

# Interview with Mohan Baidya ‘Kiran’

*[The Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) split in June 2012 with Kiran walking away with several other senior leaders to form a separate party, the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist).*

*Kiran was critical of many decisions made by Prachanda and Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, the leaders representing the Maoists during the peace process. He supported the nomination of Dr. Bhattarai as Prime Ministerial candidate in August 2011.*

*During the conversation, Kiran emphasized that the biggest mistake of the leaders of UCPN(Maoist), Prachanda and Dr. Bhattarai, was to agree to disband the PLA without consolidating their gains and securing all their demands in a Constitution. Baidya elaborates his assessment of the state character in Nepal, asserts that the revolution in Nepal is incomplete and lays out a plan for the future.*

*Rumela Sen is a Post-Doctoral Research Scholar in the Department of Political Science in Columbia University, New York. This interview was taken in July 2018 and published in the magazine, “South Asia” on August 7. – Editor]*

## **[RS] What is your assessment of the current conditions in Nepal?**

[Kiran] Nepal is semi-feudal and semi-colonial country. We need to complete a new democratic revolution in Nepal to achieve socialism and communism. It has been our goal since we first started people’s liberation war. We have not yet achieved what we set out to do. The current situation in Nepal continues to be semi feudal, semi colonial, or you can even call it ‘neo-colonial’. As a result, going forward, we believe that the only way to liberate the people of Nepal is to relaunch an armed struggle.

## **[RS] Some of your former comrades have asserted that the revolution is complete in Nepal. You seem to disagree. Why?**

[Kiran] I strongly disagree. I know some people who think that the bourgeois democratic revolution has been completed in Nepal. I don’t agree. We believe, as I said before, that the conditions in Nepal continue to be semi-feudal and semi-colonial. Let’s first define what we mean by ‘revolution’. What is a revolution? We think that revolution happens when the exploited and oppressed class overthrows the exploiter and oppressor class in power. That has not happened in Nepal. The comprador bourgeoisie and the feudal classes that ruled Nepal before are still in power. That’s why the revolution is far from complete in Nepal.

## **[RS] Could you elaborate on some of the objective indicators that you use to assess the current socio-economic and political conditions of Nepal as semi-feudal, semi-colonial and sometimes neo-colonial? Can you provide some concrete examples? I am interested in understanding this more because many on the Left and other scholars think that the conditions in Nepal have changed substantially with the advent of democracy, federalism and capitalist development.**

[Kiran] Look, unlike India, Nepal was never directly a part of the British Empire. Therefore, technically it was not a ‘colony’ of any foreign power. But that does not mean that Nepal was immune to prolonged exploitation by foreign imperialist powers. Over time the nature of oppression, by external powers or by Nepali feudal classes, has no doubt evolved. However, through these superficial changes, the subjugation of Nepali people, either by colonial powers or by the feudal classes, continues uninterrupted even today.

For example, you may have heard of the Sugauli Treaty that Nepal signed with the British East-India Company way back in 1816. Nepal had to concede a part of its territory to the British and even allow the British army to recruit the Gurkhas for military service. What did Nepal get out of it? Nothing of substance. That was open colonial exploitation.

Later on, in the 1950s, for example, Nepal signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India. In this and several other treaties signed between Nepal and India in subsequent years, you can see how the Indian state established its hegemonic control over the natural resources of Nepal. We are talking about the ruling classes in India. I have nothing against the ordinary people of India, who are also exploited by their political masters. But that is a different matter altogether.

The most significant natural resource of Nepal is its water resources. Nepal signed the Koshi treaty, Gandak treaty, Mahakali treaty which allowed the Indian state to control our natural resources. Later on there was a treaty on Upper-Karnali and Arun III. So the Indian state literally controls our hydropower. But the ordinary people in Nepal hardly see it. It's carefully hidden. This is neocolonial exploitation of Nepal.

Now let's look at some more examples. Take the field of trade and transportation. Nepal is a landlocked country. For trade, vital routes of transportation are via India. Recently a treaty was signed on this issue with China, but it's not yet been implemented. Thus India unilaterally controls Nepal's trade and does not provide any concession on transportation services in return. Further, the trade deficit between Nepal and India is beyond measure. Currently, the trade deficit with India is around 800 billion Nepali rupees (about USD 70 billion). To reduce the trade deficit, we must have export-oriented industries. However, domestic production of export goods is meager, whereas import is very high. The Nepali government does nothing to correct this trade imbalance with India. They do not provide any subsidy or initiation fund to farmers or factories to increase domestic production. You would be surprised to know that in the hilly regions of Nepal fertile cultivable land remains unused. The state does not provide our youth with any help or encouragements to cultivate these lands. The youth are then forced to immigrate to foreign countries, like Malaysia or to the Gulf or even India, for livelihood. There is no opportunity for harnessing the rich human capital and the natural resources of Nepal. This is what I call is the neocolonial exploitation of the Nepal.

The ruling classes of Nepal are comprador capitalists, who do not remedy this situation. They only try to appease New Delhi (Indian State) to remain in power. The Indian state micro-manages everything in Nepal, including bureaucratic appointments. It even encroaches on Nepali territory. There are more than 60 places along Nepal-India border, where the pillars demarcating borders have disappeared. For example, India has encroached on Nepali land in the Lipulekh tripoint pass of Nepal, in Darchula district of far-western Nepal. In 2015, China and India bilaterally agreed to set up a trading post in Lipulekh, completely ignoring Nepal's interest. Our party did protest, but our ruling elites did not even object to this, as they genuflect to the Indian state. That is how neo-colonialism works.

**[RS] You mentioned that protracted armed struggle – another people's war – is the only way to accomplish your goal of new democratic revolution in Nepal. I have spoken to others in Nepal who disagree. Could you please elaborate why you think armed struggle is the only way?**

[Kiran] I mentioned earlier that a revolution requires that the oppressed and exploited overthrow their oppressors and seize power. My former comrades like Prachandaji, Baburamji (Bhattarai), Ghanshyam Bhusal and Ram Karki all claim that capitalist revolution has been accomplished. I disagree. First, a successful capitalist revolution must lead to the development of industrial capitalism with a national character, but that's nowhere to be found in Nepal. Instead what we have here are comprador and bureaucratic capitalism.

Secondly, the New Democratic Revolution will successfully end both internal feudal oppression and external imperialist foreign intervention. Did that happen? Of course not. In Nepal, the bourgeoisie is too weak and comprador in nature, so the peasants will lead the new democratic revolution targeted against the feudal lords, the comprador bourgeoisie and the meddling foreign powers, and ends all forms of oppression.

The fall of monarchy did not automatically end feudalism in Nepal. In China too, monarchy was overthrown in 1911. However, the Chinese communists, once they were organized themselves as a party later in 1921, had set liberation from feudalism and imperialism as their goal. This is an important point to note. Yes, the abolition of monarchy in Nepal has dealt a severe blow to feudalism, but conflating that with the end of feudalism is very pretentious.

A real New Democratic Revolution will uproot feudalism once and for all, annul all unequal treaties, challenge all indirect exploitation by multinational corporations and global capital, and organizations like World Bank, IMF, and WTO. We need to augment the development of the national bourgeoisie, build national industries and do so much more to end the oppression of the people, both by India and by the global multinational corporations.

**[RS] But the abolition of monarchy was an episodic moment in the history of Nepal. Don't you agree? One might argue that it was the tragic Palace Massacre of 2001, when the Crown Prince Dipendra mysteriously murdered King Birendra and his entire family that led to the collapse of the monarchy. Further, it is public knowledge that prior to that event in 2001, the Maoists were already trying to explore opportunities for compromises and alliance, either with the seven**

**parliamentary parties or with the monarchy. Given all that, do you think that the Maoists can take credit for the abolition of monarchy?**

[Kiran] There were two immediate reasons for the fall of monarchy in Nepal. First, in the 2001 palace massacre the entire family of King Birendra Shah was slaughtered. When his brother, Gyanendra Shah took to the throne, he was no Birendra and the Nepali people lost faith in the monarchy. Given that the Nepali people considered the King a direct descendant of the (Hindu god) Lord Vishnu, such loss of faith is remarkable. Second, Gyanendra Shah, as soon as he ascended the throne, seized the power of parliament and became authoritarian monarch, which sparked anger amongst the people. As a result the major parliamentary parties including Nepali Congress, CPN(UML) and others joined hands with the Maoists against the king, which paved the way for the abolition of monarchy.

However, Nepali Congress and UML deny the role of the Maoist peoples' war in creating conditions for the downfall of the monarchy. They single out the 19 days *Janaandolan* (people's movement) in 2006, which is a completely wrong interpretation. We think that both the palace massacre and Maoist peoples' war actively contributed to the eventual abolition of the monarchy. Our armed struggle against the state was the primary reason that Gyanendra decided to act the way he did.

On your question about Prachandaji reaching out to the monarchy or Baburamji reaching out to the seven parliamentary parties prior the palace massacre, let me tell me yes, there were two lines within the Maoists at that time. Such internal contradictions and tactical compromises happen – there is nothing wrong with that. Theoretically speaking, in order to accomplish the goal of revolution, you can enter into a tactical alliance with any group to strengthen your side, as long as you remain true to your goal.

You can always wonder 'what if' the massacre did not happen, 'what if' the other parties did not join hands with the Maoists — these are all hypothetical questions with no definite answers. What actually happened was that the King banished all seven parliamentary parties and took power in his own hands because he felt that these parties were ineffective in tackling the Maoist armed struggle. The king had twin objectives to decimate the Maoists and simultaneously abolish the democratic parties. This was an ill-advised and imprudent move by the king. We immediately understood the situation, took advantage of it and allied with the other parliamentary parties to rally against the King. India also stepped in and played a significant role here, by brokering some of these challenging conversations. We were able to enter into the 12-point agreement with the seven parliamentary parties, which pledged to work towards democracy, peace, prosperity, social advancement and the abolition of monarchy. During this time, I was not in Nepal. I had been languishing in prison in India when all of these happened.

While the 12 point agreement was a high point of Nepali politics in, a much more significant event rocked our party in 2005. A fissure in our party was cracked open during the Central Committee meeting, also known as Chunwang meeting. This meeting marked the beginning of the end of Prachanda. The Prachanda-led faction abandoned the goal of New Democratic Revolution and adopted democratic republicanism as their new goal. They tried to craftily frame this as a transitional slogan, a mere tactical adjustment. We did not agree.

In retrospect, once the Prachanda-Baburam group put forward the ideas of democratic republicanism of French revolution at the Chunwang meeting, we were already on the slippery slope. This was an openly capitalist slogan and marked the beginning of end of Maoist politics under their leadership. It was primarily Baburamji's idea, which was endorsed by Prachanda. While I hold both of them responsible for this compromise & betrayal, I think it was Baburamji who brought this idea within the party. However, I know he feels otherwise and claims that was the only way forward.

**[RS] When I met Dr. Baburam Bhattarai yesterday, he highlighted that since India, China, and the United States actively interfered in Nepal at that time, it was only 'pragmatic' to make some tactical compromises. He said that it was acceptable to forgo Maoist labels and slogans like the People's War and New Democratic Revolution to necessary to preserve the gains of ten years of peoples' war and to achieve the important goals of democracy, federalism, and inclusion. Such slogans, he claimed, were out of sync with the post 9/11 world, where Maoists could be labeled as 'terrorists' much to the detriment of the people of Nepal. If some tactical compromises help you achieve larger goals of revolution, what's wrong with such adjustments? Why do you think your ideological puritanism is better than his pragmatism?**

[Kiran] I understand your question. This justification from Baburamji is not convincing. His ideas were not just a matter of tactical compromise. Back then, it was probably nothing but reformism. But, given everything he has done in the subsequent years, he has proven us right. We were rightly wary

of his rightist tendencies. Currently, his 'pragmatism' extends to the denial of even core communist principles. He has formed a party named "Naya Shakti" (New Power). What is the theoretical basis of this party? It is neither Marxism nor Liberalism. He seems to think that none of them are viable in and of themselves, which makes only a mashup of both the preferred idea. That is preposterous! Isn't that ridiculous? As far as tactical adjustments or going zigzag to preserve the gains of revolution are concerned, it's all right. Such tactical compromises can be made within the limits of theory and in advancing your strategic goals. But when you surrender the fundamental theoretical premise of Marxism Leninism and Maoism, your deviation from the path of revolution is complete.

**[RS] What are your plans to accomplish the revolution? Aside from China, which too eventually deviated from the Maoist path, there has been no model of a successful Maoist revolution. Do you have a road map to accomplish the New Democratic Revolution in Nepal?**

[Kiran] We recognize that the Maoist movement in Nepal had suffered a serious setback, primarily owing to the deviation and betrayal of our top leadership. But we do not believe that the Maoists have lost. We have neither lost nor won. The people in Nepal are yet to experience any positive change in their day-to-day lives, and continue to experience the same oppressive conditions. The plight of our people will provide fertile ground for us to engineer another revolution. Know that there are some serious challenges. First and foremost, we need to win over the trust of the people all over again. So many of our senior comrades, once the leading faces of courage and struggle, have accepted the bourgeois parliamentary system and non-revolutionary way of life. Some of them have assumed positions that are outright counter-revolutionary. Further, many of these former Maoists abandoned communist principles altogether. They have assumed the class character of our antagonists—the Nepali Congress and the Nepali army. Yet they continue to claim that they are communists. This causes confusion among ordinary people, who have started to express doubts about our intentions and about the communist ideology in general. Our immediate challenge is to ideologically expose these counter-revolutionary elements and regain people's trust. However, after the splits, our organization is currently too weak. We have to rebuild our party to expose these fake Maoists. Having said that, I do believe that most of them will come undone by themselves, as they will fail to fulfill their promises to the people. It's just a matter of time. And as they fail, they will open up space for those of us, who have not strayed from the path of revolutionary politics. It might take several years, so we must persist.

**[RS] On this question of persisting after a setback, I'd like to ask you about the trajectory of revolutionary left politics in India. The Naxal movement of the 1960s-70s, as you know, was decimated. Through many splits, however, they regrouped and resurfaced three decades later to challenge the state again. The former Prime Minister of India called them 'the biggest internal security threat the country has ever faced'. In my own research, I have found that militant mass mobilization programs, particularly by the People's War Group, with its emphasis on creating organic leadership and real social transformation at village level, had contributed to their success. Would you agree? Have you taken any lessons from the experience and trajectory of the Indian Maoists?**

[Kiran] We have been advancing our mass movements in Nepal as well. While we believe in the strategic importance of mass movements, we do maintain that we would need to prepare for armed struggle as well, in order to succeed. We cannot win with mass movements alone.

**[RS] During my meetings with Maoist cadres, I have heard about the popularity of party campaigns against country liquor, domestic violence in villages. Do you have any such mass mobilization programs undertaken by your party?**

I do not think these were examples of mass movement in the Maoist sense. If these things happened anywhere, it was wrong. These are very much against the way of life of people, particularly the indigenous people (janajati) who use liquor unreservedly. It is part of their homegrown culture. Our current mass movement programs focus on issues that are directly related to the class struggle. We mobilize people against the local feudal landlords (zamindars) and money lenders on the issues of land rights, fair prices for agricultural produce, fair share of produce for landless farmers, fair wages for agricultural workers and against usurious loans.

**[RS] Communists have often been criticized for their proclivity to splits and factionalism. Even in the face of criticisms from outside, communists are not able to work together. I understand your critique of the politics of Prachanda and Baburam. But there are others, like Netra Bikram Chand (Biplab) and Gopal Kirati who also favor continuing the armed struggle. But they are separate organizations. Why are the factions critical of the establishment Maoists in Nepal unable to unite?**

[Kiran] Thank you for this very timely and pertinent question. I can tell you that this is a matter of deep introspection within our party as well, and we are making serious efforts to resolve this. All I can share at this moment is that unity cannot happen merely on the basis of agreement on the political line alone. There are additional practical barriers to unity such egocentricity of the leadership, political careerism, and unnecessary adventurism all of which have to be handled effectively before we can achieve unity. We are sincerely trying to unite the factions that you mention, and will continued talks with them.

**[RS] On the question of winning back popular trust, I have met many former combatants and ordinary people in Nepal, who expressed their deep sense of disillusionment. They feel that their leaders betrayed them and the cause of revolution. How will you convince the people of Nepal to rise in rebellion again? After the peace process, former combatants have reintegrated back into the society or into the Nepali army. Do you think this generation will take up arms against the state all over again?**

[Kiran] You're right. I know the people of Nepal feel disappointed in us. They can see that the Prachanda faction does not care about their issues anymore. They do not have much faith in us either, primarily due to our lack of unity. When people witness factional strife among us they will not trust us. We need to be united to inspire popular confidence in us as the alternative platform of resistance. We will continue to work hard towards that.

On the question of reintegration of former combatants, this was a huge mistake. Within our party Prachandaji and Baburamji agreed internally that we would structurally change the Nepali Army. But what really happened was that some Maoist soldiers were reintegrated into the Nepali Army. However, you must know – only a very small fraction of the PLA soldiers joined the Nepali army. Most of the former PLA just disarmed and left the cantonment. But they are there. They are not in government's control, even today. They are scattered here and there. Some are in the party, some are working in regular jobs, some have left the country. The commander of the PLA is now the Vice President. But many are with us too. Many others are just watching us and will eventually come back to us. And we will recruit new soldiers. During the ten years of peoples' war, we were very successful in recruiting people into the PLA and in winning over popular support. We value that experience. We will do that again.

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