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**Representing South Asia: Studying Himal-A South Asian Journal**

**Topic: Democratic and political processes**

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**Introduction**

South Asia is a mixed bowl of different cultures, religion, ethnicity, nationalities and cultural heritages. Also, it is a domain of one of the oldest civilizations of the world. Most of the countries in South Asia had faced colonization before becoming an independent state. At the same time, South Asia is denoted with large and growing population, poverty, weak democratic processes and increasing militarization and a divided among various sectarian lines.

It incorporates 8 countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Democratization has been very uneven in most of these countries. Except for India and Sri Lanka, that have maintained, secured, and stabilized democratic form of government. India has faced emergency during the reign of Indira Gandhi whereas Sri Lanka had faced a long-term civil war. The South Asian political system had seen many forms of government such as democratic, socialist, military and monarchical.

This term paper deals with the democratic and political process in South Asia under the shadow of Himal Magazine. Furthermore, the term paper will analyze the political changes, shifts, and claims made by 'Himal' that took place in the region. Also, the paper will make comparison amongst the various South Asian countries and bring down the similarities and linkages between them. Lastly this paper will critically analyse the ways in which 'Himal' differs from other print media in portraying South Asia. A total number of 90 issues of 'Himal' magazine from 1887-2001 were analyzed for this term paper.

### **Literature Review**

Terry Lynn Carl has argued in the context of Latin America that:

To date, however, no stable political democracy has resulted from regime transitions in which mass actors have gained control, even momentarily, over traditional ruling classes. Efforts at reform from below, which have been characterized by unrestricted contestation and participation, have met with subversive opposition from unsuppressed traditional elites, as the cases of Argentina (1946-1951), Guatemala (1946-1954), and Chile (1970-1973).

This is also true for South Asian Countries. Furthermore, Gauher Rizvi said that despite the transition to democracy, the class composition of the leadership has remained very much same.

In simple words the concept of democracy is a political system for choosing and replacing the government through fair elections, active participation of the people, politics and civic. It is also comprising Protection of the human rights of all citizens. Citizen has gifted the protection of law which provide equality to all citizen. . Michael J. Sodaro (2004, pp. 31, ), for example, defines democracy as: "The essential idea of democracy is that the people have the right to determine who governs them. In most cases they elect the principal governing officials and hold them accountable for their actions. Democracies also impose legal limits on the government's authority by guaranteeing certain rights and freedoms to their citizens. Now the stories of himal magazine in itself. The role of Political process is also very much important for democracy it provides power to citizen. The social mobilization movement

known as process known as political process theory. “McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977) found that the availability of resources to the movement, as opposed to the degree of oppression, explained much of the variation in the level of mobilization”.

### **HIMAL MAGAZINE**

Himal South Asian magazine is published by the not-for-profit [The South Asia Trust](#), Lalitpur, Nepal. It's a cross border journalism magazine. It is South Asia's first and only regional news and analysis magazine. Stretching from Afghanistan to Burma, from Tibet to the Maldives, this region of more than 1.4 billion people shares great swathes of interlocking geography, culture and history. Yet today neighbouring countries can barely talk to one another, much less speak in a common voice. For over two decades, Himal South Asian has strived to define, nurture, and amplify that voice. Himal is the good source to see the representation of South Asian countries it presents outstanding coverage of different regions of South Asia stories like rural development, culture and travel.

This paper will briefly talk about the role of Himal magazine in South Asian region with the lance of democratic and political process Origins of democracy can be traced back to the Greek of sixth century B.C. Democracy is a political system which involves multiparty elections, representative government and also freedom of speech. In other words, we can say that it is a form of government that the citizens are directly or indirectly participate in the state ruling. The citizens in democratic countries have the equality and freedom in social, religion, culture and economic They are also allowed to elect the state representatives whom they more preferable through elections. The society which. This concept also requires the political process for these nations. In the phrase of Abraham Lincoln, democracy is a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Now to analyze this term the issue of democracy in south Asian is country every country following the same pattern of democracy for the people?

### **Findings And Analysis:**

Each of the countries of South Asia claims themselves as a democratic country. **Almost, the only way to participate in the political process is to vote through elections.** The practice of democracy itself varies widely, however, as it is determined, in the first instance, by the individual electoral systems. The electoral laws followed by each country lead to wildly different forms of representational politics<sup>1</sup>. The detailed election process for different countries are mentioned below.

#### **1. Afghanistan**

National Assembly of Afghanistan is bicameral i.e it has two houses. They are **House of Elders (upper house)** and the **House of People (lower house)**. They are also known as **Meshrano Jirga** and **Wolesi Jirga**. The lower houses elect 249 members through the single non-transferable vote along with a multi-seat single constituency. The highest polling

candidates (given by the number of seats in the constituency) are elected for a five-year term. These members come from 35 multi-member constituencies, including a Kuchi (nomad) constituency which elects 10 members through a Single National Constituency. Also, the house reserves 64 seats for women.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Bangladesh**

**House of the Nation** is the parliament of Bangladesh which is unicameral. There are 350 members in this Parliament. Out of these there, 300 members are directly elected from single member constituency. The remaining 50 seats are reserved for women. This is done on the basis of **proportional representation** through **single transferable vote** in which the voter ranks candidates preferentially, and votes are reallocated from ballots whose first rankings are eliminated, shifting to the next-ranked candidates on those ballots.

## **3. Bhutan**

Bhutan has a bicameral Parliament (**Chi Tshong**). It has King of Bhutan Druk Gyalpo, the National Council (Gyelyong Tshogde) and the National Assembly (Gyelyong Tshogdu). The lower house Gyelyong Tshogdu directly elects 55 members from territorial constituencies that are allocated seats in proportion to their population. Elections to the National Assembly take place in two tiers – primary round and the general election. All political parties registered with the Election Commission of Bhutan contest in the primary round. The two political parties that secure the highest and the second highest number of total votes casted qualify to run for the seats in the National Assembly in the general round of the election. The party that secures the maximum seats in the National Assembly forms the government and the other takes the opposition bench.<sup>4</sup>

## **5. India**

India has Parliament of Union consisting of **Upper House (Rajya Sabha)** and **Lower House (Lok Sabha)**. It's a bicameral parliament. The lower house Lok Sabha seats 545 members, 543 of which are elected as single-member constituencies to serve five-year terms, and two of them are appointed by the President.

The upper house Rajya Sabha can seat 250 members, 238 of whom are indirectly elected by the state's legislatures to serve six-year terms, 12 members are appointed by the President to serve six-year terms and the remaining members are chosen by elected members of the state and territorial assemblies.

## **6. Maldives**

Maldives has the first past the post voting system and has a unicameral People's Council. A total number of 85 members are elected for the term of 5 years and they are elected from single member constituencies. The President is elected by a two round system from absolute majority. The serving period is fixed to 5 years.

## 7. Nepal

Sambidhan Sabha is the Constituent Assembly of Nepal which consist of 601 members. It is unicameral. 240 of them are elected directly and 335 are elected through PR system. 33% must be elected as woman, 31.2% as Madhesis, 13% for dalits.

## 8. Pakistan

The bicameral federal legislature consists of the Senate (upper house) and National Assembly (lower house). The lower house seats 342 members out of which 272 are elected through FPTP. 60 seats are reserved for women and 10 for non-Muslims. The upper house, or the Senate, seats 104 members from 68 constituencies, 14 of whom are elected by the Provincial Assembly, eight of whom are elected from Federally Administered Tribal Areas, two from the Federal Capital such that there is one woman and one technocrat, and 12 of whom are women elected by the members of the Provincial Assembly (including four technocrats and four non-Muslims).

## 9. Sri Lanka

The **Parliament of Sri Lanka** is the 225-member unicameral legislature of Sri Lanka. The members of Parliament are elected by proportional representation for five-year terms. Of the 225 members, 196 are elected from 22 electoral districts, which are multi-member. The remaining 29 MPs are elected from National Lists allocated to the parties (and independent groups) in proportion to their share of the national vote.<sup>5</sup>

### Himal on Democratic and Electoral Process

During the phase from 1987 to 1989 three countries had witnessed election. Bangladesh and India witnessed elections in 1988 and 1989 respectively. On the other hand, something very strange was going in Afghanistan during the mentioned time period

A paradigm shift happened in Afghanistan, the Soviet troops started to leave Afghanistan and in 1987, Soviet-backed Afghan communist government introduced a law for the formation of other political parties at the same time they also introduced a new constitution that demanded for a bicameral legislature. Unfortunately, Himal did not mentioned these events and none of the issues published within mentioned time frame which talked about the election.

In 1988, Afghanistan witnessed an election in which **People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan** along with **National Front** won the election and controlled the government. Himlal ignored this election too. There was no mention of this election in the given time frame.

However, Himlal has covered a lot on Nepal in the context on achieving electoral democratic political processes such as an article "Tryst with Democracy" published in Nov-Dec 1990 issue clearly mention about the fall of feudalism and rise of democracy. The article talked about the 1951 revolution which overthrew the Rana dynasty with the help of three forces. Jawaharlal Nehru's Indian government, regarded the Ranas as colonialist collaborators. But the lack of political democracy resulted in economic under-development. The Panchayat system was gone and like their Eastern European contemporaries, they rejected a political system with a philosophy and culture that failed to meet their aspirations.

Further the article talked about how the modernization affected the democracy of Nepal under the western influence. The country started producing doctors, engineers, lawyers, scholar, civil servants and journalists. Teachers and students shared new ideas that began to populate the Nepali hinterland.

The whole article talked about the shifting of one form of governance to another form. From monarchy to feudalism, and then from feudalism to democracy. And how people accepted those changes. The article also showed some light on how the Panchayat system tried to homogenise the country by adopting one religion (Hindu), one language Khas as Nepali, one culture and one nation policy under the pretext of 'Nepali nationalism' and how the students protest forced to proclaim a referendum seeking people's opinion whether to retain the Panchayat system with reforms or to reintroduce the multi-party democracy in Nepal.

Under the article "Nepal's Tarai- Backwater or New Frontier?" projected the formation of Sadbhavna Party. With the advent of democracy, the simmering demands of the tarai people, like those of other communities and minorities who feel discrimination across Nepal, have come to the fore. Many in the tarai feel that their region is under-represented in mainstream of Nepali life as defined by Kathmandu's power centers. They cite their low numbers in the national legislature under the Panchayat and discrimination in government service. One of the results has been the formation of the Sadbhavna Party headed by tarai politician Gajendra Narayan Singh, which claims to speak for the people of the tarai.

Further the article said that if democracy continues to exist in Nepal, including Tarai, then regional discrimination will vanish. Also, it referred for the votes of the Tarai people. The article reflects upon the urge of Tarai people asking for democracy. As one of the leaders had formed the Sadbhavna Party, which can act as a saviour for them.

In Nepal the multi-party democracy, representing the hopes and aspirations of the people desiring democratic ideals, was re-established in 1990, replacing the one-party Panchayat regime. The 1990 revolution in Nepal was a result of the people's upsurge against the Panchayat system of the King which allegedly represented the wishes of the Palace rather than the masses. However, the euphoria soon dissipated when the political heads could not succeed in giving a stable government. There have been as many as three coalition governments and a number of no-confidence motions in the Parliament. The frequent changes of government make a mockery of the goals and ideals for which the leaders led the revolution in 1990 and the people who supported the leaders and strengthened the movement. The frequent changes of government make a mockery of the goals and ideals for which the leaders led the revolution in 1990 and the people who supported the leaders and strengthened the movement. There was widespread feeling of the Palace being non-representative of the masses, especially when the Marich Man Singh government faced political scandals on charges of misappropriation of funds allotted for the victims of the earthquake in August 1991 or when it reshuffled the Cabinet instead of investigating the deaths of the people in a stampede in the national sports complex in a hailstorm. Also, the souring of the India-Nepal trade relations affected the popularity of the Singh government.

In April 1987, Nepal had introduced the work permit for Indian workers in three of its districts, and in early 1989, Nepal provided 40% duty concession to Chinese goods and later withdrew duty concessions from Indian goods in such a manner that the Chinese goods became cheaper than the Indian goods. This led to the souring of relations which were already strained over the purchase of Chinese arms by Nepal in 1988. India refused to renew two separate Treaties of Trade and Transit and insisted on a single treaty dealing with the two issues, which was not acceptable to Nepal. A deadlock ensued, and the Treaties of Trade and Transit expired on March 23, 1989. The brunt of the closure of the trade and transit points was mainly faced by the lower classes in Nepal due to the restricted supply of consumer goods and petroleum products like petrol, aviation fuel and kerosene. The industries suffered because of their dependence on India for resources, trade and transit. The Government of Nepal tried to deal with the situation by depending on foreign aid from the US, UK, Australia and China. However, the government's strategy to manage the crisis could not satisfy those people who desired negotiations with India rather than dependence on foreign aid as a solution. Taking advantage of the uneasiness amongst some people against the government and the strained India-Nepal relations, the Nepali Congress (NC) and the left-wing parties blamed the government for perpetuating the crisis and not taking any serious measures to solve it. In December 1989, the NC tried to utilize B.P. Koirala's anniversary by launching a people's awareness program. The left-wing alliance known as the United Left Front (ULF) extended its support to the NC in its campaign for a party system. On January 18-19, 1990, the NC held a conference in which leaders from various countries and members of the foreign Press were invited. Leaders from India attended the conference; Germany, Japan, Spain, Finland supported the movement; and the Embassies of the USA and West Germany were present on the occasion. Inspired by the international support and the democratic movements

occurring throughout the world after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1989, the NC and the ULF launched a mass movement on February 18 to end the Panchayat regime, and the installation of an interim government represented by various parties and people. On April 6, the Marich Man Singh government was dismissed, and Lokendra Bahadur Chand became the Prime Minister on the same day. However, the agitating mob was not satisfied with the change of government as they were not against the Singh government per se but against the party-less system. The people became violent and a few people were killed in an encounter with the Army. On April 16, the Chand government was also dismissed, and a Royal Proclamation was issued the next day which dissolved the National Panchayat, the Panchayat policy and the evaluation committee and the class organizations. Instead, the proclamation declared "functioning of the political parties" and maintained that "all political parties will always keep the national interest uppermost in organizing themselves according to their political ideology."

During the second phase from 1990 to 2001, Himal reported a lot on democratic and electoral processes of south Asian countries. The political participation was also covered in the mentioned phase. The article titled **"The Limits of Tibetan Democracy"** published in March 1991 talked about democratic process which is adopted by Dalai lama when he was compelled to announce democratic measures in Dharamsala and ensured that proposed democratic measures will provide adequate scope for popular participation in the crucial political decisions that could affect the Tibetan people's future, the exile Tibet people in Dharmshala were unable to recognize themselves by state government. The essence of any functioning democracy is to encourage public participation in the political decision-making process through public or popular representation. And this article was full of quotes of Dalai Lama

Furthermore, in the July-August edition of Himal magazine published an article with the heading **"Three Gorkhali Myths"**. The article This article is only based on Gorkhali community, but this is not talking about at marginal level or not raising any issue but has its historical roots early 1500 from where the Gorkha community started developing themselves. This article providing more successful stories of Gorkha community and which is focusing only on Nepal. These myths talk about The Myth of Gurkhas and the 1947 Treaty, The Myth of Gurkhas, Ethnicity and Regionalism which gives the brief knowledge about one community.

Later in the July 1991 issue, an article was published **"Three Gorkhali Myths"**, which did not have any political inclination as such, but it did talk about the role of Gorkhas in nation building and their contribution to the society. Himal throughout all its issues has covered mainly articles related to culture and society as a whole, their area of focus has remained around culture and environment as a result politics is usually covered under opinion or reports if any. Although the magazine covered other areas of south asia, but primarily in context with culture and environment such as the February 1992 edition titled **"Rural to Real Estate"**, it throws light upon the urbanisation process of the Valley (Kathmandu), has no sought village participation without any long-term benefits. Poverty, and a pre-existing inequality in land-ownership, has meant that villagers do not have the deciding voice.



Also, unlike the style of representation of their political inclination they have hit hard with very clear articles along the timeline, such as in the 1996 issue the **“Hawala Gate Scam”**, the case involved \$18 million bribery scandal, which came in the open in 1996, involved payments allegedly received by country’s leading politicians through hawala brokers. From the list of those accused also included Lal Krishna Advani who was then the Leader of Opposition, Himal covered the issue as it was, they also extensively covered the **election crisis in Bangladesh**, followed by **Pakistan’s electoral reforms** and also hitting hard on the Hindutva in India. Their article “Hate thy Neighbor”, the Bharatiya Janta Party’s constant harping on the bangladeshi migrant issue and another article in the 1996 issue **“Experiments with Caretaker”**, covering the two general elections held in Bangladesh in 1996.

**“VILLEGERS OF THE VALLY”** discussed the issue of minority and poor people by opposing urbanization in Kathmandu. Concerning the issue of rural people Kathmandu Valley's rural residents, who are more than the urban population, are facing an unequal battle with the rapidly expanding city settlements began to emerge in Kathmandu Valley at least 1500 years ago, settlements established by the Kirats. The article focused on Kathmandu development, urbanization. Urbanization has two side there is placement but there is also displacement as new badly planned settlement emerged. Villagers who are being displaced are ignored or taken for granted district of Kathmandu is lalitpur, bhaktipur. Lalitpur lies outside the valley.

#### **How to tend this garden? -May-June 1992**

The article reflected on the issue of linguistic diversity and also shows the concern for multi-linguistic and multi-tribal divisions. Long history of political rule of Nepal feudal and authoritarian rule. Responsibility to manage multi-linguistic and multi-tribal divisions, recognition of diversity, Prithvi Narayan (king of Nepal) did recognize the cultural plurality of his conquered lands however, the cultural rights of the different communities were not recognized by the old state.

Modern states are based on the newer values of democracy, human rights, minority rights, equality and social justice. These novel and external notions of governance entered Nepal during the 1951 anti-Rana revolution. Even the Panchayat system, which did everything to retard the political process from the 1960s to the 1980s. During 1960 to 1980 the panchayat system of Nepal said that cultural pluralism of Nepal and guarantees the right of every community "to conserve and promote its language, script and culture. New Constitution rejects the earlier basis for national integration.

#### **Jharkhand will have its state -1992**

The focus of the article is more in favor of tribal community bringing. There are distinct culture have not been recognized which led to national movement which bring different communities of tribal area like Bihar, West Bengal , Orissa and Mdhya Pradesh close to each other. Srijaipal highly educated and a leader of tribal struggled to the community. Tribe leadership of Jharkhand movement as the most corrupt. Tribal ethnic group cannot achieve without addressing question of economic privilege.



The Himal Magazine covered the politics of south Asia. But at the same time that coverage was based on the cultural aspect of politics. For example, in the findings of Himal, it was observed that Himal is based on covering the ideas of political parties rather than focusing only on elections. The magazine was critical to the approach of right wings as it can be seen in the articles related to India and Pakistan on Shariya law and Sanskritization of Indian textbooks. *Himal's* articulated viewpoints on the issues covering all the south asian countries are aggressive in their style of criticism, also the magazine when covering political issues usually resort to the section of either “**opinions**” or “**Reports**”. Also, Himal at multiple occasions on record have shown a political inclination towards the left, this has resulted in heavy bashing of right wing orthodox through their articles.

Furthermore, the articles covered in the magazine talks about the anthropological approach rather than simply political or electoral approach. Tehri dam and the Panchayati system can be seen as a very good example of it.

### **Conclusion:**

The issues related to political and democratic processes in Nepal, Bhutan and Burma have been extensively covered by the magazine. The writing style seems to be progressive and community supportive. From the facts and figures mentioned in the analysis for a particular time period (1987-2001) suggests that Himal is biased towards Nepal, and issues that surrounds the Nepalis. Also, as a magazine that represents whole South Asia has missed to cover some of the most important events such as elections in Bangladesh, India and Afghanistan.

One of the most fascinating facts about South Asia is, the political aura of south Asia is mostly mixed with the religion. For example, Bangladesh and Pakistan are Muslim countries in which Pakistan is an Islamic Republic whereas Nepal initially was a Hindu nation. India too, has witnessed the rise of Hindu Nationalist in the late 1970's. So, we can say that religion plays an important part in formation of democratic and electoral process.

In its early years, Himal focussed on the Himalayan and Hindu Kush sections of the subcontinent, but it was interested in using his publication to counter nationalist orthodoxies across the region and to emphasize, instead, the shared cultures, histories, and sensibilities of broader South Asia. A commitment that signalled with the unusual, and much discussed, coinage “SouthAsia,” which added to Himal's title in 1996. In the decades since, Himal Southasian has covered the region with imagination and rigor, seeking contributions from academics and intellectuals across South Asia and in the diaspora, and paying special attention to events that have gone overlooked in the international press. The magazine reported from Afghanistan long before the attacks of September 11th catapulted the Taliban into world view.

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