

Why the Current Debate on Socialism in Nepal is So Much Hot Air

Friday 6 November 2020, by [PANT Laxman](#) (Date first published: 12 October 2020).

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A debate on socialism has been underway in the Left circles of Nepal for some time now. Friends from the Nepali Congress too occasionally become part of this “chorus” on socialism.

Had it been an academic debate among the scholars or the politicians for that matter, it would have gone unnoticed as debates and deliberations are an inalienable part of the academic world. But when such discussions are organised by fora affiliated to the ruling Communist party where senior Communist party leaders deliver key note address, focused on building socialism in Nepal, the event becomes all the more important.

Socialism is a philosophy, and political and economic theory aimed at the overall development of humanity. Even the arch rivals of socialism cannot ignore the welfare state, which is the principal part of socialism. “From each according to his ability and to each according to his work” is a key economic slogan of socialism. Other defining features of socialism are characterised by free availability of basic needs of the people, such as education, health and housing from the state.

The constitution of Nepal has envisioned a socialism-oriented prosperous Nepal. However, all the vital sectors of the economy and public life have been assigned to the private sector.

A futile discussion

Laying the foundation of socialism over a tattered social and economic base, as in Nepal, is simply inconceivable. Ironically, the leaders have not refrained from debating on the topic of building socialism in Nepal, ignoring the gloomy situation in the country for which corrupt bureaucrats and politicians are solely responsible.

Rather than engaging in a futile debate on socialism and selling the dreams of “prosperous Nepal”, it would have been better had the party leaders channelised their energy to transform the corrupt and dilapidated polity and fulfil the remaining task of nation-building.

In this choreography of “building a socialist society”, senior-most leaders of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) and leaders of the Nepali Congress (NC) take part occasionally with equal zeal. Those are the same set of NCP and NC leaders who at one time or the other had made it to the top level of the government. By virtue of their position, they were fully armed with powers and prerogatives to change the status quo. But they did nothing to transform the state of affairs, nor do they seem interested to effect changes in the corrupt system.

The irony of the present-day “federal democratic republic” is that its rulers have adopted a policy of exporting able-bodied and able-minded human resources leading to the flight of almost half of the

working-age population abroad. They have entirely washed their hands of generating employment in the country and preventing the exodus of human capital. It is a self-defeating exercise to debate building socialism in Nepal by sending half of the human capital abroad, and overlooking the bitter fact that the state is being run on remittances.

The momentum of Nepali renaissance squandered

The discourse beginning since the 1950s, the period which could also be termed as the Nepali renaissance, has always moved in the wrong direction. In 1951, Nepali people achieved some democratic rights, such as freedom of assembly and expression and party formation. But on the other hand, some of the members of cabinet would demand Indian army deployment to curb the K.I. Singh uprising, Khukuri Dal revolt and the peasants uprising led by Bhim Datt Pant.

The leaders in Delhi would issue a statement that the northern border of India is extended up to the Himalayas. Delhi and its advisors played a decisive role in the formation of ministries in Nepal, drafting of the constitution and the formulation of development plans. This meant that Nepal has had to traverse a long journey to become a sovereign and independent nation.

When King Mahendra dissolved the parliament in 1960, Tanka Prasad Acharya, a supporter of leftist ideology, became the prime minister for a brief period. Mahendra strived hard to make Nepal independent but he did not succeed completely.

Over the past seven decades, Nepal has experimented with several political systems. Some may find it amazing, but the fact is that Nepal could not become an independent nation, not only in the political and economic sense, but also in terms of geographical sovereignty even after seven-decade-old tumultuous struggle in which thousands of people sacrificed their lives. One does not need to go very far to understand this, only one simple example would suffice: the border with India has been left open.

One is free to interpret this situation, but the real meaning is that by keeping the border open with India, Nepal has been virtually merged into India. The “merger” was beneficial to the British as well as to the Ranas to facilitate the hassle-free movement of fighter youths and high-quality timber from Nepal. But even after the dawn of democracy, the borders have been left open.

Reworking of priorities required

To talk about building socialism in Nepal by leaving the border open with a very close but extremely difficult neighbour is utterly ridiculous. Open and unsecured border with a powerful country, which has one of the largest economy and military force, where the forces have a mentality of “India extending from the Indian ocean to the Himalayas” has been ingrained, is strategically dangerous for a weak nation. Moreover, India’s past history of the annexation of Sikkim and the creation of Bangladesh and its aggressive gestures still today towards its small neighbours make the situation all the more vulnerable.

Making the borders secure, maintaining a record of foreigners and fellow citizens entering and exiting the country through a passport and visa regime are the primary and fundamental duties of any government. Without fulfilling these primary duties, a nation can never attain the status of a sovereign nation. Without fulfilling primary tasks for the people, the talk of socialist “paradise” is just day-dreaming.

If the very people on whose shoulder lies the responsibility of making Nepal a separate and independent country by abrogating unequal treaties, regulation of the border with India and undoing the humiliating tradition of Gorkha recruitment, shut their eyes to these stark realities and engage

themselves in platitudes of building socialism in Nepal, it makes no sense. It is not wise to waste time talking about a PhD without clearing a high school examination. Before talking about tying the knot, let us first decide who is going to marry whom.

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