

## **Nepal Reality Check: moving towards serene villages and tumultuous towns?**

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The fundamental issues of the villages have been broadly addressed. The exploitative behaviors may still be continuing, but that is not a general trend. The productive forces may still not be freed in the true sense of its meaning, but the freedom march has already been started. The criminal caste system, *Khas* domination and gender stereotypes may still be continuing, but the village communities have discovered the nonsense *Bahunbadi* social as well state patronage of such evils. Now, the issues of civil liberty and political freedom have become the critical agenda items. Establishing inclusive pluralistic democracy at the grassroots is the challenge not only for the Maoists, but for other political and social forces as well. The return or resurgence of the local functionaries of the national political parties and their participation in the process of decision making could bring life in this process. They should participate in the local governance mechanism. But, the participation should be through election of the village assemblies. This is what the villages need now. The Maoists should welcome the returnees and/or the resurgent cadres of other political parties. They, themselves, should participate in the governance by competing with these political opponents. They should abide by the law that they agree to govern or to sit in the opposition as mandated by the people through periodic elections. When the village assemblies are in place, then comes the turn of rural physical progress. Mobilizing resources available locally, raising voices to bring the national resources through collective bargaining, and building prosperous villages should be the priority of these village assemblies. The historic process of transformation has already been started and the progressive forces should ensure to take it to its logical conclusion.

For a decade, the politico-cultural, economic and military confrontations had been heavily concentrated in the villages. Now, the villages are administered by the agencies other than that of the government in Singh durbar. The same agencies are reaching out to towns and cities to establish their governance. It sounds a bit funny, but a new reality begins its journey rather through a semi visible route and reaches to the stage of super visibility. Some people feel it, see it and talk about it in its semi visible state itself, whereas the others see it during the stage of super visibility. This happens not only due to ignorance or absence of hard facts, but also because of someone's utter dislike of that emerging reality and determined rejection of it.

Let's see what has started to happen outside the village Nepal. The Maoist army has already established its well equipped security posts in many towns. It is present in every strategic highways and major boarder posts. It has started patrolling the boarder to check the illegal movement of goods. The tax system has been introduced by the Maoists in the towns and cities too. They have started their justice delivery services there. Moreover, they have been channeling the district level government funds (though partially and only in some districts) allocated for rural infrastructure and are implementing as well as overseeing the construction works. They have started awarding the district level contracts in areas of local resource exploitation such as sand and stones and service provisions such

as ferry, boats, etc. They have been collecting the road tax. In fact, even in towns, cities and highways, now they have started to gradually replacing the agencies of the government headquartered in Singh durbar.

In the villages, there is single governance mechanism with some exceptions in areas closer to the big cities or the district headquarters. Good or bad, there is the rule as per the design of the Maoists. Hence, the dual rule is confined to the major towns and cities. The Maoists agenda is to unify the governance by designing a new system through the election of the constituent assembly. Therefore, they need the election for restructuring the state and transferring the state power to the new structures and establishing themselves as a major player in governance. But, why the seven party alliance is willing to go for the election? There are a few logics and among them the most important one is 'their desire' to resolve the 'Maoist problem'. Otherwise, they are perfectly happy with the parliamentary system they have now. Why they are ready to compromise? In the past when the king had captured all power, it was understandable that they tried to find out a common ground to have some sort of understanding with the Maoists. Hence, they agreed that they also will hold the tail of the holy cow, the constituent assembly. Now, the situation has changed and they have become the masters of Singh durbar. Hence, they do not need the tail of the holy cow; rather they need the precious villages under their control. Contrary to this, the Maoists, the champions of harvesting benefits from the fights within the enemy camps, also want to establish their effective governance over the towns and cities. They will not allow the seven party alliance to rule over the villages on the terms of Singh durbar. Similarly, the seven party alliance will not vacate the cities and towns for the Maoists. Hence, the towns and cities are going to be the areas of turmoil. To reach to that level, both, the Maoists and the seven party alliance have to pass through a logical course. Therefore, both of them have been constantly talking about the election of the constituent assembly, either enthusiastically or reluctantly. Now, this may or may not be a commitment, but certainly this talk in itself is part of that logical course.

Although, there is no credible basis to sustain it over a long period of time, the morale of the seven party alliance sounds high. They do not have their own army and the army which they inherited and are presiding over has been considered not loyal to them. It is true that the powerful regional and global forces are backing them. That is their only credible strength. But, that support too is conditional, particularly from the superpower. The condition is that they have to part company with the Maoists if the Maoists reject decommissioning and disarming. Until now, only one factor has not been clear and that is why India, at least publicly, is supporting the idea of partnership between the Maoists and the seven party alliance. Is there any secret understanding among the three - India, seven party alliance and Maoists? Secret understanding or no secret understanding, if and when the Maoists see no reason to partnering with the seven party alliance, they have the courage and motivation to come out of such arrangements, instantly. Alternatively, if and when the Maoist leadership succumbs to international pressure and starts decommissioning and disarming the Maoist army, the leadership will have to witness the revolt and reorganization of their own army against them. This could be the most logical scenario. The Maoist leadership understands it more than anybody else. Then, why they are parading on the roads and streets of the historic city of Kathmandu? Are they

enjoying life as tourists? Are they collecting information to establish a handicraft exporting house? Are they negotiating with the spineless government representatives without any purpose? Are they under strong influence of any foreign force? Are they super ambitious crooks who are in hurry to enter inside the Singh durbar? If the answer of the last five questions is an emphatic "no", then there is a mission behind. And, the mission could not be better than either to establishing a progressive political system that could transform the Nepalese society by actively participating in the election of the constituent assembly or if it fails as a process or as an output, starting the urban guerilla war, which will ensure effective governance in the villages and also will help to establish hold over the towns and cities. If the reluctant seven party alliance succumbs to foreign pressure and creates obstacles in Maoists' participation in the election of the constituent assembly or if the Maoists conclude that there is no alternative available for them other than rejecting or accepting the pre-conditions including decommissioning and disarming, the very day, they may go back to war. In fact, the Maoist army could be placed in a number of temporary barracks and the United Nations could ensure their being inside till the election has not been over. Therefore, either there might be peace by taking the route of the constituent assembly or there could be war, particularly the urban guerilla war, if the ongoing negotiation fails. In such situation, the villages may remain peaceful, but there could be unprecedented turmoil in towns and cities. Therefore, there is urgency to understand the gravity of problems, to examine availability of options, to decide immediate course of actions and to craft strategies to ensure better prospects.