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Meaningless Unity

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Prachanda was always shifting between Bhattarai and Kiran, looking to balance the two to prolong his stay in power

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The fanfare around the unity of splinter Maoist parties under the leadership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' misses the fact that there is nothing new about the combined outfit, CPN (Maoist Center). It has the same old leaders and the same old agendas. This is going to be 27th year of Dahal's continued leadership of the party. Curiously, he now claims sole responsibility for starting and ending the people's war. At this point, it is important to understand why Baburam Bhattarai 'Laldhoj' had to leave the party to form Naya Shakti Nepal; why Mohan Baidya 'Kiran' left Dahal's party to form his own CPN-Maoist; and why Ram Bahadur Thapa 'Badal' then left Kiran's party to once again join hands with Dahal.

Lest we forget, Prachanda, Kiran, Laldhoj and Badal were also the main actors behind the people's war.

The communist ideology these espoused came to Nepal not from China but from India. The Communist Party of Nepal was formed in 1949 in Calcutta with Pushpa Lal Shrestha as the founding General Secretary. Before starting the communist party he was one of the crusaders against the Ranas. In fact his elder brother, Ganga Lal, was hanged in 1941 by the autocratic Rana regime for his anti-Rana activities.

Within the original communist party, there were two lines: the Pushpa Lal line, with its emphasis on democracy and which was for aligning with Nepali Congress to fight monarchy. Another was the Rayamajhi line, headed by Keshar Jung Rayamajhi. By profession he was a medical doctor but he belonged to the landlord class. This line emphasized nationalism and external threat. He was for aligning with the king to fight Indian expansionism. Thus the Two-Line Struggle (2LS) in communist movement of Nepal started with these two leaders.

The name Prachanda, which in Nepali means 'fiery one', matches his character. Of poor economic background, he wanted to join Nepal Army. But after being rejected by the army he decided to become a schoolteacher. He even briefly worked for USAID after graduating from the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science in Chitwan. He finally plunged into full-time politics in 1981. He has been at the top executive post of the Mother Maoist party since 1990.

He is very good at the number game. Many thus criticize him for being opportunist, self-centered and power centric. He was always shifting his line between Bhattarai (who was close to Pushpa Lal line) and Kiran (who was close to Rayamajhi line), looking to balance the two to prolong his stay in power. Prachanda liked interacting with individual leaders rather than in groups, so he could better manipulate others. He sounded revolutionary but was an opportunist dogmatist.

Throughout the war, the two-line struggle was mainly fought between Prachanda and Bhattarai although Kiran was also involved. Bhattarai was known for practicing Marxism according to the needs of the time. Hence he was also known as Doctor Marxist. He saw the monarchy rather than Indian expansionism as the country's main contradiction/problem, which made him an easy target of the Rayamajhi line. His higher education and political activities in India made him vulnerable to the charge of being pro-Indian.

Bhattarai was strictly against using organization power to suppress dissidents. His followers were generally those who gave more weight to ideological supremacy. While most leaders vacillated between republic and national line, Bhattarai was for republic throughout. For him Marxism was not a dogma but a guide to scientific enquiry. Similarly, organization was not an end but a vehicle for applying ideology.

After long struggle with Prachanda and his monolithic tendency, Bhattarai left Maoist party to form Naya Shakti Nepal. He had been struggling to transform the old party so that he could lead it towards Nepal-specific socialism. When he realized it was impossible under the old bureaucratic Stalinist Party, he started campaigning for a new party based on proportionate inclusion and participatory democracy.

Rising above the old divide between neo-liberalism and state-controlled socialism, he envisioned a left democratic platform, which would unleash productive forces and take the country on the path of enriched socialism. This he did by bringing together forces from different parties including the neutral masses so as to make economic agenda and good governance the main focus of politics.

The other important leader was Kiran, which means 'sun ray' in Nepali language. However the name defies his character. Unlike 'sun ray' he is devoid of color. Politically, he was more

theoretical than practical. He had done his Masters in Sanskrit and was well-versed in philosophy and literature. He was more known as an ideologue of classical Marxism. People say his surname Baidya (an ayurvedic healer) fits him. As Baidya refers to traditional medicine man so is his line is also traditional Marxism. This earned him the name of Marxist Baidya. Generally, he was known as a principled leader.

Kiran was the general secretary of the CPN Mashal before it became CPN (Unity Center). But he was replaced by Prachanda after the 'sector episode' misfired in 1989. Sector episode entailed attack on various police posts in Kathmandu to thwart Panchayat elections. Many leaders and cadres were arrested and tortured when the attacks failed.

During people's war, there had been constant political struggle between Kiran and Bhattarai. But it never boiled over to personal struggle. While Kiran advocated dogmatic Marxism, Bhattarai advocated creative Marxism. And Prachanda swung between the two to play the numbers game.

After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006, Kiran started waging a two-line struggle against Prachanda. He criticized the 12-point program, integration of Maoist combatants into national army and Constituent Assembly. Finally he left the Maoist party in 2011 to form CPN-Maoist and started advocating the old line of New Democratic Revolution. Interestingly Badal was with Kiran when he formed the new party; however Badal left Kiran to join Prachanda to form CPN (Maoist Center) in 2016.

'Badal' means cloud in Nepali language. A son of an Indian mercenary soldier, Badal comes from Magar ethnic group, the largest in Nepal. This cloud made lot of noise but did not produce rain. Badal was philosophical. He loved contradictions and dialectics. But when it came to solving contradictions, he was never able to assert his line. He had difficulty choosing between principle and secondary contradictions in Nepali politics.

Badal had edge over Bhattarai in terms of his revolutionary image. He left his studies in agricultural engineering in Russia half-way to undertake the revolution in Nepal. In contrast, Bhattarai was looked upon as bourgeois because he not only completed MARCH but also his PhD. Badal talked a lot about dialectical methodology but in practice he was monolithic. He was also a loner. He eventually sided with Rayamajhi line. Although close to Prachanda in earlier days of people's war in later days he sided with Kiran.

Badal was the same man who spewed venom against Prachanda when he joined Kiran in alleging that Prachanda was a RAW agent. Bhattarai and Kiran, on the other hand, never attacked Dahal personally.

Today Prachanda is devoid of vision. To cover his deficiency he is using unification of splinter Maoist groups as a survival measure. Similarly those who left the party to make New Democratic Revolution have come back under Prachanda. Prachanda is like a Pied Piper for disillusioned Maoists. But instead of advocating continuous revolution he is playing the tune of continuous promise of exercise of power. He is known for harping he is not for Prime Ministerial post or Presidential post but given the opportunity he will take it with both hands.

Once again Prachanda used unification of parties as a means to divert attention from his mercurial character of trying to become a prime minister with the support of Nepali Congress but backing out the very next day.

Let us wish him well.

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