

## RECOVERING THE ROOTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN NEPAL<sup>1</sup>

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This paper is an essay about civic values or 'virtues', and the need for civic education in contemporary Nepal. It makes an argument for 'recovering the roots of civil society in Nepal', which the author locates first and foremost in Hindu philosophy. This is necessary as, in its current form, mainstream or 'elite' civil society has lost touch with democratic values and the sense of social responsibility that the author refers to as '*niskam karma*'. Divided along political party lines and moved by the pursuit of profit and self-promotion, 'elite' civil society has hampered rather than facilitated, progress towards the creation of a modern state in Nepal. Civic education programmes grounded in age-old philosophical traditions in Nepal has the potential to transform current political culture and go some way towards resolving many of Nepal's present ills.

### INTRODUCTION

Civil society and the intermediary institutions located between the family and the state are two vital units representing the public interest. They are able to use knowledge, information and other tools to ensure transparent and accountable governance in relation to the use of public resources and to achieve enlightenment as well as equity goals. This is important as enforcing accountability among public officials requires the establishment of robust institutions capable of governing the public sector and engaging citizens to exercise their sovereignty in the determination of public policy and the public sphere. However, when these institutions pander to the parochial interests and the power games among various

political forces, governance cannot achieve its goals—public security, rule of law, civic participation, service delivery and the peaceful resolution of conflict. A vibrant public sphere is possible only through the continuous rationalisation, reform and renewal of society so that it is better able to self-organise and articulate people's needs and aspirations. The autonomy of the public sphere rests on civil society groups' consistent work within the normative realm, their ability to reflect the conditions of Nepal's diverse groups and attempts to transform them into a rational public capable of enjoying constitutional and human rights and fulfilling the corresponding duties. The new art of governance lies in the

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correct disposition of actors and institutions through civic education, communication, coordination and collective action, as these seek to reconcile democratic ideals and practice among citizens and leaders and forge an interface between the state and society.

Nepal's ancient heritage supported the values of civic enlightenment above power and justified regime change in case of the violation of justice, order and peace. In many villages of Nepal, where the concepts of *niskam karma* (selfless service), volunteerism and charity support public goods, practices founded on the ancient wisdom of civil society continues to this day. Amidst the vicissitudes of their birth, inertia and renewal, civil society groups in Nepal continue to nurture basic human values, an ethos of social responsibility and culture (Acharya, 1998:1). Nepal's hopes for a stable democracy requires the revitalisation of the virtues of citizenship rooted in social solidarity to deepen trust and lift the veil of silence from those in distress. Civil society social movements in Nepal have contributed to the removal of harmful social practices such as slavery and widow burning, have initiated social reforms, political mediation, and have helped to reclaim popular sovereignty. These movements have used freedom and social justice as weapons to alter Nepal's pre-modern politics rooted in divide and rule, command and control principles, and initiate conciliatory policy changes.

Nepal's Interim Constitution 2007 has expanded citizens' rights including their right to information that affects their life, liberty, property and identity. Ensuring transparency has become a core governance principle and civil

society groups are playing a key role in educating citizens about this. Finding utility in civil society groups, Nepal's recent periodic national plans, local governance acts and regulations on local peace committees have conceptualised civil society's engagements in various domains of life. These acts and regulations envisage roles for civil society in the Nepal Development Forums and the Country Cooperation Framework of donors, consumer committees, advocacy groups, media, peace monitoring initiatives, mothers' groups, conflict-victims' bodies, associations of the disabled. Other roles that civil society is expected to play include the implementation of citizens' charters, the mediation of local disputes, service delivery and engagement in the planning cycle of development and governance. These have stoked enthusiasm for grassroots movements and contributed to the reconstruction of the state-market-society ties in this post-conflict nation. There are, however, gaps between the top-down initiatives of the state and bottom-up initiatives of citizens for the realisation of their rights and fulfillment of their needs, as dominant actors have yet to embrace the inclusive social transformation that would lead to a rationalised form of state-society synergy.

Enlightenment encouraged citizens to become fearless fighters of freedom, social justice and peace, and engaged them in public affairs. Nepal's current politics of deadlock, however, marks a departure from this wisdom. In its stead, contemporary Nepal is marked by a drain of the social energies of charity, a cultural ignorance of civic leadership, intellectuals' addiction to power, a feudal orientation among resource-owning classes, a dearth of ancient wisdom<sup>2</sup>, and

<sup>2</sup> Sage Ashtabakra for example, argued that wise people from all over the world think alike as their ground of thinking is well-being of all species while fools think differently because their thinking spring from their self-interest.

an incapacity for social learning. There is, in addition, a failure to address standoffs in relation to fundamental issues, namely: drafting a new constitution, bringing about durable peace and the inclusive transformation of society. It is hard to imagine a creative role for civil society in the absence of a stable political order that is both just and legitimate and that shores up the nation's ancient heritage of moderation, toleration and self-accountability (Bleie and Dahal, 2010: 37).

What is the longstanding connection between ancient wisdom and modern civil society? Can civil society actors foster intimacy when the adoption of an egocentric economy forms a structure of power with a highly uneven distribution of costs and benefits in society? How can the dialectic between the economic tendency to inequality and the democratisation drive for equality and justice be resolved? Do civil society groups have the capacity to connect the social divides of Nepalese society and create bonds for reconciliation, justice and peace to bring the public back to the project of nation-building? This brief article explains the relations of ancient wisdom to public action, the political culture of contemporary civil society groups, the public virtues of civil society, modern civil society and the state and draws a short conclusion.

## ANCIENT WISDOM AND PUBLIC ACTION

The Vedic scriptures affirm that when useful knowledge is not applied in life, it becomes a burden. They considered knowledge as public property, and described a three-fold path for

human beings, namely: *gyan marga* (path of knowledge), *karma marga* (path of work and action), and *bhakti marga* (path of fidelity and devotion). They further urged human beings to strive towards *virtuous conduct*.<sup>3</sup> These scriptures formed the basis of the socialisation of citizens into higher domains of life, awakening their reflective mind and leading to behavioral adjustment. Nepal's *Vedic, Janak and Buddhist* traditions of enlightenment speak of the adaptation of *vernashram dharma* (social division of labor) and *raj dharma* (statecraft) to the spirit of *yug dharma* (zeitgeist) and sensitivity to the vital, life-supporting, ecosystem. Enlightened reason and faith were not conflicting: faith provided limits to the exploitation of human beings and nature, obliged property owners to invest in charity and prevented the conversion of natural and social goods into commodities. Meanwhile, reason allowed for the vibrant common life of civil society and integrated individuals with universal freedom beyond the concerns of land, capital and labor.

With the decline of faith-based intellectuals' interest in reflecting on the conditions of existence and enlightenment, however, the process of emancipation has been reversed, and knowledge has become subordinated to state power and to the injustice of a feudal order. These intellectuals, oblivious to their own enlightenment traditions, have served the interest of rulers, restricted *shastrartha* (discourse on pure knowledge) to a small coterie of *bhardars* (power elites) and turned Nepalese society inward. The absence of openness to various perspectives, participation in and

<sup>3</sup> Vedic scriptures explains four types of human conduct: bad conduct hurts others and inflicts anguish and pain; normal conduct is meant to regulate and sustain personal and family lives without hurting others; virtuous conduct is designed to help others by means of promoting voluntary services, such as establishing resting places, inns, schools, hospitals, digging well, constructing water spouts, and uplifting the poor and powerless sections of society; and supreme conduct is attained by performing *Yagna*, protecting earth, heaven and the cosmos.

ownership of public discourse by ordinary citizens have denied the benefits of enlightenment to women, *Dalits* and other powerless groups, stunted social progress and legitimised cultural relativism. As a result, Nepal's public sphere has assumed an aristocratic and masculine character devoid of feeling and secular mobility. The private sphere has become a home for the weak—a home for their domestication, discipline and punishment.

Much of Nepal's modern life is now devoid of the conscious aspiration to perform *niskam karma* which had characterised Nepalese civil society in the ancient days. It was a duty-bound society like modern *paropakar* (charity) which helped the needy in difficult times. The notion of *dharma* (ethical conduct) defined citizens' ties with various orders of life—local to cosmopolitan—and broadened their mental horizon and vision. Knowledge about the performance of virtuous conduct emancipated citizens from the fear of neediness, domination, prejudice, ignorance and the self-interest of powerful elites. The teaching of enlightenment provided citizens the consciousness and courage that enabled them to transcend primordial loyalties to family, caste, class, gender and region. Knowledge about the self and others and debates in the public sphere about pure knowledge and rational practice helped to remove the evils of society through reform and resolve the antinomies between the state and society, law and politics and order and freedom (Sachs, 2011:162). It nurtured a civil society of fellowship, not the followership-leadership version of today's civil society which emerged in the 1990s, and whose spirit undermines the possibility of creating a new ethics for the future.

The establishment of an ethical order based on multi-stakeholders' consensus was possible because the duty to tolerate others' lawful

pursuits became a part of civic culture. Citizens' craving for gaining inner light was meant to realise both self-worth and dignity. Public discourses provided a process of collective learning, peaceful acculturation and adaptation to the changing dynamics of society. The opening of discourses to every perspective and participant irrespective of social distinctions prevented the alienation of citizens and a moral and intellectual vacuum in leadership. Even the powerless had the freedom to challenge the authorities who governed them and reject their edicts in the absence of sufficient justice. The concept of emancipation championed by Nepal's civil society awakened citizens from their deep slumber and helped to temper individual selfishness, establishing the grounds for self-governing communities beyond the circle of primary relationships (Dahal, 2011:2).

## IMPULSE OF CONTEMPORARY CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS

The innovation of the constitutional system of governance in 1950 and its rationalisation by social sciences speeded up the fall into disfavor of faith-based intellectuals. The state elite, advisors and planners became social scientists while society treaded along its own faith-based path of social service and constructed schools, colleges, health centers, clubs, libraries, water spouts, roads, temples and public spaces for learning and recreation, complementing the efforts of the state. It fostered feelings of social equality and awareness among the illiterate and impoverished and instilled in them the confidence to escape from the culture of silence and to engage in social activities. The rise of social scientists and lawyers and the fall into disfavor of faith-based intellectuals was not so much a product of the modernisation of the Nepalese polity as a whole as much as the instrumental use of reason in defense of the

narrow interests of dominant groups. Reason-based knowledge was not grounded in a desire for the egalitarian development of society, and therefore merely served the "capitalist economy's need for legitimization to be able to treat the legal aspects of the struggle for recognition as something unambiguous" (Honneth, 1995:150). Nepal's elite civil society groups, paradoxically, are both attracted to high sounding democratic ideals and unwilling to deliver justice to the masses of society.

The lives of ordinary Nepalese citizens today are exposed more to authority and power worship and less to the enlightenment ideals laid out in Nepal's ancient heritage.<sup>4</sup> This has made the modern elites of civil society and leaders less modest, democratic and innovative, often absorbed in their private lives and with little sense of loyalty to citizens, society and the state. Many of them, aligned with global market and geopolitical forces, are acting as a counterforce, undermining the historic identity of Nepal as an independent state while others are contributing to the state's withering away through radical restructuring. They refuse to acknowledge the existence of systemic ties between themselves and ordinary citizens, leaving the latter to face a livelihood crisis. Those without social support and unable to share in the resources of the nation are forced to migrate and earn their living under foreign rule. They bring large remittances to give life to the rural economy but the social costs of remittances remain unestimated. The neo-liberal privatisation projects of the 1990s promoted by political classes of all hues and silently supported by human rights bodies, elite civil society groups and business leaders, have had deleterious effects: they have appropriated

state resources, led to cuts in subsidies, allowed citizens to be consumed by a decade-long civil conflict and produced new classes of globally mobile elites who neither identify with working people nor accept their ties to the state and the country. They have had little impact on Nepal's economy and polity.

Elite civil society groups remain emotionally distant from the rural populace—a distance widened by the existence of separate private and public/state provisions in education, health, and communications. In this sense, the neo-liberal critique of welfare provisions and the defense of the subsidiary state marks the convergence of businessmen, the bureaucracy and political elites of Nepal against peasants, workers and the dispossessed. Brain-drain is further sapping the nation of its best-educated young citizens, required for the reconstruction of this post-conflict society. This has constrained civil society groups' capacity to connect with the roots of native knowledge in Nepal and fuse this knowledge with the Western concept of enlightenment to fulfill the democratic expectations of ordinary Nepali citizens.

Only enlightened thinking and action, not just devotion to a certain cause or leader, can overcome the structural barriers to social transformation in Nepal today. These can foster a greater understanding of the worldviews of others, facilitate the reaching of compromises in relation to unresolved constitutional issues and improve the unjust conditions of society.

Infatuated with the global economy and convinced of the supremacy of one discipline or one identity over others, contemporary civil society groups in Nepal seem unable to recover

<sup>4</sup> Gautam Buddha has clearly underlined that the goal of human beings is enlightenment, the goal of society is development, the goal of culture is adequacy, the goal of nature is sustainability and the goal of whole world is peace. He said that peace as a highest public good can be achieved by only peaceful means (Galtung, 1993:1).

the ethical basis of what is worthwhile about Nepalese public life. They are similarly unable to reduce the gap between expert knowledge and people's knowledge embedded in spiritually-grounded rationality. Charity-based civil society groups bear a creative force capable of integrating ordinary citizens, encouraging equity and democratic participation and fostering civics so as to forge an ethical and peaceful order across multiple spheres as envisioned by Nepal's ancient wisdom.

Civil society groups of Nepal carry multiple interests and values. Those motivated by a civic purpose have supplied a diversity of views and brought these into public visibility so that they might be subjected to contestation and mediation through public opinion. Such groups are rooted in public political culture. They have generated news, opinions and basic social facts about contemporary public issues and activated citizens' interest in solution-oriented public debate. This has increased their social sensitivity, efficacy and disposition towards the task of transforming the multiple identities of people in Nepal, such as gender, class, caste, age, religion, region, and ideology, into a universalistic civic identity and overcome the accountability deficits of leaders which have left Nepal's "democracy in the twilight zone having both the appeal and trends of negation" (Baral, 2011:12). This task poses a challenge for democratic consolidation, which is not best served by fostering exclusively rights-based civil society. Under conditions of the erosion of state institutions, encouraging rights-based civil society risks intensifying competitive fighting, sub-national solidarities, violence, fragmentation of the political sphere and relapse of the state into fragility. Nepal's ancient wisdom suggests that property owning citizens should contribute towards satisfying the basic needs of the poor. Sensible economists, too, believe that "extreme concentration of incomes is

incompatible with real democracy" (Krugman, 2011:11). The inability of various political movements in Nepal in 1950, 1979, 1990 and 2006 to transform all Nepalese into equal citizens can be attributed to the refusal of key leaders to transform political culture itself, away from one characterised by patrimonial rule and towards a culture more in line with the principles of democratic governance. Civil society groups have to seriously engage in civic education to complete the unfinished task of transforming Nepal's political culture.

## **THE VIRTUES OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

The web of human association is sustained by common values and active conversation among its members. Such conversation induces desired learning effects among citizens and state leaders and brings the state closer to the lives of ordinary people. The public sphere, where opinions and societal agendas are shaped, emerges from interacting citizens. Awakening about constitutional and human rights renews human relationships and generates the social capital essential for cooperative action.

Ethical governance marks a separation between the public and the private spheres and prevents the rulers from abusing the property of the public for private gain. The public sphere of action and speech among free and equal citizens, and the collective engagement in common projects of society, benefits all and overcomes social disconnection. Nepalese citizens have also created a number of civil society groups, associations, institutions, unions, societies, federations and networks for the articulation of their social interests and activated the relation of citizens to political parties, the state and the international community. But many of these associations are caste, ethnicity, tribe, lineage-oriented and parochial, and do not nourish the concept of inclusive citizenship. They are also

less institutionalised due to a lack of boundary between the social, economic and political spheres. As a result, the influence of the public on policy matters and long-term solidarity for collective action is less effectual.

Civil society groups have to put the life-world in the background of their "communicative action" (Habermas, 1995: 135) and bring the political system closer to them. This can be performed by robust public institutions, public-spirited civil society and media, as together, they can defend the imperative of the highest public good—peace—and the peace-oriented legacy of the nation.

Peace building in Nepal is still a strategic option, not an urgent bridge-building task. Political leaders link it to sharing government power and the distribution of benefits to clients. Nepalese civil society groups face numerous challenges, which hamper their ability to contribute effectively to the peace process. They are unable at present to systematically address the root causes of conflict, to use politics to resolve ideological, identity and interest-based conflicts, convert the economy of violence into a peace economy, protect the human rights of the powerless and conflict victims, and to serve as informed mediators in peace processes at multiple levels. Nepalese leaders do not sense sufficient institutional incentives to implement the provisions of the comprehensive peace accord because they fear prosecution and loss of political patronage through which they have accumulated vast wealth and power. They have, therefore, linked the peace process to assurances of blanket immunity for political crimes and against the confiscation of their illegally earned wealth. An attentive public, genuine civil society and the international community are demanding that leaders be accountable for human rights abuses. Breaking

the vicious cycle of impunity for powerful classes is essential in order to support positive discrimination in favor of victims, to open a common ground for reconciliation based on historical and restorative justice and to create just peace. As many elite civil society groups in Nepal are linked more to the political parties and less to the creation of an autonomous public sphere, Nepal is bound to reach a tense crossroads in the future. It will be all the more tense than, at present, Nepal lacks effective intermediary institutions to protect the integrity of ordinary citizens, moderate the forces encouraging a withering away of the state and connect citizens to the project of national construction through equal opportunity and equal outcome.

Obviously, Nepali civil society groups have played an important role in igniting, defending and sustaining democratic consciousness and movements for a peaceful system of governance. However, many members of these groups have not internalised the values of civil society in their own personal lives for the performance of *niskam karma*. Others with transformative aspirations are, almost by definition, looking for critical masses to engage in the production of contextual knowledge, policy innovation and institutions that might affect a synergy between state and society. Still others, mired in the culture of feudalism, fear the consequences of social transformation. They rattle the hope for ecological, gender, social and inter-generational justice. Cause groups are maintaining institutional closure in a pre-civil direction and lack the concept of inclusive citizenship and the concept of human rights. Those driven by caucus politics and anti-party lines challenge the possibility of responsive governance as these forces are governed by parochial interests and lack the shared values of a national community. In such circumstances,

citizens cannot make informed choices about the issues at stake without the aid of a genuine civil society able to harness social harmony and humility. Of course, neither social nor civic knowledge<sup>5</sup> is politically neutral. The same applies to the concept of citizenship which requires people to espouse the notions of national self-determination and nationality<sup>6</sup> (Wimmer, 2002:9). Members of civil society generate meaning from the conditions of people living in various layers of society and seek to influence public policy for the better. Deliberation about the production, use and benefits of democratic knowledge and information increases their civic efficiency so that they can become conscious, free, equal and spirited citizens and engage with the state.

The solely project-driven civil society groups of Nepal may have offered small-scale relief to people but they are less oriented towards emancipatory goals. Project obligations constrain the freedom of conscience of civil society members and mix their motive of civil action with a profit calculus and render them susceptible to self-promotion. If civil society becomes a high profit-making business, it loses civic-mindedness, comes to favor dominant social interests, and suffers from sterility and irrelevance. This is precisely the problem with elite civil society groups in Nepal. As a result, they have not moved beyond "civil and political

rights" and addressed ecological, economic and social rights and worked for macro-policies supportive of the livelihoods of rural citizens. In contrast, rural civil society groups have embraced the message of democracy, human rights and social justice. They feel they are denied the opportunity to do something historic and enduring as they are unable to establish cooperative relationships with elite civil society groups that act as interlocutors between the establishment and powerful political actors. Now, Nepal's villages are connected to the whole world through the migration of workers. The face-to-face world is connected to the virtual world by new means of communication, trust and reciprocity, and this is likely to produce new solidarities and collective actions.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE**

Democratic consolidation in Nepal requires civil society to promote a modern state capable of implementing a "legitimate monopoly of power" with respect to basic state functions, a unitary legal order to contain the threat of anarchy and the ability to transform the members of Nepal's many ethnic/caste communities into equal citizens. As a political term, citizenship refers to the identification of individuals with the state together with their active commitment and responsibility, making a difference in one's own community, society and country (Drucker,

<sup>5</sup> Civic education is a key to democracy. There is a surge of interest about civic education worldwide. The primary concern of civic education is to create civic culture committed to deepen democracy in public and private life. With the dawn of democracy in Nepal, the importance of civic education has increased. Efforts are being made to teach thousands of citizens of all hues each year in the program intended to impart civic knowledge and skills and to develop their virtues for their role in public life.

<sup>6</sup> Andreas Wimmer argues that "nation-states are the product of four closely interconnected processes of institutional closure: a political one (democracy tied to national self-determination), a legal one (citizenship tied to nationality), a military one (universal conscription tied to national citizenship) and a social one (the institutions of the welfare state linked to the control of the immigration of foreigners)" (2002:9).

1993:172). The new consensus on the welfare state in Nepal is expected to generate civic virtues and bridge social divides within society, liberate nationalism from class interests and facilitate participatory development.

A myriad of civil society groups, clubs, Hamlet Reforms Committees, NGOs, CBOs, cooperatives, and local individual initiatives, have generated critical knowledge in society, opened up citizens' choices in relation to their personal and public life and nurtured the latter's autonomy, self-esteem and dignity. Other groups, however, by virtue of their relations with power elites and as a result of internal fragmentation, have not been able to translate the concept of democracy from the constitution to the local context and then modify both in order to construct a new political order. Instead they "represent uncritical glorification of the perpetual movement of society against the state and constitutional order" (Bhatta, 2010:145) to block the social mobility of the under-classes. In the context of the Nepalese state's fragility, democratisation of the relationship between leaders and citizens requires an improvement in the level of trust. This would allow for the resolution of societal problems through collective action and help reshape the nation's shared future. Here civil society groups should produce more inclusive frameworks to accommodate diverse forms of life and "recreate the grounds for the state to listen" (Heaton Shrestha, 2008:13). The advent of a national political community based on a robust social contract is a basic precondition for the state to exercise its sovereignty over a given territory, overcome the marginalisation and invisibility of under-classes and foster the conditions for mutual recognition. Competing demands for state restructuring, federalism, group autonomy, self-determination, preemptory rights, prior use rights, and so forth, defy the possibility of creating a modern state

based on the concept of *demos*. Elite civil society groups maintain silence on these issues for fear of drying up their sources of aid, while ordinary citizens feel suffocated by the daily political acrobatics of their leaders which appear to lack any sense of public and national purpose.

The nation's heritage shows that civil society did not constitute a negative domain, generating conflict in the manner of current civil society groups, in Nepal's transitional period. In the absence of a strong national center, social fissures will overwhelm the capacity of government to govern. It is not likely that the alliance of civil society, NGOs and non-state armed actors arrayed against the power of the state will create a public cohesive enough to contribute to policies of inclusive citizenship. Nor are these likely to mediate between the state and various sections of society and bring about political stability. They should have served as a platform for political pluralism, checking the abuse of power and authority and enforce the accountability of leaders.

As a result of various failures, Nepalese citizens are yet to liberate themselves from the fear of violent politics; their basic needs remain unmet and they continue to suffer under a patrimonial rule that has removed the boundary between private and public interests. Pervasive corruption, a culture of impunity, cronyism and rent-seeking have undermined the impartiality of the state and its power to ensure security and the rule of law, and deliver public goods. Owing to institutional weaknesses, civil society groups suffer from indoctrination by partisan programs, leading them to manufacture support for the establishment, to conform uncritically to authoritarian leaders, and sedate citizens through the phony presentation of economic indicators of progress. The cooperation between

economic society and citizens is largely marked by distrust as the former indulges in unethical business practices and contributes little to nation-building in times of crisis.

As a result of the dissolution of boundaries between the state, the establishment, political parties and civil society, Nepal's parliament is far from becoming a national autonomous interface between the state and society, a platform for representation, for the formulation of public policies and the resolution of political conflicts. Crucial decisions are made outside its doors. This allows individuals highly placed in political parties to control legislators in crucial decisions while manipulating cadres and followers into treating them as Gods, publicly adorning them with garlands of flowers. This produces a distance between the status of leaders and ordinary citizens. Civic virtues in leadership cannot grow without civic knowledge and dispositions as well as enabling leaders and cadres with the capacity for connection, reflection, judgment and rational action against unjust domination and public interests.

Still, public consciousness stoked by civil society groups has familiarised citizens with their constitutional and human rights and duties and fostered a sense of ecological, social, gender and inter-generational justice. Grassroots experience also suggests that where there "is popular participation in planning, budgeting, control, monitoring and feedback, development outcomes are fairly distributed" (Dahal, 2012: 4). Active citizens have brought ideas of human rights, democracy, development and peace to bear on understanding, reflection and action in order to resolve a diversity of problems such as domestic violence, child marriage, girl trafficking, human rights violations, authoritarianism, ecocide, threat to peace, and so on. The only question is how to bind the state and civil society in mutual obligation.

## **ART OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP**

Civic education is the training of youth into ideas of citizenship and exposing them to the functioning of their civic rights and duties in various areas of life, such as the family, the cultural industries, political parties and government. As the family, religion and schools decrease in importance as means of socialisation, the media plays a more central role in circulating political messages between the society and the state and in producing feedback and social adjustment. Civic education brings the private world into the public sphere and removes the irrationality of society through communication. In this sense, civic education is a process of learning not only about labor and role occupation but also about cosmology—the enlightenment—and ways to integrate individual citizens in a shared conception of the nation and the collective good.

As a result of political awakening, Nepal's social world has undergone a major transformation. The equality of men and women, the rights of children, a shift of society away from concerns of social status, hierarchy and patriarchy to equality and social contract and the universalisation of gender and workers' rights have gradually deconstructed the historically inherited natural will in favor of rational will. These have fostered pro-democratic values and attitudes for the reconstruction of Nepal's post-conflict society. Informed by universal communication, today's citizens of Nepal are motivated to seek far-reaching changes in the social and cultural attitudes which permeate the entire political system. Civic education for them is a practice in discovering their inherent potential for enlightenment rather than developing a rigid culture of conformity which banishes them into a situation of no choice—either silence, cynicism, migration or rebellion.

What they need is the source of stability that the nation's ancient heritage offers, without appearing old fashioned in terms of modernity's standards.

Citizens are members of a state; therefore, their active participation in the daily life of society fosters participatory democracy and makes leaders accountable to their actions. Active citizenship requires Nepalese people to participate in a larger public sphere on a sustained basis, not simply to cast votes in local and national elections every five years, while remaining passive onlookers in politics in between elections. Creative participation out of a sense of civic duty requires information and knowledge about principles, issues, actors, rules and context and also a stake in public participation. Involvement in various agencies of the state and civic institutions provides citizens the motivation to engage in politics and enter a world of solidarity. In a post-conflict situation, the purpose of politics is to connect factions of society and create a culture of social harmony and peace. Civil society groups have to be proactive in this sphere. However, in Nepal, peace building has become a difficult task because leaders are using conflicting means to approach it. They link peace to power-sharing, constitution, federalism, form of governance, land reforms, and redistributive justice. Nepalese media persons, divided along the lines of conflict, have become the victims of the culture of linkage politics. This has undermined the ability of civil society to become a watchdog of democracy. It has also impeded their role in countering propaganda and hate campaigns such as those grounded in ethnocentric sub-nationalism and regionalism. Combating these trends is necessary to rebuild relationships across Nepalese society and forge ahead with the tasks of reconciliation and national reconstruction.

The democratisation of education is essential to improve the identity of citizens from the private to the public sphere and engage them in the construction of human dignity. The democratic dynamic helps to overcome civil society's alienation from the nation's ancient heritage and wisdom through the creation of public space for deliberation and collective action on a number of issues, such as climate change, globalisation, commerce, tourism, terrorism, or social movements. However, a stable order can be achieved only when instruments of agreements create the grounds for social justice. As an agency of people's power, civil society groups are required to work on this as well as on their own democratisation and solidarity among themselves. They should endeavor to counter trends of separation from each other as rival groups compete for donors, projects, patrons and clients. They should also be mindful of the following: conflict sensitivity, long-term well-being of citizens, autonomy from the government and dominant national and international interest groups, and an ability to maximise *niskam karma* to bring the Nepalese public back to a secure and peaceful life.

## CONCLUSION

Civil society groups of Nepal have to define the boundaries of selfless action. A dignified life requires citizens to escape from alienation, passivity and consumerism and regain the capacity for social sacrifice and integrate citizens in the public sphere through mutual aid. The reformist spirit of Nepalese civil society groups has provided a corrective mechanism for democratic resilience. However, there is a need to socialise civil society members into enlightenment thinking and its politics of social responsibility, empowerment and peaceful social transformation. Civil society is also a source of courage, optimism and solidarity in confronting

the politics of violence and nihilism. It can replacing these with a desire for association and builds among citizens a new awareness, allowing them to respond to the social transformations under way in Nepal.

A vibrant civil society is crucial in Nepal to create a national communicative space and educate society to ensure coherence between democratic ideals and conduct. Education,

divorced from real life, undermines the ability of citizens to engage in conflict-sensitive knowledge production, socialisation and policy making based on ecological, social, gender and inter-generational justice. A Nepalese civil society grounded in a public political culture of democracy, human rights, social justice and durable peace can cultivate the habits of citizens to obey national and cosmopolitan laws.

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