
Democratic Socialism of BP and its Imperatives in Nepal's Politics and Development: A Critical Outlook

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jsdpj.v2i2.69560>

Abstract

This paper explores Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala's interpretation of democratic socialism and its influence on Nepal's political and developmental trajectory. Adopting a review-based methodology within a critical framework, the research delves into BP's principles of democratic socialism, which aim to blend democratic governance with social fairness and economic equity. The study evaluates how these principles were reflected in development policies during the Nepali Congress leadership, noting both positive outcomes and limitations. Additionally, it addresses the substantial obstacles encountered in applying democratic socialism in Nepal, such as political instability, leadership crisis, economic constraints, and societal challenges. In conclusion, the paper assesses the ongoing significance and future prospects of democratic socialism in Nepal, advocating for its effective theorization and application through development strategies centered on the people, improved governance practices, and reinforced institutional structures to promote political morality and sustainable development.

Keywords: Democratic socialism, BP Koirala, Nepali Congress, Nepalese development

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Introduction

Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, often referred to as BP Koirala, is a foundational figure in Nepalese political history, known for his vision of democratic socialism. His ideology aimed to merge democratic governance with social equity, positing that genuine democracy requires significant social reforms to achieve economic fairness and inclusive development. BP has contributed significant role in south Asian politics in his time paving the ways of leadership quality, struggle for democracy and ideology of socialism. However, there is not a singular perspective in evaluation of his contribution. This paper examines BP's theoretical framework, providing an overview of his democratic socialist vision. It situates his ideas within the socio-political context of Nepal, offering a comparative analysis with other dominant ideologies and practices of his era.

BP Koirala's approach to democratic socialism emphasized grassroots participation, fair resource distribution, and extensive social welfare. His goals were designed to address the entrenched inequalities in Nepalese society and advocate for policies that would foster more inclusive development. Although the Nepali Congress (NC), a major political party in Nepal, has adopted these principles, it is essential to evaluate BP Koirala's ideas in a broader context beyond the party. As the founding leader of the NC, established on April 9, 1950, through the merger of the Nepali National Congress and the Nepal Democratic Congress, BP aimed to advance a democratic socialist agenda. Since its inception, and excluding the thirty-year non-democratic period, the NC has seen seven prime ministers and led the government seventeen times as of August 2024. Despite this, the tangible impact of democratic socialism on Nepal's politics and socio-economic development remains minimal. Few studies have explored the historical and political contexts influencing BP Koirala's ideas and the challenges faced in implementing them amid a rapidly evolving political and modernization process (Jha, 1983; Nepal, 2020; Subedi, 1998). A thorough critical evaluation and assessment in this area remain notably absent.

The multifaceted personality of BP Koirala has been extensively discussed, more so than any other Nepali politician, and will likely continue to be the subject of future discourse. However, these discussions often fail to fully unveil the complete dimensions of his character. While some admirers have hailed him as a visionary and a great human being, there is also a segment that does not attribute as much significance to his persona, including certain leftist ideologues with entrenched political biases. It is essential to approach both of these perspectives critically, without undue weight. This brief article will focus specifically on the analysis of his economic policies and socialist philosophy, within a limited scope.

While BP Koirala's ideas have had a significant impact, translating his vision into practical outcomes has proven challenging. This paper will explore how BP's democratic socialist principles have been applied within Nepal's development framework and evaluate their effectiveness in practice. To address these aspects, the paper will pose central research questions to assess the real-world integration and impact of BP's ideas on Nepal's development practices. For reassessment:

- (i) What is the vision of BP's democratic socialism and how does it explore Nepal's development?
- (ii) How theoretical ideals and practical implications of democratic socialism are constructed?
- (iii) Why democratic socialist worldview is facing different types of challenges amidst its wider prospects?

Methodological Standpoints

This study employs a review-based approach to investigate BP Koirala's democratic socialist ideology and its effects on Nepal's development. The methodology involves analyzing a range of primary and secondary sources, including historical documents, political speeches, scholarly articles, and policy analyses, to gain insights into BP's vision and its practical implications. By synthesizing these various sources, the research aims to develop a thorough understanding of how BP's principles have influenced socio-economic policies in Nepal and their actual implementation.

In addition, the methodology includes a critical assessment of the application and interpretation of democratic socialism in Nepal's development contexts. This involves evaluating both the successes and challenges of policies derived from BP's ideology. The study draws on case studies and empirical research to provide a detailed examination of how these theoretical principles have been put into practice and their real-world effects.

Debates, Discussion and Synthesis

Global Paradigm of Democratic Socialism, and Recent Politics

The emergence of democratic socialism as a significant global paradigm can be traced back to the early 20th century, responding to the shortcomings observed in both capitalism and authoritarian socialism. Democratic socialism seeks to merge democratic governance with social ownership and welfare policies to promote economic fairness and social justice. Its prominence increased notably after World War II, as nations endeavored to reconstruct their economies and societies in a more equitable manner. The welfare state model, marked by extensive social safety nets and progressive taxation, became a defining feature of democratic socialist policies, particularly evident in Scandinavian countries (Ball et al., 2019; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Wright, 2019).

During the latter part of the 20th century, democratic socialism gained traction globally, largely due to the achievements of social democratic parties in Europe. These parties managed to effectively balance market economies with social protections, demonstrating that democratic socialism could serve as a practical alternative to both laissez-faire capitalism and authoritarian socialism. The success of social democracy in Western Europe, with its robust labor movements and progressive reforms, set a precedent for incorporating socialist principles within democratic frameworks, thus broadening its global appeal (Häusermann, 2010; Larson & Larson, 2021).

Despite facing challenges from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of neoliberal economic policies in the 1990s, democratic socialism continued to influence political discourse and policy-making. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in democratic socialism, driven by increasing concerns over income inequality, economic instability, and the shortcomings of neoliberal capitalism. This renewed interest is evident in the growing prominence of democratic socialist leaders and movements advocating for reforms aimed at addressing economic disparities and advancing social justice in the diverse manifestation of capitalism (Bolton, 2020; Piketty, 2014).

In recent years, social movements have gained prominence, and digitization has introduced new dynamics into global political discussions (Sapkota, 2021). These developments have contested traditional concepts of political authority and centrality. Theoretical perspectives such as Marxism, Functionalism, and Socialism have evolved, reflecting a broader and more complex range of ideas rather than adhering to a single, linear framework (see also Dalio, 2021; Inglehart, 2020; Wells, 2022). The role of non-state actors and technological advancements in the digital age have further diversified these political theories, underscoring the need for adaptable and multifaceted approaches in understanding contemporary political landscapes.

BP Koirala and His Political Career and Key Works/Writings

BP Koirala was a prominent leader in Nepal's political history and a key figure in the country's transition to democracy. He was respectfully referred to as 'BP Babu'. Born on September 23, 1914 in a politically and economically strong Brahmin family of eastern Nepal, BP emerged as a significant advocate for democratic governance during the intense political turbulence of the early 1950s. His activism was crucial in opposing the autocratic Rana regime (1846-1951), playing a vital role in the movement that led to the establishment of Nepal's first democratic government in 1951. As a founding member of the NC Party, BP was instrumental in advancing democratic reforms. His tenure as Nepal's first elected Prime

Minister, from May 27, 1959, to December 15, 1960, was marked by efforts to modernize the nation. However, his administration was abruptly ended by King Mahendra, who reinstated the non-party Panchayat system (1960-1991). Despite being removed from power and facing political persecution, BP continued to champion democracy and social justice throughout his life. He spent much of his later years in prison or exile, and his health declined due to cancer, leading to his death on July 21, 1982, at the age of 67.

BP Koirala's literary contributions are significant, encompassing political essays, novels, and autobiographical works. His writing often employed a Freudian psychological approach to explore complex characters and social issues, revealing his deep insights into human experiences. While politically he identified as a social democrat or socialist, his literary works reflect existential and anarchist themes. Notable novels and stories include "*Doshi Chasma*"(1949), "*Teen Ghumti*" (1968), "*Sumnima*" (1969), "*Babu Aama ra Chora*"(1989), "*Narendra Dai*" (1969), "*Hitler ra Yahudi*" (1982/83), "*Modi Aain*" (1980), "*Sweta Bhairavi*" (1983), and an incomplete autobiography, "*Mero Katha*" (1983). Many of these works were written during his imprisonment and exile and continue to be influential in Nepalese literature.

In addition to his literary achievements, BP's political writings have left a lasting impact. His essays, such as "*Rajatantra ra Lokatantra*" (Monarchy and Democracy, 1960), "*Thichieka Janata Jagisake*" (The Oppressed People Rise, 1969), "*Rastriyata Nepalko Sandarbham*" (Nationalism in the Context of Nepal, 1970), and "*Prajatantra ra Samajvad*" (Democracy and Socialism, 1979), reflect his enduring commitment to democratic socialism and social justice. His works remain relevant in political discourse, underscoring his influence on contemporary discussions about socialism, democratic governance and economic reform in Nepal. However, the debates and discussions on BP Koirala's contributions are often marred by political distortions, with overt biases, party-based explanations, and unrealistic imperatives shaping the narratives.

Sources of Claims of Socialist Idea of BP

BP Koirala has shared various insights into his background and personal development through several sources. The first of these is his autobiographical account, written during his imprisonment, which details his life up to adolescence and provides an engaging view of his family background and early experiences. Another key source is an interview conducted with Indian journalist Aniruddha Gupta in 1959, while Koirala was serving as the elected Prime Minister. This interview offers valuable perspectives on his political views during that period. Additionally, an interview with Dr. Hari Sharma, Director of the Nehru Museum and Library in Delhi, was held in 1975 shortly before BP's return from exile in India. Excerpts from this interview are featured in the book *Political Archives*, edited by socialist thinker and leader, Pradeep Giri (Giri, 2066 BS).

Furthermore, a series of interviews with Indian journalist and long-time friend Bhola Chatterjee, conducted between October 1979 and November 1981, were published in 1982 in the book *Portrait of a Revolutionary: BP Koirala (Chatterji, 1982)*. These interviews provide a comprehensive summary of his character. Conversations with renowned lawyer Ganesh Raj Sharma in 1981 also contribute to the understanding of Koirala's personality, although they cover similar themes as those found in the interviews with Indian journalists. In addition to these sources, BP's diaries, written over many years, might offer further insights into his personality. However, only the diaries from his two periods of imprisonment in Sundarjal, spanning approximately five years, have been published. As stated above, he also wrote numerous essays on various topics, including political, economic, social, and literary issues, from 1953 to 1977.

Historical Context of Democratic Socialism in Nepal

The evolution of democratic socialism in Nepal is intricately linked to the country's political transformation during the 20th century. The concept began to take shape in the early 1950s, amidst a period of intense resistance

against the Rana regime, which had ruled Nepal as a feudal autocracy for more than a century (Stiller, 1994). The repressive nature of the Rana regime, coupled with its denial of political freedoms, spurred a widespread demand for democratic reform. This era saw the rise of political activism influenced by socialist ideals, including Marxism, which proposed radical changes to address socio-economic disparities and advocate for social justice. The theoretical framework provided by Marxism supported the push for systemic reform in Nepal's political and social structures, resonating with global critiques of colonial and feudal systems (Mishra, 2015).

The democratic revolution of 1951 marked a significant turning point, bringing democratic socialism into the forefront of Nepalese politics. Led by figures such as BP Koirala, the Nepali Congress Party adopted democratic socialism to challenge autocratic rule and promote a more equitable society. BP's vision, guided by Marxist concepts of class struggle and the necessity for social reforms, sought to establish a democratic framework capable of addressing deep-seated inequalities. The end of the Rana regime ushered in a new political era, featuring a constitutional monarchy and democratic governance. Nonetheless, the early gains were undermined by persistent political instability and resistance from entrenched elites, which hindered the full implementation of democratic socialist principles (Koirala, 1979).

The subsequent rise of King Mahendra and the imposition of the Panchayat system further complicated the realization of democratic socialism in Nepal. In 1960, King Mahendra dismissed the democratically elected government led by BP and dissolved the parliament, initiating a period of autocratic royal rule. This era was marked by heightened political repression and the suppression of democratic ideals. Despite these obstacles, the principles of socialism continued to shape political discourse, advocating for a return to democratic practices and social reforms. The failure of the Panchayat system to address the demands for political freedom and social justice ultimately led to its downfall in 1990, paving the way for the restoration of democracy and the resurgence of democratic socialist ideas in Nepal's political landscape (Koirala, 1983).

BP Koirala's democratic socialism was deeply rooted in Nepal's historical and socio-political context. Confronted with an autocratic regime and widespread poverty, Koirala's vision aimed to create a democratic framework that could effectively address systemic inequalities. His approach was also shaped by international influences, including global socialist movements and the Cold War, which impacted political ideologies globally. BP's efforts sought to merge traditional Nepalese values with progressive socio-economic reforms, reflecting a nuanced negotiation between national needs and international ideologies.

Principles of BP's Democratic Socialism:

BP Koirala's concept of democratic socialism was founded on the idea that democracy and socialism can coexist and complement each other in the pursuit of social justice and economic fairness. Central to BP's vision was the principle of participatory democracy, which underscored the need for inclusive political structures that allow citizens to actively engage in governance. He imagined a political framework where democratic mechanisms ensured broad representation and decision-making processes were characterized by equity and accountability. BP believed that true democracy could only be achieved if it was paired with a strong commitment to social and economic reforms that addressed entrenched inequalities (Koirala, 1979). Hence, BP's socialism stands with the norms of democracy.

For BP, socialism represents a foundational concept within a global intellectual movement. This movement is focused on addressing and ending economic exploitation and the social distortions it creates, with the goal of fostering an environment where human development can thrive in true freedom. Socialism aims to eradicate societal inequalities by emphasizing fair distribution and equal opportunities, thereby facilitating social change and transformation. It is important to note that socialism is not a monolithic tradition but rather encompasses a range of approaches and perspectives. In this context, BP Koirala's political ideology can be distinctly understood through two key objectives: (1) the establishment of a

democratic governance framework that guarantees political and economic equality, and (2) the creation of a socialist system designed to ensure social and economic justice. In his influential article published in *Tarun Magazine* (1980), BP Koirala articulates that the pursuit of equality inherently involves the struggle for socialism. In the context of Nepal, socialism encompasses several key attributes, including:

- Personal freedom and fundamental rights
- The right to form political parties and provision for elections through adult suffrage
- Accountability of the Prime Minister and Ministers to Parliament
- Adherence to the rule of law
- Abolition of caste barriers, with special incentives for the advancement of backward classes across various fields
- Decentralization of governance
- Immediate resolution of issues related to slums and new settlements, including the registration of land in the names of its occupants
- Employment of ex-servicemen in development projects, with a focus on national interests
- Protection of national capital from misuse, aimed at increasing production
- Vigorous protection of farmers' legal rights
- Reform of the education system in accordance with democratic principles, and safeguarding the autonomy of educational institutions
- Prevention of exploitation by protecting workers' jobs
- Strict adherence to a neutral foreign policy

BP's approach to democratic socialism also placed a significant emphasis on social welfare and economic fairness. He contended that the state should play a pivotal role in ensuring that fundamental needs such as education, healthcare, and social security were accessible to everyone, particularly those in need. This perspective was driven by his belief that economic success should be shared widely rather than being concentrated in the hands of a few. His vision included implementing progressive taxation and

wealth redistribution policies to mitigate economic inequalities and promote a more equitable distribution of resources. BP's strategy aimed to blend the dynamism of a market economy with the benevolence of a welfare state, reflecting his dedication to both economic progress and social equity (Koirala, 1986).

Additionally, while BP's democratic socialism was influenced by Marxist theory, he adapted these ideas to fit Nepal's unique context. BP commended Marx for his contributions to economic welfare but criticized his ideas for constraining personal freedom and limiting individual choices. Although he incorporated Marxist critiques of capitalism, he opposed the concept of an authoritarian regime, advocating instead for democratic governance as a method to achieve socialist aims. His approach was marked by a commitment to peaceful reform and democratic processes, underlining his belief that social change could be accomplished through non-violent means rather than radical upheavals. BP's perspective fused Marxist ideals with a pragmatic approach to Nepal's socio-political landscape, striving to develop a harmonious and viable model of democratic socialism (Koirala, 1967).

Ideals of Nepal's Development through Democratic Socialism

BP Koirala's worldview on Nepal's development through democratic socialism was firmly anchored in his belief that genuine progress required a synergy between democratic governance and equitable resource distribution. He envisioned a Nepal where democratic institutions would not only guarantee political freedoms but also drive socio-economic reforms aimed at enhancing the overall quality of life for its citizens. For BP, true democracy was incomplete without addressing the significant economic disparities that afflicted Nepalese society. He proposed that democratic socialism offered a framework for merging democratic values with policies aimed at achieving social justice and economic fairness. BP's development vision emphasized the state's role in fostering social welfare and mitigating inequalities. He advocated for comprehensive social programs to meet fundamental needs such as education, healthcare, and

housing. BP's approach entailed creating a robust welfare state capable of providing a safety net for the most vulnerable segments of the population. He believed that economic growth should be inclusive, ensuring that its benefits were broadly shared rather than concentrated among a few. This perspective underscored BP's commitment to reconciling economic efficiency with social equity, with the goal of establishing a more just and compassionate society (Koirala, 1986).

Furthermore, BP's worldview extended to the importance of international solidarity and cooperation. He viewed Nepal's development as part of a larger global context and advocated for policies consistent with international human rights and social justice standards. BP emphasized the necessity for Nepal to engage with the international community to gain support for its development objectives and to adopt global best practices in democratic socialism. His vision was not only focused on domestic reforms but also on positioning Nepal as an active participant in the global efforts to address social and economic inequalities.

BP's Remarks on Socialism and Contradictory Claims

In the context of Nepal, BP Koirala did not author any comprehensive works specifically on socialist philosophy, apart from some scattered writings that connect socialism with democracy. At the 1952 party congress in Birgunj, socialism was outlined as a party objective, but a detailed definition of this socialism was not provided. Essentially, BP did not lay out a definitive framework or roadmap for socialism. Despite this, some intellectuals have been reluctant to accept this lack of specificity, maintaining the belief that BP's ideas were fully developed.

BP's commitment to socialism is well-documented, but it is not theorized as 'comprehensive model'. He articulated his views on socialism for Nepal in two written documents, though detailed analyses of socialism in his speeches and writings are limited. BP believed that socialism could only reach its full potential when integrated with democracy, considering socialism synonymous with political democracy (Giri, 2066, p. 294). In

February 1979, during the 'Asian Pacific Socialist Organization' conference in Australia, BP presented a paper titled 'Socialism in the Context of Nepal.' In an interview with Indian journalist Bhola Chatterjee, BP summarized his Sydney conference paper on democratic socialism into five key points:

1. ***Democracy as a core element:*** The essence of socialism is democracy. Political institutions that align with the people's interests, such as party democracy, are essential. Without these, economic development is unachievable.
2. ***Impact of foreign aid:*** In a developing country like Nepal, foreign aid does not promote development but rather fosters a new dependent class. This class lacks a solid economic foundation and is often prone to corruption and illegality, driven by external interests.
3. ***Inapplicability of western Models:*** The Western development model is not suitable for countries like Nepal. Advanced technology imports may not be advantageous; improving and utilizing traditional tools is more appropriate. The Western model often exacerbates inequality, making the rich richer and the poor poorer.
4. ***Liberal democracy:*** BP referred to liberal democracy when discussing democracy. He critiqued some socialist peers for undermining the importance of democracy and focusing excessively on economic aspects.
5. ***Future of socialism:*** BP viewed socialism as a fundamental current of the future, naturally aligned with the Third World and distinct from the alliance of powerful nations.

Vision in Economic Planning and Critique of Historical Determinism

BP Koirala addressed not only national politics and global contexts but also the development model that Nepal should pursue. He highlighted that, given Nepal's agrarian status, development plans should prioritize rural areas. He recommended that these plans be formulated with originality,

rather than simply adopting models from developed nations. This perspective is reflected in an interview included in the book *Vichar Bindu*, which likely documents his conversation with the esteemed Indian journalist Bhola Chatterjee. To reflect more:

I expressed my views on the economic framework necessary for Nepal and the country's developmental trajectory. Although my ideas were not fully delineated, I observed a degree of clarity emerging in that direction. I shared an experience from my time as Prime Minister, during which I visited the National Planning Commission's office. I saw a portrait of the king displayed in the planners' room. Feeling compelled to speak, I suggested that, in addition to the king's portrait, there should be an image of a farmer working the fields. I urged the planners to keep the farmer living in a modest hut in mind when developing plans, questioning whether their plans, crafted in the comfort of their offices, would benefit the farmer or merely serve the king. I made it clear that this approach was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi rather than originating from my own thoughts.

BP Koirala acknowledged that, although he was not an economic expert, development that neglects rural populations cannot be considered genuine progress. He emphasized the importance of viewing people from a multidimensional perspective, rather than solely through economic or deterministic lenses. Consequently, he argued that Marxist dialectics should be regarded as a partial framework rather than an absolute truth. He noted that hunger alone is not the sole driver of human actions and that no movement has emerged solely from the notion that "one can only eat to be full." He believed that individuals are shaped by both historical and extra-historical factors.

During his prime ministerial tenure, BP explored various economic development models. He sometimes endorsed the Nehruvian model of industrialization, while at other times, he supported Mahatma Gandhi's labor-intensive rural economic model. At one point, he criticized Gandhi's rural agricultural model as an impediment to modern development,

advocating for increased investments from both domestic and foreign sources to drive industrial progress. He stated, "We are not advocating the immediate construction of socialism. We have deferred this goal for a few years, focusing instead on the planned use of national resources and increasing capital in all sectors. In the current context, private capital is essential. We will also seek to attract foreign investment" (see also Congress Government Program, June 6, 1960; interview with Indian journalist Aniruddha Gupta; Giri, 2066 BS).

BP further expands on his economic policy by asserting only local/domestic resources and agrarian reform. Achieving the level of economic progress necessary for socialism cannot be accomplished through agricultural reforms alone. Industrial development is also essential. For him, true economic development requires the establishment of various industries rather than relying solely on rural foundations. He asserts, "to lift the country out of poverty and guide it toward development, embracing an industrial revolution is crucial" (Integral Component of Democratic Socialism, December 15, 1960, as highlighted in Political Archives of Giri, 2066 BS, p. 137).

Therefore, the aim of socialism should be to foster prosperity, not to distribute poverty or economic inequalities. Indeed, after his return from exile in India in January 1975, BP revisited Gandhi's development model, aligning it with the ideas of British economist Ernst Friedrich Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful." Schumacher advocated for economic policies that cater to community needs rather than corporate interests. BP's death occurred before he could fully define or implement Schumacher's model in Nepal. Nevertheless, he had not provided a clear definition of his economic development model before his death. Even the recent scholarship of political science and Nepal's overall academia could not reach into the paradigmatic debate of modernization vs dependency, mainstream vs alternative and disciplinary vs transdisciplinary approaches of development (Sapkota, 2023).

Nepali Congress and its Ideals of Democratic Socialism

The Nepali Congress (NC) has been a prominent proponent of democratic socialism, which has served as a cornerstone of its political ideology and policy framework. Established in 1947 and restructured in 1950 by BP Koirala and his colleagues, the party quickly became a pivotal force in Nepal's quest for democratic governance and social justice. The NC's embrace of democratic socialism since its sixth General Convention in 1956 underscores its commitment to merging democratic principles with social equity, striving to create a society that harmonizes individual freedoms with collective welfare. This ideological commitment has been integral to the party's identity and strategic direction, shaping its policies and defining its influence within Nepalese politics.

The ideological foundation of democratic socialism, as upheld by NC, is based on the conviction that democracy and socialism can work together to tackle social inequalities while safeguarding democratic freedoms. The party's ideological basis is significantly influenced by BP's vision, which integrates democratic governance with a robust focus on social welfare. The NC's slogan underscores the necessity of using democratic institutions to enact policies that advance economic fairness and social justice. This approach seeks to create a safety net for the underprivileged, ensuring that the advantages of economic progress are shared more equitably throughout society. However, rather than depending on governmental goodwill to implement BP Koirala's socialist policies, his advocacy for democratic socialism has proven more influential in shaping electoral politics in Nepal particularly for Nepali Congress in recent years (Shrestha, 2020).

The practical application of 'democratic socialism' by NC party has often highlighted a significant discrepancy between its declared ideals and its real-world actions. Although the party champions democratic socialism as a core principle, it has faced criticism for failing to consistently adhere to these principles in its policies and governance. Instead of upholding the transformative social and economic reforms central to democratic socialism, the NC's governance approach has frequently leaned towards

political convenience and power retention. This divergence has led many to question whether the party's endorsement of socialist ideals is genuinely reflected in its actions.

Furthermore, the NC's use of democratic socialism as a symbolic framework has not always been matched by practical policy measures that embody its core values. The party has faced challenges in translating its socialist rhetoric into effective strategies for addressing social and economic inequalities. Policy decisions and political strategies often seem to focus more on immediate political benefits and strategic alliances rather than on implementing long-term reforms aimed at economic fairness and social justice. This gap between the party's ideological commitments and its practical outcomes has fostered doubts about the authenticity of its dedication to the principles of democratic socialism.

Nepalese Development Policies and Practices under Democratic Socialism

Under democratic socialism, Nepalese development policies and practices would be profoundly influenced by a dedication to fair social reforms and democratic governance, focusing on reducing socio-economic inequalities and improving institutional integrity. This can be demonstrated through the following elements:

Early years and foundational reforms: In the initial phase of democratic governance in Nepal, particularly under the leadership of the NC and BP Koirala, democratic socialism significantly influenced development policies. Upon becoming Prime Minister in 1959, BP sought to implement progressive reforms designed to modernize Nepal's socio-economic landscape. His administration prioritized building essential infrastructure and enhancing social services such as education and healthcare, reflecting the democratic socialist emphasis on equitable access. Notably, land reforms were introduced to redistribute land to underprivileged farmers, aiming to alleviate rural poverty and boost agricultural productivity. These early initiatives set the stage for a more inclusive development approach,

aligning with democratic socialist principles of reducing economic inequality and fostering social justice.

Challenges and policy adjustments: The pursuit of democratic socialist policies encountered considerable obstacles, particularly following the dissolution of BP's government in 1960 by King Mahendra. The ensuing Panchayat regime, which persisted until 1990, restricted democratic freedoms and obstructed the achievement of socialist objectives. Nevertheless, the Nepali Congress reaffirmed its commitment to democratic socialism upon regaining power in 1990. The new democratic government aimed to restore civil liberties and advance economic and social welfare policies, focusing on expanding educational access, improving healthcare, and fostering rural development. Despite these efforts, challenges such as political instability, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited resources often hindered effective policy implementation. However, BP Koirala's conceptualization of democratic socialism does not address the challenges posed by neoliberal interventions and the survival strategies of developing countries like Nepal in the evolving context of globalization. This gap in BP's framework is likely attributed to his inability to foresee the collapse of the Soviet Union, the crises in late capitalist Europe, and the impact of globalization on poorer nations, all of which became evident from the early 1990s onward.

Contemporary practices and criticisms: In recent decades, the NC has continued to advocate for democratic socialism, though the impact of its policies has been varied. These are thoroughly committed in the documents of 14th General Convention (Dec 13-15, 2021), Policy Convention (2023) and the election manifestos for General Election and Local Elections 2022. The party has undertaken initiatives aimed at addressing social inequalities and promoting economic growth, reflecting BP's democratic socialist ideals. Despite efforts to implement poverty alleviation and social inclusion programs, the effectiveness of these measures has been questioned. Issues such as political corruption, governance challenges, and inadequate reform implementation have undermined the intended outcomes. Critics argue that while the NC maintains a commitment to democratic socialism in its

rhetoric, the practical results often fall short of its goals. This gap between policy promises and actual performance underscores the difficulties the party faces in translating democratic socialist ideals into effective governance and sustainable development.

Challenges and Obstacles for Democratic Socialist Practices

Implementing democratic socialist practices in Nepal encounters several formidable challenges, such as persistent political instability, widespread corruption, and opposition from entrenched power structures. Furthermore, the absence of unified policy frameworks and inadequate institutional backing obstruct the successful adoption of democratic socialism. These issues can be examined through the following four key domains:

Political instability and governance issues: Political instability has been a significant barrier to the effective implementation of democratic socialist practices in Nepal. The country's political environment has been marked by frequent shifts in government, periods of authoritarian control, and internal conflicts. A notable example is the Panchayat system, which, from 1960 to 1990, suppressed democratic processes and obstructed the advancement of socialist policies. Despite the return to democracy in 1990, Nepal has continued to face political volatility, with ongoing government changes and the emergence of new political factions. This instability has led to inconsistencies in policy execution and difficulties in maintaining a cohesive development strategy aligned with democratic socialist principles. The persistent instability in the country can be attributed to several critical factors, including the political parties' often unjustified alliance policies, their focus on electoral politics, and their ineffectiveness in service delivery. These issues have contributed to the rise of populism, as evidenced by the recent federal, provincial, and local elections held in 2022. Growing frustration, particularly among the youth, has been brewing and could potentially escalate into violence if the situation continues to deteriorate and if political parties, including the Nepali Congress, fail to address the genuine concerns of the citizens. Governance challenges, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and lack of transparency,

have compounded these issues, making it difficult to effectively implement and oversee development initiatives.

Economic constraints and resource limitations: Economic constraints and resource limitations have also significantly hindered the implementation of democratic socialist practices in Nepal. Persistent issues such as poverty, low economic growth, and limited fiscal capacity have restricted the government's ability to invest in comprehensive social welfare programs and infrastructure projects. Although the NC has promoted policies aimed at poverty reduction and social equity, these efforts are often undermined by inadequate funding and economic challenges. The dependence on foreign aid and loans has sometimes resulted in policy constraints and dependencies, further impeding the realization of democratic socialist objectives. The ongoing difficulty in mobilizing sufficient resources for social welfare and development initiatives remains a major obstacle to achieving the ideals of democratic socialism.

Social and cultural barriers: Social and cultural barriers have also obstructed the effective implementation of democratic socialist practices in Nepal. The country's diverse social fabric, encompassing various ethnic, caste, and regional groups, presents challenges in addressing socio-economic disparities. Deep-seated social hierarchies and cultural norms, such as caste and ethnic discrimination, complicate the design and execution of inclusive social programs. Additionally, there is often limited understanding or support for democratic socialist principles among the general populace, which can hinder the effectiveness of policies aimed at social justice and equity. The mainstream political landscape, including parties like the NC that profess democratic socialism, often overlooks new social movements, identity-based movements, and the dissenting voices of marginalized farmers and disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, most of the mainstream political parties, including NC followed a dual policy on identity politics of Nepal during the constitution-writing phase (Sapkota, 2014) which also continues today. Overcoming these social and cultural

divides is crucial for the successful application of democratic socialism in Nepal.

Leadership crisis and implementation fluctuation: The NC Party has faced internal challenges, including leadership crises and deviations from ethical standards, which have affected its ability to implement democratic socialism effectively. Leadership conflicts have led to inconsistencies in policy coherence and execution, undermining the party's credibility and influence. Ethical stances, adherence to moral values, dedication to public agendas, simplicity in lifestyle, and a commitment to professional service and collective well-being are fundamental attributes anticipated from effective leadership. However, these qualities are often lacking in practice. Many political leaders, including those within the Nepali Congress (NC), have been afflicted by issues such as individualism, monetary influence, incompetence, nepotism, favoritism, and hero worship.

Consequently, identifying exemplary socialist leaders who embody the principles of democratic socialism within the current political context proves challenging. Deviations from BP BP's ethical framework have further weakened the party's commitment to its democratic socialist ideals. These internal issues have critically shaped the party's approach to democratic socialism, impacting its overall effectiveness in advancing BP's vision and addressing Nepal's political and socio-economic challenges.

Relevance and Prospects of Democratic Socialism for Nepal's Development

The significance of democratic socialism for Nepal's development is evident in its ability to harmonize social equity with democratic governance, targeting economic inequalities and political instability. Its potential for success hinges on the practical application of its principles through well-designed policies, strengthened institutional frameworks, and active involvement from all societal sectors. This relevance can be demonstrated in the following three areas:

Contemporary Relevance: Democratic socialism remains pertinent in addressing Nepal's development challenges due to its focus on blending democratic governance with principles of social justice and economic equity. In today's context, Nepal continues to face notable socio-economic disparities and political instability. The ideals of democratic socialism—such as fair resource distribution and robust social welfare systems—are well-suited to tackle these issues. Contemporary policy discussions often echo these principles, advocating for inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and universal access to essential services like healthcare and education. These topics are central to the political platforms of parties like the Nepali Congress, which persistently champions social justice and economic fairness in its policy agenda.

Future Prospects: The future of democratic socialism in Nepal hinges on several critical factors. Political stability and effective governance are essential for the successful implementation of democratic socialist policies. There is an urgent need for the reformulation and revitalization of political parties, focusing on leadership, policy development, organizational structure, and ethical conduct. The dominance of political and power elites poses a risk of undermining the benefits of socialism. Socialism is not confined to political parties alone but extends beyond the party system. Therefore, the future prospects of socialism depend on engaging with the voices of voters, party members, non-voters, and, at times, political opponents.

Addressing challenges such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and political fragmentation will be vital for creating a supportive environment for these policies. Moreover, democratic socialism must evolve to address contemporary issues such as climate change, urbanization, and technological advancements while continuing to emphasize social equity and inclusive growth. Adapting democratic socialist principles to these new challenges will be crucial for their relevance and effectiveness in the future.

Strengthening Institutional Frameworks: For democratic socialism to have a sustained impact on Nepal's development, there must be a concerted effort to strengthen institutional frameworks and enhance government capacity. This includes improving the efficiency of public institutions,

ensuring transparency and accountability, and fostering greater public involvement in decision-making processes. By doing so, Nepal can create a more favorable environment for implementing democratic socialist policies and achieving sustainable development goals.

Additionally, engaging with international best practices and learning from other nations that have successfully integrated democratic socialism into their development models can offer valuable insights and strategies for Nepal. BP Koirala advocated that a politician should embody simplicity, approachability, and dedication to the people, similar to a monk's commitment. However, today, there is a prevailing view that "one does not need to (and cannot) be a monk to participate in politics." In reality, merely crafting appealing ideas and quoting socialist thinkers is insufficient to achieve the goals of socialism.

Conclusion and Implications

BP Koirala's vision of democratic socialism aimed to blend democratic governance with socialist principles to foster a more equitable and inclusive society. This ambitious framework sought to address the political and social injustices prevalent in Nepal's historical context. Despite the compelling ideals of integrating democratic processes with social equity, the practical implementation of these principles has been fraught with inconsistencies and challenges. This paper does not endorse the assertion that BP can be regarded as a theorist of democratic socialism, even though he was instrumental in formally introducing this concept within the context of Nepal. While BP's efforts were crucial in embedding democratic socialism into Nepal's political landscape, the paper maintains that his contributions were more focused on practical implementation rather than the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework. Yet, BP should be treated a collective asset for all political schools including liberals, socialists and Marxists as well as the literary genre of existentialism.

The Nepali Congress has had several opportunities to explore and expand BP Koirala's model of democratic socialism. However, there has been a lack of substantial theoretical development to enrich the ideology, and the model has not been fully implemented in practice. The party's attempts to apply democratic socialism have been impeded by various challenges, such as leadership crises, organizational disarray, factionalism, political instability, governance inefficiencies, and socio-economic limitations. These issues have often obstructed the effective realization of BP's principles. While the party has expressed a commitment to democratic socialism, the practical realities of governance and theoretical/ empirical dilemmas have prevented it from fully achieving its socialist objectives. For democratic socialism to realize its potential in Nepal's future development, several key issues should be addressed. This includes a renewed emphasis on stabilizing the political environment, enhancing governance mechanisms, and tackling socio-economic disparities. Adapting democratic socialism to contemporary challenges and realities is crucial for its success. Without significant reforms and effective strategies, the vision of democratic socialism risks remaining an aspirational ideal rather than a transformative force in Nepal's development.

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