Nepalese Political Leadership in Relief Distribution and Constitution Drafting Process after Earthquake-2015

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Abstract

This paper discusses the characteristics of leadership in Nepalese politics specifically after the earthquake of 2015.With some examples from the context, it argues that leadership like other techniques prioritizes on the elements like caring, problem solving and facilitation. It makes attempts to promote sustainability in the social and capital structure of the nation. Again, it challenges long rooted social problems like discrimination, injustices and inequalities leading towards unity in diversity of culture, tradition and ethnicity. In exercising the power in Nepali society, there are a number of leadership styles like charismatic, authentic, feudalistic, authoritative, democratic, transformational, spiritual, and ethical in practice. However, we find lacking of responsibility in the tendency of exercising leadership in our context. This article highlights the drawbacks like arise of conflict due to the lack of responsibility in leadership. It further discusses attributable factors causing harm in the peaceful and prosperous setting of society. Thus it hopes in developing the culture of responsibility in crafting leadership styles in various sectors of the Nepalese community in times to come for a better social order.

Key words : Community, Culture, Leadership Style, Politics& Responsibility.

Introduction

The earthquake of 7.8 magnitude on April 25, 2015 brought a series of humanitarian crises in Nepal. The death and destruction caused by the natural disaster compounded further with the lack of responsible leadership. When Nepal promulgated the new constitution, those outside of the ruling parties protested demanding the issues of identity and inclusiveness.

The protest in Nepal India border against the constitution served as a pretext for the "supply disruption" from India. Situation worsened in the following days, for Nepal as a landlocked country depends solely on India for her supplies. The lack of basic necessities, together with medicines, fuel and food aggravated the situation in Nepal. This impacted the Nepalese economy and public sphere adversely. The seriousness of the situation attracted concerns from various corners. Due to the shortage of basic necessities, Nepal was gradually entering a humanitarian crisis (United States Embassy Kathmandu, 2015). Similar voices have echoed from many other regional and international sectors. With this background, the following paragraphs are structured to inform about what responsible leadership is and about the leadership traits in Nepal after the earthquake of 2015.

Responsible Leadership

The concept of responsible leadership engages with the questions like: to whom to offer care and concern; to whose problem to solve and how; and how to facilitate with what objectives. From this perspective, responsible leadership departs from the conventional leadership styles. It not only involves the "other side" but also engages and integrates the adversary into a network of mutual beneficiaries with a scope of dignity and sustainability. Moreover, it aims to engage all those stakeholders who are "less visible" in any other types of leadership.

Creating a value network of multiple stakeholders, (Lord & Brown, 2001), responsible leadership enhances social capital ensuring sustainability and common ground for all those concerned. By doing so, it aims to challenge the social constructs responsible for the making of the conflict in the contemporary world. There is no outsider for responsible leadership. It strives to integrate diversities to make a "rainbow" culture of togetherness and peace. Responsible leadership is compared with a weaver who makes something more beautiful by weaving different fabrics of the community. Maak (2007) confirms this notion with Plato's reference as:

> Interestingly enough, Plato saw this quite clearly in his ''Statesman,'' where he noted that people are not sheep, and leaders are not shepherds; Plato regarded the leader as a weaver, whose main task was to weave together different kinds of people into the fabric of society. (p. 340)

However, a responsible leader as a weaver attracts questions like: weaving from which side? Is this weaver weaving a quilt from outside or weaving a spider's web from inside? The position of the leader, to a great extent, determines the question: what is responsible leadership?; what makes a responsible leader?; and how can responsible leadership be developed?

Upanishadic (Easwaran&Nagler, 2007)concept *NetiNeti* refers to the idea that the "truth" is not this and it is not that. Rather, we construct truth according to our requirements and convenience. To learn beyond the social construction, one must search for something beyond the realm of the known or something that appears negotiable with the other side. This notion challenges the existing knowledge of the issue in question, and fosters a background to explore the unknown terrain of the knowledge through cooperation and co-creation, that is, to know what you don't know is the beginning of the knowledge in Plato's term. In relation to this notion, responsible leadership paves way for the contestants to move beyond their own circumstantial understandings of the issue. Augsburger writes:

> In neither-nor cooperation, we move beyond both-end processes of combining perceptions and intended outcomes to co-creation of an alternative solution that neither party has envisioned or engendered. The parties involved neither own the solution nor claim any portion of it as a victory. The outcome is a joint creation--a mutually constructed, equally supported, communally concluded process. (p.53)

Responsible leadership is an attempt to realize sustainable togetherness. It is also a type of transformative leadership in a way that it helps shift the paradigm for a better solution for all the stakeholders concerned. When all the stakeholders are addressed, they opt to take ownership of the leadership, and the leader as a person becomes less important. A responsible leader lives in the mind of the people rather than in the objective reality. In Nepal, a verse from a folk poet attempts to describe responsible leadership as:

> *K chhajagat ma thulo? :pashinarabibek*
> *Udesyakelinu?:udichhunu Chandra ek*
> *Sabaikhojchhansukha, sukhatyokahachha?*
> *Afumitaiarulaidinujahachha*

(Translation: What is the greatest thing in the world?: prudence and labor.   What should be the goal of a human being ?: strive beyond the sky, there is no limit. Where is *eudaimonia*?: in embracing the whole cleansing self-interest and ego.

Leadership after earthquake in Nepal

Leadership in Nepal after the earthquake exhibited multiple facets. Many of them contributed towards building resilience, cooperation and sustainable peace. However, the political leadership evolved thereafter and failed to grasp the spirit of responsibility. Primarily, the political leadership acted like the "situation managers", without specific long term vision to integrate all stakeholders. It not only failed to steer the situation towards a common goal that could ensure coexistence and peace, but also was unable to offer powerful narratives that would integrate and energize the divided communities in Nepal after the promulgation of the new Constitution. In addition to these, the leadership could not mobilize different intelligences to address the deteriorating situation after the earthquake in Nepal. Following are some of the traits that characterize Nepalese leadership after the earthquake of 2015.

Irresponsible Endeavors

Lack of a timely and prompt response to the chaotic situation after the earthquake was one of the weak factors of Nepalese leadership. Eight million Nepalese needed humanitarian assistance due to the earthquake (Padma, 2015). It was a time to take ownership of the situation and act responsibly to address the impact, specifically by the political leaders. But, the situation was otherwise. During that time, the leader of the nation the Prime Minister, ministers, and the political leaders were not visible in public responsibly. The chaotic situation elevated towards an atmosphere of hopelessness and despair in the public arena.

To fill the vacuum, the political actors having low profiles in contemporary politics embarked on the mission of rescue, but they could not stand. First, the Indian Army landed in Kathmandu airport with a "rescue" mission. Other rescue operations from many countries were on their ways to Nepal. The Chinese mission was unable to land timely, for Nepalese airports were occupied by Indian rescue missions. Later Chinese and American rescue missions operated rescue missions in Nepal. But, the Meanwhile, delegates and "well-wishers" from various parts of the world landed in Nepal with materials needed for the

victims of the earthquake. During the primary phase of the rescue operation, Nepal was unable to regulate the activities of the "rescue" workers. Unscrupulous agents intervened into the disaster stricken scene, who distributed supporting materials to the victims. Similarly, human trafficking escalated in the aftermath of the earthquake. The demand of pale skinned mountain Nepalese girls in the Middle East and the prospect of high supply after the earthquake in Nepal motivated human traffickers.

Militarism

Military displayed undue power over the civilian government. Rescue operation became solely a military function. Security forces not only attempted to micro-manage the entire relief operation, but also tried to influence other constitutional bodies of Nepal Government. For example, Nepal Army blocked the deployment of British Chinook helicopters which would have been invaluable to the relief effort, only because one of the military personnel, Colonel Kumar Lama, was facing a British trial for his crime against humanity during the Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) in Nepal.

Foreign support in different forms for the victims of the earthquake was monopolized by the security forces. There was neither transparency nor acceptability. Though, in the later phase, the security gave way to the bureaucracy and political parties in a limited form, which did not stop corruption. Rather, corruption escalated when political stakeholders entered into the scene. Corruption at various levels of political and bureaucratic function forced the Nepalese Prime Minister to acknowledge the situation and promise in public to take action against corruption (Adkin, 2015). Victims lost faith in the system. People started to protest against the government (Bhagat, 2015; Buckly and Ramzy, 2015).

Corruption

Centralization of relief material to ensure systematic distribution, corruption was practiced after the earthquake. Government failed to tackle corruption (Elliott, 2015) the systematic corruption process. For this and many other reasons, many donors and philanthropic organizations opted to fund directly to the victims. (Bell, 2015). Political cadres embarked on the rescue mission under various pretexts. At thebeginning, there was no public discontent regarding the politician discriminatory behaviors in distributing relief materials. However, the politicians formed a sort of syndicate, making them consolidated for their group interests. Officials generally relied on All Party Mechanisms to take decisions and address conflicts related to relief distribution (The Asian Foundation, 2015). However, politicians were challenged in the following days when many of them were found to be involved directly in corruption at various level of the relief operation (Jha, 2015).

Impunity

Impunity escalated after the earthquake of 2015. The notion of impunity in the Nepalese political spectrum is as old as its history. Prithvy Narayan Shah, the founder of modern Nepal, also committed crimes and happened to overcome them with some good deeds which ultimately justified his acts. Instead of regulating wars on the principle of

justice and fairness, he encouraged the public to employ any means necessary to invade neighboring principalities.

After the earthquake, a Nepalese military official, suspected of crimes against humanity during the Maoist insurgency, was being brought to trials abroad. The military tried to "build up" an image by controlling media and public affairs. To this, Amnesty International (2015) warned that "the army's renewed popularity in the context of earthquake relief should not become an excuse for failing to address past human rights violations and to bring perpetrators to justice" (p. 15).

Seeking Help Encouraged

At a time of crisis, begging is more effective than in normal periods. In Nepal, begging is a normal practice in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Hindu gods and Buddha himself used to beg for their livelihood. In Hindu tradition, Brahmins are professional beggars. According to Vedic notions, *Brahmins* are not allowed to take any other profession except studying the Veda, performing Vedic rituals and religious ceremonies - *karma kanda*. They have to depend upon others for food, shelter and other necessities of life.

It is also because of the influence of fatalism that the good *karma* of the past life or of the ancestor's good *karma* enables their further generations to enjoy luxury in their life. For this reason, and in order to distinguish oneself as superior to others, Nepalese avoid manual work, particularly in Nepal. According to Vedic tradition, manual work is assigned to the lower caste, particularly *sudra*. However, begging is allowed for all castes. It is not something ignoble; rather begging is a prestigious profession of the highest caste - *brahmins*.

The earthquake of 2015 offered an opportunity for the political leaders to raise money in the international arena. Many individuals and organizations entered Nepal with various purposes under a banner of "relief aid". Nepal hosted the International Conference on Nepal's Reconstruction in June 2015 to rise aid from donors. To win the confidence of the donor community, the Nepalese prime Minister publicly vowed that relief aid would reach the victim (Mathema, 2015). The donor community pledged 4.4 billion US Dollars in aid during the conference. Together with this, a certain surge in remittance inflow Remittance Inflow Up, 2015 and relief programs of charity, philanthropic, and diaspora organizations inspired political actors to realign political equilibrium to benefit from this opportunity.

Opportunism

The earthquake of 2015 inspired political division (Pokharel and Bhattacharya, 2015). Political parties in the government hastened to the constitution making process, without testing the assumptions or building consensus with the stakeholders. They not only snuffed out the protesting political parties from the southern part of Nepal, who are commonly known as Madheshi, but also irked India, without considering the spill-over effects of the conflict in Nepal's border region.

Symptomatically, a group of political dissidents embarked on violence to have their voice heard during the constitution drafting process. As the government failed to address the protest, it resulted in the Tikapur massacre (7 police personnel, one child killed in Tikapur) (Kailai District administration, 2015). Thenceforth, Nepal tried to resolve the issues of discontent through security measures, only to aggravate the situation in the following days. Despite the discontent from a sizeable portion of the stakeholder and miserable condition of the nation after the earthquake, the political syndicate promulgated the new constitution.

The new constitution triggered political turmoil in Nepal. The internal conflict attained a new dimension when the Constitution of Nepal 2015 was not welcomed by India. India suggested a revision to make the constitution more "inclusive and acceptable" to the Madheshi minorities, who were fighting for their identity in the southern plain. Whereas, China welcomed the constitution and extended its support to Nepal (Basnet, 2015).

Irresponsible leadership of the political parties after the earthquake raised questions about their legitimacy in the public. They feared a "palace revolution" which would overthrow the ruling parties. When the politicians found India against their interests, they attempted to invite turmoil. They tried to engage other regional and international players, not only to save their political supremacy, but also to give the people an abstract sense of identity instilled with nationalism.

To aggravate the situation further, Nepal has tried to internationalize the issue of the blockade which might attract humanitarian and diplomatic interventions (The Tribune, 2015). But, intervention in a hot spot surrounded by three nuclear powers, China, Pakistan and India, might escalate the conflict to a new dimension. A better option would be bringing the conflictants to a negotiation table. The role of India in Nepalese movements, specifically in the Maoists insurgency that brought the Maoist to power is significant (Lawoti, 2010). Its role has further been strengthened by Nepal's geo-physical configuration and cultural factors. Making a neighbor an enemy is like sleeping with a snake. Therefore, India must have been persuaded that the ongoing unofficial blockade would complicate the lives of the common people, not that of the political elites. To restore friendliness and harmony, some other options must be tried for mutual benefit.

Conclusion

Responsibility is missing from Nepalese leadership traits. Nepal has practiced many leadership styles. Responsible Leadership in various sectors of the community is yet to develop. Without a culture of social responsibility sustained by a responsible leadership, Nepal may remain a perpetual victim of anomalies attributable to various types of conflict in Nepal. Leadership in Nepal has been characterized with various traits like militarism, impunity, opportunism, dependency and corruption. The study also traces back to the time of king Prithvy Narayan Shah who ignored the investigation process for the cases of corruption. Later as the time passes, the leadership has come down associating with Nepalese social, political, economic, geographical as well as religious spectrums. The study has attempted to present a significant guideline for those who want to have much concern about Nepalese leadership. It also suggests for the necessity of reconstructing Nepali politics

as a vital component in settling down hurdles permanently in our society as its lack has been considered the cause of so many diseases in Nepali politics.

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