.

Table VI

Nepal: General Election Results, May 1999

Party Name	Candidates	Seats on Parliament
Nepali Congress	203	110
CPN-UML	193	68
National Democratic Party (Thapa)	194	11
Nepal Sadbhavana party	66	5
National People's Front	53	5
Nepal Worker's and Peasant's Party	41	1
United People's Front	39	1

Elections in Kathmandu-1 Kathmandu-3, Palpa-3 and Siraha-5 were postponed owing to the death of Candidate in those constituencies.

Source: EIU, Country Report, 2nd Quarter, 1999, p.39.

CPN ML Manifesto

The Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist Leninist (CPNML) released its election manifesto on 24th March pledging to preserve national sovereignty, independence and democracy. In its manifesto, it has vowed to consolidate democracy and safeguard the national interest with the support of the people. The party has also announced

its commitment to work in the interest of the nation, the people and the party. It has also vowed to initiate necessary step to remove the Indian armies form Kalapani, the party will adopt a policy of working permit and will not allow any intervention inside the national boundary.

Regarding democracy and people's empowerment the manifesto states that the party will work for the interest of workers, farmers and downtrodden people. In the political front, the party has made its commitments to bring some changes at the interest of minority groups and give emphasis to involve them in the mainstream of development. Its was expressed it's firm commitment to stand against all kinds of discrimination and misuse of the state's power. The party has also raised several issues including agricultural, tourism, hydropower, regional development and education. The manifesto also highlights other issue like public health, population management and town development.⁵⁰

The Nepali Congress won a clear majority in Nepal's third parliamentary election since the 1991 restoration of democracy. The formation of a majority government is a welcome development after four years of unstable coalitions. The Nepali Congress won 110 seats in the 205 members of parliament. The Communist Party of Nepal United Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML), with 68 seats, will be the main opposition party. The faction of the National Democratic Party (NDP) led by Surya Bahadur Thapa won 11 seats, while the rival faction NDP (Chand) led by Lokendra Bahadur Chand, failed to win a single seat. The breakaway communist faction, CPN-Marxist Lenin (CPN-ML), led by Ban Dev Gautam also failed to win a seat.⁵¹

The veteran Nepali Congress leader Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was unanimously elected leader of the Nepali Congress Parliamentary Party. Outgoing Prime Minister G.P. Koirala, who is the President of the Nepali Congress, proposed Bhattarai's name for the Post of the Prime Minister. Koirala said: "shortly after I recommended parliamentary poll in January, I declared that Krishnaji will be the next Prime Minister of the Nepali Congress government. I stand by that commitment and I am happy to hand over the leadership of the Party's parliamentary group to Krishna Prasad Bhattarai."⁵² King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev appointed Mr. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the leader of the Nepali Congress parliamentary Party, as the Prime Minister on 27th May.⁵³

The electorate, it seems, has best understood the cause of past anomalies and the series of ugly practices of making and non making of governments. Since the electoral outcome remains unpredictable democracy-friendly the electorate has proved more matured and more democratic than any political party ever imagined. The people clearly wanted a single party majority government and their choice fell on the Nepali Congress.

The Painful division in the UML psychologically drove them to the Nepali Congress as they had no other alternative, not that the Nepali Congress fared well in the people's eyes, neither they are happy with the way of the CPN-UML performance but they had no better alternative.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁸ Asian Survey, vol.XXXII, no.2, February, 1992, p.179.
- ¹⁹ Almeen Ali, n.8, p.87.
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- ²² Munmun Majumdar, n.20, p.96.
- ²³ Laksham B. Hamal. Contemporary Nepal: Triumph and Agonies of the Nepali People, Ganga Kaveri Publishing House (Varanasi, 1994), p.198.
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Chapter IV

NEPALI CONGRESS: ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE, LEADERSHIP

Organisational Structure

In terms of the organisational structure of the Nepali Congress in exile phase, it could be said to have been a pluralistic organisation till the death of its acting President Suvarna Shamsher. Though constitutionally speaking, Suvarna Shamsher was all-powerful President of the party, he apparently believed in inter-party democracy. All important decisions were taken by the working committee of the party. If and when the President took any important decision, he sought ratification of the same by the appropriate body of the party.¹

As for the rank and file of the party, as in the past, people from all regions, ethnic groups and professions appeared to be coming to either join or sympathise with the party. Many tended to believe that the Nepali Congress was the symbol of democracy in the Kingdom and it must be strengthened at all costs.²

The different problems which came up for discussion at the seventh conference made the Congress leadership well aware of the need to build a strong organised party. For the first time, great stress was laid on the observance of discipline by the ranks and proposals were made to evolve a method of promoting or demoting party members according to the merits of their work. A disciplinary Committee was also set up "to vitalise the party and compile a comprehensive code of conduct for party members. Similarly, in order to co-ordinate the works of parliament and mass wings of the party, a parliamentary committee was elected with the Prime Minister as Chairman. The Congress legislature wing was controlled by a secretary and a chief whip.³

The primary units of the Party were also reshaped to meet the changes initiated by the introduction of parliamentary rule. Both committees were set up in each constituency to elect first, the constituency and, next, the regional committees. Several important decisions touching party organisation and policies were taken when the Nepali Congress Central Committee held its plenary Session in August 1960. In its deliberations the Committee observed that although socialism was placed as the ultimate goal of the party, "Considering our strength, means and social condition", it could only be reached through slow stages. After the various legislations passed by the Nepali Congress government, the new programmes were added:

To meet the new challenge, an elaborate programme was drafted to launch educational training camps for party workers; to make governmental measures popular by intensive propaganda and constructive works such as obtaining legal rights for the peasant, opening rural, voluntary, and credit societies, etc.; to activate and expand the youth and peasant mass organisations under the guidance of the Nepali Congress, and to publish and propagate socialist literature.⁴

But these reforms have not much impact upon the people. The reasons are that

- (1) have forgotten to built the base-camp before reaching the Summit of socialist society; and
- (2) have also forgotten that unless there was a clear theoretical understanding, forward march against adverse circumstances cannot be possible.

Though these projected aims could not materialise owing to the sudden decision of King Mahendra to cut short the parliamentary system, nonetheless they showed new trends in the Nepali Congress and the possibility of its becoming a well organised parliamentary party.

After the Patna convention of the party in January 1961, more and more people came to join the Nepali Congress. They came from a number of other political parties hitherto opposed to it. We have seen how all political parties in the dissolved Nepalese parliament except the Communist Party of Nepal and the defunct Praja Parishad of Acharya had come to join the Nepali Congress. Not only that a large number of young men studying in India at that time found the Nepali Congress to be a symbol of democracy in Nepal and thus more and more hitherto political inactive people also came to join the party in exile. This was bound to make the party more pluralistic than ever.

Composition: Rank and Leadership

The Nepali Congress was a pluralist party. Its rank and leadership was composed of such diverse sectors and elements as wealthy Ranas, big and small landowners, poor peasants, intellectuals, students and small businessmen in towns. To some extent, this plurality of the Congress was caused by the fact that during the pre-revolution period, its recruitment came from all sundry elements who wanted to end the Rana system. This mutual sharing of a common goal brought students, ex-soldiers and, later, an influential section of the exiled Ranas and their followers in the party. After the revolution, for a long time, the Nepali Congress depended on the peasantry of eastern Tarai, especially of Biratnagar,

Saptari, Mohattari and Rantahat, for active support. During this period, it worked more or less as a regional party. But after 1956, it made resolute efforts to enlist new members from other groups and regions to become more national in composition. Caste-wise also, the Congress ranks came to represent a heterogeneous combination of different castes, communities and occupational groups like the Brahmans, the Newars, the Muslims, the Limbus, the Rais and so on.⁵

Perhaps, this composite character of the ranks also influenced the composition of the Congress leadership. Unlike some smaller parties and factions, Congress leadership did not become the sole monopoly of a dominating personality or group. Thus, while B.P. Koirala undoubtedly held an unchangeable position in the party, he owed much of that position to the support he received from men like Subarna Shamsher, Ganeshman Singh and S.P. Upadhyay. All these men represented powerful caste or sectional interests in the party, but did not prevent them from forming a strong unified leadership at the top. This solid association between B.P. Koirala and his associates, which came to be known as the "Big Four" in Congress circles, was, to a large extent, responsible for the wide measure of support which the Congress received from different sections of the people.

Nevertheless, in a party such as the Nepali Congress, certain amount of tension and conflict was unavoidable at both levels of the ranks and the leadership. Sometimes regional groups or factions became too powerful for the party leader to control. Thus during 1951-52, many Congress workers in western Tarai supported Dr. K.I. Singh's revolt because they resented the control of the Party

organisation by men who mostly belonged to Eastern Tarai.⁶ At other times, some factions or group leaders opposed the "Big Four" leadership to cause splits in the party. Among many such splits, those led by D.R. Ragmi and M.P. Koirala were outstanding.

Again, this kind of factional rivalries and threats to party-unity often forced the Congress leaders to make compromises with principles and, to that extent they did so. The Nepali Congress failed to evolve ideological clarity in its programme. Some considerations forced the leadership to take every care to have all caste, classes and geographic areas represented at the time of screening the candidates for the election. It is also true that after the election the tendency towards caste and regional affiliations grew stronger in the party. This was made evident at the seventh conference where members from the hill areas charged the leadership with sowing favouritism towards the Tarai people. In his presidential address to the Conference, B.P. Koirala himself admitted that "Parochialism" had gained "added vitality" in the party which had been responsible for impeding the constructive programmes undertaken by the government.⁷

The leadership of the party like its rank and file also appeared to be pluralistic, in so far as three of the Big Four leaders -- B.P. Koirala, Shuvarna Shamsher and Ganeshman Singh - who largely lived in exile, -- although differing from one another at times, had a cordial and workable equation among themselves. They kept on meeting and sorting out their differences.

After the death of Suvarna Shamsher there appeared to be some visible changes in the state of the Party. Immediately before his death, Suvarna Shamsher had handed over the presidency of the

party to B.P. Koirala. Observers had expected that B.P. Koirala, the undisputed leader of the party would be able to carry the entire rank and file with him. But because of various factors, the Nepali Congress split into various factions. People having faith in democracy and the deals of the Nepali Congress still to believe that Koirala would find some workable solution to bring the entire rank and file of the party under his leadership. This was not a difficult task in view of the impending referendum. What was needed, was a bit of accommodation and understanding, for there was no difference between the two factions - one led by Koirala and the other led by Upadhyay - over the importance of, and the issues involved in the proposed referendum.⁸

The leaders of both factions of the Nepali Congress have been touring various parts of the Kingdom and campaigning for the multi party system in the proposed referendum. Despite persistent bickering among the leaders of the two factions, the efforts of all are directed towards the victory of the multi-party system. Immediately after B.P. Koirala's death, Girija Prasad Koirala, his brother and the general secretary of the party, said that the out-lawed Nepali Congress would continue with the departed leader's reconciliation policy, but might adopt some new tactics including Satyagraha, when appropriate.⁹

Unconvinced of the rationale of Koirala's policy of national reconciliation, if not openly critical of it, as the triumvirate of the party -- K.P. Bhattarai, Ganesh Man Singh and to some extent Girija Prasad Koirala- has always been, their open and unequivocal pledge to adhere to it in itself significant. While Bhattarai, Ganeshman Singh and Girija Prasad Koirala do have their differences on the

approach and style of the party, arising mainly from their diverse personality traits, they largely agree on one point, that the King cannot be persuaded to relinquish even a part of his power and authority to the people's representatives. If the other leaders of the party recounsil themselves and facilitate the process of Ganesh Man Singh's succeeding to B.P. Koirala's place in the party in good faith and sincerity, while Bhattarai and Girija Prasad Koirala continue to hold their --formal offices, the unity of the party may not be in danger at least in the near future. To say all, this is not to belittle either the importance and quality of leadership or the sacrifices of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and G.P. Koirala. Both have been pillars of this organisation and have undergone great suffering. Bhattarai has solid following among the younger generation of the party and G.P. Koirala commands the respect of the Tarai people. The three can make a good team and their mutual understanding and spirit of accommodation can save the party from internal disorder and external pressure and allurements to win away its rank and file. On the other hand, if Bhattarai is misled by the pressure of the youth to capture the organisation's command reins, or if G.P. Koirala commits the mistake of extending his hold over it on the basis of "clannish consideration", it would spell disaster for the organisation. In sum and substances, the unity of the party now depend on too many ifs and buts. For the time being, it is, however, reassuring to learn from Bhattarai, the acting president that 'no difference has arisen even over minor issue after Koirala's death.. our organisation has full collective unity and understanding.¹⁰

When democracy is established after a long struggle, its natural, that some political leaders who have parallel personalities of some heights are claiming the position of political supreme. In such

case a person who is appointed to the post of chief executive or prime minister exercises limited power which is eroded by the ambitious political colleagues and rivals. This situation of Nepali Congress is like this. Ganeshman Singh, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Girija Prasad Koirala are some Prominent leaders who led the Nepali Congress in the democratic struggle of Nepal. During the period of interim government a dispute began to appear among the top leaders.

The same situation emerged again when after election of 1991, the Nepali Congress Parliamentary party elected G.P. Koirala as its leader and question of forming the council of ministers again arose. With the formation of new ministry K.P. Bhattarai expressed his doubts about the supremacy of Koirala by saying that "if popular leader Ganeshman Singh was able to contest the election he would have been the Prime Minister according to people's like". When the Koirala tried to function as supreme of government, conflict between prime minister and other ministers belonging to other groups became so intense that Koirala dropped six ministers from his council of ministers. These were supporters of Ganeshman Singh and Bhattarai. Ganeshman Singh charged that Koirala was following the path of Matrika Prasad Koirala and not of Bishveshar Prasad Koirala. After this criticism and counter criticism became the order of day in Nepali Congress, his own party members charged Koirala to be uneducated, uncultured and follower of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. They demanded to change the leadership of parliamentary party.¹¹

The by-elections in two constituencies which were held on 7th February 1994, deeply affected the politics of Nepal and also intensified groupism in Nepali Congress and clearly divided into

groups led by Prime Minister Koirala and party President Bhattarai. Bhattarai was a candidate in this by-election from Kathmandu valley constituency and was defeated for the second time by CPN (UML) candidate Vidya Bhandari. After this defeat Bhattarai and his supporters openly accused Koirala of 'Sabotaging the party President's election campaign".

Koirala was fully prepared to face the challenges of Bhattarai faction or dissidents of his party. In the meeting of Central Working Committee held on 19th February 1994, Bhattarai joined others demanding of Koirala's resignation. Koirala replied "I would rather face the House-- then resign at the behest of the some members of the CWC who have been mounting pressure on me".¹²

According to the Party Central Committee member, it was Koirala who was responsible for Bhattarai's defeat in the 1994 by-elections. Koirala's supporters in the faction ridden Nepali Congress held Bhattarai responsible for pulling down the Koirala government, which was installed in 1991, leading to the November 1994 mid-term polls, in which no party secured a majority. Besides factional rivalry, which has almost split the party several times, differences between Bhattarai and Koirala were believed to have been responsible for the Nepali Congress losing the 1994 elections.

But Koirala's currently change of attitude towards Bhattarai in May 1999 election. G.P. Koirala who was the President of the Nepali Congress proposed Bhattarai's name for the post of Prime Minister. Koirala said, "shortly after I recommended parliamentary polls in January, I declared that Krishnaji will be the next prime minister of the Nepali Congress government. I stand by that commitment and I am happy to hand over the leadership of the party's parliamentary group to Krishna Prasad Bhattarai".¹³

ENDNOTES

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 - ³ Anirudha Gupta, Politics in Nepal 1950-60, Kalinga Publication, (Delhi, 1993), pp.183-84.
 - ⁴ Ibid.
 - ⁵ Ibid., pp.185-186.
 - ⁶ See the Statesman, 2 May 1951.
 - ⁷ Anirudha Gupta, n.3, p.187.
 - ⁸ Parmanand, n.1, pp.414-15
 - ⁹ Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 22 July 1982.
 - ¹⁰ See the Press Interview of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Current Weekly, Kathmandu, 28 July 1982.
 - ¹¹ Pramod Tewari, "Prime Minister of Nepal Constitutional and Political Dimension, in P.K. Kaushik (ed.), New Dimension of Government and Politics of Nepal, South Asian Publisher, (New Delhi, 1996), pp.68-70.
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 - ¹³ See Frontline, June 18, 1999, p.53.

Chapter V
OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In the previous chapter we have examined the evolution, working and performance of the Nepali Congress. For the sake of convenience we will divide the period into two sub-periods. First period will cover the development before 1991 and the second period, after 1991 to 1999. The role and performance of political parties in Nepal in general, and Nepali Congress in particular.

As we have seen that through politics in Nepal has been dominated by monarchy and political parties were made to remain inactive (e.g. during partyless panchayat system), the political parties have played a significant role. Political parties didn't exist in Nepal till 1935. The first political party to be formed was the Praja Parishad in 1935 under the leadership of Tanka Prasad Acharya with the objective of overthrowing the autocratic Rana government. Their attempt was foiled and the group was suppressed in 1940. But the second and the most important political party was Nepali National Congress who was formed in October 1946 under the leaderships of D.R. Regmi and B.P. Koirala. It appeared on the political scene in Nepal by participating in a labour strike at Biratnagar in March 1947. This triggered off anti-Rana agitation in a number of places which forced the government to enter into a dialogue with the political leaders. Prime Minister Padma Shamsheer Rana agreed to introduce the change in the political system.¹ In pursuance of these commitments a new constitution was announced in January 1948. It provided for a bicameral legislature, a council of ministers and high court. The conservative elements amongst the Ranas were opposed to any attempt to liberalise the political system. They forced Prime Minister Padma Shamsheer to resign. He was succeeded by Mohan Shamsheer who scrapped the new constitution before it could be enforced.

B.P. Koirala and his supporters broke away from the Nepali Rashtriya Congress in March 1950 and formed the Nepali Congress Party in collaboration with Nepal Prajatantrik Party. Soon after its establishment, the Nepali Congress Party challenged the Rana government by launching a movement for political rights. As a result, Delhi Agreement was signed in 1951. The Delhi Agreement led to the end of 104 years of Rana rule, cessation of armed struggle by Nepali Congress to become a partner in the coalition government under the Prime Ministership of Mohan Shamsher. But within a short period dispute between the Rana ministers and Nepali Congress came to the fore and the Nepali Congress ministers finally resigned. Nearly ten governments were formed and dissolved during 1951-59 period. Birganj Conference of Nepali Congress in January 1956 was important because the party adopted a new constitution. The new constitution reaffirmed the party's resolve to establish socialism in Nepal on the basis of peaceful democratic means, through elections, held under constituent assembly. Bowing to the pressure of the movement, the king announced the date of election. The Nepali Congress at its Birganj Conference in 1958 decided to contest the election on the king's terms and gave up the demand for a constituent assembly.

In 1959 election, the Nepali Congress scored an impressive victory by securing 74 out of a total of 109 seats and 38% total votes cast. On 27th May 1959, B.P. Koirala became the Prime Minister. On 15th December 1960, King Mahendra dismissed the B.P. Koirala ministry, dissolved the parliament and arrested the leaders of the Nepali Congress and other political parties. He charged that the Nepali Congress government failed to maintain law and order in the

country, pursued partisan approach, “wielded authority in a manner designed to further party interest only”.²

After Royal take over, Nepali Congress demanded in 25th January 1961 that the King should release all political detainees, withdraw his proclamations and reconvene the parliament. Initially Nepali Congress believed in non-violent means for achieving the aims of the party. Later, it adopted a policy of armed struggle. In 1966, the party took decision to call off violent activities against Nepalese government. On 15th May 1967, the party reiterated its stand for election to constitutional assembly to frame a constitution for the country on the basis of adult franchise.

On 15th May 1968, Subarna Shamsher offered loyal cooperation to the king to which B.P. Koirala also agreed. He was released after 8 years. Ganeshman Singh and K.P. Bhattarai were released from Prison two years later. B.P. Koirala remained silent for sometime but on 4th February 1969 at Biratnagar he expressed his dissatisfaction with the existing socio-economic and political situation in the country and asked for a change. He remarked that he would adopt non-violent means to achieve democratic ideals, but if that failed, other methods would also be adopted.³ The Koirala faction of Nepali Congress continued to indulge in occasional and sporadic violent activities in 1970, 1972, 1973 and 1974. In 1974 Nepali Congress workers organised an armed attack in Okhaldunga.

When the holding of referendum was announced on 24th May 1979 by the king, B.P. Koirala opposed the idea of joint campaigning with other parties. He reposed confidence in the palace and its administration and opposed the installation of interim government.⁴ The victory of panchayat system in referendum of

May 1980 came as a rude shock of the multiparty supporters. Some observers have attributed this defeat of the multiparty supporters to the arrogance of Nepali Congress leaders. Opposition to the Panchayat System was more sharpened after the election of 1981 and the death of B.P. Koirala in 1983. The death of B.P. Koirala created a leadership vacuum. Now, the troika of G.M. Singh, K.P. Bhattarai and G.P. Koirala, started managing the affairs of the party. The indecisiveness of the party leaders in determining its future course of action was expressed in many ways.

As a part and of its policy, Nepali Congress did not participate in the general elections of 1981 and 1986 nor even in the election of district panchayats held in 1987. It however, continued to reiterate its demand of multiparty democracy. The Nepali Congress announced the *Political Awakening Week* which coincided with the 75th birthday of B.P. Koirala – from 9-15th September 1989. The participation and arrest of some leftist leaders along with Nepali Congress leaders and workers during the “political awakening week” created a possibility of a situation in which Nepali Congress and left parties could jointly launch any political movement in future.⁵ In the central executive committee meeting of Nepali Congress in Kathmandu on 5-6th November 1989, it was decided to launch a peaceful, non-violent mass movement to restore full democracy in Nepal. Nepali Congress had become a synonym of democracy in Nepal. In the political convention of Nepali Congress convened on 18th January 1990 more than 10,000 delegates, mostly youths, participated.⁶ The movement became so powerful that it finally forced King Birendra to lift a thirty-year ban on political parties on 9th April 1990 and disband the panchayat system. The party leader G.M. Singh was asked by the king to form an interim government

with ULF members but he declined on health ground passing over the responsibility to K.P. Bhattarai, the acting President of the party.

The first general election after the restoration of democracy was held in 1991 when the Nepali Congress got the absolute majority. The Girija Prasad Koirala formed the government. But it could not complete its term of five years and had to resign in 1994 because of some internal rivalry on leadership. On the recommendation of Koirala, the King dissolved the House of Representatives and the election took place on 15th November 1994.

In 1994 General election, Nepali Congress got 83 seats out of 205 (30 short of absolute majority) it got 33.38 percent of votes. And the Communist Party (UML) got 88 seats and 30.85 percent of votes. Though some members of Nepali Congress wanted to go for alliance with other parties to form government, Koirala ruled out any such possibility.⁷ He declared that he was committed to sit in opposition as the people's mandate had not favoured the Nepali Congress.⁸ In absence of any single party getting absolute majority Communist Party led government headed by Man Mohan Adhikari was formed. After being in power of nearly six months Prime Ministership, Man Mohan Adhikari, on 9th June 1995 in order to stave off a no-confidence move tabled by Nepali Congress asked the king for a snap poll to be held in the last week of November 1995.⁹

During the period of December 1994 to December 1998 six government took office one after another under five Prime Ministers – Man Mohan Adhikari of the CPN-UML, Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress, Lokendra Bahadur Chand of the National Democratic Party (NDP), Surya Bahadur Thapa of the same party but leader of his own faction and lastly Girija Prasad Koirala.

During this period, coalition governments were turned by these leaders with each other. Party's support such as Nepali Congress and UML; Nepali Congress, the RPP and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP); The UML, the Sadbhavana Party and the RPP, and lastly, the Nepali Congress, the break away CPN-ML and the Sadbhavana Party. These permutations and combinations had blurred the political differences between the rightists, the centrists and the leftists rendering these political terminologies irreverent.

When on 15th January 1999 King Birendra dissolved the second Pratinidhi Sabha on the recommendations of the Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and had trusted the "Caretaker" Prime Minister with the task of holding the general election for the third Pratinidhi Sabha. Cynics in Nepal had predicted a hung Parliament once again. Even media reports emanating from Kathmandu has suggested a fractured mandate. This time, it seemed to the people of Nepal that this type of sordid drama is no longer enacted and voted for the only party that was capable of providing a stable government, the Nepali Congress.

For the first time after the return of democracy in Nepal in 1990, Nepal's largest political party, the Nepali Congress has shown signs of unity. This is probably the reason why the party, which claims to have drawn inspiration from the ideals of leading socialist leaders B.P. Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh, Ram Narain Mishra, has restored its lost credibility and easily secured absolute majority in the 205 members of (Parliament) Pratinidhi Sabha by winning 110 seats. Senior leader of the Nepali Congress and former president of the party and former Prime Minister of interim government, Shri Krishna Prasad Bhattarai has been sworn as Prime Minister.

The Nepali Congress has decided to present K.P. Bhattarai as its Prime Ministerial candidates in the general election of 1999. The leadership of the Nepali Congress must have realised that the image of Bhattarai, who was the Prime Minister of the all party interim government formed after the restoration of democracy, could possibly attract the voters to the party.

In the name of the Bhattarai and the Koirala factions, the Nepali Congress had once come to a point of almost a split-like situation. Under the circumstances the declaration by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala who was also the president of the party, that Bhattarai would be the future Prime Minister could possibly give a message of unity to its workers. Though a few second generation leaders of the Nepali Congress have of late been publicly expressing their difference of opinion with both the leaders, their influence among the Nepalese masses cannot yet be compared with that of Koirala and Bhattarai. Following the parliamentary democratic system of some countries who have the practice of presenting one of their leaders as the candidate for prime ministership in general election. This gave the voters an opportunity to apply their mind not only on a party's policies and programmes, but also on the structure of the future government. Making the public the name of its leader who would lead the forthcoming election campaign of the party by the Nepali Congress, no doubt, a positive beginning on its part.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, we hypothesised that

(a) Nepali Congress plays a decisive role in the politics of Nepal.

(b) Nepali Congress fared well during 1999 election because of people's mandate for single party majority.

As we have observed during the course of the study that Nepali Congress has played a decisive role in the political developments of the country even when it was not in power. This confirms our first hypothesis. We have also observed that after 4 years of remaining out of power, Nepali Congress could form the government only in 1999 when it was given clear mandate by the public.

It was basically a revolution for change again coalition government. For a stable government Nepali Congress itself had problems regarding the leadership issue. It could get the mandate only after it projected a clear picture of future leaders of Nepal which would provide some stability to the system. This confirms our second hypothesis also.

ENDNOTES

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 - ³ Ibid., p.138.
 - ⁴ Ibid.
 - ⁵ Ibid., p.140.
 - ⁶ Ibid.
 - ⁷ See, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 22 November 1994.
 - ⁸ See, The Indian Express, New Delhi, 24 November 1994.
 - ⁹ See, The Times of India, 10 June 1994.

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