

The Enlightenment Tradition of Nepal Can the Civil Society Grasp it?

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Abstract

Nepal's history of enlightenment reflects three traditions—Vedic, Videha Janak and Buddhist. Each of these traditions searches the meaning of life, actual human condition, links with nature and ways of emancipation. The cardinal features of its native civil society are rooted into niskam karma (selfless service) to others, enlightened thinking and action. Modern civil society troubled by the turmoil of post-modernity needs to capture this ancient wisdom that sees human life in the interconnection with other species rather than isolated fragments and requires to perform many other tasks to move the this post-conflict nation from violence to stable peace. Nourishing the civic virtues of freedom, justice, solidarity, reconciliation and peace are vital nutrients.

Keywords: civil society, the state, political parties, ideology, dharma, *niskam karma*, justice, public sphere, etc

1. Introduction

The progressive life of human society rests at large on its civil society, the *homo cogitans*, home of knowledge, which enables its members to achieve full consciousness and cast off their chains. Modern civil society is based on the enlightenment's claims to freedom, rationality,

equality, justice, and peace. These values stoke the free will of the human being to resolve the disorders of modern life and achieve self-awareness, self-realization, and enlightenment. Enlightenment is human beings' quest for a dignified life through a departure from ignorance, bondage, ego, alienation, and grief by opening to *antar gyan* (internal vigilance), *pragya* (bliss acquired through learning, experience, and reflection) and *chaitanya* (conscious power of knowledge, thought, and wisdom). It helps shape the autonomous life and character of human beings. The mind entirely absorbed either in prejudice, self-interest, personal ego, or material benefit fails to seek enlightenment. Enlightenment provides humanistic impulse within societies to create favorable condition to exercise the freedom for self-autonomy and abide by the laws of peaceful existence. The ultimate duty of justice is to establish the perpetual condition of peace through the creation of a just society (Guyer 2006, P. 371) where no one is under the control of other's will.

As an agent of peaceful social change, the *dharma* (righteous conduct) of civil society is to de-traditionalize the general society and work for continuous reforms, renewal, and rationalization of conditions of human existence for the realization of freedom, security, and basic needs. Attainment of self-realization helps citizens search for the conception of a higher moral order of existence and generates egalitarian impulse necessary to mediate the life-world and the system, and nature and culture. There is no duality here; the former two variables are the foundations for the latter ones. Finding the greatest possible 'golden mean' removes the dualism that divides *atman* (personal consciousness) and *brahman* (pure super-consciousness), material self-interest and general welfare, and ethical realm of freedom and order. The *Upanishads*¹ say, "It is by seeing,

¹ The Upanishads were composed around 7th century BC in the South Asian subcontinent by seers which explain the interconnected web of life of all beings. For details, see (Haberman, 2004, pp. 27-47). They say that consciousness inherent in every individual is called *atman* while collective consciousness is regarded as *brahman*.

hearing, reflecting and concentrating on one's essential self (*atman*) that the whole world is known" (Hamilton 2001, P. 30). The realization of *brahman* is more than self-consciousness as it requires liberation from temporal chains, time and entanglements with all human conditions and make history with what Immanuel Kant says, "will and consciousness."

Enlightenment requires an end to dualism between the phenomenal world and liberated mind and the Cartesian method of judging truth by breaking the whole into parts. The dialectic of dualism feeds the source of division, distrust, and conflict. Dualistic worldview fosters conflicting socialization and corresponding action and ruptures the basic harmony of the common human family: their inter-connections. "The life of an individual, the life of a community, and even the life of mankind, ought to be, not a member of separate fragments, but in some sense a whole" (Russell 1989, P. 169). The breath of life is common to all living beings. Martin Heidegger rightly says, "The sap of life flows through plant and animal"(2005, P. 5) as well as micro-organisms. *Rig Veda*, an ancient treatise, therefore, goes deeper beyond human concerns: "An enlightened person, realizing all living beings with one's soul, does not consider others different from himself (Paliwal 2008, P. 49). A harmonious future, according to Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian philosophies, requires transcending binary oppositions of all kinds enabling people to get a sense of radiant humanity.

Emerging as a free sovereign space within the state, the duty-based civil society represents the rational construction of human will to eliminate the irrationality of society through *shastrartha*, (open and informed discourse), cooperative action, and peaceful change through the creative impulse of enlightened persons. Unconstrained by the boundaries of space and time, Nepal's culture and civilization bear telling impacts of both the Indian and the Sinic cultural evolution as well as that of the West; because enlightenment here has become a shared sense of consciousness of all civilizations—Nepalese, Asian, and the world—a consciousness that enables human beings to "serve some end outside human life, some end which is impersonal and

above mankind" (Russell 1989, P 169). This brings a convergence of the Eastern and Western philosophies. Given the perspective, this article briefly narrates the system of ethical life, different traditions of enlightenment that shaped the life of civil society, and their future in Nepal.

2. System of Ethical Life

Human character, say *Upanishads*, springs from three main natural virtues: *sattwa guna* (altruistic virtue), *rajo guna* (envy and lust), and *tamo guna* (evil instinct). Intensely attached to each other, these virtues and vices shape the character of individuals in adult life. But the cosmic desire of enlightened individuals to use *sattwa guna* cultivates the right idea and links education to *dharma* (moral behavior) and *karma* (living one's life performing human duties). Enlightenment shapes the Platonic harmony of the whole on the basis of the *Upanidisdic* ideal of eternal consciousness of the oneness of all life. It helps to destroy the harmful effects of lusts and evil instincts upon the moral character of mankind. Of the four aims of human enterprise—*dharma* (virtuous conduct), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (worldly pleasure), and *mokscha* (emancipation), Hindu philosophy regards the last one as the supreme because "it includes the idea of duty which every human being owes to itself, to one's ancestors, to society as a whole, and to the universal order" (Rangarajan 1992, P. 13). Mankind's fullness and happiness rest on discovering in themselves three dimensions of reality: the divine, the human, and the cosmic or earthly (Panikkar and Pavan 2005, P. 19). The *Rig Veda* suggests each individual to move to a higher divine order and rise above one's *karma*. Hindu philosophy, mainly derived from the insights of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, puts *sanatan dharma* (eternal order of life aimed at human welfare) above *raj dharma* (national statecraft), and *barnashram dharma* (social division of labor) adding that a society which is highly resistant to adaptation and change to higher moral order stumbles into conflict (Dahal 2008, P. 158).

Unlike Thomas Hobbes who characterized human life as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” and favored order and peace over freedom, the Hindu-Buddhist philosophy treats human nature as divine regarding the purpose of enlightenment is to attain this divinity and humanity by continuous inner vigilance and outer worldview. The awakened human consciousness finds its true expression in *aham asmi*, “I am,” human being’s primordial understanding of the self in terms of gaining the meaning of life, its goal, and resolution of antinomies. According to *Rig Veda*, *atman*, the discovery of which means to overcome both death and the fear of death (Panikkar and Pavan 2006, P. 63), enables one to understand that human body perishes after the disappearance of *pran*, the vital life-force, but *atman* carries eternal life after death. It resides in all beings and is inseparable from the *brahman*.

Seer Yagnavalkya says: “The knower of the truth about *brahman* overcomes death” (Prabhavananda and Manchester, 1985, P. 93) and attains *moksha* (immortality). *Brahman* is constructed out of the different *atmans* like sea out of different sources of water. The world of *brahman* is a world beyond good and evil, and cause and effect. But upon achieving full consciousness about self, humankind discovers that their species-life is connected to the lives of other species and, therefore, they have a moral duty to relieve the suffering of others. This induces them to believe in the sacredness of individual conscience as the foundation of social and ethical order and overcome the shakiness of human condition in the state of nature through the use of the faculty of reason and feeling. Reinhold Niebuhr says that human beings are essentially good because they are rational and their rationality is divine, or at least benign (Time 1948, P. 2). It is such *dibya gyan* (divine knowledge), acquired through spiritual enlightenment, which separates human beings from other species. Spiritualism is connected to the cosmic web of life and embodies sublime universal comprehension.

“Spiritual experience is an experience of aliveness of mind and body as a unity” (Capra 2004, P. 59). Seer Uddalaka Aruni says to his son Swetaketu, “This body dies, when deprived of life, but life

does not die” (Panikkar and Pavan 2006, P. 81). There is transmigration of soul to new life unless *moksha* (liberation) is achieved. Arthur Schopenhauer, while seeking to lift human beings out of the biological sphere of nature (Mann 2002, P. 30) proclaims them “metaphysical animals” having the ability to create values honored everywhere. Seer Astabakra speaks to King Janak, “Wise persons have inner vision of *atman* while the unwise can see only the outer world, the perspectives and visions of wise persons are common while those of the unwise are opposing. The wise persons speak truth while such unwise spell untruth.” This metaphysical insight has inspired people to live piously and lead ethical life.

Human action is judged according to the aim it serves. A positive action performed with good intention yields good results while bad action produces bad results. This is the science of *karma* founded on linear cause-effect relationship irrespective of human wish. It predicts that behind every event there is the web of cause and the system of causation links present behavior to future. In such a context, the mission of *dharma*-based civil society is to use altruistic human spirit to grasp freedom from the oppressors, espouse public character, and make their associational life group-opened, rationalized, and cosmopolitan. Civil society seeks to eliminate all forms of discriminations, denials, and privileges from public life and public policy and opens up possibilities for citizens to become ‘cultural’ and creative human beings liberated from *noble savage* (J. J. Rousseau’s idealized concept of natural man uncorrupted by society).

Culture, the expression of human society, matters in social relationship because it provides an enabling environment for building self-confidence and fostering an attitude of trust, solidarity, and peace. Human values are derived from culture and, therefore, they cannot be reduced to mere commodity. The task of building a community is human beings’ primordial necessity to guarantee historical existence through self-control, order, and discipline performed through *yoga* (meditation) and natural feeling for reciprocity and eternal peace founded on the notion of inner and outer harmony of means and ends. *Nirvana* (enlightenment), for Gautam Buddha, can be realized through

the self-experience of super-consciousness and knowledge of the greater reality of the “underlying oneness of the world that leads to the higher goal of immortality” (Hamilton 2001, P. 31). Waking up to the eternal path of enlightenment exposes one to “a state where one is free from human sorrow, suffering and miseries resulting from earthly temptations and trappings” (Shrestha and Bhattarai 2004, P. 75).

The narrative of enlightenment aims to uplift people from their place-bound thinking to a higher ethical order of things. Their orientation to three paths-- *gyan marga* (path to knowledge), *karma marga* (work as worship and desire), and *bhakti marga* (devotion and feeling) other than self-interest defines their virtue and higher will and a transition from what G. W. F. Hegel says, “natural to absolute ethical life by equipping individuals with the necessary characteristics and insights” (Honneth 1988, P. 23). Bhagavad Gita favors reconciliation between *gyan marga* and *karma marga* through the dedication of all goals and activities of life to the divine and the assimilation of all activities into *samadhi*² in the highest wisdom of *brahman* (Mukerjee 2010, P. 16). The sacred dramas of *Ramlila*, *Krishnalila*, *Bhakta Prahlad*, *Shrawan Kumar* and many others staged in villages of Nepal, India, Bhutan, Thailand, and Indonesia explain the relative virtues of these three realms and provide moral, intellectual, and social growth of the Southern Asian peoples of various generations. These notions resemble close to enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant’s critique of pure reason, practical reason, and judgment though he has given an amazingly elaborated scientific treatment of these concepts.

Constant engagement of civil society in educating people about knowledge, life-skills, and resources helps them to liberate themselves from “immaturity” and “self-incurred tutelage,” to use the concepts of Kant. The life of conscious thought springs not only from erudition of reason and rights but from virtuous conduct in public and

private life with the ability to know the difference between good and evil (Rajagopalachari 2008, P.152). Enlightenment through various experiences of life enables human beings to acquire liberating insights and wisdom and overcome anguish, anxiety, and agony. Kant defines two conditions under which human beings can escape from their immaturity: they can become at once “spiritual and institutional, ethical and political” (Rabinow 1984, P. 35). These are also the highest eternal virtues of civil society, defined by *Upanishads*, founded on compassion, charity, and self-sacrifice to help others. There is a continuity of the links of spirituality from Hindu-Buddhist tradition to Taoism, Kant, and Soren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard too was obsessed with the “ultimate potentialities of human soul” (Time 1948, P 4) for the solution of the ethical problems of human society and attainment of highest good--peace. Due to the dissolution of spiritual energies, says, Martin Heidegger, “the world is darkening. The essential episodes of their darkening are: the flight of gods, the destruction of earth, the standardization of man, the preeminence of the mediocre” (2005, P. 45). The *Rig Veda*, therefore, says that peace in human life requires peace in the outer and inner sphere of nature and culture—sun, sky, air, water, earth, dawn etc and the re-generation of spiritual, ethical and moral life.

3. Multiple Enlightenment

In Nepal, the tradition of civility is ancient and embedded in the diversity of national life. Modern civil society has, however, failed to shore up the heritage of multiple *nirwan* (enlightenment) derived from Vedas, Janak, and Gautam Buddha though they have become a part of the national consciousness and social life. The literal meaning of Vedas, Janak, and Buddha is enlightenment. For the “enlightened, past and future are abolished” (Gombrich 1993, P. 167) as they become neither captive of the historical situation nor subordinated to the Omnipresent Creator or ruler against whom they cannot express their conscience. Attainment of enlightenment is the common search of these traditions. According to German Scholar Max Mueller, the

² Samadhi is the final step in becoming absorbed in something where mind becomes completely one with it. The literal meaning of Samadhi is complete merger into thinking.

four *Vedas* (Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva), written between 1,500 to 1,600 BC, reflect the ancient wisdom of the Eastern civilization nourished by successive generations of scholars about the elemental truth of being and duties of human life for the welfare of the entire living species and inspired people and leaders to perform good deeds (Paliwal 2008, P. 74). The *Rig Veda* considers *pragyanam brahman*, the living spirit to be the basis of knowledge, *atman*, and *brahman*. The renunciation of ego is a path to know the real nature of one's own self, comprehend the needs of others, and realize emancipation (Nikhilananda 2002, P. 242).

Vedant speaks about the beginning, nature and destiny of human beings and the mystery of the entire creation. The Hindu-Buddhist philosophy articulates the planetary idea of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the whole world is one family) and its realization through the curative powers of teaching of *dharma*, performance of virtuous *karma* (good conduct), *vinaya* (politeness), *maitri* (friendliness), and *karuna* (empathy) embedded in enduring selfless desire. It argues that the fullness of life does not mean going beyond the requirement of subsistence. The function of a good teacher is not only to explain texts and letters and spirits, but as to teach through one's life—by daily acts, by causal words, and sometimes by silence (Prabhavananda and Manchester 1975, P. xi). *Rig Veda* says, "Action is pure when it is performed without the expectation of its fruit." Each living species, imbued with common heritage of the nature, holds a supreme value of its own and must not be sacrificed to the claims of economy, society or even mankind. This is the cardinal feature of eternal humbleness that rescues each from extinction and contributes to the optimum functioning of the cosmic web of life.

Raj Rishi Janak, popularly known as Seeradhwoj Janak, ruled Mithila Kingdom around twelfth century BC and was the 21st sage in the tradition of enlightenment. He can be regarded the philosopher King of the Platonic ideal state. His unbending stoic ideals and wisdom sought to discipline the coercive potential of power into a normative edifice of governance and received the title of *videha* from the public for his *niskama karma*. *Videha* means transcending the

bodily self for spiritual enlightenment. Later on, his kingdom was known as *Videha* for he was ready to sacrifice his entire property, empire even himself to become the knower of *brahma* (enlightenment) (Prabhavananda and Manchester 1975, P. 111). Seer Astabakra, while speaking to King Janak says that only wise persons can make their lives consistent with the enlightened values and accept the integrity of all living species because they perform *niskam karma*, action without any desire for benefit and speak timeless truth. The *shastrartha* (discourse) on classical treatises performed by scholars such as Yagyavalkya, Aswala, Sanditya, Upakosala, Ushastha, Uddalaka, Gargi, Maitreyi, Astabakra, etc at his palace sought to remove inner contradiction in knowledge, appraise the utility of knowledge for improving the condition of society, and supply the rulers and people with comparative experience and insights fulfilling various needs of life. Their discourse also centered on eternal laws and the relation of individual *atman* (consciousness) to *brahman* (collective consciousness or the world-soul), the spirit of life of all living beings and sought to separate body from the soul, the mortal from the immortal one. It also helped to transcend individual experience by enlarging it bearing positive effects for collective good.

King Janak, enthused by this ideal, says that even the gods indulged in lust, power, and self-interest cannot realize *brahman* (Sharma 2011, P. 40). The purpose of their discourse was to increase critical awareness, settle issues and define future course of action. Enlightened persons are beyond social stratification. Astabakra says to King Janak: "You do not fall into social division of caste system nor identify yourself with Brahmin, Chhetri, Vaishya and Shudra after achieving the spiritual enlightenment." Modern thinkers like Immanuel Kant, Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Johan Galtung, and Fritj of Capra too reflect the need of spirituality to discover common minds and link it to build humanity. Kant says: "There is formed within us an inner spiritual man, whose nature is distinct and for whom the body is merely an instrument. The human soul first acquired this great asset of a more lucid consciousness in a spiritual manner, as a result of its humanity" (2008, pp. 206-7). Truth, for

Astabakra, lies neither in theory nor in treatises, it lies in the lotus of heart. The aim of knowledge is to search for it through meditation which is also the essence of inner peace (Sharma 2011, P. 61).

Siddharth Gautam (born in 563 BC), who was the 25th and perhaps the last Buddha to attain enlightenment, was a contemporary of Socrates, Confucious, and Mahavira-the innovator of Jainism. Buddha repudiated the *Vedic* sacrifice of living creatures to sun, fire, wind, water, and earth, opposed fatalism, mysticism, and prejudice, found the meaning of life into a seemingly empty universe, elevated the identity of humanity like modern existentialists—Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and Jean Paul Sartre, abandoned the notion that consciousness is identical to an indispensable self *atman*, propounded the rationalistic worldview, encouraged critical education for the cessation of human suffering, and believed that *nirvana* is “attainable in this very life and obstruction to it is said to lie in the very nature of worldliness” (Sharma 2004, P. 24). It is thus in Buddha’s golden mean, between mortification and the pursuit of conscious aspiration for enlightenment, that Kant found solution to eternal peace. The middle way is the only lawful way” to a stable peace (Saner 1973, P. 244). Like King Janak, Buddha utilized the freedom of critique of classical treatises for the creation of a new society of social equality, justice, and a path of self-sacrifice, serenity, and peace. This consciousness reconciled politics and ethics into the rationalist tradition of modernity akin to the one inspired by Kant, who brought philosophy to serve human beings’ quest for freedom from ‘tutelage.’

While Hindu philosophy justifies just war for greater public good, Buddhists maintain a pacifist position and seek means compatible with the ends. Gautam Buddha said, “Inner peace within the self and outer peace are related and peace can be achieved only by peaceful means.” He laid out four noble truths of human life: life essentially involves suffering, the cause of suffering is unfulfilled desire, the cessation of suffering can be attained through *nirodha* and the perusal of righteous eight-fold path (mode of seeing things, thinking, speech, action, living, efforts, attitude of mind, and mediation) can help achieve emancipation from the cycle of birth,

suffering, death, and rebirth. Buddha learned this from his own experience and the *Upanishads*, the insights of sages and seers, who also believe that the “sage who by faith, devotion and meditation has realized the self, and become one with *brahman*, is released from the wheel of change and escapes from rebirth, sorrow and death” (Prabhavananda and Manchester 1975, P. 113). Socrates too believed that “suffering wrong and doing wrong are equally bad” (Arendt 2003, P. 153).

Kant, like Buddha, creatively criticized the unreasonable practice of religion and separated religion from reason and magic from rationality while seeking to understand the nature of reality. Buddha demanded the adequacy of culture and religion to the people and opposed the orthodoxy of Brahmanism and its spiritual corruption. Kant also thought that “religious immaturity is the most pernicious and dishonorable variety of all” (2008, P. 59). The socially engaged philosophers Buddha and Karl Max linked in their concern the welfare of ordinary people. In doing so neither Buddha nor Marx was bound by traditional standards. Both had the courage to apply principles into action. But, unlike Marx, who radicalized the discourse on life, labor, work, and language along materialist line, both Buddha and Kant approved the necessity of spirituality considering it “the supreme expression of humanity” (Kant 2008, P 205) without which human history would sink into barrenness (Heideger 2005, P. 53). Both Buddha and Marx, however, relied on need-based economy for they foresaw the greed causing massive scale of human intervention imperiling the habitat of living species and articulated the importance of social deconstruction of caste and class respectively for the creation of an egalitarian society whereby both the upper and lower classes could equally enjoy freedom, justice, and peace. Long before Jacque Derrida, the Buddha thus became a great deconstructionist (Gombrich 1993, P. 165) as he debunked the veiled ideological and hierarchical thinking of society perpetuating the system of social discrimination. Like King Janak, Buddha had extinguished his selfish desire and delusions fostering civility, non-violence, and egalitarian values in society, values that helped to avoid the clash of cultures and created

an autonomous state for civil society. For Buddha, civil society, faith, and the state were not at odds nor were they cut off from humanity.

Like Greek philosophers—Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, Kant shares with King Janak and Buddha a common ground of discourse as a means to establish the validity of knowledge and an inward growth of wisdom. For them, discourse helps in mutual perspective taking of all the participants enabling them to become responsible for ways of conducting their lives and resolution of conflicts. But they differed on one count—Kant, like Greek philosophers, allowed only knowledge entrepreneurs as participants in the discourse while Buddha, like King Janak, allowed all irrespective of age, caste, class and gender distinctions. Participants of the discourse were free of coercion and fear of state authority; there was neither caste consideration, nor gender distinction not even inheritance of position as knowledge was fully sovereign and the state power was subordinated to it. Marx differed from Buddha; the former was concerned with radical change and used dialectics to weaken the privileged classes for the resolution of conflict; the latter used non-violent discourse for conflict resolution. Both Buddha and Marx were philosophers of emancipation and brought contemplative philosophical traditions of the East and the West into practical life. Both broke the authority of many irrational traditions, the culture of silence of the oppressed, and opened the way to an acute awareness of people about their own historical condition of existence.

Marx wanted to liberate the oppressed while Buddha and Kant's concept of enlightenment was cosmopolitan as they wanted to restore the dignity of human life. Both Buddha and Kant found harmony in a larger natural order and sought to bring accord with species lives. Education for Buddha, as for Marx, was not rote learning of books for scholastic abstractions, but an active reflection of the concrete life-world situation focused on changing its irrational conditions through education, reflection, and transformation. Marx, as a radical humanist, however, believed that economic equality is a precondition for human emancipation, the emancipation from "necessity," alienation, and exploitation through dialectical solidarity.

But, under the Hindu-Buddhist philosophy this solidarity becomes organic where even economic profits obliged business persons to conduct *shuvha lav* (ethical practices) akin to the one articulated by English enlightenment thinkers such as David Hume, Adam Smith, and Adam Ferguson, inspired by the ideals of kindness, justice, and humanity. All this does not mean that it did not include hedonism and pragmatism. Charvak, for instance, stands distinctly in the tradition of hedonism and Kautilya in pragmatism leaving a profound impact on the whole psychology of South Asian peoples.

4. Impact of Enlightenment on Nepal's Public Life

Enlightenment has a civilizing impact on the public and private life in Nepal. The consciousness it fostered became civil society's impulse for the improvement of social standards, national awakening, and cosmopolitan solidarity. According to Kant, the public use of reason can bring about enlightenment in human life. Inspired by duty-bound ideals, many well off individuals in Nepal's Tarai, valleys, and part of the hills set up public places such as colleges, *Gurukuls* (residential school), *paropakar* (charity-based organizations), roads, health centers, resting places, water taps, community ponds, parks and organizations for the benefit of the people and made the people feel connected to a network of their mass cultures, norms, and a common Nepali civilization. Nepalese educators trained in Benaras and various parts of India had imparted consciousness to the people considering that knowledge is public and cannot be privatized by its producers. This explains why many classical treatises remain anonymous—they do not bear the names of authors. Kautilya made a clear distinction between the public and the private sphere and suggested public officials not to use the nation's commonwealth to enrich private fortune. Faith-based intellectuals—seers, sages, mendicants, priests, and teachers-- did not reduce knowledge to serve personal interest, ideology, and political power but taught others to live righteously and avoid evil (Hesse 2011, P. 39). Some of the intellectuals and leaders

inspired by the Gandhian ideals even used knowledge to build civic character of citizens.

The learning of philosophy, history, culture, and civility in these terms reduced the amount of direct violence and helped to resolve conflict between various social classes and oligarchy. The civil codes prepared by the rulers during pre-unification days, *Dibya Upadesh* of Prithvi Narayan Shaha, cultural integrity and autonomy fostered by successive rulers became the foundation to guide Nepal's public life. They abolished the immortality of slavery and ruminated over the nation's new-found identity in the aphorism: "Go to Gorkha if justice is denied." Even during anti-Rana struggle the middle classes of Nepal invoked *Bhagbad Gita*, the classical Hindu treatise, to fight for the right cause (Atmananda 2002, P. 17) against injustice inflicted on people through moral and ethical reconstruction of agrarian feudal order and set up constitutional and ethical checks on political power. The spring of rebellion nourished by civil society helped Nepalese people to regain their humanity—equal freedom and equal rights under the constitutional dispensation. The era of modernity that followed, however, saw a conflict between the customary privileges and the civic power of public opinion, new technologies, and new visions of civil disobedience and national reconciliation. They are also posing difficulty in establishing the constitutional tradition of politics and norm-governed behavior of powerful leadership. Neo-colonialism, excessive materialism, corruption, and civil wars have exacted their toll on the cultural and artistic richness and civility that marked Nepal's historical past, a trend that continues to strain the possibility of infusing civic culture in the country for the creation of a rationalized order based on the modern spirit of constitutional and human rights.

Enlightenment requires "the courage and audacity to know and use mental faculties" and search for truth regardless of current prejudices and regimes (Guyer 2006, P. 39). The Hindu-Buddhist treaties also place the importance of truth before power and argue that only fearless person can attain enlightenment (Prabhananda and Manchester 1975, P. 19). But Nepal's faith-based intellectuals lost

this courage as they cohabitated with the materiality of regime power and justified its acts—right or wrong. As personal impulse and desire overwhelmed their creative thinking and action they completely lost interest in their own worthy habits of personal enlightenment and the emancipation of Nepali people from harsh life. Decline of intellectual standards marks the beginning of the moral decadence of Nepalese society, the institutionalization of social, gender and economic discrimination, non-investment of social surpluses for public education, innovation and progress and an absence of dialogue between urban elites and rural masses of the periphery. Their counterpart, reason-based and discipline-bound social scientists who later replaced it in policy making, too, lost touch with the essential need and feeling of people as they were taught to maintain "value neutrality" and "intellectual detachment" from the people for the "objectivity" of their knowledge acquired from entirely different context. Submerged in the external regime of truth, they used "reason" first to fight myth, fatalism, blind faith and despotism and latter on to silence the scream of people and manipulate public opinion as well as development indicators. As a result, Nepalese schools, colleges and universities specializing in various disciplinary sciences, social sciences and management have failed to shoulder the civic duty of promoting social cohesion, national unity and civic responsibility.

The social scientists of Nepal stand confused between the universal validity of science and cultural context of ideology. Their blind worship of "reason" to solve the entire problems of Nepalese society is the central cause of their decline. The reason's excess is, in truth, "the triumph of irrational forces which succeeded in using the processes of reason to satisfy themselves" (Morgenthau 1974, P. 155) where they have lost the native heritage of enlightenment and wisdom and the very meaning of human responsibility. Jurgen Habermas argues, "freedom from tradition is often experienced as alienation from the moral context of life" (Tucker Jr. 1998, P. 135). It is entirely wrong to argue that conscious Nepalese were fatalists. Its maxim, "Fate does not guarantee the hold of milk in bamboo basket," suggests

that Nepalese relied on labor and hard work rather than fate only. Their rebellion against the fate was one of the sources of enlightenment.

Modern Nepal's legal, economic, and educational system founded on disciplinary code thus reflects the inversion of *dharma*-based justice and the critical discourses independent of the network of power which have today degenerated into ritualized seminars and workshops where participation is restricted to invitation in a club-like manner and no one knows where its outputs are utilized. To Martin Heidegger the "absent of openness" for multiple views is "the cause of our present distress" (Dreyfus 1987, P. 217). Both sets of intellectuals could not dissolve the stirring "fear" of the loss of their privileges coming from rationalizing power of knowledge and ideology and invisibilization of the heterogeneity of national life. Both became so intensely interest-bound that they are no longer able to reflect the human condition of people and help overcome ecocide, cultural erosion, social deformation, moral loss, and popular disaffection. But, so long as knowledge is subordinated to the practical end of self-interest of the small group of governing elites, leaving the rest of people in poverty, ignorance and desolation, national renaissance in Nepal remains a mirage.

Clashes of different moralities between the state, political parties, business, civil society, and citizens are today obstructing the goal of mass emancipation formulated in terms of Nepal's peaceful and stable future. The intellectual tradition is no more governed by *dharma* or *modern constitution*. But, the emerging modern civilization if it is to endure, requires a synthesis of all enlightenment traditions—spiritual, rational, and scientific-- for reforms in human knowledge, conduct, and duties and to remove the source of fundamentalism associated with the instrumentalization of class, caste, ethnicity, religion, and region achieving personal and power gains. An awakening of national awareness about active citizenship and human duties through the enlightenment of civic education can erode parochial, patriarchal, and patrimonial order of life. But concern for the survival of Mother Earth has now refused to recognize the

universal primacy of human beings and their domination of nature and other species. The ecological imperative constrains the human capacity for free will and links individual life with species life. In this sense, human rights' struggle cannot capture the cosmology of *nirwan*, as it is based on anthropocentric conception of the world inclined to establish the supremacy of human beings over all other living-species and does not conform to the ancient Vedic ideal of *sarve bhavantu sukhina, sarve santu niramaya* (well-being of all species). Rights-oriented reasoning is also an inadequate response to environmental issues and the problems of the unorganized Nepalese people as they lack the effective political agency for their empowerment. It requires the participation of the affected citizens within and across national borders, integrity of species, and adaptation to the changing spirit of time defined by interconnection of life.

The project of emancipation formulated in terms of a future egalitarian society in response to the critique of current conditions of Nepal requires civil society's creative roles in building this post-conflict nation. The society's claim of state sovereignty and citizens' awareness about global enlightenment help contextualize policies and generate a common ground for the resolution of identity, ideological and interest-based conflicts. Nepal's history shows that civil society's knowledge does not contrast with the market and the state as it now is. In this sense, the autonomy of civil society does not mean liberation from the civic duty of national affinity and certain sympathy with inarticulate native people and freedom from its interest to rationalize and humanize society. The class, caste, ethnic, and regional representation of society in no way works for the general emancipation of the entire Nepali society and, therefore, cannot be considered genuinely 'civil.' The neo-liberal narrative projectized civil society as a counter-power against the state for the operation of free market economy. This helped to deconstruct the national affinity of the elites who are linked to global mobility of capital and who have forced the workers to migrate abroad in order to capitalize on the job market opportunities. Now, the retreat of elites into the private sphere of security, education, health, communication, and transportation

marks the decadence of their standards from public accountability and exposes the hypocrisies of the ruling classes. What civil society needs now is to exalt the human feelings over reason.

The Nepalese civil society acutely lacks the spiritual and moral socialization and organic connection with the nation's history of enlightenment. As their imagination is rooted in the geopolitical interest of regime change, many of them lack both the historical awareness of the contribution of previous generations and the concrete national course of action. "For human beings, thinking of past matters means moving in the dimension of depth, striking roots and thus stabilizing themselves, so as not to be swept away by whatever may occur—the *Zeitgeist* or History or simple temptation" (Arendt 2003, P. 95). The deviation of rights-based civil society from the 'golden mean' of politics is the main reason for their declining importance within a few years of span while the value of the duty-based native civil society has increased in reconciliation, relief, and service to the needy. Inspired by spiritual destiny, faith-based discourses by organic intellectuals in the public space of Nepal's villages are successfully emotionalizing the voluntary spirit of people for donation to social works and expand welfare-based programs to heal the wounds of society and assert their humanity.

Modern civil society has to democratize itself and uphold the values of a cultivated public which is citizenship-based, group-opened, and political while the pre-political, religious, and non-political agencies devoid of any potential for modernity also need democratic acculturation (Bleie and Dahal 2010, P. 37). Imperfect socialization of citizens, duality of education and health, and lack of national reflection continue to foster individual impulse over the shared construction of national community and strain both the social and system integration process in Nepal. This needs to be rectified by appropriate institutional and policy measures. Both sets of intellectuals—organic, spiritual, and faith-based and reason-based social scientists-- require meaningful dialogues with the people to bring the relevance of their education and thinking in accordance with

their contexts, needs, rights, and aspirations. Civil society, in such a context, needs to cultivate quite a few tasks:

5. Tasks of Civil Society

First, a way forward for social transformation requires Nepalese civil society to free itself from the nation's cycle of decadal political change through the re-politicization of their duty-oriented character. American historian Karl Lotus Backer wrote: "The past is a kind of screen upon which each generation projects its vision of the future." Historical and cultural ignorance leads one to the blindness of contextual knowledge and ability to resolve conflict through enlightened reason. The course of history aims to set up a framework of order and peace. Therefore, reconciliation with the tradition and experience of modern life can revitalize its national spirit. This means

First, civil society as an *embodiment of enlightened reason and feeling* and capable of achieving self-consciousness, must instil historical awareness of the present need to respond to the changing rights, and aspirations of Nepalese citizens, not just the interests of the present generation but also to ecological, social, gender, and inter-generational justice. As a part of culture, civil society has to see whether it is undertaking social interest of public into account or spreading only elite interest and weakening the democratic system through the spread of cheap populism and unaccountable activism. For culture is the foundation of nationalism and, therefore, its attrition marks the collapse of the state (Acharya 1996, P. 4). The monopoly rule by non-performing leaders in Nepal has made its democracy weak as many forces are using the democratic means to destroy it. The *dharma* of civil society is to check such destructive tendency and broaden the scope for reconciliation through spiritual, moral, and social values.

Second, civil society should broaden the *binary code of politics* steered by a competition between the friend and the foe and between the left and the right and aim for a new social contract, a workable constitution owned by all citizens. The binary code of

politics based on single unit determinism such as class, ethnicity, gender, territory, and ideological division is destabilizing as it does not establish democracy's optimal values of the inclusion of the "Other" but maximizes one at the cost of other. The transformation of working people into multi-classes—white, blue, and green collar workers, professionals, dispossessed, and self-employed citizens and unfolding of multiple identities offer the possibility to transcend the binary political mode. But the emancipation of workers requires production of the necessities of life. Workers' sustained engagement in *karma yoga* (work is worship) helps to overcome alienation, necessity, and dependence and gain freedom of choice in the same way as the theory of *shuva lav* (ethical business) commands social support for the economy and business to grow and create a viable framework of transitional justice, livelihood, and social security.

Third, the historical *crisis in Nepal's reformist politics* reflects the weakness of civil society to uphold the golden mean of politics defined by Gautam Buddha - and the capacity of mediating agencies of society to open up reforms in each generation of citizens and the rational articulation of political life. Buddha has rightly advocated the liberation of human beings through knowledge acquired through active listening, contemplation, meditation, and feeling, not through only faith and reason. Knowledge gained through self-experience and feeling informed by reality and performance of virtuous *nishkam karma* (conduct) provides the bedrock of cultural awakening about the management of the nation's natural resources and undertaking enlightened policy action.

Fourth, and finally, the organic formation of civil society in Nepal is essential to *free them from borrowed existence* and open a debate in the public sphere about the democratization of informal society, economy, polity, and the state and shift them to rule-based governance. Only then their exhortations to the leaders to execute the people's mandate for a new constitution, remove gaps in governance between security and development, and promote citizens' welfare to consolidate democratic gains can uphold legitimacy. The democratic outcome presumes a qualitative transformation in the patterns of

orientation, attitudes, values, and beliefs of the civil society to inspire the hope and enthusiasm of the poor in the polity. A positive outcome of civil society's works can constructively contribute to the creation of a civic culture. The overall transformation of the political culture of the day, however, would demand habit-breaking, innovative, and visionary policies in the country rooted in the changing spirit of *yug dharma*, the *zeitgeist*, and the conscious aspiration of the Nepali people for enlightenment. A simple temptation to transformation without destiny and social and economic preconditions can easily land its geopolitical and cultural landscape into chaos. Already one can see Nepal's political transition from violence to peace has traversed into a windy road lacking an anchorage of enlightened action.

Second, *raj dharma* (statecraft) aims at promotion of security and well-being of all citizens. About the model of polity the great poet and essayist Laxmi Prasad Devkota said, "We Nepalis are highly influenced by religion. Since religious life and society of Nepal desire an ideal system instead of arcane communism, we may lean to the spiritual form of democracy" (Devkota 2010, P. 75). There is an element of truth here as the concept of spirituality has an integrative potential and encompasses the cosmic web of life. National leadership in its various forms, such as political leaders, citizens' representatives, planners, and policy-makers needs to open up its mind to this *social learning* of the changing nature of citizens' rights in order to seek to institutionalize those rights, inspire civic participation, and initiate socio-economic reforms and institutional transformation. *Institutional transformation* does not begin from within the system; it comes from alternative leadership and vision provided by a genuine civil society and grassroots organizations. The social pressure for institutional opening is broadening the social base of political parties in Nepal but at the same time tribalism, gender, ethnicity, and territoriality are straining the ideologies' integrative potential and working against the collective claims of the Nepalese people to popular sovereignty. There are, however, also good signs visible now in the nation's horizon as the social movements of Nepalese citizens across the party lines are also fostering inner-party democracy and representation of their

interests in various layers of party committees and their articulation in the constitution, laws, and policies. A rational collective action of civil society can restructure the nature of work and offer a favorable environment for citizens' demand for better working conditions, dignity, and standards of living. This will support the societal *élan vital*, the vital energy, needed for broadening the public space and vigor for state-building from below, constitutional stability, national security, rule of law, and supply of public goods. A genuine democratic transformation of Nepali parties, however, calls for arresting the 'social diversions' underway and synergizing all the centripetal forces and resources for a rational reconstruction of the future order.

Third, Nepali society has undergone a shift from inherited community governed by custom, duty, deference, and folk life to a *self-chosen society* governed by rights, laws, and contracts, from its earlier hierarchical status to citizen equality and from emotional to rational will driven by the forces of modernity. This is deconstructing its historically-evolved *barnashram dharma* (caste and gender division of labor). Technological change, globalization, and new economy are exposing Nepalese society to a new social stratification which requires new adaptation of the state to the emerging global social space. Federations of many civil society groups in Nepal are struggling to moderate the hierarchical systems of production, appropriation, and control, reform policies and attain a self-governing polity. The economy of tomorrow will be horizontal as it will remove the boundaries between the worker and the boss through a culture of partnership and seek to equalize welfare benefits across the citizens of all social strata. But the key propellers of modernity, such as education, economy, technology, institutions, and leadership processes are not yet sufficiently rationalized in Nepal to achieve a breakthrough even in fulfilling the basic human needs. Nepalese civil society institutions, in that context, have to play a pro-active role in familiarizing themselves with the vision of tomorrow's sustainable economy and the imperative of workers and business persons to collaborate in order to adapt to it. A certain set of incentives for free

collective bargaining and codetermination of public interest are preconditions needed for the equal development of the multi-classes of Nepalese society and solidarity of citizens of both the formal and informal sectors. Social *stability*, moreover, requires bridging the gap between the old and the virtual world, the knowledge class and the working class and the nationalist and supranational citizens for a shared future. Civil society, in such a context, can serve as a bridge between the two if they are capable of removing their own self-contradictions, enforce democratic accountability, and converse about multi-level governance.

Fourth, confronting a web of problems requires that all the 'systemic causes' be known in their entire context for resolution. Civil society has to take up the policy agenda of progress, climate change, and post-conflict peacebuilding as they affect the citizens most and are important for building a viable future for Nepal. The *solidarity of civil society with the general society* at large can bring the inputs essential for enlightened policy and institutional reforms. Similarly, the promotion of a strong public sphere for opinion and will formation can rectify the subversion of general will by the private interests of power, money, and media and radiate the trust across the empirical divides of the nation. It will also help to bridge the gap between citizens in the informal and the formal sectors of the political economy by networking, widening, and deepening the possibility for inclusion, representation, modernization, and collective action.

Fifth, and finally, *social transformation* driven by the country's competitive position in the world economy cannot be strengthened without increasing the quality and productivity of economy, education, and technological application to address the unmet demands of citizens arising from new social stratification, new social formation, gender equality, and new challenges. Nepalese civil society must, therefore, seek to overcome the turmoil triggered by the forces of post-modernity and unrestrained materialism of free-market and dialectic and their various manifestations in the politics of divide and rule, and command and control of citizens. In the changed context, civil society must ultimately also strengthen their capacity for

modernization and contribute to the modernization of Nepalese democracy, economy, and polity without undermining the capacity of its spiritual force to connect people and enhance their overall well-being and social peace.

6. Conclusion

Peace through social justice has become a rational, inalienable hope of the seers, sages, leaders, and teachers in Nepal since ancient days. An important feature of Nepalese public life is that it involves not only the supremacy of individuals but also fellow humans, and the living species, where individual citizens are an intrinsic part of *brahma*. According to Vedic, Janak's and Buddhist philosophies, the dissolution of the personal ego for greater public good is the way to achieve enlightenment and conciliation of *atman* and *permatma*, human mind and heart as well as nature and culture. Egoistic persons are partial human beings, not species-beings, as Ludwig Feuerbach put it, as they think about the emancipation of class, caste, religion, gender and race, not the emancipation of all Nepalese citizens and mindful of nature. Under the Hindu-Buddhist philosophy, individual freedom is allowed only to the extent that it does not destroy nature's capacity for resilience and the possibility of human contact with the eternal world. Buddhism has an emotional basis in universal compassion and a commitment to communicate to the ordinary public about ways to achieve enlightenment and multiple levels of change processes. The reconciliation of diverse interests, ideologies, and identities requires greater openness, contextual debate and seeks the golden mean through compromise to address the suffering of species life. Shared interests and values are the fundamental rules governing the formation and operation of civil society. A network of civil society rooted in the public political culture of the nation's heritage can recreate the eternity of Nepal's enlightenment spirit, foster durable peace, as well as a common conception of democratic order and a shared sense of justice for all people.

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