

interest in cottage industries producing computer spare parts in the valley. Considerations are so serious that we are negotiating on having a direct flight from Osaka to Kathmandu in 1994.

Q: My last question leads back to the problems you are facing with the carpet industry and factories. What will you do about child labour and prostitution in these factories?

A: At the moment I try to get more facts and figures in order to take immediate action as soon as possible. UNICEF, for example will soon start up a project which will bring children into SOS children's villages. But this can only be seen as a beginning.

Thank you very much for this interview.

On Political Culture in Contemporary Nepal: An Interview with Professor Lok Raj Baral

Martin Gaenzle

Lok Raj Baral is Professor of Political Science at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, where he was head of the Political Science Department from 1976 to 1988. As a critical observer of political developments during the Panchayat period he first published *Oppositional Politics in Nepal* in 1977 - after which his position as a professor was temporarily endangered - and then *Nepal's Politics of Referendum: A Study of Groups, Personalities and Trends* (1983). A later study, published in 1990, dealt with *Regional Migrations, Ethnicity and Security: The South Asian Case*. His latest book titled *Nepal: Problems of Governance* (1993) came out recently: this he had prepared before the democracy movement in 1990, but he revised the entire manuscript after the fundamental political changes which were brought about during that year. Being the president of the newly-established Political Science Association of Nepal (POLSAN), he convened the first South Asian Political Science Conference in June 1992, the proceedings of which he edited under the title *South Asia: Democracy and the Road Ahead*. (1992). He is also the president of an NGO called "Society for Constitutional and Parliamentary Exercise" (SCOPE) which aims at strengthening the process of democratization. Professor Baral hit the headlines early 1993 when he was asked to chair the advisory committee on the controversial Tanakpur issue in January. As the Supreme Court had ruled in December 1992 that the agreement between Prime Minister Koirala and his Indian counterpart on the Tanakpur barrage was in fact a treaty requiring ratification, the government was under pressure to decide on the exact status of the treaty, and therefore the mode of ratification, i.e. either by a simple or a two third majority in parliament. As this question had been left open by the Supreme Court, the government sought advice from the "Baral Committee" which eventually

suggested that the agreement is of an ordinary nature, i.e. requiring only a simple majority. This was one of the issues we discussed at Prof. Baral's house on August 26, 1993.

Q: Prof. Baral, let me first ask you a personal question. What has changed for you as a political scientist since the restoration of multi-party democracy? Or to put it more generally; how has the role of intellectuals changed?

A: I was one of the victims of the former regime, the partyless panchayat regime. Not directly a victim, but we were harassed by the former regime several times. Now I think as an intellectual, as an academic, I have a liberation of mind. I am free, I can express my ideas freely. Even if I want to criticize the King I can do that. Nobody is going to obstruct my academic thinking and writing. That way I feel that I have been liberated.

Q: Just recently you have been heading this advisory committee on the Tanakpur issue. Does this mean that the role of intellectuals is being upgraded, that they are more included in public decisions? Or was it rather exceptional? How did you feel about the role you were playing in this hot issue of Tanakpur?

A: Yes, very conflicting interpretations were there when I was appointed as chairman of the Tanakpur committee. Some of my colleagues also advised me not to take that kind of responsibility since I would be involved in this controversy. Then I thought that as an intellectual, and since the elected government wants our services, why not? They wanted a neutral man who was supposed to balance all kinds of people in the committee. The former foreign minister Mr. (Shailendra Kumar) Upadhyaya was there as a member of the committee, three or four water resource engineers were there, very eminent lawyers were there, and other people from the government's side were also there. And perhaps they thought that a man like me could balance all these people, and they could work under the chairmanship of a professor who is basically neutral in his political thinking. ... They recognized my independence and my status. That way I'm happy.

Q: Do you think this will happen more often now - that the Government or the parliament will seek the advice of intellectuals?

A: I was the head of the department for one decade, 12 years. But then I didn't like to continue as head, because of more administrative problems, many problems. But I am also these days the president of SCOPE, the Society for Constitutional and Parliamentary Exercise.. that is an NGO, which is concerned very much with strengthening the democratic process. We have a lot of interaction with members of parliament, and we have a forum. For example, last Saturday, we had a very big meeting on the Upper House, the National Council, we were discussing the role of the Upper House in our context. We were all intellectuals, professors, lawyers, politicians, MPs, ministers, chairmen, they all came and it was a very good exercise.... In that way we are also now concerned with the practical aspects of politics, not only with the theoretical side. And we help the government, we help the MPs, we help the women members, for example we have a women's cell. We want to know how to upgrade the level of the MPs. That way intellectuals are very

much in interaction with the democratic process.

Q: This brings me to my next question: how has the political culture changed with the "return to competitive politics", as you have called it? For example, how has the opposition found its place in the parliamentary process? This is a topical question, as just recently the agreement between Nepali Congress (NC) and Nepal Communist Party United Marxist-Leninist (NCP-UML)¹, has raised the question whether this has challenged the supremacy of the parliament. As they have made an agreement on Tanakpur just between the two parties...

A: If we start thinking in that line, I think it leads nowhere, because the movement was launched by two parties. Basically it was initiated by the Nepali Congress, then later on the communists joined the movement. These two, Congress and UML, are the movement parties. And they were the agents of change, they transformed the former absolute monarchical system into a multi-party democratic system. This is the background. And also they were very much instrumental in framing the constitution.... That means the whole show was run and is being run by these two parties. And even some things which are taken to the parliament just for formality will be decided by these two parties. If they decide to amend the constitution, they can do that. They will have a two thirds majority. It is up to them. They were the real agents of change. That's why Prakash Chandra Lohani, my friend, who belongs to NDP, says they have bypassed the parliament. Of course, as an opposition, he is right in what he is saying. Everybody should raise that kind of voice, I admire this. That voice should be there. It is good for democracy, it will alert them. Otherwise I think it is O.K. (to have such an agreement.) The basic thing is to have stability.

Q: To come back to the role of the opposition. Now just recently there was still a lot of political agitation on the streets, and you said that, the UML especially, still considers itself as a movement party, because it often takes decisions back to the street and creates a movement. Now it has just been called off, but it can come back any time.

A: Now if I say movement parties, I also call Nepali Congress a movement party. For the last 30 years they have had one program: abolition of the Panchayat system!

Q: But now they are in power...

A: Now they are a constitutional party, but they are still continuing their movement psychology. The UML does not think it is a constitutional party, a responsible opposition.

Q: But the Congress has changed. They have transformed from a movement party into the party in power.

A: And I expected that UML would also do the same, but UML is wavering. Sometimes it behaves like a movement party, all the time guided by the psychology of the movement. (Saying:) "I can change the prime minister!" Who is UML to change the prime minister on the basis of street politics? They are not taking a vote of no-confidence. They could have registered a vote of no confidence, as a parliamentary party. That's why I say they are still guided by the same old movement psychology. They think that they can dictate to the ruling party, to make it change its leader, Prime Minister Koirala. But

ultimately they had to give in. They dropped that idea, that demand.That's why I have been saying in my books, these people, the UML leaders, are not showing their parliamentary democratic political culture. They are still thinking they can determine everything by street politics. That is not going to help the democratic process. Of course, everybody can go to the streets, can stage demonstrations, can have a peaceful assembly without arms. The constitution has given them all freedoms. They can go on strike, they can stage a peaceful demonstration. . . .But now after the agreement they are very categorical, they are supporting very categorically the multi-party system. And they say they are equally concerned with the stability of the system. If that kind of commitment continues, it will be good for the system, but if they change the strategy again, and if they don't like something and go back to the street and start doing the same old business, that is not going to help us. It is still unclear.

Q: I was surprised by this agreement because they suddenly dropped the main demand that the Prime Minister step back.

A: And they did so much for that demand. "We cannot reach an agreement without the P.M.'s resignation." They were so categorical. But ultimately (they gave in). That's why I say they have a brinkmanship policy. They always go too far. And now they have the problem of retreat.

Q: Saving their face..

A: This is the third time they are doing this. Sometimes I don't know about their future strategy. But I always tell them when I meet them, "You are an independent variable for the left movement in Nepal, why are you being guided or swayed by other elements, by very minor parties? You are an independent factor for the Nepalese left movement. You should decide your own action, your own strategy. Why are you guided by others? .. Ideologically they are still wavering. It was very interesting during the coup against Gorbachev in 1991, when he was ousted these people welcomed the coup. The Nepali Congress took a very correct decision, it denounced the coup, it appreciated Gorbachev's reforms. And these people (UML) were caught on the wrong side. And they had to accept Nepali Congress in the parliament and they had to change their previous stand. Such is their problem.

Q: How can the problems of institutionalizing a culture of debate be solved? How do you see this process? I have the impression that the parliamentary debates are not well covered in the media, they are only summarized. For example, there are no televised parliamentary debates.

A: We should understand that this is only a two-year-old democracy. The people are completely new in the whole process. Even the Prime Minister Koirala, Bhattarai etc. are new to the whole process... And as compared to many other South Asian countries, there is a criticism recently, and the Speaker gave a directive to the government that the things that are expressed in the parliament should be broadcast to the maximum. But as far as TV is concerned, TV is also just a beginning, it is too early. More or less I think they are trying to cover as much as possible.

Q: But the speeches themselves are not broadcasted....

A: Not exactly...But major things, major points are covered. We have a

special programme, commentary, in TV and radio, parliamentary proceedings, they call *Samsad bhitra*, In Parliament Today. They have that programme in addition to the news item. ... Of course, it is a government-controlled media.

Q: That's what I was wondering. How do you see the role of the media in general? Is it a healthy role?

A: There are two sides. If you look at the local press, it is muddy, full of all these stories, wild allegations, very negative..

Q: Is that what you called the psychology of conspiracy, this lack of confidence?

A: Yes, because what happens, even the leaders are not immune to such a crisis of confidence. Because some of these media are run by the former regime's supporters. And most of them also get assistance from different quarters who want to create confusion, chaos, to show that multi-party democracy cannot function in this country, that we need an authoritarian regime. In that way some of the papers don't see the positive side of the process, they only expose the negative, all the time wild allegations, wild rumours. Now people are becoming very selective. Gradually people try to know which paper is good, which paper is not, which is more responsible. But still we lack professional journalism.

Q: For example investigative journalism?

A: Yes, but still, a lot of stories are exposed by the press, by the weeklies. For example stories about the RNAC, whether they are right or wrong, the government has to come out with a statement.

Q: So is this a beginning of investigative journalism then?

A: Yes, but sometimes they go after the personalities. But sometimes they are correct, they just publish cheque number scandals, bribery, so many stories. This is democracy, and they can easily pick up the story in the parliament and expose the government. I think we have just started. That way I see things changing. Actually it started ten years ago, after the referendum. But now, newspapers, new dailies are coming, now we have Kathmandu Post, Kantipur, and they are challenging The Rising Nepal and Gorkhapatra, the Government newspapers. People are moving towards these private papers. That way we are gradually developing our own ways of thinking, and analysing events. That is going to shape our political culture also.

Q: And how about the internal party structures? There too I think there is much left to be done in the way of democratization.

A: That part is lacking in our party system. And moreover, the old leaders, ageing leaders are there in the NC. Internal party democracy is lacking in major parties.

Q: Also in the UML?

A: In the UML, compared to the NC, most leaders are young, Bhandari was young, in the forties, Madhav Nepal is young, C.P. Mainali is young. Mostly these people are young, in their forties. And moreover compared to the NC, in the UML the internal party democracy (is better)... I could see this in the UML, when they were discussing the ideological positions of the leaders: Madan Bhandari had one school of thought, People's Multi-party Democracy,

bahudaliya janabad. And another *naulo janabad*, New Democracy, of C.P. Mainali. These ideas were floated, they were published in the papers, and we were also invited to discuss them. And they could elect their leaders on the basis of their internal debates and elections. Now there is a pressure even these days on the NC leadership, but the pressure is not enough. We hope that the time will come, and the younger elements will act. We have to put pressure on the leadership to democratize. Because according to the constitution of Nepal, these parties are supposed to hold their organisational meetings, and they should be democratically managed. This has just been started, I don't think we can make a sweeping statement that they are doing nothing.

Q: So as this is prescribed in the constitution, could anybody take this to court?

A: Yes, that is a precondition. Within five years, before the elections, each party should have completed its internal democratic structural arrangement. That is a condition. Most of the parties say they have already elected their leaders, working committee, general committee, district committee. They have to go that way. And the NC is these days trying to find a new constitution for the party. The leaders don't like to give up their posts. There are certain contradictions. The NC manifesto has no position of 'supreme leader', but Ganesh Man is considered as a supreme leader. What is a supreme leader? It happened when the parliamentary party, the working committee said, we support Girija Prasad Koirala as a prime minister, he should continue, and whatever the Government decides on the Tanakpur issue that will be accepted by all the members. That was the official position. Suddenly Ganesh Man sent a letter: "If you pass the Tanakpur agreement by a simple majority it will be suicidal for the party, for democracy. You should get a two-thirds majority."

.. And, according to the general secretary of the party, Mahendra Narayan Nidhi, Ganesh Man is not even a member officially. But he just vetoed. And people could not ignore him. So the party and the government could not push that agreement for a simple majority. It is still there in parliament, it is still not decided by the parliament. Now, according to the NC-UML agreement, one of the points is on Tanakpur. Now they have decided to settle this not in this session, but in the coming session on the basis of understanding. They didn't say two thirds or simple, but on the basis of a national consensus.

Q: So it's still not decided... And how do you see the role of the judiciary, the Supreme Court, for example, now plays a more crucial role.

A: Two points. If you look at the constitution making committee, most of these people were lawyers. Including the present chief justice who was the chairman, Bishwanath Upadhyaya. Bharat Mohan Adhikari, Daman Dhungana, all these were lawyers. The position of the judiciary was very much focused on the constitution. If you read the constitution, there is a long list of functions, powers, privileges, and status of the judiciary, because all these lawyers were there. Not a single political scientist was a member of the committee. It is very much a lawyer-biased constitution. But the role of the judiciary is prominent, and on the Tanakpur issue the judiciary established that now the right to transparency is very much there. Everything should be transparent; even if some agreement is concluded by the government, it cannot

be kept in secrecy. They should be very open to the people. The right to information has been established by the Supreme Court. That was a crucial decision given by the Supreme Court. And the Supreme Court also said, if there are agreements, even minor documents between two governments, they are considered as treaties, not understandings. All the time the government had said (in the case of the Tanakpur agreement), that it did not need ratification, but the Supreme Court said: No, you need ratification, but it is up to the government to ratify either by a simple majority or by a two-thirds majority. ... That's why these things have been vindicated and the Supreme Court is very crucial. Now most of the dismissed Civil Servants have gone to the Supreme Court for redress, (saying:) "We have been victimized by the government, we want justice." So people are looking to the Supreme Court as an independent institution in the present setup.

Q: Now another question concerns the present role of the army.

A: It varies from person to person, but I don't see any role for the army at the moment.

Q: Except clearing roads and building bridges....

A: ...the leaders are still haunted by the King's ghost, (saying:) "The King can stage a coup against the system like his father did in 1960, because the army is still loyal to the King, and the police are still loyal to the King." But the King has already committed himself to the constitution, saying that he is a constitutional monarch and accepts this position. That was the position accepted by the leaders when they terminated the movement in April 1990. And the constitution has said clearly that sovereignty lies with the people of Nepal. The King has also accepted the role of the movement. But if the army could become a decisive force, why did the King not use it in 1990? He could have used the army to resist the movement, and could have suppressed the movement. But he did not do that. It is the weaknesses of our leaders, either in opposition or in the government, or in the parties, they have their own imaginary enemy. ...But if these people are united as in the present agreement (between the NC and the UML) I don't think there is any possibility of using the army against the established system. The King has a very limited role to play. Where will he go by dismissing the government? Can he manage his show? That's why I don't see the political role of the army.

Q: One crucial point is that the constitution still defines the kingdom as a Hindu kingdom. Many people are not very happy about this definition. Do you think that this may bring a constitutional crisis at some stage?

A: This is also the weakness of our leaders, a weakness of the movement parties, the NC and the UML. According to the 1959 constitution Nepal was a secular state. But now they have compromised on this issue. They should not have done it. These leaders thought: "in our country Hinduism is not so fanatical. It is more or less tolerant and a very liberal type. It doesn't make a difference, let us compromise." That was the position taken by our leaders. Actually, personally I said they could have retained the 1959 situation as far as this issue was concerned. And B.P. Koirala said in 1980 when the issue was raised during the referendum, that if somebody says that Nepal is a Hindu state it is a fraud. He was very confident, he was a charismatic leader. But the

present leaders are not confident. That's why they compromised on that issue. Otherwise, after 30 years we should not have gone back to the pre-1959 situation. We could have gone ahead. Practically, it does not make much difference. But here a strong lobby was there to include "Hindu", so indirectly the word has been used in the constitution... Democracy must be secular.

Q: Considering the older political structures which still influence present politics, where do you see the greatest problems for democracy? For example social structures, like what has been termed the patrimonial system, or personality orientation, or other social hierarchies.

A: This is not only the situation in Nepal, such a situation exists in South Asia in general. Hierarchical society, caste-ridden society, and class-oriented society are common.... But if you give the opportunity to express opinions freely, that will also create some kind of impact on the nature of the system. For example, now that the ethnic groups, the deprived people, have freedoms, they have opportunities to express their views. That's why you cannot become all the time dominant. But we have an elitist system, the poor people in the villages do not have the opportunity to send their children to school. They cannot compete with the elite's children. After all, there is a circulation of elites, the same families, the same people are in circulation. But this is not only a phenomenon of this country, that is a phenomenon of other countries as well. ... I am very worried about the performance of the system, because this system should not be a procedural democracy, democracy by legal constitutional method only, but it should also be a democracy by performance. If it cannot be a performance-oriented democracy, it cannot accept egalitarian principles. If our government cannot become radical in providing some kind of respite, some kind of opportunities to the people, then these people will become very dissatisfied with it.

Q: This is probably only possible through certain legal measures. For example some ethnic organisations have demanded a kind of reservation policy like in India. Is this a solution?

A: Our people are now scared of the Indian situation. We have learned a lesson from India, that there should be no reservation policy, that is very categorically said here. We should try to provide opportunities for them, but how to do it is very difficult. All these elitist children are sent for higher study in India. And all these people are coming back as new elites, and they will be continuing.

Q: So you don't see that at the moment ethnic problems are becoming serious? What about the future?

A: We should always be on our guard. Now the trends are there in South Asia. A number of influences are there. We are importing a number of bad influences. We cannot be assured of the present situation, we have to foresee the future and accordingly plan and try to find new strategies to tackle or to avert such ethnic problems in the future. Possibilities are there, because people are just raising their voice against the Brahmans, Chetris, and Newars who are perceived as exploiters. We should try to accommodate their feelings. That way we can rectify the situation.

Q: The present government is often accused of being very Brahman-oriented.

A: That is not the design, that is purely accidental.... If you look at the table in my book, (*Problems of Governance*), the Brahmins are represented in large numbers. In the previous system the Chetris were dominant. The Panchayat-system was a Chetri-dominated system. ...It takes some time to correct.

Q: One last question concerning your own interests as a political scientist. What are your main research interests at the moment? What do you focus on?

A: Did you read my book on *Migration, Ethnicity and Security*? It was published in 1990 by Sterling, in New Delhi. I visited all six SAARC countries, except Maldives. I studied refugee movements, migrations, and their links with national security. After that, *Problems of Governance* just came out in 1993. But my basic interest now is in migration, refugees, security of South Asian countries, particularly smaller countries, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh. Right now, I am interested in doing work on South Asian refugees, particularly Bhutanese refugees, and on the danger of the disintegration of nations, including India, to the south of the Himalayas. People are talking about Gorkhaland, Greater Nepal. You might have heard that. And the Bhutanese are always playing that card. ... You know that this whole belt, the southern Himalayas, is a Nepali speaking belt? Starting from Assam, Meghalaya, Bhutan, Darjeeling, Sikkim, Nepal, if you cross the border in the western sector, western Nepal-India border, Kumaon, Garhwal have also language links because of migration. In Assam Nepalese constitute a huge population. Now Darjeeling is a Nepali speaking area. 80 % of Sikkimese are Nepalese. Also in Bhutan, about 55-60 % are Nepalese. If the refugees go back, altogether it will be about 55-60 % in Bhutan. But the government says only 25-30%, that is the official figure. Thus the whole belt is a Nepali-speaking area which gives rise to doubt for the authorities.

Q: Is there a strong separatist movement?

A: ...That is a kind of fear psychology created by some people and the government in Bhutan. The Nepalese are accused of expansionist designs. We cannot afford to do such things. We cannot become an expansionist power. ... We cannot go against the will of India. We are India-locked, and are dependent on India in many respects. It is very difficult for us to think beyond India. ... We are having some problems with the Bhutanese because of the refugees. The Bhutanese government wants to arouse the sensitivity of India, pointing out that the Nepalese will be a threat to Indian security and Indian territorial integrity. The Bhutanese want to impress on India that now the Nepalese are interested not in democracy in Bhutan but in expanding their territories, Sikkim, Darjeeling and other areas....

Q: Did it work out that way?

A: ... India cannot put pressure on Bhutan to democratize the system or to take all these refugees back home. It may try to persuade quietly but India cannot help Nepal at the cost of Bhutanese friendship. Both Bhutan and Nepal are India's good neighbours.

Q: Are you also involved in teaching at TU?

A: Yes.

Q: How big is your department? Is it a very popular subject to study? For

example I know that in anthropology there are quite a lot of students...

A: Now we don't have that problem. Our department was one of the biggest. Since the department of Sociology and Anthropology started, many young students joined it. But still Political Science is one of the popular departments.

Q: Being a political scientist, have you ever been tempted to enter politics yourself?

A: No. Now I have come to the conclusion that I will not join politics on my own initiative. If my government wants my service, if tomorrow the government nominates me and gives me some role to play, perhaps I may do that. But I will not go and fight elections, join a party, I don't like that. My freedom will be totally curtailed if I become the member of a party.

Notes:

¹On 17.8.93 the two parties agreed on ten points (mainly by establishing a number of committees and task forces to look into the disputed problems, e.g. the circumstances of fatal accident of UML leader Bhandari, treatment of recent movement victims, inflation etc., and by extending the time limit for solving the Tanakpur issue, s. The Independent 25.-31.8.1993). With this the movement, which was going on since spring, was called off, but the most crucial point, the demand for the Prime Minister's resignation was not mentioned.

NEWS

Symposia

Adapted Technologies and Environmental Education as Possibilities of Inter-Cultural Communication in the Himalayan Region Ittenbach, August 13-14, 1993

On the occasion of the exhibition in honour of Toni Hagen (see EBHR No. 5) the German committee of the King Mahendra Trust of Nature Conservation (Nepal) organised a symposium on the problems relating to the introduction and sustainability of environmental projects in the Himalayan region. Papers related to the following topics:

- New strategies in nature conservation projects in Nepal (C.P. Gurung, Bikash Pandey, Ditya Gurung, Manjushree Thapa)
- Urban Planning (P.L. Singh, Christian v. Hatzfeld)
- Income generating projects (biogas, microhydropower, medical plants) (Toni Hagen, Klaus Rudolph, Klaus Duerbeck)
- Solid waste (management, hygienic education) and waste water (Eckhard Spreen, Verena v. Hatzfeld, Oskar Werner Pawel)