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## **How does democracy allow people to participate in the affairs of the State? Why did several political leaders frequently mock and sometimes defy the Supreme Court decisions?: Note\***

Prakash C. Lohani Ph.D.\*\*

In 1990, a historic political movement took place in our country. This movement firmly established that sovereignty resides with the people and it outlined a democratic structure to serve the people's interests. It was not a social revolution and its economic content was at best confused between the slogans of socialism and the new mantra of economic liberalism, competition, and globalization. What the country lacked was a vision that would link multi-party democracy and development together into a unified whole.

Experience has taught us that democracy does not automatically lead to peaceful development unless the political leadership is able to consciously establish values that can act as a link between the two. Our experience, and indeed the experiences of many other new democracies, indicates that electoral democracy is no guarantee of stability and transformational development. Similarly, the notion that free markets and electoral democracy somehow complement each other is not necessarily true. The wealthy, with the free market as a shield, can use the democratic system for their benefit much more easily than the poor. A small minority can progress at the cost of the majority. If this process gains momentum, as has happened in our country, corruption emerges as an important, albeit ironic, by-product of an ideology that is based on the will of the people. In this scenario, the state begins to assume a predatory character and the political double-cross in the name of democracy generates social tension and conflict, and the emergence of a competing paradigm of social transformation based on violence and terror, promising a utopia that sometimes seems to border on religious mysticism. At present, our country is an example of this phenomenon.

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\* Question posed by Mahesh Chhetri, Kathmandu, Nepal.

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As a system of governance, democracy has the potential to transform subjects into citizens. Freedoms of the press and association allow people to examine their relationship with the state and demand a better deal for the future. The awareness of one's rights, and of the role of the state in creating the infrastructure necessary for the meaningful exercise of these rights, generates new expectations and demands. These expectations and demands can take on a populist character. When the democratic structure and its leadership fail to respond to these demands, and go so far as to use the legitimacy of the political system for the interests of the elite rather than the interests of the masses, there is a serious mismatch between the intended and the actual function of the system, between the structure and the function of the system. The resulting social tensions can make it increasingly difficult for the democratic state to sustain democracy. A lead-lag relationship between the increasing awareness among the people and the inability of the system to respond effectively can lead to a "failed" democracy.

Incongruence between the structure and function of a democracy is not uncommon. However, there is always the hope that the feedback mechanism that is supposed to be the major strength of a democratic system will generate policy changes and control the structure/function gap. In new democracies, however, the efficiency of this feedback system leaves much to be desired. Nepal is an example of a country with such an inefficient feedback mechanism.