

# Communists don't celebrate Dasain

Interview with Ninu Chapagain, in-charge, Cultural Division,  
UCPN (Maoists), in *Samayabodh*, Oct-Nov, 2009

**As in-charge of the Maoist Cultural Division, how do you view the festivals that people celebrate in Nepal?**

Nepal is a multi-cultural nation. The different ethnic and language groups here have their own cultures. But instead of considering all these Nepali culture, there is a bad tendency here to think of the culture of those ethnicities and classes in power as Nepali culture. This needs to be corrected.



**Nepal's festivals are generally based on Hinduism. Are there any scientific aspects to these religious festivals?**

Religion and science are opposed to each other. To believe in god is to deny man agency and to accept external control of oneself. This is not culture, but a lack of it. If it lacks humanity, intellect and independent agency, it cannot be considered culture.

**UCPN (Maoist) has been speaking out against religious festivals but hasn't hesitated to indulge in religious inaugurations of hospitals and schools it is involved in. Isn't this double standards?**

The wrong idea that it is acceptable to use any means to collect funds continues to hamper our revolutionary progress. That is why we have seen communist party members engaging in cultural traditions such as *deusi* and *bhailo* that actually extend the reach of the Hindu cultural hegemony in Nepal. Our cultural revolution lags behind our political revolution.

**Chairman Prachanda announced at a religious program recently that the Maoists aren't atheists. What do you say?**

I am ignorant of the context in which these remarks were made, so it's better not to dwell on them. But if by religion we understand a system that works to trap people who live off their labour into believing in the supremacy of an external agency, that prevents them from realising their full potential and from changing society through struggle and class awareness, then we don't believe in it, we are atheists.

**How do communists celebrate Dasain?**

Dasain has become a *dasha* (ill omen) for the mass of the people in recent times. It is a financial

burden for most people. No one who is concerned for the welfare of the people will insist that everyone should celebrate Dasain. The only good thing about Dasain is in strengthening social ties. If poor people feel compelled to mark Dasain by spending money on special food and new clothes, to the extent of incurring debts, then the festival has no meaning. There is no reason for it to be spread over 10 days either, with attendant public holidays so people can indulge in drinking, gambling and fighting.

If communists want to celebrate Dasain then they should limit themselves to renewing social ties with their families and local communities, and spend time speaking out against the social evils of this festival and promoting other local festivals.

**What is the people's culture that the Maoists want to replace our old cultural traditions with?**

A people's culture is one that first involves giving up exploitative customs in order to move towards a new culture in favour of those who live by their labour. This means a culture based on science, nationalism and a people's or democratic set-up. A new people's culture is a scientific culture that works for the liberation of Dalits, farmers, workers, indigenous peoples and women. A revolution cannot only be based on political change, to be sustained it has to be accompanied by cultural change, a cultural revolution.

**They say culture represents a country to the world. If we rid ourselves of our culture then don't we risk losing our identity?**

Opposing a backward culture does not mean opposing culture itself. Communists are in support of a progressive culture for all.