



Dispatches from The Hall of Ideas!

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STATE, SOCIETY AND PROSPERITY*

Murahari Parajuli**

In my exploration of the complex relationship between social values, political authority, and economic progress, I find that the adage “every society gets the leader it deserves” serves as a good starting point for analysis. This observation suggests that a leadership’s character is not an isolated phenomenon but is a direct reflection of the society from which it emerges.

I perceive our current society as being in a state of profound transition, having moved away from a traditional feudal structure but not yet reaching a definitive new destination. Although some observers might categorise our current state as capitalist, I agree with the assessment that we have not yet fully embraced a liberal market economy. Instead, we reside in a mixed, transitional phase where our institutions and constitutional frameworks are guided by an aspiration toward a “socialism-oriented” economy.

This ideological leaning is not confined to the halls of government; rather, I see it as a pervasive influence across civil society and the media. There is a dominant narrative that favours a welfare state

and a distributive economy. By framing society through the lens of constant exploitation, whether via mass media, marketing, or popular culture, these ideologies promote a politics of perpetual protest. I worry that this tendency toward fragmentation and “the politics of opposition” prevents the formation of a cohesive, progressive society and instead keeps us trapped in a cycle of blaming one regime only to be disillusioned by the next.

The character of the state, in my view, is a mirror of these societal values. We often fail to distinguish between the state, the government, and the cabinet, viewing them as a monolithic entity. This lack of distinction leads to a misunderstanding of what it means to limit the role of government. For instance, while there have been efforts to reduce the number of ministries, I observe that the actual functions and roles of the government have not diminished. We remain, in essence, a “command economy” where the state operates through orders and interventions rather than through the spontaneous order of a market economy.

I find it striking that despite our democratic aspirations, our societal tendency leans toward the support of “benevolent dictators”. We often prioritise physical development, such as roads and bridges, over democratic values like consensus and non-violence. This “winners take all” mentality

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** Mr. Murahari Parajuli is an Economic Analyst.

suggests that we view elections as a means to achieve absolute power for five years rather than as a tool for ongoing democratic practice. Consequently, when a party is in opposition, it champions checks and balances; however, once in power, it seeks total control over the judiciary, the parliament, and all state institutions. This desire for a “hero” or a “nayak” to solve all problems leads us to place leaders on a pedestal, only to see them inevitably fall when they cannot fulfil our impossible expectations.

Furthermore, I note that the state frequently employs a “rule of fear” or intimidation to maintain

toward profit and the market economy in our society. Profit is often misunderstood as a zero-sum game where one person’s gain is another’s loss, or as a form of exploitation. I argue, however, that the pursuit of profit, when conducted without harming others, is a legitimate and necessary driver of economic growth. The “No Harm Principle” should be our guide: individuals should be free to pursue their interests as long as they do not infringe upon the rights or well-being of their neighbours.

Our economic challenges are further complicated by our reliance on a “remittance economy”. While this increases per capita income on paper, it



its grip. Whether it is through symbolic threats to media houses or the house arrest of political opponents, the method is one of “fear exploitation”. This approach is often justified by the “ends justify the means” logic, where the pursuit of a perceived “better end” is used to excuse the violation of individual rights and human dignity.

When I define prosperity, I move away from abstract or purely physical metrics. To me, prosperity rests on two fundamental pillars: maximizing individual freedom and continuously improving the quality of life. While infrastructure like roads is important, I believe it should be viewed as a tool for human comfort and accessibility rather than as development itself. True progress should be measured through indices like the Human Development Index, focusing on education, health, and per capita income.

Currently, I observe a deep-seated scepticism

creates a cycle of consumption fueled by imports because our productive youth are working abroad. We have become a society that consumes but does not produce, and our domestic economy fails to absorb and add value to the funds sent home. This results in a slow rate of improvement compared to our neighbours, leading to widespread public frustration.

The management of “Sukumbasi” or squatter settlements provides a poignant example of the state’s mechanical rather than humane approach to complex problems. I believe that the use of force, such as dozers and police intervention, fails to address the underlying social and economic aspirations of these individuals. Squatters are often treated as a “vote bank” by political parties, who provide temporary protections and promises but no long-term solutions.

In my experience, providing a house or a piece of

land in isolation is insufficient. Without connecting these individuals to economic opportunities and income generation, such interventions often fail, as seen in the displacement of Chepang communities who were given homes but no means of livelihood. Furthermore, the political promotion of “unmanaged dwellers” for electoral gain has created a system where the problem is perpetually inflamed rather than resolved.

Despite the deterioration of bureaucratic discipline and the rise of populism, I remain cautiously optimistic about the future. Every crisis, whether it is a violent movement or a public protest, offers a lesson that can eventually lead to societal evolution. I believe that by engaging in continuous dialogue across all platforms, from schools to think tanks, we can begin to clarify the roles and limits of our democratic institutions.

Prosperity will not come from a single “hero” or a government mandate. It will emerge when we as a



society begin to value individual freedom, respect human dignity, and understand that the state’s role is to facilitate an environment where every citizen can improve their quality of life. We must move beyond the mirage of quick results and physical structures to build a society rooted in democratic values and economic productivity. Only then will our “satta” reflect a society that is truly ready for the path to prosperity.

