

Personal Experiences of CA Members

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The Constituent Assembly of Nepal is very heterogeneous, representing different ethnicities, religious, communities, class, regions, and gender. It can be called a 'rainbow assembly'. The CA members bring different faces, languages, and dresses to the Assembly meetings. These members from different backgrounds were elected with the aim of drafting a constitution through the Constituent Assembly election on April 10, 2008 through a mixture of direct election and proportional representation, all with the aim of drafting the constitution for new democratic republic of Nepal. There were 601 members in the first sitting of the Constituent Assembly on May 28, 2008. This number kept changing afterwards, and this number is now 594. The initial joy, ambition, energy, and revolutionary fervour with which they had first entered the Constituent Assembly building in Naya Baneshwor soon died down. Their zeal for constitution-drafting had subsided so much that during the three-year duration and 109th meeting of the Assembly, they had become subjects of ridicule and derision.

The CA members who had aim of drafting the constitution also had personal, familial, social, and national obligations, and they had to meet these challenges as well as the duties assigned by their parties. Despite these challenges, they prepared a preliminary draft after two years of discussion, consultation, and debated on different issues of the constitution. However, this could not be presented as a bill in the Assembly due to positions and disagreements among the parties.

Along with management of Maoist combatants, finalisation of federal structure, form of government, and judicial system, and issues of inclusion needed to be incorporated in the constitution. However, these could not settle despite many discussions. The indifference of 'senior leaders of large parties' was mainly to blame for this. The CA Regulations and calendar of events could not be implemented properly. Now they are being blamed for not drafting the constitution amidst accusations of just drawing the allowances.

The CA members remained divided. The division among CA members tasked with drafting the constitution affected all parts of society. They were also divided on the issue of ethnic federalism. Some fervently advocated ethnic federalism, while others fiercely opposed it. CPN (ML) CA member from Chitawan Pravati Mahato Kumal had said in April of 2010, 'I am daughter of a Kumal, married a Mahato. I am Janajati but not in favour of ethnic states'. Similar sentiments are also expressed by Congress CA member from Kathmandu Dhyangovinda Ranjit. Though he is a local Newar of Kathmandu, he is not in favour of Newa: state.

UML CA member from Mustang Tasi Shangmo Gurungseni accused the CDO of tampering her caste while issuing citizenship certificate. Her actual caste is Bahragaun. She wants her identity to be as someone from Bahragaun. She says, 'There had not be a parliamentarian from our caste; I am the

first one. This is a pride for our caste.' UCPN (M) CA member from Dolakha Chun Bahadur Thami, who used to be a carpenter, is also not happy about being included within Tamsaling. He wants a separate autonomous state for Thamis. Another CA member from Dolakha Shanti Maya Jirel had claimed Wollo Kirant. Thus, even among the Janajatis, some are after ethnic states while others are worried that their identity will be lost under ethnic states. On the other hand, members from Bahuns, Dalits, Muslims, Giri, Puri, Bharati and others are opposing ethnic states.

The government provides monthly NRS 45,000 to the CA members; however, they complain that the party collects heavy levies from them. They get only NRS 40,000 after taxes. CPN (ML) CA member Kumal expresses thus: 'The party takes NRS 25,000 as monthly levy. How can we survive on the remaining NRS 15,000 in an expensive place like Kathmandu? The room rent alone is NRS 8000. How can we send our children to school? How can we run our household? We have to travel on the public tempo and minibuses with CA member logos on us. Some say that we can ride taxis since we are paid NRS 50,000. But we know our troubles. Before becoming a CA member, I used to teach at nursery level. I used to own NRS 18,000 monthly. I used to get monthly NRS 20,000 from goat-rearing. Our household was running smoothly; my husband used to study, but now he has had to quit his studies'.

The leaders were confused; the CA members were focused on their own issues of ethnicity, religion, region, and gender, and wanted to include their issues in the meetings and preliminary reports of the thematic committees and presented themselves accordingly. But they could not draft the constitution. Amidst distrust, pessimism, frustration, prejudice, the chagrined CA members extended the CA deadline for another three months with claps in the morning of May 28, 2010. The sleepy and sleeping CA members lying on the lawn, sofas, and snoring in the corridors on that night presented a sorry sight. The sleep-deprived members went to their homes with the sunrise as if after a hard-won fight. Though the deadline was extended easily enough, there was no sense of relief on their faces; instead there was much confusion and uncertainty for the next three months if the leaders continue their previous working styles.