

Civic Education in National Context

(A national seminar held in Rautahat and Makawanpur on November 27/28, 2015)

By Ritu Raj Subedi

Even after having one of the world's best and most inclusive constitutions, the Nepalese are on the horns of dilemma because the promulgation of national charter was followed by the intensification of Madhes agitation and inhumane blockade from India. The youngest republic was/has been forced to pay the price of freedom. It was the first time in the history of Nepal that the elected representatives framed the statute by exercising the national sovereignty and right to self-determination. Entire statute making process was guided by the conventional wisdom, collective consciousness and over six-decade long democratic experiences. To our utter bewilderment, the southern neighbour took big exception to the national charter. It has been widely perceived that India took the hump after Nepali leaders spurned its unsolicited advice and overbearing attitude. Contrary to the insular and tepid response from India, the international community welcomed the new statute with encouraging remarks and warm congratulation.

The common people need correct information and constitutional enlightenment in order to end their dilemma. There is urgency to expose lies and rumours against the statute and bring the truth to the fore. The political leaders, lawmakers and intellectuals have the onus to supply the authentic facts about the political, economic and social situation to the society in the wake of agitation and the blockade. In democracy, the bonhomie between the parties and people is crucial. When this connection is cut off, it gives rise to misunderstanding, and the parasites start to fish in the troubled waters. Unfortunately, the post statute promulgation phase saw little activities on the part of parties and civil society to take the people into confidence by enlightening them about the new constitution feat. This lacuna resulted in the misinterpretation of the statute and spread of malicious heresy and communal disharmony.

Against this backdrop, the FES and NEFAS took the initiatives to end this obvious communication deficit that has had direct negative impact on the spirit of constitutionalism and republican set-up. They discharged this duty in form of propagating the civic and democracy values that in turn helped the people to understand the basics of statute and its stated goals. Experts and journalists interacted with the grassroots people. The two-way communication was propitious to do away with some weird propaganda. Participants at the national seminar 'Civic Education: National Context,' organized in Paurahi of Rautahat and Manohari of Makawanpur in the last week of November, showed their strong enthusiasm about the national politics and penchant to learn the grand constitutional undertaking. They sought solution to burning challenges facing the nation.

Local leaders, teachers, social workers, students and youth expressed their commitment to social harmony, development and durable peace at the seminars. They heeded the opinions of experts and offered inputs for the consolidation of national unity and republican system. The excerpts of the seminars are as follows:

Place: Bagmati Higher Secondary School, Paurahi, Rautahat

Date: November 27, 2015

'Civic education is liberates people from infantile behaviour'

Dev Raj Dahal, head of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Nepal Office

The aim of civic education is to liberate people from their infantile behaviour and self-subordination and transform them into awakened citizens and human beings. Civic consciousness, like spark of light, reveals life beyond the needs of body and mind. It helps them to familiarize them with various rights (liberty, power, claim, and immunity and livelihood rights to equalize the differences of material circumstances) and duties holding each other accountable for their action. Civic education helps the people acquire maturity. It is a praxis- use of critical knowledge to shape positive attitude towards the nation and polity and create norms that are socially binding. It fosters critical judgment. Freedom resides in the faculty of critical judgment about ideological blindness, demagogic illusion, fundamentalism and determinism of class, caste, gender, ethnicity and locality. It promotes democracy and active citizenship; builds national identity and close gender and intergenerational gaps. Civic education is important for a society like Nepal for reconciliation of various identities through the elevation of perspectives. The transmission of civic knowledge to many generations of citizens can give impetus to those native civic values of giving, charity, healing and safeguarding social peace lying dormant underneath the dialectics of central power, build social ties and engineer democracy from below. It is also important to give Nepali citizens a chance to converse with power elites on equal terms and create a common ground for cooperative action. Civic education, in this sense, seeks to foster normative consensus on democratic values among the political parties of various hues and improve state-citizenship ties.

'Neo-liberalization weakens state'

Guna Nidhi Sharma, former vice-chair of National Planning Commission

The Sugauli Treaty (1816), Betrawati Treaty (1792) and Peace and Friendship Treaty (1950) had brought Nepal to its knees economically and geographically. India does not want to see Nepal prosperous and powerful. For example, in 1983, the World Bank proposed building irrigation channels from five rivers, including Sikta, Babai, Kamala and Kankai. But, India objected to this proposal, citing that it will hamper its existing structures and violate its rights to the use of water of these rivers. The WB washed its hands of the proposed project. More than three decades passed since then and the Nepalese government has not yet built irrigation canals to tap water from these rivers.

The 1950 treaty continues to give India an upper hand over monetary, fiscal and trade policies. It has tied Nepal's hands, stunting its overall economic development. India always behaves with Nepal as a client state. This treaty should either be annulled or revised for the development of self-dependent economy. Indian ambassador to Nepal is poking his nose into the internal affairs of Nepal as it is reeling from blockade and internal political agitation. Following the 1990 political change, Nepal came under the sway of liberalization policy that downsized the state and four Ds were followed to do this end- D- denationalize, D- decontrol, D- devaluation and D- deregulation. With this policy, the state remained no longer obliged to provide education and health service to the people.

Ananda Shrestha, NEFAS executive director

Nepal's over 25-year long experiment with multiparty democracy has been disastrous as the political parties came unstuck in delivering on their promises. Until the youth take the mantle of political leadership, socio-economic development remains a distant dream. The schools and varsities are producing such graduates, who have no idea about the nation's history, culture and geography. NEFAS seeks to overcome this intellectual deficit by organizing seminars on civic education in different parts of country and documenting the inputs of deliberations, which will be handed over to the government for the reforms in governance and service delivery points.

Professor Ram Kumar Dahal

It is imperative to educate the young generation about the nation's true and glorious history in order to imbue them with a feeling of nationalism, morality and dignity. However, it is not only students but even teachers do not know about the nation's history and culture. Here I would like to mention an instance in which a school teacher committed a faux pas. In course of teaching the students about the festivals of country, she said: "We should celebrate all parba (festivals), including *kot parba*." Her gaffe drew peals of laughter from the class room. The poor teacher did not know about kot parba that was a massacre carried out by the first Rana prime minister Jung Bahadur Rana. Prithvi Narayan Shah unified Nepal from several principalities. Bhanubhakta played crucial role to unite Nepal culturally. But, today their great legacies are being attacks in the name of identity politics. This trend must be end in order to get the nation on the right track.

Shiva Raj Dahal, NEFAS programme coordinator

It is only the civic education that will guide the Nepalese youths, strayed by political chaos, unemployment and loss of public morality, to move through the right path. It purifies the politics and education sector, bringing the Nepali society back on the track. The present young generation is deemed as the competent citizen and leader of future. They require to be inculcated with the universal principles and values as well as practical insights about democracy. The youth generation needs to be awakened to the national politics and nationalism. Civic education based on the eastern values and philosophy will

be instrumental to this end. In order to make the state strong, all citizens should be conscious, cooperative and competent. While becoming aware of their rights, duty and responsibilities, they need to be careful enough not to infringe upon the rights of others. The civic education is another name for the virtuous socialization of the people. The civic knowledge boosts individual growth, communal harmony, religious tolerance and class balance.

From the floor

Bir Bahadur Gole said that Nepal lost a lot after Britishers came to India that continues to pursue policies of their colonial master. India wants to take Nepal to the path of Fijization and Bhutanization. India does not want to implement federalism here. PN Shah unified Nepal after he sensed the mal-intent of East India Company. Rameshwor Koirala said that educational curriculum does not correspond with the reality. Teachers are also responsible for the lackluster performance of public schools. It is necessary to impart the eastern philosophy to the students. Rajesh Kumar Khadka said that a feeling of nationalism should be instilled in the students. Tek Bahadur said that the seminar on civic education should have been organized many years ago in order to do away with anomalies and injustice in the society. Youths should be handed over the leadership mantle. Sagar Nepal said that political leaders needed to learn about the civic education and the intellectuals should form a common position on national issues. One woman representative said that Nepal is the fountain of spiritual knowledge and it must learn to be independent.

From the chair, Gopi Krishna Khatiwada, principal of Bagmati Higher Secondary School, said that since the politics was the master of all policies, the nation could not make a stride in economic field until the politicians demonstrated integrity, honesty and commitment. Education system is in doldrums because of the hollow promises of the leaders.

Place: Mahendra Kiran Higher Secondary School, Manohari, Makawanpur

Date: November 28, 2015

Dev Raj Dahal

Civic education is an education about self-awakening of human beings. Regular organization of civic education discourse provides opportunities for Nepali citizens and leaders for political education, deliberation and reflections about ideals and practice of democracy. Building the cognitive, affective and evaluative base of citizens and leaders is essential for a civilized coexistence and continued progress toward freedom. Informed public deliberation in Nepal is essential to define and address public issues and inspire collective action. In Nepal, deliberations at learning centres and public places on citizens'

charter, public hearing and social audit at the grassroots level provide citizens to learn the concepts and practices of social, economic and political democracy and make governance transparent and accountable. The diversity of Nepali society had made it resilient while its historical political culture of middle path offered it a good prospect for the creation of mindful society to avoid the extremes. The dominant concern now is the promotion of peace and reconciliation in many spheres of Nepali lives. The instrumental approach to politics and legitimization of violence had, however, de-culturalised Nepali elites and weakened their capacity of feeling and reflection on human condition and its reforms for better. This has left the youth and poor largely in choiceless other than to migrate. Against this backdrop, regular civic discourse of Nepali leaders and citizens is expected to renew the civility of Nepali society, break the deadlock and strengthen that rational base of politics, law and development. A society with a high degree of civic consciousness acquires virtues by performing virtuous acts, strengthening the bases of democracy, development and peace.

Guna Nidhi Sharma, economist

There is no any condition for the nation to face the blockade. We have got Loktantrik constitution that has clearly stated that everything is subject to change except the national integrity and sovereignty. This is the time to move ahead on the basis of consensus. In Loktantra, the people should be at the centre of all decisions. No one will be rich by selling his/her property. It is a matter of worry that brainy and brawny powers are leaving the nation, which will have negative impact on the development. We can build the nation on the basis of the new statute. There is the need for devising foreign policies. After the government brought Company Act, education turned out to be sector and investment was made to earn profits from it. This deprived the children from lower class families of education opportunities as the rich and powerful have their monopoly in education.

Ananda Shrestha, NEFAS executive director

The NEFAS is awakening the people about burning issues of the nation and bringing their views in the book format. Then, we provide our publications to the politicians, ministers and policy makers so as to broaden their views on economic development.

Ram Kumar Dahal, political scientist

Here I would like to quote 'Handout on Democracy' to highlight human rights. It says: "Human rights are those rights which men and women deserve as human beings for their freedom, dignity, equality and civilized coexistence." There are civil rights, political rights, economic and social rights and cultural rights. All five sets of human rights have are interconnected and interdependent. Nepal has endorsed all these rights in the new constitution.

Shiva Raj Dahal, NEFAS Programme Coordinator

Despite having the most inclusive and democratic constitution in South Asia, the nation's political, economic and educational conditions are not in good shape. Inter-party and intra-party conflicts have marred the political parties, generating crisis of confidence among them. Inner party democracy is still a far cry. The parties need to bolster their ties with the people and provide enough space to the new generation to strengthen democracy. On the other hand, corporate-led globalization and market-led economy have weakened the state, society and family. The remittance has provided a lifeline to the economy that is not a good omen for the country. The black-marketing and inflation have made the people's life miserable. In a similar manner, our education is neither provides critical perspective to the students nor guarantees jobs to them. It needs to be overhauled to suit the reality of the country. We have to promote civic education to make the people dutiful to the society and nation.

From the floor

Bishnu Uprety said that the government needs to listen to the views of experts. Lila Raj said that India should not feel headache over the promulgation of secular constitution. Jyoti Subedi said that the people's awareness has increased to unprecedented level. Ram Hari Subedi said that nationality and economy have become weak. Ashok Bhandary. Lekhnath Ghimire asked: What the hell the UN is doing when Nepal is facing blockade? Is it providing security to only strong nations? The new statute was promulgated with the approval of over 90 per cent lawmakers and the government has to take the spoilers in control. Yadunath Shrestha said that the state was no showing sympathy towards Madhes. There should be genuine nationalism, not the hollow one. Bimala Karki said that the children and women have suffered most from floods, earthquakes and blockades. Hari Ghimire said that India has no right to encroach upon land, water and forest of Nepal. Sanju Rijal said that blockade has put students' future in dark. The leaders also need civic education. The medical herbs are exported to India from where come medicines. We have to process the herbal medicines ourselves. We became weak because we paid little attention to nationality.

From the chair, Khushi Lal Moktan underlined the need for spreading civic education in order to strengthen democracy, discipline and transparency.