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**Nepal**

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- Inactive
- Defunct
- Don't Know



**THE MAOISTS' ARE COMPARATIVELY THE BEST IN TERMS OF THEIR POSITIONS RELATING TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, MADHESIS, DALITS ...**



**Dr. Krishna Bhattachan**  
**Sociology Department, T.U**

He needs no further introduction to the regular readers of this newspaper. He possesses special attachment with this newspaper.

Dr. Krishna Bhattachan is an academican who pushes his ideas very strongly. He is adamant on his perceptions and would not compromise in his convictions. This is a quality in him that we at this paper like most. He is not unlike other academicians who talk differently on different occasions. He is candid and puts his views straight. In the process, he becomes target of his colleagues as well for a variety of reasons.

He is most vocal against the country being ruled by a set of Brahmins since long. According to this scholar, the prevalence of "Brahminism" in practically each and every sector of the Nepali society, is the root cause for the under-development and for other ailments that continue to grip the country. Those are his views definitely.

Dr. Bhattachan secured his Doctoral degree in Sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, USA in 1993. He is the former Head and currently a senior Lecturer at the Sociology and Anthropology department of the T.U.

Dr. Bhattachan's working model is RATOS (Research, Advocacy, Teaching/Training, Organization Building, and Social Mobilization).

Dr. Bhattachan has several books to his credit which include, among others, Development Practices in Nepal and NGO, Civil Society and Government in Nepal: Critical Examination of Their Roles and Responsibilities and Gender and Democracy.

He is considered to be the one who is the leading advocates of the disadvantaged groups of the country including indigenous nationalities, Dalit, Madhesi, and women. It is for this reason that this time he is one of the member that has been negotiating with the government on the demands pushed by the Janjatis.

He is modest in his dealings with his friends. Dr. Bhattachan is an amicable personality. His colleagues love to listen to his comments, at times a fiery one indeed, though they may not necessarily agree to his line of thinking.

We approached this qualified scholar last week for a tête-à-tête. He agreed.

Below the results: Chief Editor

**TGQ1: You have remained a vocal critic of what you call "Brahminic hegemony" since a couple of years. In what ways this hegemony has had its profound impact upon the upliftment of other indigenous nationalities, Dalits and other communities? How you justify your claims? Your comments please!**

**Dr. Bhattachan:** "Bahunbad" has indeed some common and some differential profound impact on indigenous nationalities, Dalits and other communities.

"Bahunbad" has profound negative impacts on indigenous peoples as we lost our homeland, forest and other natural resources. We became "strangers," "refugees" in our own homeland. Loss of control over land, forest and other natural resources has resulted poverty and hardship in making our living. For example, we all know that the Tharus used to be the only human beings who could live in the "Charkose Jhadi" (dense forest) in Terai before 1950. After spray of dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT) in Terai in the fifties, it not only eliminated mosquitoes but also the Tharus due floods of peoples migrating from the Hills and the south. DDT indeed turned out to be "Dangerous Dose to the Tharus." Many Tharus lost control over their land and forest and became Kamaiyas, landless and homeless since then. Similarly, the Limbus had communal landownership known as the "Kipat." It was abolished by King Mahendra in the sixties. According to the Nepal Human Report 1998 the percentage of Limbus living below poverty line is 71%. Also, continuing imposition of Khas Nepali language as the only official language and medium of instruction in schools, many mother tongue speaker indigenous peoples have been deprived from literacy, basic and primary education, and higher education. As a result we see nominal representation of indigenous peoples in decision making positions in civil service.

Similarly, 'Bahunbad' as expressed in the form of caste-based discrimination, including



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untouchability, has profound negative impact on the Dalits. It has resulted landlessness, bonded labour, such as Balighare, Khaliya, Bista and Haliya, illiteracy and bad health.

Evidences, including quantitative, qualitative, empirical and experiential, of my claims are everywhere. In brief, my claims are justified on three grounds: one, academic research, specially anthropological, findings of studies after studies; two, evaluation reports of donor's missions and studies; and three, personal observation of common peoples' every-day-life experiences they share. In academic world, Anthropological studies such as 'Land and Social Change in Eastern Nepal. Hindu Tribal Interface' by Lionel Caplan, 'Priests and Cobblers' by Patricia Caplan, 'Regionalism and National Integration in Nepal' by Friedrich H. Gaze, and 'Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal' by Mahesh Chandra Regmi, are some of the outstanding works on such issues. Prof. Dor Bahadur Bista's much acclaimed and widely read book 'Fatalism and Development' well explained negative impacts of 'Bahunbad' in Nepal's development. Govinda Neupane's book 'Nepalko Jatiya Prasna' ('Ethnic Question of Nepal') also reveals how strong is Brahmanism in Nepal. In real life-world, many peoples from grassroots to elites have shared their plights during my advocacy works.

**TGQ2: You are in the negotiating team representing the indigenous nationalities (Adivasi Janajatis). What are your demands from the State? What if other similar tribes and communities come forward and demand the same? Will the State in that eventuality be able to satisfy the demands put forth by various ethnic groups and tribes at a time who conclude that they had been neglected by the State in the past?**

**Dr. Bhattachan:** We have long outstanding demands from the state that has accumulated in the last 238 years. So the list is long. Currently Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities and other affiliated organizations have launched street protest movement with 20 points demands. Our main demands are:

- (1) Ensure ethnic, linguistic and regional autonomy with right to self determination within federal democratic republic; and
- (2) Proportional representation of caste and ethnic groups on the basis of their population size with a guarantee that at least one representation will be made from each of the small caste and ethnic groups.

If round table conferences at national to local levels were organized during the drafting of the interim constitution, aspirations of different caste, ethnic, linguistic, language, regional, class, sex and professional groups would have been met in a consociational way. As the interim constitution was prepared by the political parties, specially the central level leaders only, demands of different communities were not addressed. As a result, indigenous peoples and Madhesis burnt articles and sub-articles of the interim constitution that were discriminatory against them. Dalits, women, peoples living in remote areas, including Karnali region, disables etc. also have expressed their dissatisfaction on it. I believe that round table conference of all demanding communities and acceptance of principle and practice of right to self determination would solve most of the problems in amicable ways. Some may opt singular autonomous region, some may opt for comprehensive autonomous region with a merger of several indigenous nationalities, some may opt for sub-autonomy within an autonomous region, and few may opt to stay directly within the federal government. Review mechanisms should be in place in certain interval of time (say 15 years) to rethink about autonomous regions again with the exercise of right to self-determination. Provision of round table conferences, proportional representation, special rights and measures and referendum may prevent problems of insurgency and violence-counter violence for good.

It is for sure that if the state wants to maintain status quo in terms of continuation of monarchy, "Bahunbad", patriarchy, 'Hill' domination, unitary and predatory state, and domination of Khas Nepali language and Hindu religion and culture, there is no way that the state could meet any demand. Instead if the "Bahunbadi" rulers, political leaders and decision makers have courage and political will to fully and sincerely accept equity and equality, social justice, real democratic practices, human rights, including individual and collective, I do not see that State should have any problem in meeting the demands made by various communities.

**TGQ3: You, as we see it, demand an inclusive structure in the country. Fine! While pushing your own demands are you aware that it might exclude some others? To put it simply, can inclusion satisfy the possible exclusion?**

**Dr. Bhattachan:** Piecemeal approach by any one, be it the State or "us", i.e. the peoples who are in various rights-based movements, would definitely lead to endless problems. We should understand that the Nepali society is like an onion; there are layers after layers. If you peel one layer other layer appear. For example, imagining Nepali society as a single homogenous community is like unpeeled onion. Once you peel the

'Nepali' layer, you find layers of caste/ethnicity, language religion, culture, region, class, sex and so on. If we peel the 'caste/ethnicity' layer we find several other layers. For example, peeling of 'Dalit' layer would reveal other layers such as 'Hill' and 'Madhesi' Dalit layers. You can go on and on. During the peeling process, the more you peel you shed more tears. Peeling is also necessary and avoiding shedding tears is also equally important. How do you do it? It is easy. Deep the onion in water for sometime before peeling it off. This 'water' in the case of addressing voices of various communities is to organize round table conference of all communities from national to local level and accept their right to self-determination.

**TGQ4: Of late the Maoists appear to have come heavily down against the Madhesis, the indigenous nationalities and the likes. How you interpret their recent political behavior? Have they changed or are still adhering to their past promises made in favor of different groups at different intervals of time?**

**Dr. Bhattachan:** What has happened is that all these communities had high expectation from the NCP Maoist since they started People's War in 1996 as they strongly pursued their political demands politically. As the Maoist had to negotiate with the Nepal government, they not only negotiated to put their People's Liberation Army (PLA) in cantonment and their arms in the container, they could not make significant achievement in incorporating their demands in the interim constitution and ensure proportional participation in the constituent assembly. In psychology, there is proven formula: Frustration (F) = Expectation (E) ÷ Achievement (A). Given high expectation and low achievement frustration would obviously become high. If the Maoist had interest based negotiation on the PLA and arms issues and positional, instead of interest-based, negotiation on the issues of restructuring of the state and the rights of indigenous peoples, Madhesis, Dalits, women/gender, region, class etc., the story would have been different. They had no BATNA (Better Alternative to No Agreement) in the first case but they definitely had it in the second case as these all communities would have provided huge support to the Maoist in the streets. The 'expendable' population is very high among these communities. Therefore, they should not have yielded to undue pressures from Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and international forces to give up, though temporarily, the 'core issues' in the name of flexibility, negotiation and 'peace'. Unfortunately it did not happen. As a result there is a peace agreement in paper but there is no peace in the hearts and minds of the peoples.

Having said these, my observation is that among the existing political parties, the NCP Maoist are definitely the best in terms of their positions relating to indigenous peoples, Madhesis, Dalits, women/gender, region, class and so on. They actually score 'distinction' marks, following Dr. Harka Gurung, in theory. So far they have mostly 'failed' in practice after they landed in Baluwatar ("sandy land"! ). I still want to give the benefit of doubt to the Maoist. If they correct their past mistakes, keep firm gaze on the 'core issues' and show seriousness in its realization, they could make leaps and bound quickly. However, it is highly likely that Madhesis and indigenous peoples could form their own political parties, at the least 'disposable political party' for the purpose of elections for constituent assembly, and lead it by themselves, instead of following the Bahun-Chhetri leaders as has been the case in the past and the present.

**TGQ5: The monarch's democracy day message created furor in the country. King Gyanendra in his message talks of unity among the people. Is this a survival tactic or some thing else? How you would wish to interpret his message?**

**Dr. Bhattachan:** The message showed that monarchy has regained some consciousness from coma and uttering words to show that he is alive. It is nothing but an addition to his poor judgments. It could be a trial balloon for possible military takeover in future. By now he and his supporters should be clear that the Nepalese people would no more tolerate any kinds of dictatorial rules, such as monarchy, military or any other form of undemocratic total institution. They should know that the Nepalese peoples including indigenous peoples, Madhesis, Dalits, women and others know for sure that their liberation is not possible as long as monarchy, "Bahunbad", patriarchy, the 'Hill' domination, and unitary-predatory undemocratic ideologies, systems, institutions, and practices exist. The interim Parliament had historic opportunity to eliminate by constitutional amendment but they fall short by directing political action against the King by the interim government.

[The most appropriate demands of our time are ethnic, linguistic and regional autonomy with right to self-determination...](#)

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