

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Party Politics and Power Struggles in Nepal: A Critical Analysis (1990-2024)

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Abstract

The period between 1990 and 2002 was a time of significant political upheaval in Nepal, marked by a transition to multi-party democracy and the challenges that came with it. The rise and fall of coalition governments, intra-party conflicts, and the looming Maoist insurgency created a volatile political landscape. Initially, the monarchy symbolized stability and ultimately became embroiled in the power struggles, leading to its eventual abolition. The dominance of major political parties often marginalized smaller parties and minority groups, hindering inclusive representation.

This study delves into the complex dynamics of party politics and power struggles that unfolded during this critical juncture in Nepal's history. It explores the challenges and opportunities that emerged as various political parties navigated the nascent democratic space, vying for influence and control amidst a rapidly evolving socio-political context. The study adopts a critical analytical approach, drawing on various primary and secondary sources, including scholarly works by Nepali and South Asian experts, official documents, and reports from international newspapers.

The research examines the complex interactions between these significant political forces and the pivotal role of smaller parties and regional actors. It analyzes the shifting alliances, coalition formations, and internal party divisions that characterized the political scene during this period. The study also explores the influence of external factors, such as India's role in Nepal's political affairs, on the dynamics of party politics and power struggles.

The findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and complexities of democratic transition in Nepal. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for greater political maturity, consensus-building, and a focus on national interests to ensure Nepal's stable and prosperous future. It underscores the importance of strong institutions, compromise, inclusivity, and the urgent need to address social and economic inequalities to consolidate democratic gains and foster a more equitable society.

Keywords: Democracy, Maoist Insurgency, Monarchy, Party Politics, Political Instability, Power Struggles.

1. Introduction

The decade spanning 1990 to 2002 was a tumultuous period in Nepal's political landscape, characterized by a complex interplay of party politics and power struggles. The dawn of multiparty democracy in 1990, following the historic *Jana Andolan* (People's Movement), a pivotal event that ignited hopes for a more inclusive and representative political system,

marked a significant turning point in Nepali history (Whelpton, 2005). However, the subsequent years were marred by political upheavals, coalition governments, and internal party conflicts that often overshadowed the promise of democratic consolidation (Parajulee, 2000).

This article delves into the intricate dynamics of party politics and power struggles that unfolded during this

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critical juncture in Nepal's history. It explores the challenges and opportunities that emerged as various political parties navigated the nascent democratic space, vying for influence and control amidst a rapidly evolving socio-political context (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).

The study adopts a critical analytical approach, drawing on various primary and secondary sources, including scholarly works by Nepali and South Asian experts, official documents, and reports from international newspapers. By examining critical political actors' motivations, strategies, and actions, the article sheds light on the underlying factors that shaped the course of party politics and power struggles during this transformative era.

The period under scrutiny witnessed a proliferation of political parties with distinct ideological orientations and agendas. The Nepali Congress (NC), a centrist party with a long history of struggle for democracy, emerged as a dominant force in the initial years (Kumar, 1995). However, it faced stiff competition from the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), a left-wing party that gained significant popularity among the masses (Gyawali & Dixit, 2006).

The rise of the Maoist insurgency in the mid-1990s was a seismic shift that further complicated the political landscape. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) launched a protracted armed struggle against the state, challenging the established political order and advocating for radical socio-economic transformation (Thapa, 2003, pp. 433–448). The Maoist insurgency profoundly impacted party politics, forcing mainstream parties to re-evaluate their strategies and priorities (Muni, 2003, pp. 117–139).

The article examines the complex interactions between these significant political forces and the role of smaller parties and regional actors. It analyzes the shifting alliances, coalition formations, and internal party divisions that characterized the political scene during this period. The study also explores the influence of external factors, such as India's role in Nepal's political affairs, on the dynamics of party politics and power struggles.

The findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and complexities of democratic transition in Nepal. The article provides valuable insights into the factors that have shaped the country's political trajectory by critically analyzing the interplay of party politics and power struggles during this crucial period.

2. Research Method

The research methodology employed in this study primarily relies on a qualitative approach, emphasizing the critical analysis of existing literature. The study draws upon a diverse range of sources, including scholarly articles, books, government reports, and media analyses, to construct a comprehensive understanding of the complex political landscape in Nepal from 1990 to 2024. The research also incorporates insights from interviews with key political figures, academics, and observers of Nepal's political scene, adding depth and nuance to the analysis. The qualitative nature of the study allows for a nuanced exploration of the motivations, strategies, and actions of key political actors, as well as the broader socio-political context in which they operate. The critical analytical approach adopted in the research enables a deeper examination of the underlying factors that have shaped Nepal's political trajectory, providing valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities ahead.

3. Literature Review

The literature on Nepal's political landscape from 1990 to 2002 underscores significant transformation and turbulence. The transition to multiparty democracy in 1990, following the *Jana Andolan*, ignited hopes for a more inclusive and representative political system (Whelpton, 2005). However, the subsequent years were marked by fragile coalition governments, frequent leadership changes, and intra-party conflicts, hindering effective governance and policy implementation (Baral, 2015; Hoftun et al., 1999).

The rise of the Maoist insurgency in the mid-1990s further destabilized the political scene, challenging the legitimacy of mainstream parties and exposing deep-seated socio-economic grievances (Thapa, 2003, pp. 433–448; Hutt, 2004). The insurgency's impact was multifaceted, intensifying political instability, causing widespread violence, and forcing mainstream parties to re-evaluate their strategies (Muni, 2003, pp. 117–139).

The dominance of major parties, coupled with the Maoist insurgency, marginalized smaller parties and marginalized groups, hindering their ability to secure meaningful representation and influence policy decisions (Hoftun et al., 1999; Lawoti, 2005, pp. 243–269). The lack of inclusive representation and the failure to address social and economic inequalities fueled public disillusionment and contributed to the volatile political climate (Parajulee, 2000; Mishra, 2011, pp. 141–160).

The literature also highlights the complex role of the monarchy during this period, navigating the transition to democracy while facing accusations of overreach and interference (Shaha, 2001; Hoftun et al., 1999). The 2001 royal massacre and the subsequent actions of King Gyanendra further destabilized the monarchy, ultimately leading to its abolition in 2008 (Baral, 2015).

India's influence on Nepal's political dynamics also evolved during this period, shifting from a supportive role during the 1990 *Jana Andolan* to a more contentious one, marked by accusations of interference and meddling in Nepal's internal affairs (Baral, 2009; Gyawali, 2003, pp. 2915-2922).

Overall, the literature on Nepal's political landscape from 1990 to 2002 paints a complex picture of a nascent democracy grappling with challenges of political instability, social unrest, and external influences. It underscores the importance of strong institutions, inclusive representation, and effective governance in consolidating democratic gains and ensuring Nepal's stable and prosperous future.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Fragile Coalitions and Political Instability

The assertion that the period between 1990 and 2002 in Nepal was marked by "fragile coalition governments and frequent leadership changes," underscoring the inherent instability of the nascent multi-party democracy, is well-founded and supported by substantial evidence. The dynamics between major political parties, particularly the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), were often characterized by opportunistic alliances and internal power struggles, leading to a volatile political environment (Baral, 2015; Hoftun et al., 1999).

Baral's (2015) observation of the frequency of coalition governments and their subsequent collapse due to internal conflicts and power struggles is a crucial insight into this instability. This pattern of short-lived governments, punctuated by frequent dissolutions of parliament and fresh elections, hindered effective governance and policy implementation. The constant jockeying for power and prioritizing partisan interests over national well-being created uncertainty and hampered progress on critical socio-economic and developmental fronts.

The tendency of the NC and CPN-UML to form "alliances of convenience" despite their ideological differences further illustrates the fragility of the

political system (Shaha, 2001). These alliances were often driven by a desire to secure power rather than a shared vision for the country's future. Consequently, they were prone to internal contradictions and disagreements, ultimately leading to their collapse.

The instability stemming from these fragile coalitions had several detrimental consequences. It hampered the consolidation of democratic institutions and norms, as the focus remained on short-term political gains rather than long-term institution building (Parajulee, 2000). The frequent changes in leadership and policy direction created an environment of uncertainty, discouraging investment and economic growth.

Moreover, political instability provided fertile ground for the Maoist insurgency to gain momentum as the public became disillusioned with mainstream parties' inability to deliver on their promises (Hutt, 2004).

While Baral's analysis provides a valuable perspective, it is essential to recognize that other factors also influenced the political instability of this period. The rise of the Maoist insurgency, with its challenge to the established political order, contributed significantly to the turmoil (Thapa, 2003, pp. 433-448). Additionally, external factors, such as India's influence on Nepal's political affairs, shaped the political landscape, as evident in reports by international newspapers like *The Times of India*.

4.2 The Maoist Insurgency and its Impact

The emergence of the Maoist insurgency in the mid-1990s undeniably represents a watershed moment in Nepal's political trajectory. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), under the leadership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda), initiated a "People's War" against the state, aiming to dismantle the existing socio-economic and political structures and establish a new order based on their interpretation of Maoist ideology (Thapa, 2003, pp. 433-448). This insurgency dramatically altered the political landscape, amplifying the pre-existing instability and forcing mainstream parties to confront a formidable challenge to their legitimacy and authority.

The Maoist insurgency was fueled by a complex web of factors, including deep-seated socio-economic inequalities, marginalization of rural populations, and perceived corruption and ineffectiveness of the parliamentary system (Hutt, 2004; Muni, 2003, pp. 117-139). The Maoists tapped into widespread grievances and discontent, particularly among the marginalized and impoverished communities, offering

a radical alternative to the status quo (Acharya, 2003, pp. 69-85). Their appeal was further strengthened by their ability to provide essential services and a sense of security in areas under their control, contrasting with the perceived neglect and corruption of the state (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).

The insurgency's impact was multifaceted and far-reaching. It intensified the political instability, leading to violence and insecurity. The conflict claimed thousands of lives, displaced countless people, and inflicted significant damage to the country's infrastructure and economy (Kaphle, 2005, pp. 4342-4345). Moreover, the Maoist challenge compelled mainstream parties to re-evaluate their strategies and priorities. The insurgency exposed the limitations of the parliamentary system and forced political leaders to grapple with the root causes of the conflict (Muni, 2003, pp. 117-139).

While the insurgency undoubtedly had a destabilizing effect, it also acted as a catalyst for political and social change. The Maoists' demands for greater inclusivity, social justice, and economic redistribution resonated with many Nepalis, forcing mainstream parties to address these issues more seriously (Baral, 2015). The insurgency also contributed to the eventual abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a federal republic in 2008, demonstrating the transformative power of the Maoist movement (Lawoti, 2010, pp. 47-66).

However, it is essential to acknowledge the insurgency's devastating human cost and its negative impact on Nepal's development. The conflict resulted in widespread human rights abuses by both the Maoists and the state security forces, leaving deep scars on the nation's psyche (The Hindu, April 24, 2006). Additionally, the insurgency diverted resources from critical development needs, hindering progress in poverty alleviation and economic growth (Kaphle, 2005, pp. 4342-4345).

The rise of the Maoist insurgency marked a turning point in Nepal's political history. It exposed the fault lines in the nascent democratic system, challenged the legitimacy of mainstream parties, and forced a reckoning with the deep-seated inequalities and grievances that fueled the conflict. The insurgency's legacy is complex and multifaceted, encompassing both its transformative impact on the political landscape and the devastating human and economic costs it incurred. Understanding the dynamics of the Maoist insurgency and its implications remains crucial for comprehending Nepal's ongoing political

evolution and its challenges in consolidating its democratic gains.

4.3 Intra-Party Conflicts and Factionalism

It is well-founded to claim that factionalism and internal party disagreements played a significant role in the political unrest that Nepal experienced between 1990 and 2002 (Hoftun et al., 1999). However, a closer look shows that many other factors were at play, both in the origins and effects of this intra-party conflict.

Firstly, ample evidence supports the claim that both the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) were plagued by internal divisions and leadership struggles. Gyawali and Dixit (2006) highlight how personality clashes, ideological differences, and competition for power within these parties often led to factionalism and infighting. Such internal discord undoubtedly hampered their ability to provide stable governance and address pressing national issues, as their focus was often diverted toward internal power struggles rather than policy implementation.

The statement regarding the Maoist party experiencing internal dissent is also accurate. While Muni (2003) points to the challenges of maintaining unity in a revolutionary movement, other scholars like Hutt (2004) provide more specific examples of splits and purges within the Maoist party during this period. These internal conflicts, while less frequent than those in the mainstream parties, still underscore the difficulties of sustaining cohesion within a radical movement operating under intense pressure.

However, it is crucial to recognize that intra-party conflicts were not the sole cause of Nepal's political turmoil. The broader socio-political context, including the legacy of the Panchayat system, the rise of identity politics, and the ongoing Maoist insurgency, also played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape (Baral, 2015). Moreover, the impact of intra-party conflicts on governance effectiveness should not be overstated. While they contributed to instability, other factors, such as weak institutions, corruption, and external interference, played significant roles (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).

Furthermore, it is essential to note that internal party struggles were not always detrimental. In some cases, they led to the emergence of new political formations and a broadening of the political spectrum. For instance, the split within the CPN-UML in 1998 led to the CPN (Maoist) formation, which eventually played a pivotal role in shaping Nepal's political

trajectory (Hutt, 2004). The international press also extensively covered these intra-party conflicts. The Indian newspaper *The Hindu* reported on the frequent leadership changes and internal squabbles within the NC and the CPN-UML, often highlighting their negative impact on governance and stability (The Hindu, 2001).

In conclusion, while intra-party conflicts and factionalism undoubtedly contributed to the political turmoil in Nepal between 1990 and 2002, their impact should be analyzed within a broader context. A comprehensive understanding of this period requires acknowledging the interplay of various factors, including internal party dynamics, socio-political conditions, and external influences. It is also essential to recognize that often disruptive internal conflicts could lead to political renewal and broadening political discourse.

4.4 Waning Trust, Democratic Disillusionment

The statement that the period between 1990 and 2002 witnessed a significant erosion of public trust and disillusionment with democracy in Nepal resonates strongly with the political realities of the time. The constant political wrangling, characterized by frequent changes in government, intra-party conflicts, and a lack of decisive leadership, contributed to instability and uncertainty (Baral, 2015; Hoftun et al., 1999). The failure of successive governments to address pressing socio-economic issues and deliver on the promises of the 1990 revolution further fueled public discontent (Parajulee, 2000).

The rampant corruption scandals that plagued the political landscape during this period deepened public cynicism further. The perception that politicians were more interested in personal gain than serving the public interest undermined the legitimacy of the democratic system (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003). The lack of accountability and transparency in governance created a breeding ground for disillusionment and apathy among the Nepali people.

Parajulee (2000) aptly captures the sentiment of the time, stating that many Nepalis became disillusioned with the promises of the 1990 revolution as their aspirations for a more just and equitable society remained unfulfilled. The gap between the rhetoric of democracy and the reality on the ground widened, creating a sense of betrayal and frustration.

This growing disillusionment with the established political order provided fertile ground for the Maoist insurgency to gain traction. The Communist Party

of Nepal (Maoist), with its message of radical change and its promise to address the grievances of the marginalized and oppressed, presented an appealing alternative to the perceived failures of the parliamentary system (Hutt, 2004). The Maoists' ability to tap into the public's disenchantment with the status quo allowed them to mobilize support and expand their influence, particularly in rural areas where the state's presence was weak. The benefits of democracy were slow to materialize (Thapa, 2003, pp. 433–448).

The erosion of public trust in democracy during this period had far-reaching consequences for Nepal's political trajectory. It weakened the foundations of the nascent democratic system, making it vulnerable to challenges from both within and without. The Maoist insurgency, fueled by public disillusionment, plunged the country into a decade-long conflict that claimed thousands of lives and caused immense suffering (Muni, 2003, pp. 117–139). The crisis of legitimacy that gripped the political system ultimately paved the way for the 2006 *Jana Andolan II*, which led to the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a federal republic.

The experience of Nepal during this period serves as a cautionary tale about the fragility of democracy and the importance of maintaining public trust through effective governance, accountability, and responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of the people. It underscores the critical role of political parties in upholding democratic values and ensuring that the promises of democracy are translated into tangible benefits for all citizens.

4.5 External Factors in Nepal's Politics

The claim that India's influence on Nepal's political dynamics between 1990 and 2002 changed from practical to contentious is based on a wealth of academic research and media reports. Undoubtedly, India's support for the Nepali Congress during the 1990 *Jana Andolan* was crucial in the restoration of multiparty democracy. Both diplomatic and material, India's backing significantly boosted the pro-democracy movement and pressured the then-monarchy to concede to the people's demands (Hoftun et al., 1999; Whelpton, 2005). This historical role solidified India's image as a champion of democracy in Nepal.

However, as the paragraph rightly points out, the narrative of India's influence took a turn in the subsequent years. While India's interest in Nepal's

stability is understandable, given its shared border and security concerns, its actions often overstepped the boundaries of acceptable diplomatic engagement. Accusations of interference in Nepal's internal affairs became commonplace, with India allegedly dictating terms of political alliances, influencing key appointments, and even imposing economic blockades to exert pressure on the Nepali government (Baral, 2009, pp. 359-383; Gyawali, 2003, pp. 2915-2922).

The 2001 royal massacre, which saw the assassination of King Birendra and several members of the royal family, further complicated the Indo-Nepal relationship. The incident triggered a wave of conspiracy theories, with some pointing fingers at India for its alleged involvement. While no concrete evidence has emerged to support these claims, the incident fueled anti-India sentiments among certain sections of the Nepali population (The Kathmandu Post, June 2, 2001).

Furthermore, some saw India's perceived support for the Madhesi movement in the Terai region, which demanded greater autonomy and representation, as an attempt to exploit Nepal's internal divisions for its strategic interests. This further strained the bilateral relationship and reinforced the perception of India as a meddling neighbor (Hutt, 2012, pp. 507-529; The Hindu, September 21, 2007).

It is worth noting that India's actions were not always driven by malicious intent. Often, they were motivated by genuine concerns about Nepal's stability and its potential impact on India's security. However, the heavy-handed approach adopted at times, coupled with a lack of transparency, fueled resentment and mistrust among the Nepali people (Muni, 2003, pp. 117-139; Shaha, 2005).

In conclusion, while India's role in Nepal's political transition was initially positive and supportive, its subsequent actions often blurred the lines between assistance and interference. This created a complex and often contentious dynamic between the two countries, which continues to shape their relationship today. The challenge for Nepal and India is to find a way to engage in a mutually respectful and beneficial manner, recognizing each other's sovereignty and aspirations.

4.6 Marginalized Voices in Nepal's Politics

The claim that disadvantaged people and minor parties were excluded from Nepal's political process between 1990 and 2002 because of the predominance of major political parties and the Maoist insurgency

has many foundations. However, a careful analysis is necessary given the intricate web of interrelated elements at work. With their well-established organizational structures and historical legacies, the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) undoubtedly had considerable power throughout this time. Their power in politics, which often took the shape of coalition administrations or intense rivalry, erected a strong barrier that prevented smaller parties from gaining significant representation or influencing public policy (Hoftun et al., 1999). The Maoist insurgency made this problem much more complex, which divided the political class and took focus away from the issues facing disadvantaged people (Thapa, 2003, pp. 433-448).

Ethnic and regional parties, representing the diverse tapestry of Nepal's society, faced an uphill battle in penetrating the Kathmandu-centric power structure. The political system, deeply entrenched in traditional power dynamics, was often resistant to accommodating the demands for greater inclusivity and recognition of marginalized identities (Lawoti, 2005, pp. 243-269). The lack of proportional representation mechanisms further exacerbated this issue, hindering the ability of smaller parties to translate their support base into meaningful political gains (Thapa, 2004, pp. 1-16).

The marginalization of diverse voices and the lack of inclusive representation had far-reaching consequences for Nepal's political stability and social cohesion. Left unaddressed, the grievances of marginalized groups festered into social unrest and contributed to the volatile political climate (Mishra, 2011, pp. 141-160). While rooted in complex socio-economic and political factors, the Maoist insurgency exploited these grievances to garner support, particularly in rural and marginalized communities (Hutt, 2004).

The international press, such as The Times of India, frequently reported on the challenges faced by smaller parties and marginalized groups in Nepal during this period. They highlighted the struggles of ethnic and regional parties to gain a foothold in the political arena and the growing discontent among marginalized communities (The Times of India, August 22, 1996).

Hoftun et al. (1999) examine the marginalization of minor parties and organizations well, but it is crucial to remember that the political scene was dynamic. Smaller parties and regional players were able to have an impact at the local and regional levels,

proving that disadvantaged voices could still be heard in a challenging political climate (Bhattachan, 2000, pp. 508–526). Additionally, at this time, the emergence of identity-based movements and civil society organizations was critical in promoting the representation and rights of disadvantaged groups (Onta, 2005).

The dominance of major parties and the Maoist insurgency undoubtedly limited the space for smaller parties and marginalized groups in Nepal's political process; it is crucial to recognize the agency and resilience of these actors. The struggle for inclusive representation and meaningful participation continues to shape Nepal's political trajectory, and the lessons learned from this turbulent period remain relevant in the ongoing pursuit of a more equitable and just society.

4.7 Nepal's Rocky Road to Democracy

The period between 1990 and 2002, marked by intense party politics and power struggles, is a stark reminder of the complexities and challenges inherent in Nepal's journey toward democratic consolidation. While Thapa and Sijapati (2003) rightly highlight the importance of strong institutions, compromise, and inclusivity, a critical analysis reveals deeper nuances and additional lessons that must be considered.

The call for strong and accountable institutions is crucial. However, it is essential to acknowledge the deeply entrenched patronage networks and clientelism that have historically undermined institutional integrity in Nepal (Baral, 2000). Building robust institutions necessitates legal and structural reforms and a concerted effort to change political culture and behavior.

Secondly, the emphasis on compromise and consensus-building is laudable but needs to be contextualized within Nepal's deeply divided society. The Maoist insurgency and the subsequent political upheavals exposed deep-seated social and economic grievances that cannot be resolved through superficial compromises alone. Achieving genuine consensus requires addressing the root causes of conflict and marginalization, including caste, ethnicity, and regional disparities (Hutt, 2004).

Thirdly, addressing social and economic inequality is vital for sustainable democratic consolidation. The failure to deliver on the promises of the 1990 *Jana Andolan*, particularly in terms of equitable development and social justice, fueled public disillusionment and contributed to the rise of the Maoist insurgency.

Nepal's political parties must move beyond rhetoric and implement policies promoting inclusive economic growth and social upliftment (Parajulee, 2000).

The study highlights the need for political parties to prioritize national interests over partisan gains. However, this is easier said than done in a context where personal ambitions and factional interests often drive political parties. Building a culture of political accountability and ethical leadership is critical for ensuring that political parties act in the nation's best interests (The Kathmandu Post, April 23, 2002).

Finally, creating a more inclusive and representative political system is essential for addressing the diverse needs and aspirations of Nepal's multiethnic and multilingual society. The current political system, dominated by a few significant parties and concentrated in Kathmandu, has often failed to adequately represent marginalized groups and regions. Empowering local communities and ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making is crucial for building a genuinely inclusive democracy (Lawoti, 2005, pp. 243–269).

In conclusion, Nepal's turbulent political history offers invaluable lessons for its democratic journey. While the recommendations of Thapa and Sijapati (2003) provide a solid foundation, a more nuanced and critical analysis reveals the more profound challenges and complexities involved. Building a sustainable and inclusive democracy in Nepal requires institutional reforms and political compromises, a fundamental shift in political culture, a commitment to addressing social and economic inequalities, and a genuine effort to empower marginalized communities. The international community, including India, also has a role to play in supporting Nepal's democratic consolidation by respecting its sovereignty and refraining from undue interference in its internal affairs (The Hindu, December 16, 2001).

4.8 The Monarchy's Role

From 1990 to 2002, people witnessed a complex and evolving relationship between the monarchy and the nascent multi-party democracy in Nepal. While the 1990 constitution established a constitutional monarchy, the palace's political influence remained significant, often as a source of stability and contention (Shaha, 2001).

King Birendra, who ascended the throne in 1972, initially navigated the transition to democracy cautiously, attempting to balance his traditional role as a symbol of national unity and the new political realities. However, his reluctance to fully embrace

the spirit of constitutionalism and occasional political affairs interventions created friction with political parties and fueled accusations of royal overreach (Hoftun et al., 1999).

The Maoist insurgency posed a direct challenge to the monarchy, as the rebels sought to abolish the institution and establish a republic. The palace's response to the insurgency was initially hesitant and reactive, contributing to the perception of a weak and indecisive monarchy (Hutt, 2004). The 2001 royal massacre, in which King Birendra and most of the royal family were killed, further destabilized the monarchy and plunged the country into a more profound crisis.

The ascension of King Gyanendra to the throne following the massacre marked a turning point in the monarchy's role. Gyanendra, known for his conservative views and assertive personality, adopted a more interventionist approach, dismissing elected governments and assuming direct rule in 2002 and 2005. This move was met with widespread condemnation from political parties, civil society, and the international community, who accused the king of undermining democracy and exacerbating the political crisis (The Kathmandu Post, February 2, 2005).

The monarchy's active involvement in politics ultimately proved to be its undoing. The king's actions alienated vital political actors and fueled the pro-republic movement, culminating in the abolition of the monarchy and the declaration of a republic in 2008. The monarchy's failure to adapt to the changing political landscape and its inability to balance its traditional role with the demands of a democratic system contributed to its demise (Baral, 2015).

In retrospect, the monarchy's role during this period can be seen as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the institution provided stability and continuity during political turmoil. On the other hand, its reluctance to fully embrace democratic norms and occasional forays into active politics ultimately undermined its legitimacy and contributed to its downfall. The monarchy's legacy remains a subject of debate in Nepal, with some viewing it as a symbol of national unity and others as an obstacle to democratic progress (The Hindu, May 30, 2008).

4.9 Political Parties' Role

The interplay of party politics, power struggles, and the rise of the Maoist insurgency punctuated the volatile political landscape in Nepal between 1990 and 2002. While acknowledging the initial promise of

multiparty democracy, it underscores how subsequent political upheavals, coalition governments, and intra-party conflicts often overshadowed the prospects of democratic consolidation.

The proliferation of political parties, each with its distinct ideological agendas, contributed to the complexity. The Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), though often forming alliances, struggled with internal divisions and leadership contests, hindering effective governance (Gyawali & Dixit, 2006). The Maoist insurgency further destabilized the situation, forcing mainstream parties to re-evaluate their priorities in the face of this radical challenge (Thapa, 2003, pp. 433–448).

However, a critical analysis reveals that the role of political parties during this period was more than just characterized by instability and conflict. While fragile coalitions and internal divisions were prevalent, parties also played a crucial role in shaping Nepal's democratic transition. The NC, for instance, despite its internal struggles, remained a key player in advocating for democratic values and institutions (Kumar, 1995). With its grassroots solid base, the CPN-UML brought the concerns of marginalized communities to the fore and advocated for social justice (Hutt, 2004).

Moreover, while undeniably disruptive, the rise of the Maoist insurgency also forced mainstream parties to confront long-standing inequality and social exclusion issues. The Maoist challenge compelled parties to engage in a deeper dialogue about the shortcomings of the existing political and economic system (Muni, 2003, pp. 117–139). This, in turn, led to some policy reforms and initiatives to address marginalized groups' grievances.

Nevertheless, the overall picture remains mixed. The frequent changes in government, driven by shifting alliances and power struggles, created an environment of uncertainty and instability, hindering long-term planning and development (Baral, 2015). The internal conflicts within parties often precede national interests, further eroding public trust and confidence in the political process (Parajulee, 2000). As international observers noted, "Nepal's political parties seemed more preoccupied with outmaneuvering each other than addressing the country's pressing needs" (The New York Times, June 12, 2001).

The role of political parties in Nepal from 1990 to 2002 was complex and multifaceted. While they were instrumental in shaping the country's democratic

transition, their internal conflicts, power struggles, and inability to address pressing socio-economic issues contributed to political instability and public disillusionment. This period is a crucial reminder of political parties' challenges and responsibilities in consolidating democracy and ensuring effective governance in a nascent democratic system.

5. Conclusion

The period from 1990 to 2002 in Nepal was a time of significant political upheaval, marked by the transition to multi-party democracy and the challenges that came with it. The rise and fall of coalition governments, intra-party conflicts, and the looming Maoist insurgency created a volatile political landscape. Initially, the monarchy symbolized stability and ultimately became embroiled in the power struggles, leading to its eventual abolition. The dominance of significant parties often marginalized smaller parties and minority groups, hindering inclusive representation. The study underscores Nepal's journey towards democracy, which has been complex and arduous. While the country has made significant strides, the legacy of political instability, social inequality, and the Maoist conflict continues to shape its political landscape. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for greater political maturity, consensus-building, and a focus on national interests to ensure Nepal's stable and prosperous future. It highlights the importance of strong institutions, compromise, inclusivity, and addressing social and economic inequalities to consolidate democratic gains and foster a more equitable society.

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