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Fake news, fairy tales and non-inclusion : Why don't the parties react to the massive criticism from civil society and the media?

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The closer the election date, the more severe the criticism of the behaviour and slogans of the parties and their everlasting top politicians, who seriously claim to be the guardians and protectors of democracy, stability and development. Yet they have repeatedly shown that they do not know how to consolidate and develop the still young democracy.

Election period 2017-2022

Five years ago, in the previous elections, an electoral alliance of the two left parties CPN (UML) and CPN (ML) ensured a narrow two-thirds majority by these parties in the House of Representatives and, with the exception of Madhesh Province, solid absolute majorities in the provinces as well. This was an optimal basis for a stabilisation of politics and a quick implementation of the numerous requirements of the new constitution. After all, the two parties had applied for exactly this task. But they failed miserably.

Right from the start, the top politicians of both parties indicated that they were not at all concerned with this "service to the state and the people", but solely with power and all the personal advantages that came with it. What was striking in this context was the agreement between KP Oli and PK Dahal that they would alternate in the office of prime minister after two and a half years, i.e. stability by means of a five-year government with as few personnel changes as possible was not envisaged at all from the beginning. The only thing that could be credited to the two parties was that they had an apparent ideological closeness, in contrast to the parties of today's governing alliance. But that, too, proved to be a deception.

As is well known, the already pointless change in the office of prime minister did not even happen because KP Oli did not dream of relinquishing his power. When pressure from within the party got out of hand, Oli even preferred to destroy the foundations of parliamentary democracy instead of abiding by the democratic rules of the game and relinquishing power. It took the intervention of the Supreme Court (SC) to heave him out of office. But the subsequent multi-party government under SB Deuba also repeatedly flouted the constitution and laws in the interest of retaining power. Ultimately, both governments of the previous legislature and all parties involved in them failed dismally.

Abuse of the electoral system

In the run-up to the upcoming parliamentary elections, the political parties have stepped up their manipulation campaign even further. Every day, the politicians of the ruling coalition repeat their constant slogans that it is imperative that the voters give their vote to their electoral alliance in order to ensure stability, democracy and development for the next five years as well, all things that have been deliberately neglected by Nepal's parties in the past years.

The very nature of the electoral alliance is anything but democratic. Five parties have come together here

that have hardly anything in common ideologically, although the question of ideology is difficult to answer for all Nepali parties anyway. It is not that the alliance parties have declared that they want to form a joint government after the elections; rather, what is to happen after the elections has remained completely unspoken. What is much more serious is that the leaders of the parties involved have agreed on a single common candidate in all constituencies. Voters no longer have any possibility at all to choose a candidate of their personal choice. They have to accept whoever the party leaders put in front of them. This may be a politician who belongs to a party that the voters do not actually want to vote for. The balance of power of the parties with regard to the FPTP system is also largely anticipated by the arrangement.

One consequence of the arrangement is that each of the parties involved can only nominate a very limited number of candidates. Since, of course, most of the so-called top politicians in each of the parties insist on running, this means that the vast majority of candidates are the same politicians who have amply demonstrated in the past that they are not qualified. Social inclusion, which all parties had declared as a priority with regard to the new political system, does not take place. This applies to the younger generation of politicians, but especially to women, and also Dalits, Janajatis, Madheshis and Muslims. Politicians mostly residing in the Kathmandu Valley contest as candidates in distant constituencies; local and regionally active politicians are not given a chance.

Dissatisfaction among politicians and voters

It is obvious that in view of this situation there is great dissatisfaction within the political parties. Open criticism is still the harmless way. Many of the politicians who have been bypassed are running as so-called "rebel candidates" in competition with the official candidates of the electoral alliance. This in turn is mercilessly punished by the party leaders. The Political Party Law, which is deeply flawed in terms of democracy, gives party leaders every right to act authoritatively if their directives and decisions are not followed eloquently.

But also the voters, civil society in general, and the media criticise the abuse of the electoral system in the strongest terms. There was already a lot of discontent in the local elections in May. There were many independent candidates, a number of whom were successful. This trend seems to be continuing in the upcoming national and provincial elections.

In any case, what is happening now in Nepal no longer has much to do with democracy. There are two blocs facing each other, the aforementioned electoral alliance of the ruling parties and the bloc of their opponents headed by the CPN (UML). The leader of the latter party, KP Oli, tried to abolish parliamentary democracy less than two years ago. At any rate, this cannot be called anything else after he did not acknowledge his loss of confidence in the House of Representatives and then dissolved parliament a second time with the aim of maintaining his personal power, although the SC had clearly denied him this right beforehand. According to the principles of democracy and the rule of law, it is incomprehensible that such a politician should be allowed to run for parliament again and even seek the office of prime minister. The current alliance of his party, which still calls itself "communist" and had already made the abolition of the monarchy its goal in the 1990s, with the RPP, which advocates a return to monarchy and Hindu state, also seems absurd.

It may not be voiced, but the machinations of the established top politicians have only the goal of ensuring their personal re-election. The manipulative approach of the major parties also has a direct impact on smaller parties. First and foremost are the two Madheshi parties represented in the previous parliament, JSPN and LSP, whose leaders obviously also put their personal interests first. In the process, they do not realise, or they do not want to realise, that the top politicians of the big parties are playing with them when the two Tarai parties change camps and in the process harm themselves the most. Particularly affected by all this are the voters in the Tarai who are now totally confused about how to vote.

But even some smaller parties that were not represented in parliament before and initially declared that they would stand for election this time, have recently deviated from this plan. These include Netra Bikram Chand's CPN and CK Raut's Janamat Party. In the case of both parties, there was hope that they would move away from their leaning towards militancy. It is directly due to the leaders of the major parties that this positive development has now come to an end.

Lack of reactions from the top politicians

In view of the never-ending massive public criticism of the established politicians and their parties, one should expect immediate reactions from the latter. But nothing happens. Either they can neither read nor listen or they simply do not want to. They seem so self-importantly aloof that they only repeat their same slogans and phrases all the time. At the same time, they present utopian election manifestos for which the term "fairy tale" would be flattering. It is good that the voters know that none of the parties can and will even come close to implementing what they now declare as their goal. Election manifestos tend to gather dust in some corner after the elections.

The critics' arguments are so well-founded that the top politicians lose all counter-arguments. So they prefer to remain silent and pretend that the criticism does not exist. But it is also too late to change the wrongdoing just a few days before the elections. One reason for the widespread optimism of the party leaders is probably their hope that they have already manipulated the electoral system in such a way that they will also "successfully" survive this election. The hope remains that the voters will nevertheless teach them a lesson. This could happen through a significant drop in voter turnout, which would definitely be the wrong way to go, as voting is the only way to clearly express the will of the voters. Unfortunately, the established politicians have once again disregarded the SC's directive and refused the option of rejecting the listed candidates on the ballot paper. What remains to express criticism is to vote for one of the many independent candidates. I think the election remains exciting.