

[Note: This article is not by Baburam Bhattarai, nor does it even quote him. But it does purport to describe his views vis-à-vis those of the other leaders of the UCPN(M). It should of course be kept in mind that this is a bourgeois publication. –BT.net editor]

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Unscripted lines: Without Baburam Bhattarai, the Maoists will repeat history

Prasant Jha

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Marxists argue that broader social and economic forces, rather than individuals, shape the course of history. But Nepal may still have been stuck in a bloody conflict but for Dr Baburam Bhattarai and his emphasis on democratic republicanism. The ongoing attempts to marginalise him within the Maoists reveal much about the balance of power and how counterproductive it could be for the peace and constitution-writing process.

Prachanda remains the unchallenged supremo. His control over the organisational apparatus, ability to reconcile interests, and personal charisma are testimony to remarkable political skills.

Kiran has a support base of loyalists like Biplab who call the shots in the party's base areas, operators like Krishna Mahara, polemicists like CP Gajurel, ethnic champions like Deb Gurung, and key PLA and YCL figures.

Judged in terms of numbers of supporters, Dr Bhattarai is not the most powerful. He does not believe in patronage politics, but is a man of ideas who translates them into practice. Bhattarai conceptualised the war; judged when the time was ripe for peace and convinced the party of it; ensured its aims of a republic and CA were fulfilled; and has given the party respectability way beyond its base. Even now, it is Bhattarai and supporters such as Khimlal Devkota and Ananta who have been doing all the groundwork in the CA or peace negotiations.

Most importantly, Bhattarai has provided Nepali Maoism an intellectual coherence on issues as varied as federalism, the nature of the state, internal colonisation of the Tarai, class and ethnicity, and the nature of the 'semi-colonial' relationship with India.

In his 1997 essay, 'Political-Economic Rationale of the War', Bhattarai identifies Nepal's key structural problems: the use of Nepal as an exporter of raw materials and a secure market for finished Indian products; the unfavourable balance of trade; control of the Nepali economy through Indian-origin capitalists; the trend of MNCs operating in Nepal through their Indian subsidiaries; unequal water treaties; use of cheap Nepali labour; and the hegemony of Indian monetary policy. Bhattarai's articulation remains the single most important text on which the Maoist insistence on redefining the relationship with India is based.

That is why it is a bit rich for party rivals to accuse Bhattarai of being an Indian agent. Under the radical garb lie deep fears. Kiran feels ideologically dwarfed by Bhattarai's creative and so far successful application of Maoism, dubs him a revisionist, and is looking for a role for himself. Prachanda is personally insecure, and is afraid Bhattarai could trump him due to his popularity across party lines, performance in government and international credibility. He is also keen to cosy up to his orthodox colleagues by criticising Bhattarai.

Even if the end goal of radical state restructuring and hegemonic control is common to all Maoists, there are significant differences on how to get there – which have implications for the evolution of the party itself.

Kiran believes that class warfare has to move to the next stage through a violent urban insurrection. Bhattarai understands the need for a broad multi-class, multi-ethnic alliance, and feels that a combination of mass politics, constitutional process, and elections can win the Maoists state power. He recognises geopolitical limits, and will engage with India more constructively in contrast to the abuse in public-suck up in private approach adopted by Prachanda, or the blind chauvinism of Kiran. Bhattarai knows the way to transform Nepal's structural dependence is through internal resource mobilisation and boosting national competitiveness while using India.

Make no mistake – Dr Bhattarai is a committed Maoist, not a social democrat. But his approach will force the Maoists to address diverse interests, and create checks against their violent impulses. This can however succeed only with more openness on the part of non-Maoists externally, and Prachanda's backing internally.

By snubbing Bhattarai and his 'line' again – as Prachanda did by depriving him of the deputy prime ministership in August 2008 and incorporating Kiran's views at Kharipati two months later – the Maoists run the risk of undermining their achievements, repeating the mistakes of their 20th century communist counterparts, and failing.

<http://nepalitimes.com/issue/2010/01/08/PlainSpeaking/16681>