

“We need a new system where individual rights are respected and the state plays a responsible role in providing security to those who need it” – Baburam Bhattarai

LSE blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2016/12/01/we-need-a-new-system-where-individual-rights-are-respected-and-the-state-plays-a-responsible-role-in-providing-security-to-those-who-need-it-baburam-bhattarai/

2016-12-1

On 14 November **Dr Baburam Bhattarai**, former Prime Minister of Nepal and Chair of the new Naya Shakti (New Force) party, spoke at LSE on ‘New Politics and Policies for Nepal’. While he was in London, **Pragya Kc** and **Manoj Paudel** interviewed Dr Bhattarai about the 2015 earthquake, development, Nepal’s relationship with India, and youth engagement in politics.



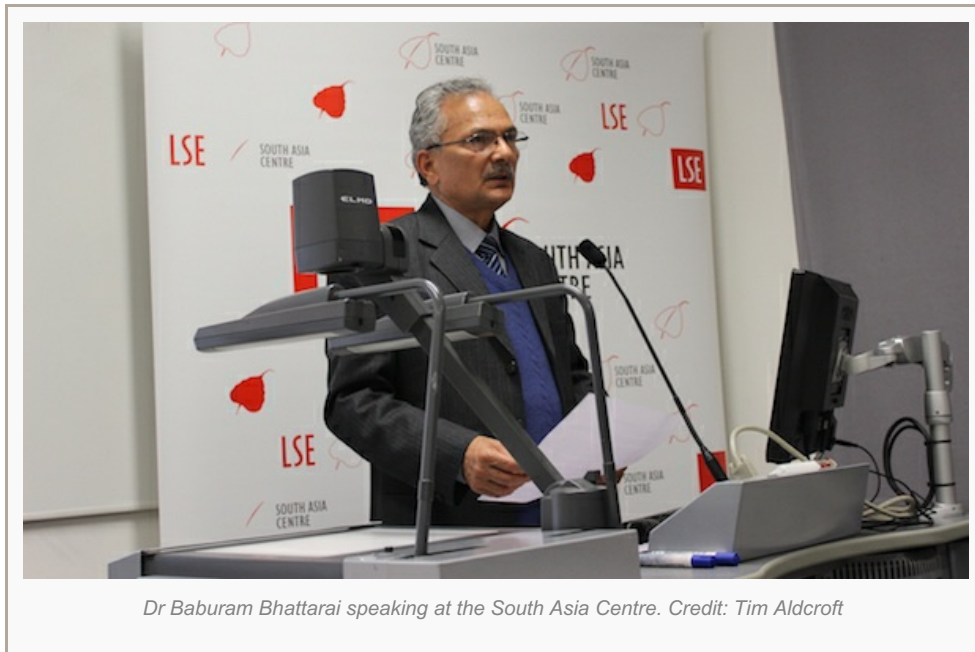
MP: What does it mean to be a Nepali today?

BB: This is a very pertinent question. Nepal is both a state and a nation: the state basically refers to a form of governance, organisation of society, whereas the nation means the people. In the case of Nepal, there has been a mismatch between the notion of the state and the nation which has led to confusion when it comes to identity. As a state, Nepal encompasses and belongs to all the different linguistic, ethnic, regional groups. But in reality, the old ruling classes that have monopolised the state have defined the nation’s identity as their own monolithic identity of a particular community.

In this way, vast sections of the people have been excluded, which has led to a dispute in what exactly is a Nepali and who is a Nepali. So this needs to be redefined. The new constitution defines Nepal as a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural country with regional diversity. This acknowledges Nepal’s rainbow identity; it is a nation which consists of different nationalities, ethnicities, linguistic groups and all sections of society. With the federalisation of state, we are trying to cater to the various identities and tried to build a composite Nepali nationality. Naya Shakti believes in creating a new Nepali identity which subscribes to this rainbow character of the nation.

PK: The earthquake in Nepal can perhaps be classified as a class quake where poorer people and those living in rural areas were worst affected. What will the government’s focus be on building resistance and helping reduce vulnerability in such crises?

The earthquake affected all sections of people living in the central region of Nepal from Marshyangdi in the West to Dudh Koshi in the East. But if you look more closely, it did cause more damage in the rural areas and areas inhabited by poor people—especially by the Janajatis and the Dalits. In that sense, it’s seen by some as having class and ethnic impact. The main issue was that these people had been forced to live in vulnerable areas that were not practically habitable so these people suffered more. So while making the reconstruction plan, the government should prioritise to the vulnerable sections of the community, especially the Janajatis, Tamangs and Dalits.



Dr Baburam Bhattarai speaking at the South Asia Centre. Credit: Tim Aldcroft

The government has also been very slow and lacking in its responsibility. This process needs to be expedited. It's estimated that the reconstruction will cost around \$10 billion and more than \$4 billion was pledged within 2 months of the earthquake. But unfortunately, after one and a half years, the government has not been able to utilise even that fund. Our proposal is that the government needs to constitute a powerful reconstruction authority that can make a comprehensive plan for the whole region and deliver it in a systematic manner.

PK: Recent funding from DFID and WFP targets the construction of infrastructure as a part of the recovery. Can the government mobilise the economy and use this flow of aid to generate jobs as well as creating a strong base for Nepal's longer term development?

Definitely. Nepal's new agenda is to embark on a path of rapid economic development and prosperity. For that, government has to make investment in big infrastructure, for example roads and hydropower. The areas affected by the earthquake can take the lead in this infrastructure development.

MP: In your PhD thesis, 'the nature of underdevelopment and regional structure of Nepal: a Marxist analysis', completed in 1986, you spoke of the dominance-dependence relationship between India and Nepal. 30 years on, how do you think the relationship with India has evolved?

This dominance-dependence relationship between Nepal and India started with the Sugauli Treaty of 1815/1816. It still continues to this day. We will have to devise a policy of interdependent economic development and Naya Shakti has proposed that Nepal should be developed as a vibrant bridge between India and China. That means there should be more physical connectivity, roads, rails, with India and China. Our trade and investment should be diversified to encompass both India and China, as well as other countries. In this way our overwhelming dependency on India can be gradually reduced and ultimately done away with.

MP: You present 'progressive socialism' via 'national industrial capitalism' as the conceptual base for the new kind of politics in Nepal. How might national industrial capitalism be achieved in this wave of globalisation and isn't it contradictory to progressive socialism?

Globalisation doesn't prevent national development. Even within the formal framework, least developed countries and less developed countries can reserve special rights for their national development. As Nepal is one of the least developed countries, we should focus more on national industrial development in the first phase so that our nascent industries can be developed. Then we can slowly connect with both India and China and invite some foreign investment as well.

At a certain stage of industrial development the tendency towards monopolisation will naturally occur, resulting in inequality that will necessitate socialist transformation of the economy in the latter phase. But this socialist transformation won't be like the earlier Soviet-style state controlled socialism. It should be a more participatory socialism, which will cater to the rights of the individuals with a clearly defined role for the state. This type of enhanced socialism should be the ultimate goal of development for Nepal.

All the countries used the state-led strategic trade at some point, not just the Asian Tigers. Even when there was industrial revolution in Great Britain, the state played a leading role. The same thing happened in America in the late 19th century, then in Japan, Korea and China. So, in a country like Nepal, the state needs to play an active role in the development of industrial capitalism in the first phase.

The old-style liberalism which leaves everything to the market and individual greed is creating crisis in places like in America. The old-style socialism where everything is controlled by the state without democracy and individual rights is also not sustainable, as has been proved by the Soviet experience. We need to develop a new system whereby individual rights will also be respected and the state will play a responsible role to provide security to those that need it. Enhanced socialism should be the alternative for the 21st century.

MP: You have appealed to young people, especially in their 20s, to join their forces with your political party, Naya Shakti. Amidst all the nepotism prevalent in Nepali politics, why should young people join Naya Shakti? How can they be assured that their leadership and progression in the party will be based on merit?

Naya Shakti offers an alternative politics in the sense that it will practice more genuine and real democracy than approach practiced by the old parties. In our party constitution we have made a provision where there will be direct election to all posts in our party and all members of the party will participate in the election of the leaders. Secondly, we will follow a policy of 'one person, one post'. Thirdly, we will follow a policy of 'one post, maximum two terms' that will limit a person's tenure and there can be no life-long leader in any party. This will provide greater scope for the youth to have a say and advance within the party. Even if you are in your 20s, you have every chance of getting elected as a Chairman of Naya Shakti party. That's why I appeal youths to join Naya Shakti party and lead the development of a prosperous Nepal.

Listen to the podcast of Dr Baburam Bhattarai's talk at the South Asia Centre [here](#).

This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the South Asia @ LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

About the Authors

Dr Baburam Bhattarai is a Marxist scholar and politician who has served as Finance Minister and Prime Minister of Nepal. He holds a BA in Architecture, an MA in Planning, and a PhD in Regional Development Planning. He is now founder and Chairman of the Naya Shakti Party, which was established in June.



Pragya Kc is a MSc student at LSE, studying Political Economy of Late Development. She completed her BA in Economics and Spanish Language and Culture Studies from the University of Washington.

Manoj Paudel is a Chevening scholar at the London School of Economics studying MSc in Local Economic Development.



- Copyright © 2016 London School of Economics

