

Clientelism and its Influence in the Nepali Press

Sudarshan Prasad Dahal¹

This review explores the clientelist structure in politics and its influence in Nepali media with two aims: first, to identify how the clientelist structure has been practiced and influenced media in Nepal; second, to identify how the media perform the functions of clientelist networks. This review uses desk research of post 1990 documents focusing on the practices of clientelist structure in personalized behavior of the leaders, volatile political culture, fragmented civic society, and mounting corruption index in Nepal. Clientelism was a widely practiced phenomenon and it weakened the ideological base of the political parties and became the causes of uncertainty in Nepali politics. The unstable politics decreased public trust and reputation of the politicians, and visibility became a major concern to the leaders while reaching out to the electorate. In this context, the media became a vital tool to communicate with the public for political goals. The power holders practice clientelism, appointing loyalties in the board of directors in the state-owned media, attempt to endorse press restricted bills, and distribute welfare advertisements and subsidies to the favorable media. The media owners practice clientelism, recruiting professionals with strong political ties, frequently changing editors and journalists to ensure balanced representation of different political connections. The journalists tend to establish political connections and cover news with limited ethical guidelines with reference to their allies

and advocate the political strategies of their patronage. Besides political intervention, the shrinking economy in the limited media market, long history of political parallelism of the press and the strong presence of the role of the state might be the explanation for adopting clientelist networks in the media.

Keywords: clientelism, corruption, desk research, media performance, Nepali press

Introduction

This review explores the clientelist structure in politics and its influence in the media performance of Nepal. Media systems of Nepal are characterized as a shrinking media economy in a limited market, partisan history of the press, and unchanged apathetic role of the state. The country has witnessed the multiparty system in 1990 and the political systems developed with the clientelist features like personalization, fragmentation and volatile political culture. There seemed to be a high level of personalized political parties and the government; fragmented civic society; a high level of volatility in electoral, party and the government and mounting corruption indexes in the country.

Concurrently, increasing clientelist structure loosed rational-legal authority in party and state mechanism, weakened party ideology and loosed public trust and reputation in one hand and such tendency developed unstable government and fueled unhealthy competition in the political parties and the leaders in Nepal. In other words, visibility became a crucial factor to win electoral votes in fragile and competitive politics. In such a context, the role of the media became vital to disseminate political information in order to reach out the electorate for political goals. It is obvious that they can use media as a communication channel for dissemination of their own message intending to enhance their positive images and at the same time there is also a possibility that the leaders may reveal their

opponent's transgression intending to downsize their public image so that they can get electoral support in the elections. In this context, there remains an unanswered question that responds to the way the political environment, particularly the clientelist structure emerged and expanded its network in the media performance in Nepal. The aim of this review is to know how the media, particularly the press, interacts with the politics and practice journalism in the changing democracy of Nepal.

Clientelism is a term that is heavily used in political science, which is commonly understood as a relationship between the politicians and the voters. Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 73) illustrate Max Weber's concept of 'rational-legal authority', which is opposite to clientelism and explain the notion of political clientelism as 'an absence form of rule based on adherence to formal and universalistic rules of procedure'. In this sense, clientelism is a contrast form of rational-legal authority that 'seeks to establish bureaucracy which conceive and act as an administrative apparatus being autonomous from particular parties, individuals, and social groups for serving society' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 73). However, the purpose of rational-legal authority is to establish a civic-service system that governs the process of hiring and promoting administrative personnel; the purpose of clientelism is to expand network appointing clients in different private and public positions expecting to fulfil vested interest exchanging votes, money, and power.

Considering these phenomena, the present study was designed to identify how the changing media and political systems intertwined and administered clientelism in their practices in the context of Nepal.

Research method

The literatures that relate to clientelism particularly the patron-client structure available on the fields of media and politics of Nepal

were reviewed. The desk research was used to collect data from various sources like reports, policy documents, legal documents, books, book chapters, journal articles, and government decisions that were published in online or offline platforms. Desk research is often called secondary research that refers to research approaches that use data that already exists in some form. Richard Schaefer (2017) suggests that the desk approach involves analyzing mass media outputs mainly newspapers and magazines using library resources or the internet. This method aims to re-analyzing material in the collected data for other purposes, re-examining interview transcripts or anything else that does not involve primary research (Hinds et al., 1997). Richard Schaefer (2017) describes the benefit of desk research as it allows researchers using ‘a variety of research techniques that make use of publicly accessible information and data’. Another reason for choosing the desk research for this study is that it offers many qualitative data narratives that discuss issues related to the primary research questions, which have never been analyzed. Similarly, it seeks to critically assess the theory, methods, and findings from existing qualitative research in an attempt to generate and synthesize meanings from multiple studies. The research methods follow four steps from identifying the research questions for secondary analysis, assessing the data, sorting the primary data, and outcome of the sorting data (Long-Sutehall et al., 2010).

Researchers choose desk research in order to apply a new perspective or a news conceptual focus to the original research issues (Heaton, 1998). Another purpose of using this analysis is to describe the contemporary and historical attributes and behavior of individuals, societies, groups or organizations (Corti & Thompson, 1995). Regarding ethical consideration, unlike primary research which is conducted with the consent, the secondary analysis is a re-use of data for purposes that indicated in the primary research (Long-Sutehall et al., 2010). Thus, the present study was conducted without receiving any consent.

The secondary data related to clientelism were reviewed and its consequences on the media systems were explored. The impact of clientelism structure on the role of news media was assumed as an interventionist rather than the detached performer. The functions of the media are also evaluated as more likely to the political interest rather than the interest of the people. The main purpose of this historical exploration was to acquaint the media landscape particularly responding to the queries of how the Nepali the press practiced journalism in a highly clientelist context after 1990 of Nepal.

Clientelism and media

Weingrod (1968, p. 379) provides an operational definition of clientelism, stating that as ‘largely the study of how political party leaders seek to turn public institutions and public resources to their own ends, and how favors of various kinds are exchanged for votes’. Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) describe the concept as ‘a pattern of social organization in which access to social resources is controlled by patrons and delivered to clients in exchange for deference and various forms of support. Hallin and Mancini explain clientelism as ‘a particularistic form of social organization, in which formal rules are less important relative to personal connections or connections mediated through political parties and other organizations’ (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 58).

According to Hicken (2011), the relationship between patron and client of clientelist networks consists of the four important elements: 1) dyadic relationships, 2) contingency, 3) hierarchy, and 4) iteration. In a dyadic relationship, the patron and clients interact either face-to-face or through a chain of brokers or networks in order to exchange votes and resources. In the form of contingent or reciprocal relationships, the delivery of a good or service can be seen on the part of both the patron and client with direct response to

a delivery of a reciprocal benefit by the other party, or the credible promise of such a benefit in the form of goods that can be offered to voters. In the hierarchical patron-client relation, the patron uses his/her own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for the clients who, for his/her part, reciprocates by offering generous support and assistance, including personal service, to the patron. In the iteration stage, both parties involved in the exchange of goods in a formal program anticipating future interactions (Hicken, 2011). Hallin and Mancini (2004) suggest that a strong level of political clientelist structure in politics fuels the political culture of personalized decision-making in the government, or party; a high level of volatility in the formation of government, electoral and the party system. The clientelist forces also ignited corruption and also fragmented civic society (also see Mancini, 2018). Before moving to the phenomena of clientelism in Nepali politics, I have briefly introduced the concept of clientelist network in media, so that it can assist to understand the relationship between the concepts in Nepali context that is the second objective of this exploration. Thus, the following section provides the analytical framework separating the concepts from political clientelism to the media clientelism for detailed analysis.

Clientelist network in media

However, clientelism is explained with vote buying and exchanging practices by establishing networks with social and professional institutions; it is a phenomenon of media studies in which scholars explore how the politicians affect voters via the media (Ornebring, 2013, p. 498). Ornebring provides two fundamental differences of clientelism from political implication to media studies. First, clientelism in media studies is interpreted as the ‘unlike buying and exchanging’ phenomenon in which the politician can affect the voters via the media. Second, the media

itself can perform clientelist behavior by acting as the *Fourth Estate* exposing clientelist practices and networks (Ornebring, 2013, p. 498). Following this explanation, it can be assumed that the concept of media clientelism can be explained with two dynamic actions: firstly, the media actions can be observed based on the extent that external clientelist forces such as government and non-government organizations including trade unions, civic societies, political parties and business groups that influence the media performance. Secondly, the clientelist performance of the media actions can be explored with the performing roles of the media itself. For example, the clientelist features can be identified in the media performance in the interventionist roles in which the journalists intend to cover the news advocating the patrons who provide resources to them rather than being detached performer while revealing patron's transgression in the news (McQuail, 1992; Hanitzsch, 2007; Mellado, 2015; Marquez-Ramirez et al., 2019).

Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) note that the patrons in clientelist structure intend to establish their network offering some goods or services, appointing their loyalties in the public institutions and promoting them with providing incentives and other benefits including corruption. Mediated clientelism can be explained as the system commitment in which the media focuses on particular interests of the group of people that is stronger and the notion of the 'common good' weaker (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 58).

The relationship between media and clientelism associates with the instrumentalizing power of media in favor of patron-clients benefit (Mancini, 2018). In the process of instrumentalization, 'the clientelist structure, as outside influences such as parties, politicians, social groups, or movements, or economic actors intend to control the media performance making visible in the media seeking favor in the world of politics' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 37; Thompson, 2000). In this process, the government as a patron makes appointments in

the posts of executives more on the basis of political loyalty than purely professional criteria aiming to establish a strong patron-client network in the media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Similarly, in the private media, the owners hire journalists from political backgrounds in order to establish connections with the political parties and the governments. They often use their media properties as a vehicle for negotiation with other elites and for intervention in the political world; and for these reasons political parallelism in the media tends to be high where the clientelist tradition is strong (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 76).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) explain the phenomena of clientelist networks in the media in different levels and forms. In the strong clientelist connection, Hallin and Mancini (2004) suggest a number of indicators that lie on the behavior of the journalists, media owners, and the political leaders or the regulatory authorities. Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 77) explain that the regulatory authorities in the clientelist structure tend to make more appointments on the basis of political loyalty than purely professional criteria. The government seems unsuccessful in enforcing broadcast regulation. The promulgated laws often honored in the breach offer many opportunities and incentives for particularistic pressures. The political leaders can pressure media owners by selectively enforcing broadcasting tax and other laws. At the level of the media or the owners, they intend to hire professionals who have political affiliations so that the owners can obtain government's contracts and concessions for successful operation of the media business. The owners or the prominent journalists may exert pressures of their own by threatening selectively to expose wrongdoing by public officials. The media owners also often use their media properties as a vehicle for negotiation with other elites and for intervention in the political world. In journalists' level, they tend to be integrated into clientelist networks, and their ties to parties, owners, or other

patrons weaken professional solidarity and also are not obliged to follow journalistic codes of ethics. They also give less importance to the public hearings and documents to the political process and closed negotiations among elites.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) provide an analytical framework in which each parameter can be measured with two weak and strong unidirectional dimensions. The presence of these above-described phenomena can be explained with the strong feature of clientelism in the media systems in which the press is encouraged to perform instrumental use of media being interventionist rather than the detached performer.

Furthermore, Hallin and Mancini describe the clientelist structure, though a particularistic phenomenon, that rarely practice in advanced democracy, but a pervasive feature of non-Western media and political systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, 2012; Mancini, 2018). Some scholars reveal the clientelist phenomenon in their comparative as well as country specific case studies. McCargo (2012), for example, compared media performance in non-Western context such as Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia and found the media of these East Asian countries were practicing watchdog journalism often ‘captured by private, elite interests’ rather than the public interest. In another case, Chakravarty & Roy (2015) analyzed Indian media and found that the media of India supported the interest of the media organizations rather than the interest of the people. These Indian media were shaping news with the value of political-economic dynamics such as populism that embedded the ‘Modi phenomenon’. Researchers also identified the phenomenon of clientelism with other concepts of media systems such as journalistic professionalism, political parallelism and the role of the state. The presence of the strong clientelism exist in the media systems in which the journalism seems less likely professional autonomy, more likely performing politically parallel role in the society, and more

likely practicing state intervention (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, 2012; Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011; Mancini, 2018), practices more likely the role of interventionist watchdog (Marquez-Ramirez et al., 2019; Mellado, 2015; Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011), and also perform more likely episodic framing (Iyengar, 1991).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) suggest that such tendencies of clientelism can be found in both private and public media where the media exist with a low level of newspaper circulation and a high level of shrinking economy. Mancini (2018) identified that media clientelism was prevalent in the East European countries where democracy was in transition. The political culture of these countries seemed to have a high level of government turnover, a high level of volatility in the electoral and the political parties along with a high level of conflict in the civic society. The political leaders were struggling to win public trust amidst massive corruption in the competitive politics.

The following section provides a brief description about how the politicians practiced clientelism and influenced media performance in Nepal. The first part of this section gives some basic foundation of the media landscape of Nepal and the second part highlights some key features of emerging clientelism structure in politics and its influence in Nepali press.

Media landscape of Nepal

Media market and readership

Liberal political systems after 1990 provided ample ground for a number of private investors establishing media houses and breaking the monopoly of the state-owned media market in Nepal.

Despite the growth of media in local, regional, and national levels, there is a limited circulation of newspapers and also a minor presence of readership (UNESCO, 2013). There is a domination of

Kathmandu-centric elite readers in the Nepali press (Onta, 2006). Despite the growth of media outlets; the media organizations of Nepal have been facing economic challenges losing advertising revenue. The Advertising Agency of Nepal (AAN) has mentioned in its annual report of 2020 that the advertisement of newspapers has dropped by 40% within a few years shifting to online portals, particularly in multimedia applications (Rijal, 2020). The shrinking economy of the press started a bit earlier when the country was heated by the Great Earthquake 2015 followed by trans-border blockade with India in 2015 and occurrence of COVID19 in 2020. In these crises, the media have lost billions of dollars. The Government of Nepal-National Planning Commission (2015) estimated the total loss of the damage by the Great Earthquake in the communications sector was NPR 3.6 billion (US\$ 36.10 million). Aryal (2022) pointed out that many newspapers shut down for a week, and several media organizations also closed down forever and hundreds of journalists forcefully quitted their jobs in the period of economic downfall of the media business.

Political connections of the press

Press and politics have a long-term rampant relationship in which both institutions were fighting for establishing democracy. The press supported the political parties, making aware the citizens about the politics and mobilizing them updating political news and also taking part as a campaigner in every political movement led by the political parties of Nepal. On the contrary, the purpose of the establishment of the press in the autocratic *Rana* regime (1846-1951 AD) was to lionize the rulers and their family (Devkota, 2016). The press was completely prohibited from writing against the government (Malla, 1983). This was the time, Dev Samser, the then *Rana* Prime minister, had promulgated a *sanad*, a written authority that directed the press with strict guidelines, of ‘what should and should not be published’ (Devkota, 2016). When the political system changed from

Rana autocracy to democracy in 1951, several private newspapers emerged. Banskota and Bhattarai (2022) note that the newspapers of the first decade of democracy were limited in number but that was the pioneering attempts of some enthusiasts who started private-owned daily newspapers in Nepal. Siddhi Charan Shrestha, renowned poet in Nepali literature, started first private daily newspaper ‘*Aawaj*’ in the 19th February, 1951 (Banskota & Bhattarai, 2022). The role of the press in democracy after the immediate downfall of the *Rana* regime was to provide news to the mass illiterate people through the selected elites in the country.

Mission oriented journalism was prevalent in the absolute monarchy period between 1960 and 1989 (Dahal, 2015). Major political parties had their own newspapers such as *Nepal Pukar*, *Nawa-Nepal* (Nepali Congress); *Nepal-Sandesh* (*Rastriya Praja Party*); *Nawa Yug* (Nepal Communist Party) (see Devkota, 2016, pp. 94-96). Aditya (1996) remarks that the journalists in the party-less political systems were divided either by affiliating in the party, or, the rulers.

Since 1952, the journalists of Nepal have been affiliated with several professional organizations including the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) (Devkota, 2016, 138); but these journalists’ unions were divided based on their affiliated political parties (UNESCO, 2013). For instance, the four major journalists’ unions and associations are affiliated with political parties like ‘the *Press Chautari* is understood to be an association of Journalists close to the Communist Party of Nepal, Unified Marxist-Leninist; Nepal Press Union close to Nepali Congress; and, the Revolutionary Journalists’ Association close to Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist’ (UNESCO, 2013, p. 76).

Nepali journalists conceived their role orientation as a watchdog performer, but their historic root was ‘development journalism’ in which the journalists perceive their role is to advocate

governments' development related decisions (Ramprasad & Kelly, 2003). Regmi (2022) observed Nepali journalism performance and found that the investigative reporting was scattered in different genres including literary books, newspapers, and magazines.

Role of the state

The state has been performing dominant roles in the development of the press in Nepal. The democratic government for the first time guaranteed the press freedom constitutionally in 1990. It was a milestone to Nepali press; the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 had protected freedom of expression, and editorial independence with the norms of 'no prior censorship' (Kharel, 2010). The state also endorsed a number of laws, regulations and policies including Press and Publication Act 1991; Press and Public Rules 1992, National Communication Policy 1992; and Long-Term Policy of Information and Communication Sector, 2003 in subsequent years (Media-Foundation Nepal, 2012). Recently, the Constitution of Nepal 2015 incorporated a number of rights including Rights to Information and Rights to Expression as the fundamental rights of the citizens.

There is a strong presence of state-owned public media systems in Nepal. These media include the Radio Nepal, the Nepal Television, a century long newspaper, the *Gorkhapatra*, and a national news agency, the *Rastriya Samachar Samitee* (RSS). These media are supplying authentic information of the government and also regulating the private media provoking the quality of the press (Kharel, 2010). In sum, the state-media are promoting the norms of social responsibility of the press and also providing information to the Nepali press (Aditya, 1996). It can be observed that many senior journalists working in the state-owned media where it is their professional responsibility to advocate the government, are now shifting toward the private media and holding senior positions across the country.

Assessing the journalism situation of Nepal, Freedom House (2015), an international monitoring organization, has assessed the Nepali press as a 'partly free' category. But in the past, the journalism situation of Nepal was in the 'not free' category. Many media persons were intimidated, kidnapped and also killed during a decade long Maoist Insurgency (1996-2006), and Royal Coo in 2005 (Freedom House Report, 2008) and also in the republic democracy of Nepal (Adhikary & Pant, 2016). Freedom House had marked Nepal as one of the top ten unsafe places for journalists in the world in 2008.

Professionalism practices

The journalists of Nepal seem occupied with new technology and deregulating platforms having higher education in journalism (Acharya & Sharma, 2022). The universities of Nepal are providing a number of journalism and mass communication related courses (Adhikary & Pant, 2014). A great number of educated youths are entering the journalism profession (Media-Asia Foundation, 2012; Acharya & Sharma, 2022). The media houses, though insufficient, are providing in-house training, encouraging scholarships and learning opportunities abroad (Media Foundation-Nepal, 2012; Humagain et al. 2010).

For the first time in Nepal, the Nepal Press Commission was established in 1957 and today's Press Council Nepal (PCN) has formed with the promulgation of the Press Council Act 1992 (Khadka, 2020). The purpose of the CPN is to promote the standards of a free press and to advise the government on matters relating to the development of healthy credible journalism in the country (Khadka, 2020). Khadka (2020) states that the Press Council, as an authorized sole government body, regulates the media outlets and deals with public concern to the media. The Council categorizes media houses and also provides welfare advertisements and subsidies to the needy organization.

The professional organizations like the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) have initiated and launched some ethical

guidelines, including Journalists' Code of Conduct 2016, Working Journalists Act 2007; Online Media Operation Directive 2016 in order to enhance professionalism of journalism and minimize external socio-political intervention in the news.

Unstable clientelist structure and use of media

The political history of Nepal can be marked with the continuation of a long tradition of clientelism. Pandey (2018) connotes the term of clientelism with corruption and states that the patron-client structure is a historic phenomenon of modern Nepal. He describes the clientelist tradition with the foundation of modern Nepal that was initiated in the mid-eighteenth century. The great King Prithvi Narayan Shah, who unified the modern kingdom of Nepal, had distributed land as *Jagir* (a system assigning land for the government employees) to the '*bhai-bhardar*, the near and the dear ones in the cabinet or in the palace. Though, the purpose of the formation of the clientelist structure was neither seeking votes nor increasing corruption; but it was for seeking favor in the unification of the Kingdom of Nepal. Unlike its initial days, Pandey (2018) correlates the concept of clientelism with the mounting corruption cases in Nepal. He uses the term like 'patrimonial structure' instead of clientelism and explains the situation as lack of 'integrity' in the government. He also describes the patrimonial structure that expanded their networks for centuries in all kinds of rulers such as autocratic, authoritarian and even the followers of democracy of Nepal.

The autocratic *Rana* rulers distributed lands and resources to the near and dear ones in the name of '*birtas*, and '*jagirdaris*' (Pandey, 2018). The purpose of this type of clientelist practices was to collect revenue from rent-and-revenue farming feudal agents to regular administrative officials in order to protect their own family and throne. In the party-less *Panchayat Period* (1960-1989), the

authoritarian rulers competed for power and patronage and engaged in keeping clients and surrogates happy at the expense of the public (Pandey, 2018). The power holders are intending to make informal contracts between patrons and clients on lucrative appointments in high public offices in multiparty democracy of Nepal (Pandey, 2012; Mahat, 2005).

After 1990, when the country shifted from authoritarian party-less *Panchayat Systems* to multi party system, Khanal (2004, p. 56) marked the period as ‘the political appointments in the public sector, particularly those having financial dealing, were made on the basis of monetary offerings to the ministers and the party fund’. The leaders involved in illicit financial give and take among coalitions to form or bring down governments (Mahat, 2005). Dix (2011), though illustrating the phenomenon of patron-client network with increasing corruption context, opined that the politically aligned individual power holders succeeded to expand their network in various socio-political strata disseminating party’s slogans through media and the developmental projects.

It can be noted that when the peoples’ movement down-sized the king’s power from absolute monarchy to ceremonial kingship in 1990; the political leaders who had fought for democracy also had no idea how to form a good governance (Pandey, 2018). It was expected that the political transformation had to establish a strong rational-legal authority in all state-mechanisms such as in the government, party, and civic society; they were unable to adequately form the required rules and regulations in time. As a result, the elected governments failed several times to perform long-term consensus on political culture. Baral (2004) pointed out that the political leaders in this fragile state, could not demonstrate a strong foundation of legal provision that can bound each party member and transform their consolidated democratic ideas into action. The leaders also lost the opportunity to change the whole bureaucratic system (Pandey,

2018). The elite bureaucrats who were in the government's key position from the beginning were the 'power-hungry traditional elites'. In such a transitional situation, these bureaucrats, as a stable government, fulfilled the void of poor governance in the new democratic set up. Pandey (2018) noted that these elite forces were involved in the formation of state-mechanism and continued their legacy of provoking politicians expanding informal networks appointing the loyalties in the government's organizations rather than following any formal procedures. He concluded that these power-hungers captured the state mechanism and gave continuity to their past legacy of clientelist structure capturing human and capital resources in the country.

In a nutshell, the consequences of the clientelist structure weakened party ideology and strengthened individual leader's power and gave birth to unstable political culture. The political culture can be characterized as a strong hold of personalized leadership; a high level of volatile circumstances in the formation of the government, electoral choices and the emerging political parties, and also highly fragmented civic society. These changes not only geared up corruption indexes in the government, the political parties and the leaders also dissociated with the voters. Since a couple of years, the political institutions have been losing explicit public trust. For example, very recently Kathmandu University has conducted a survey of the Nepali people along with Interdisciplinary Analysts and The Asia Foundation in 2022. As usual, this time also marked a high level of political distrust among the people. Only 44 percent respondents show their trust toward political parties whereas 91.2 percent show their acquaintance toward Nepal Army, out of 7,060 respondents across Nepal in 2022. In other words, the role of the media has been becoming vital to connect leaders with the dissatisfied electorate, making visible political leaders in the media disseminating political information without any hindrances.-

Domination of personalized politics

Leaders' personalized approach was the cause of weakening the role of the state and the political party in the multiparty democracy of Nepal. The institution of the government of Nepal, for instance, the cabinet, parliament and the public institution where the role of individuals seemed dominant, weakened the role of the state and political party (Baral, 2004a). Hachhethu (2004, p. 83) notes that the Parliamentary Parties (PP) of Nepal lack to practice 'intensive discussion' on 'party's policy', 'government program', and 'bills' because of less developing mechanisms for effective deliberative function and authoritarian approaches of the leaderships.

Hachhethu (2004) argues that the Prime Ministers of Nepal have been performing the patronage role by controlling and commanding the sources in the Parliament, controlling distribution of patronage, and practicing authority in party organization. He further claims that the PM can use the power of patronage distribution keeping in mind the survival of government as top-most priority while selecting the members of Council of Ministers from among several MPs of the ruling party. As the Leader of Parliament, the PM can play a decisive role in the posting of MPs in privileged positions and /or executive posts of Houses, including Speaker, Chairman of National Assembly, and Chairman of Parliamentary Committees (Hachhethu, 2004; Baral, 2004a).

Furthermore, there are a number of cases that show how the PMs exercise personalized approaches in the government and at the party level. For example, when G. P. Koirala formed a cabinet in 1998, he included dissidents in the cabinet considering the internal balance of power of his own party, the Nepali Congress (NC), taking own decisions in the selection of the ministers (Hachhethu, 2004, p. 86). Similarly, the NC leader and the Prime Minister S. B. Deuba had formed a jumbo-sized cabinet with a number of ministers extending to 49 out of 205 members which is the highest number

ever recorded, without party consent in the Parliament during his coalition government in 2001 (Hachhethu, 2004, p. 86). The PM of the Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) led government placed members of the minority factions by own decision in the government. The *Rastriya Prajatantra Party* (RPP) leaders resorted to a strategy of inclusion of its 17 out of 19 MPs in Parliament who were in the cabinet of three successive coalition governments from 1995 to 1998 led by the leaders of NC and RPP itself (Baral, 2004a). Although the patronage practices in Nepali politics did not support the general logic of giving long term jobs among groupings and also increasing tenure of the government, the PM highly practiced the patronage role of setting criteria of inclusion and exclusion in the government and the party system (Hachhethu, 2004).

The PMs exercise their power of punishment that retains control over the Parliamentary Parties. In Nepal, the PM not only possesses the sole authority to sack ministers from the cabinet as the party leader in the Parliament but also can command through the Party Whip and control the MPs to act for implementing the party's policy and the Leader's decision in the House (Hachhethu, 2004). Giving some examples, Hachhethu (2004, p. 87) notes that 'G. P. Koirala had sacked six cabinet ministers from his government, charging them for showing greater loyalty to party leaders Ganesh Man Singh and K. P. Bhattarai, rather than the Prime Minister in 1991'. Although the UML had led a minority government for nine months in 1995, sacked C. P. Mainali from the cabinet charging him for the violation of party discipline (Hachhethu, 2004). Baral (2004) remarks that the situation occurs because of the lack of defined rules and responsibility in party-government relationships.

Volatile politics

Leaders' highly ambitious personal moves lost confidence and trust in the coalition governments and pushed politics into a high level of unstable political culture that developed as a high level

of government turnover, a high level of electoral volatility, and a number of new political parties in the political arena of Nepal.

Hachhethu (2004, p. 97) recalls the representative democracy of Nepal as the street confrontation and coalition making and unmaking that gave birth to instability. Despite consensus practices in Nepali politics, Hachhethu notes that the de-ideologization was a common characteristic of all political parties and the place of CPN-UML was ahead in this process because of its fluctuation in inter-party relations while making and unmaking governments. The CPN-UML was fit for alliance building under the other parties' leadership, for instance, with the extreme rightist, the RPP in 1997, with the centrist, the NC in 2004, as well as with the extreme leftist Maoists in 2008. This party also formed its own coalition government along with the partnership of other parties such as with the UCPN (Maoists) in 2011 and 2015 and also with the NC in 2009 (Hachhethu, 2021, p. 294).

There were 29 governments that appeared in the 30 years, between 1990 and 2021 in the period (Office of the Prime Minister of Nepal, n.d.). Because of the mounting intra and inter level competition of the leadership, any single government succeeded to remain in an average one year four days in the government. This kind of fluctuation in the formation of government can be considered as one of the highest turnover records, 96.7% in Nepal (As per Pedersen Index).

Party leaders' decreasing trust was associated with the fluctuating behavior of the electorate. The political parties confessed high levels of electoral volatility where almost 19 percent popular voters moved from one party to another and from one candidate to another between 2008 and 2017 national level elections (Election Commission of Nepal, 2017, 2021). Voters' such tendency, determine the position of political parties and the leaders whether they remain in the office or in the opposition. The Maoists, for example, had a landslide electoral victory winning 50% seats out of 240 in the first

CA election in 2008. The scenario changed dramatically, when the political parties failed to draft a new constitution through the first Constitution Assembly. This was the period when the Maoists had not only derailed the government but also abandoned its own previously promised commitment of identity-based restructuring of the state (Hachhethu, et al., 2008). The Maoists confessed an unexpected result in the second CA election shifting from the first to the third position in the Parliament, securing only 26 seats out of 240 in 2013. We can see a high level of electoral volatility in these elections, when around 19% of the electoral voters switched their preferences from one election to another election from 2008 to 2017. Hence, the role of media as a tool to communicate political information can be considered as crucial to influence citizens' volatile behavior for electoral victory in the competitive clientelist politics of Nepal.

The third changes that lost confidence in the constituency of the leaders and led to uncertainty in the politics were the causes of appearance and disappearance of new political parties in the political arena. Various sources show that the *Sadbhabana Party Nepal* (SPN) was formed in 1985 by *Gajendra Narayan Singh* in the name of *Nepal Sadbhavana Council*. The main aim of this party was to promote the interests and citizenship of the *Madhesi* community of the *Terai* region. However, the party had participated in the 1990 democratic movement of Nepal; in 2003, the party split into two groups: *Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandidevi)* and *Nepal Sadbhavana Party*. In 2007, two parties merged into NSP (A). The *Nepal Sadbhavana Party* merged with another four parties: *Madhesh Rastra Janantrik Party (Krantikari)*, Social Republican Party, Nepal Republican People's Party and *Jantantrik Terai Madhesh Mukti Tigers*. Similarly, six of the seven *Madhesh*-based parties under the *Samyukta Loktantrik Madhesi Morcha* (SLMM) also merged and formed a new party – *Rastriya Janata Party* (RJP) in 2017. Hachhethu (2021) states that the increasing number of political

parties increased competition and hence, the leaders who were representing for long in their constituencies might have been feeling uncertainty in the upcoming elections.

Fragmented civic society

Political parties' anti-move on their commitments, performing weakening ties with their social institutions and manifesting it with a series of protests and unfulfilled demands created division in the society. There were a number of governments and non-government organizations that associated with political parties and performed civil roles aligning the political parties in Nepal. Parajuli (2004, p. 175) describes the civic society as the long term practiced clientelist social structure. The tradition of civic society associates with the traditional practices such as *guthis*, *dhikurs* and *parmas*, a system in which labor can be exchanged on a physical level among the community people. Today, such traditional practice has transformed into the form of non-government organizations (NGOs), professional organizations and unions that function in various sectors such as health, agriculture, poverty alleviation, and good governance in Nepal. During the Maoists' Insurgency between 1996 to 2006, a number of civic representing groups formed by the Maoists and other political parties such as *Madheshis*, *Tharus* and other indigenous groups like *Limbuwan*, *Khumbuwan* and other had acted for making people aware, achieving mutual goals, making demands on the state, and holding state officials accountable (Karkee & Comfort, 2016). Many scholars claim that the functions of these government and non-government organizations and civic representing groups were to support the party leaders raising the social and political agenda organizing media campaign, performing political activism, and strengthening public opinion in line with their aligned parties and ideologies (Parajuli, 2004; Baral, 2004; Karkee & Comfort, 2016).

The Maoists, for example, not only succeeded to mobilize these organized pluralistic forces, they also succeeded to create

ideological differences among the political cleavages (Hutt, 2004). As a result, the Maoists were able to perform their victory forming parallel judicial institutions capturing several districts of Nepal and paralyzed state mechanisms (Karki & Seddon, 2003).

Later in republican political systems, the minorities' pluralistic forces like *Madheshis*, *Tharus*, *Limbuwan*, *Khumbuwan* uprisings called protest against the state and a number of citizens were threatened and killed in their movements (Hachhethu, 2021). Many householders who were not involved in the representing agitator groups in the region where the protesters had strong presence, migrated to other locations particularly from *Terai* to other parts of Nepal where the victims feel safe to live. Scholars argue that the agenda of 'identity based federal state' of the ethnic communities was synchronized by the Maoists, but with the downfall of this party in the second Constitution Assembly election in 2013, the other mainstream party such as the NC and the CPN-UM had partly accepted Maoist's agenda and hence, ignite the conflict in the nation (Hachhethu, 2021; Hutt, 2004). Hachhethu et al., (2008) note that these clientelist forces were agitators when the Maoists took anti-move from their own previously promised commitment of 'ethnic and regional identity' while restructuring the nation that was applauded during the Insurgency.

Despite these limitations, in several cases when the political parties were committed to perform collective decisions, the functions of the civic societies were considered as a safeguard to democracy of Nepal (Parajuli, 2004). The campaign of these informal groups seemed as an important mechanism to represent citizens' voice and the members of the civic society and in many cases, they consulted to find out the solution to the issues like women's right when the Parliament passed the amendment of the *Muluki Ain* (Muluki Act) in its 21st session (Parajuli, 2004). Along with a year-long uprisings of the *Madheshis*, the social groups like *Tharus*, *Janajatis*, women and

Dalits had also organized movements against the government and gained momentum ensuring a quest for recognition of their distinct cultural identities and building pressure for political power-sharing in the upcoming Constitution of Nepal 2015.

Hachhethu (2021) further explains that the consequences of the movements of these organized groups in the initial days of democracy were to transform pragmatic norms and systems in various levels such as in the Civic Service system, recognition of national language, and their representation in the different levels of governments. In later days, when the political interventions continued, the roles of the informal clientelist groups seemed as ‘vociferous’ in the media criticizing the government particularly in the royal coup in 2005 to reinstate the sacked government (Hachhethu, 2021).

Similarly, the role of civic society including media can be interconnected as the causes of downfall of monarchy, promulgating different rights-based policies, and many ethnic upsurges when the political parties demonstrated unity. But in many cases these ethnic communities and representative organizations were expanding clientelist networks distorting from the notion of aligned parties. Hachhethu, observed a mounting figure of more than four dozen of *Janajatis* communities dominated by the Left cadres, particularly the Maoists, were fragmented when the party seemed weak and derailed from the government in 2009 (Hachhethu, 2021). In sum, the political parties, because of lack of willingness of the implementations of the political parties’ commitments, were weakening their ideological base and their ties with the civic societies.

Mounting corruption

Corruption has been becoming a social problem where the power holders, unlike the welfare of the common people, concentrate their actions for personal benefit. However, the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of Transparency International

(TI), an international non-governmental organization (INGO) which measures the perceived level of public sector corruption worldwide; provides limited data only after 2004 of Nepal. These reports indicate that despite Nepal Governments' anti-corruption commitment, the country has been suffering with a high level of corruption index. The CPI reports ranked Nepal as 121 positions in 2006, 154 in 2011 and 131 positions in the list of 168 countries, in 2016. The Transparency International has not only shown the corruption figure that prevailed in every sector and ranked the democratic country Nepal as the fourth most corrupt country in South Asia followed by Afghanistan (165th) and Bangladesh (146th) and Pakistan (124th) in 2019.

It is interesting to note that the corruption rank showed a very low of 90 in 2004 when the Parliament was vacant and the political system was parallelized by the troika forces known as the Parliamentarian parties, monarchy and the rebellion Maoists. Because of the failure of the state to conduct periodic elections, the political parties at that time were not in the position of continuing the Parliament and then King Gyanendra had nominated some persons from non-political background of the members in the cabinet. The index reached an all-time high of 154 in 2011, when the political parties were forcefully practicing coalition government in order to draft a new constitution, though failed, in the Republic Democracy.

However, the economic condition of Nepal is shifting from 'least developed country' that was classified by the United Nations in the 1970s to 'developing country' in 2021; the country itself is known as one of the highly corrupted states in the world (Transparency International, n.d.). Country's political, economic and social parameters have been showing alarming situations and indicating transitional obligatory figures on the miserable condition of the nation. Pandey (2018) remarks the increasing political corruption is the cause of *integrity deficit disorder* that refers to the tendency of the political leaders who fetish for power and perks in their personal and party-

political behavior. Pandey further explains leaders' such unrelenting tendency to ignore others and create contagious effects on the larger society that result with an absence of empathy – and, moral sense.

Although, Pandey (2018) explains the causes of fertility of economic corruption is because of the unprecedented failure of the leaders to form successive governments that support to achieve progress and perform functional political culture; the forces of status quo that had implanted for centuries in Nepal in the form of a patron-client structure. Pandey (2018) further argues that there are three interrelated social factors that created patron-client networks across social institutions including the media in Nepal. These factors are the foundation of 'historically practiced social composition', 'dubious role of political leadership', and 'patrimonial mind-set in the politics and society' that have been practiced and fueled corruption through clientelist networks in the democratic transition of Nepal.

In sum, the leaders' personalized approach weakened the roles of the state and political party. Political leaders' highly ambitious personal moves not only performing clientelist behavior, lost trust and reputation in the coalition government, electoral support and the inter level party politics. The coalition government was completely failing to perform stability in the country. A high level of electoral volatility and appearance and disappearance of the number of parties in the political arena were reflecting citizens' distrust toward the political institutions and also creating a competitive political environment where the politicians feel unsafe in their constituency. The mounting fragmentation in the civic society was manifesting anti-move of the political commitment and threatening mainstream politics that was creating division in the society. And finally, mounting corruption not only demonstrated a strong foundation of clientelist structure, it was indicating unprecedented failure of the leaders to form good governance. The power of the media can communicate political information, making visible the leaders in the media in order to

make aware the citizens about the political agenda, engaging them to discuss over the disseminated agenda and finally can encourage them to take good actions mobilizing the voters in the political decision-making process such as in the elections. Considering such a situation, there might be a possibility that the incumbent political parties and the leaders holding power in the government and getting victory from the electoral votes might be encouraged to expand clientelist networks in the media. Hence, the patrons might appoint loyalties in the board of directors in the state-owned media including the Press Council Nepal, attempt to endorse the press restricted bills, and distribute welfare advertisements and subsidies to the favorable media expecting to exchange their political power with votes disseminating their own interest news in Nepali press.

Media practices in clientelist structure in Nepal

It is apparent that the media production is a collective action and for this task the journalists have to encounter a number of influences from their own personal characteristics to the media and political structural level that can influence their performance (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; McQuail, 1992). Hence, the country's political systems, mainly the clientelist structure can be considered as an important influencer of the media performance.

Though any empirical research to date presents a direct clientelist ties of political patronage with the ownership in the privately owned daily newspapers of Nepal. It is obvious that because of the absence of any 'clear laws on media ownership', there is no mechanism to address the issue of media concentration (UNESCO Report, 2013). The practices of political affiliations of the Nepali press can be seen in various levels of interventions such as in the government or authorities, media or ownership, and the individual journalists' levels.

Government's intervention in the media of Nepal

The governments of Nepal intend to establish its connections with its clients appointing political loyalties in the public media. Acharya and Sharma (2022, p. 3) observed that the government awards 'their loyalty appointing them in high-level posts in order to manage government media'. Pandey (2022) observes the governments' appointees in the leading position in the public broadcasting, the press and the news agencies. Besides media, the government also appoints in the state mechanism where informal contracts covertly transacted between patrons and clients on lucrative appointments in high public offices (Pandey, 2005). While appointing the loyal cadres in the boards of directors in state-owned media, the government takes arbitrary decisions, appointing non-journalism professional background (Sharma & Acharya, 2022). Unfortunately, these officials' tenure seemed similar to the unstable political culture where the appointed members very often sacked in a short tenure when the government changes.

Acharya and Sharma (2022) state that the government of Nepal not only appoints political loyalties in the board of the Press Council Nepal (PCN), the government also controls the media making policies of welfare advertisements of the private media. Maharjan (2014) found the government allocates a huge amount of budget in its annual plans and the PCN distributes it to the favorable media houses in order to carry welfare advertising across multiple mediums.

Besides welfare advertising, the government also expanded its clients offering many opportunities and incentives in Nepal. Sharma et al. (2022) found that the government directly and indirectly influences 'the so-called autonomy of the PCN by controlling its budget and access to external funding'. KC (2019) remarks that the state provides subsidies in the name of reducing postal and the taxes, VAT, newspapers' printing papers and transportation expenditure

of media houses and the journalists. The government had also announced a health insurance policy in the COVID19 through which the journalists would be treated with special care without any charges in the public hospitals (Aryal, 2022). Although, the special offer is not only prevalent in media sector, it was also found in the politics while the UML had formed a minority government in the second parliament (1994-99), when the PM as the patron introduced the system of constituency development fund to be spent by the concerned MPs in their respective constituencies (Khanal, 2004, p. 55). Khanal further notes that ‘each succeeding government (between 1994-99) increased allowances and other financial incentives to the MPs’, for instance ‘no income-tax’, ‘unlimited amount for medical treatment’ and ‘allowed to import vehicles with duty exemption’ also known as ‘*Pajero scandals*’ in Nepal (Khanal, 2004, 55). Hachhethu (2021) writes about the causes of excessive politicization of society, the professional domain in particular is due to the continuation of clientelist structure even the governments that formed after the promulgation of the New Constitution 2015. He describes as ‘both the NC and the CPN-UML are overwhelmed by the distribution of selective incentives by top leaders controlling and selecting candidates from non-political backgrounds for the elections (Hachhethu, 2021, p. 295).

UNESCO assesses media development in Nepal and illustrates that ‘there are no tax and business regulations aimed at encouraging media development in a non-discriminatory manner’ (UNESCO, 2013, p. 41). Furthermore, the provision of government’s advertisement and subsidies that pressured media houses and created a division between the state and the stakeholders. Sharma and Acharya (2022) found that the PCN had promoted a division between the state and the stakeholders while implementing the government’s decisions of distributing subsidies in the media. They further note that the distributed budget of 2019 has ‘only favors the alliance newspapers’ (Sharma & Acharya, 2022).

The government's intervention can be observed in receiving special contracts and concessions of the media business. KC (2019) observed that the owners of private media get special contracts and concessions even in the broadcast licenses from the government. Some scholars also observed in many cases that the receiving advertisements and subsidies without any effort were even criticized and rejected in some cases by several media houses who claimed in the favor of independent professionalism (Sharma & Acharya, 2022; KC, 2019).

The government very often seems unsuccessful while attempting to enforce some press related bills. In 2019, a newly elected ideologically leftist party, the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), that was unified between CPN-UML and CPN (Maoists) in 2018, formed a single party-led majority government. This government attempted to amend the bills like the Press Council Act (1992). The aim of this amendment was to widen the PCN's jurisdiction beyond print that can monitor even online news portals, radio, television, and social media. The clauses of the amending bills had a provision of heavy amounts of charges and imprisonment in many cases, if in case the journalist who covers the news without evidence. Many civic societies including journalists' professional associations, for example, the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) had condemned the government's intervention as an exercise of its patronage power either imposing journalists' self-censorship or arresting them as the rule breaker of social order. Some blame the government's intervention charging this step as "harshly curbing media and press freedoms" (Sharma et al., 2022, p. 34).

Although, patron-client relations are not healthy practices in media business, increasing competition along with shrinking economy in a limited media market and weak delivery of committed promises of the government of Nepal might be the causes of private owners to be involved in the clientelist networks of the political forces as an alternative approach to sustain media business.

Media owners' practices of clientelist networks

The media intend to establish political connections in the process of hiring human resources. KC (2019) states that the media organizations of Nepal frequently change their editors in order to balance representation of different political tendencies while hiring them. The media houses also recruit those professionals who have strong affiliations with the politics (Acharya & Sharma, 2022). Many journalists, though lacking empirical findings, seem to choose their career paths to be shaped by their political affiliations (Acharya, 2018).

The impact of these patron-centric organizations can be seen in the terminating journalists who demand professional rights including basic salary and protest against the owners. Several cases led by the younger and fresher journalists who were sacked from the job without negotiating their demand had terminated amidst the COVID19 pandemic (Aryal, 2022).

Interestingly, when the media covers power holders' transgression, the media owners and the senior journalists also get threats and, in some cases, even have to face custody in revealing the wrongdoing of the power holders in Nepal. For example, Thapa (2012) illustrates that after a series of coverage on Lauda Air rent scandal on *Kantipur* daily, the then Prime Minister G. P. Koirala, who was blamed for dealing the case, took into custody the editor and the management chiefs through the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2001. In another case, when then Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal was blamed by *Kantipur* Daily for not returning the vehicle (Toyota Prado Jeep) even after 17 days of termination from the premiership. The ex-prime minister Nepal criticized the media and also provoked an editorial through the journalists and the editors who were advocating his representing party, the CPN-UML, were condemning the *Kantipur* Daily publishing an editorial in the

Budhabar Weekly, a mouthpiece of CPN UML, in 2010 (Thapa, 2012). Thapa further states that the vehicle was used changing its original number plate from a project of Nepal Electricity Authority to the government number plate without taking any decisions of the government.

Clientelist networks and journalists' performance

Although a number of professional unions of journalists work for safeguarding professionalism in the journalism profession; the functions of these organizations also seem as 'exercising as a sister organization of the political parties of Nepal' (Onta, 2006). KC (2019) states that the journalists' political connections were seen in their tendencies to be active in political life. He further points out that they often serve in party or public offices taking responsibility of a media person of the party. Despite professional representation, the journalists' associations can be seen as functioning being a client of their aligned parties. For instance, the larger organizations such as the *Press Chautari* is understood to be an association of Journalists close to the Communist Party of Nepal, Unified Marxist-Leninist, the NPU close to Nepali Congress and the Revolutionary Journalists' Association close to Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UNESCO, 2013, p. 76). The partisan division among journalists often have to face themselves to get threats and violence from those on the 'other' side reporting (Adhikary & Pant, 2016).

Clientelist performance was prevalent in the time when the political parties of Nepal suffered with internal conflict. Kharel (2010) states that the journalists, in general, take side of the near and dear patronage while referring to their sources as an exchange of power making their voices more than the other side covering routine-based information claiming public interest in the news. Thapa (2006) points out that the newspapers of Nepal cover the politics heavily with negativity and conflict stories taking particular faction's side on the coverage.

Though clientelism is a similar phenomenon of political parallelism, Nepali news media and political patronage exchange their mutual interest violating ethics in their news. For instance, journalists provide space for visibility to different groups or affinities of diverse political loyalties and orientations in their outlets (UNESCO, 2013). It can be observed that the political leaders not only invite the media owners and editors or journalists in their formal and informal ‘get together’, the media houses and the journalists also invite them in their personal and organizational programs and cover the news. For instance, it was highly covered by the media that Pushpa Kamal Dahal (a.k.a. Prachanda) the supreme commander of a decade long Maoist Insurgency, who later became a premier, had been invited as a ‘guest of honor’ to launch a book written by the senior editor of one of the largest media houses the *Kantipur* Publications. The book not only covered the story of the commander of a decade long Maoist Insurgency, as the credible sources, the journalist-cum-author had credited the revolutionary move of the Maoists as the foundation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal (see Sharma, 2013).

It can be noted that despite performing idealistic roles of the journalists as a neutral and detached performer, they were performing interventionist character in many cases. For instance, in *Terai* unrest, in which the media portrayed the power holders as the protagonists framing their story with thematic coverage portraying positive images with in-depth coverage of them who were mobilizing resources to the media. The media criticized protestors as the antagonists portraying their negative images with a short description. These protestors were demanding to address their ethnic identity in the formulation in the new constitution and also obstructing journalists’ mobility and newspapers’ circulation blaming biased performance of the Nepali media (Dahal, 2018). UNESCO (2013) illustrates that some marginalized issues such as

violations of the rights of women and Dalits were receiving very poor coverage in Nepali media.

Kharel (2010) observed the role of the PCN as an ombudsman in Nepal and claimed that its subsidies very often become the causes of yellow journalism practices providing fake news and covering sensational stories. There are several media houses which published newspapers only for the record of the Press Council for granting benefits once in a year (Kharel, 2010). In a similar vein, a comprehensive study conducted about 30 years ago showed the domination of opinion and gossip journalism in the newspapers of Nepal (Aditya, 1996, p. 163). UNESCO also marked the media performance as ‘individual media outlets have not made discernable attempts to enforce the code (UNESCO, 2013). In another survey study conducted by the Media Foundation – Nepal (2012) assesses the media capacity, credibility and media literacy of Nepal, and show that the journalists were facing problem while disclosing identity of subjects at risk such as rape victims, people in trauma and other marginalized issues.

In sum, the clientelist structure was a prevalent phenomenon in the political landscape of Nepal, it is also apparent while shaping media performance in the Nepali press.

Conclusion

The clientelist practices has vandalized the state mechanism hindering to form strong rational-legal authority, allow civic society to work independently, and control corruption establishing a mechanism of a good governance in the country (Baral, 2004; Khanal, 2004; Parajuli, 2004; Hachhethu, 2021; Pandey, 2018). This practice has also fueled the political culture that creates political division and a high level of unstable competitive political environment along with uncertainty in the politics (Hachhethu et al., 2008; Hachhethu, 2015, Hachhethu, 2021). Media has become a useful tool to disseminate

political information in order to reach out to the electorate and the party members. That is the reason the government, political parties and the leaders as a patron might be encouraged to use the media as a tool for achieving political goals. For this, these patrons might be encouraged to intervene in the media expanding clientelist networks so that they can provide news in line with their political interest.

The political culture of a particular country shapes media systems mainly on the formation of news management and the practices of journalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Mancini, 2018; McQuail, 1992; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The government that exists with temporal basis and frequent elections may feel the importance of visibility of the political parties and the leaders to get voters' support and hence such tendency can encourage them to control media systems of a country by playing as owner, regulator, and funder of the media (Thompson, 2000; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The political forces with clientelist structure can expand their network enabling and controlling human and capital resources through newsroom management (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The patrons appoint regulatory bodies in both private and state-owned news media, allocate budget for subsidies and attempt to regulate media endorsing press restricted legislative provision (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002). Concurrently, the media owners practice clientelist functions while recruiting the professionals selecting them who have a strong political tie, frequently change editors and journalists in order to make balanced representation of different political connections. The journalists show their tendency to establish political connections to be active in political life, serve in party or public offices, and cover stories without caring about ethical guidelines. They show their loyalties advocating the political strategies of their patronage (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002, Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Ornebring, 2013; Mancini, 2018; Mellado, 2015).

Finally, the widely expanding political clientelist structure in Nepal has succeeded to establish clientelist networks influencing the power of media advocating patrons' point of view, making them visible in order to reach out the voters. For this, the government has been appointing board of directors in the state-owned media and the regulatory bodies like the Press Council Nepal. The government has been providing a budget for subsidies reducing VAT, tax and registration fee and distributing welfare advertisements to the favorable media houses. The government has also attempted to endorse press restricted bills in order to control free flow of information. The media owners, on the other hand, have been practicing clientelist functions while recruiting the professionals' selection. They have been hiring those persons who have a strong political tie, and also been changing the editors in the press frequently. The journalists have been showing their tendency to establish political connections, being active in political life and serving in party or public offices. They have been covering the story without caring ethical guidelines showing their loyalties advocating the political strategies of their patronage.

There might be several possibilities of widening media clientelism in Nepali press. These explanatory factors can be the political leaders' unhealthy intra-, and inter level competition; the weakening role of the state and political parties; losing reputation and trust in the voters, parties and the government; weakening political ties with the civic society that has created political stagnation and overall, the leaders' indifference to perform 'stable democracy'. It is also possible that the mounting corruption cases have degraded the leaders' reputation and their visibility in the media has become an essential ingredient for mobilizing voters for electoral success. The developing media systems might be another cause of practicing clientelism in media, that have been facing economic crisis, having a shrinking economy in a limited media market; long partisan history

of the press; and, the strong presence of the role of the state in the country. Finally, the role of the journalists might also be the possible cause of expanding media clientelism in Nepal. Since the very beginning, the journalists have been practicing mission journalism advocating aligned party or leader's ideologies; establishing political ideological base professional unions in which they lack to perform professional solidarity in the profession; and, above all, they possess inadequate training and academic background that can support them to perform their professionalism. Despite immense scope to explore the possibilities of increasing media clientelism in Nepali press, there is still little attention paid to date in the field. Hence, to understand the exact phenomenon of clientelist media in Nepal, conducting new research that reveals the way media perform social realities exploring the practices of watchdog function, such as framing, while scrutinizing the power holders' transgression such as corruption scandals, for example, can be a special contribution.

Sudarshan Prasad Dahal is Assistant Professor of Media Studies at Kathmandu University, School of Arts. He can be reached at spdahal@ku.edu.np

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