

Nascent Federalism in Nepal: An Observational Review in its Evolution

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Abstract : Nepal practiced a centralized unitary governing system for a long and has gone through the federal system after the promulgation of the new constitution on 20 September 2015. There is a big paradigm shift in terms of governance after it. Now, there are three levels of governments, one federal government in the center, seven provincial governments and 753 local governments. Federalism refers to a political governing system with multiple tiers of government working together with coordination. It is preferred for self and shared rule. Though it has opened the door for rights of the people, political stability, state restructuring, and sustainable peace and development, there are many prospects and challenges for its proper implementation. This research analyzes the discourses of federalism implementation in Nepal with special reference to one of seven provinces, Gandaki. Federalism is a new phenomenon in Nepali politics and informed debates on it are required for its right evolution. This research will add value in this regard. Moreover, tracking its evolution and the exploration of the attitudes and behaviors of key actors and stakeholders in a new experiment of a new governing system is also important. The administrative and political system of Gandaki province in terms of service delivery and development will critically be examined. Besides demonstrating the performances of the provincial government and assembly, it will analyze the inter-governmental relation of Gandaki with the other two tiers of government. For this research, people from provincial and local governments (elected representatives and government employees), provincial assembly members, academicians, civil society leaders and journalists are being interviewed. The interview findings will be analyzed by supplementing with published documents. Just going into the federal structure is not the solution. As in the case of other provincial governments, Gandaki had also to start from scratch. It gradually took a shape of government and has been functioning sluggishly. The provincial government has many challenges ahead, which has badly hindered its plans and actions. Additionally, fundamental laws, infrastructures and human resources are found to be insufficient at the sub-national level. Lack of clarity in the jurisdiction is another main challenge. The Nepali Constitution assumes cooperation, coexistence and coordination as the fundamental principles of federalism which, unfortunately, appear to be lacking among the three tiers of government despite their efforts. Though the devolution of power to sub-national governments is essential for the successful implementation of federalism, it has apparently been delayed due to the centralized mentality of bureaucracy as well as a political leader. This research will highlight the reasons for the delay in the implementation of federalism. There might be multiple underlying reasons for the slow pace of implementation of federalism and identifying them is very tough. Moreover, the federal spirit is found to be absent in the main players of today's political system, which is a big irony. So, there are some doubts about whether the federal system in Nepal is just a keepsake or a substantive.

Keywords : federalism, inter-governmental relations, Nepal, provincial government

Conference Title : ICPS 2021 : International Conference on Political Science

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : September 16-17, 2021