

# People's Multiparty Democracy: A Base to Socialism

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## ABSTRACT

*Madan Bhandari, an iconic revolutionary leader, formulated People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD), a groundbreaking political framework in Nepal rooted in the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Bhandari's PMPD emphasizes socioeconomic transformation to eliminate discrimination and dismantle remnants of feudalism and imperialism. This article examines the essential alliances and integrations among parties with socialist ideologies, highlighting their significance in the ongoing debate over effective and equitable governance. It investigates the origins and core principles of PMPD and its roadmap to socialism in Nepali context. The main findings of the research suggest that placing governmental control in the hands of the people, focusing on socioeconomic transformation, fostering social ownership, promoting economic equality, and ensuring cultural and material preparedness are critical elements of PMPD's path to socialism. By adopting PMPD's guiding principles, Nepal can develop its own unique model of socialism.*

## Introduction

Madan Bhandari (1952–1993), the then General Secretary of the CPN (UML), emerged as a charismatic and popular Nepali political leader during post-1990 era until his death in a mysterious road accident in 1993 (Karki, 2023). With his political philosophy of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD), Bhandari envisioned a future course of progress and prosperity for Nepal embedded in this principle of revolution in the country (Dhakal, 2023). PMPD is a creative approach to redefining Marxism in the twenty-first century. It advocates for multiparty competition, the rule of law, and the supremacy of competition for the development of leadership. It also focuses on social justice, human rights, and economic equality (Chapagain, 2023). The thesis of multiparty democracy is the ideological frame of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy suggested that

political parties with communist ideologies could secure socialism or socialist aims by popular mandate or elections instead of armed struggle (Shahi, 2021). These arguments themselves proved that PMPD envisioned socialism within the multiparty framework. PMPD is an innovative principle within the context of Nepal's geopolitical dynamics, emphasizing opposition to feudalism, comprador capitalism, hegemonism, and imperialism, to eradicate these issues from Nepali society (Pokhrel, 2023).

Bhandari's major ideological evolution is the synthesis of Marxism in the Nepali context. PMPD is a comprehensive political, economic, and social theory that incorporates key Marxist principles within the specific context of Nepal (Dhakal, 2023). PMPD is becoming increasingly relevant and important in contemporary Nepali politics because it promotes collaboration between

communist parties under the political thought of PMPD to accomplish goals of socialism within a democratic framework. According to Dhungel (2014), PMPD is a unique attempt to incorporate contemporary Marxist principles into Nepal's specific sociopolitical situations. Shahi (2021) mentioned that Bhandari developed PMPD by considering the Nepali historical socioeconomic and political background, a distinct Nepali communist identity, and the communist movement by accepting multiparty democracy over more typical Marxist practices. Thus, PMPD represents a constructive application of Marxism in the Nepali environment, and socialist practitioners can benefit from the Nepali innovative and constructive ideology.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 articulates its resolve in the preamble to establish a democratic society founded on the principles of proportional inclusion and participation, ensuring fair economic prosperity and social justice, and paving the way for socialism with democratic norms and values, including a competitive multiparty democratic governance system for the people. PMPD also emphasizes socialism in the context of Nepal although there is a significant gap in translating PMPD's overall essence into socialism. Therefore, this paper aims to identify the roadmap to socialism through the review and analysis of PMPD's original document.

## **Methodology**

The article utilizes secondary sources of information from scholarly articles by academicians and political figures. Qualitative information is derived from the contents of PMPD documents. The study examined the sources of PMPD, namely the prevailing socioeconomic and political situation in Nepal (pre-1990), lessons from the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and an analysis of the global context of Marxism and its ultimate aim of socialism. To accomplish this aim, the paper identifies the major ways (intervening areas) to the roadmap of socialism, which include

consolidating the state power in the hands of the people through elections, eliminating all forms of exploitation and oppression by feudalism and imperialism, ending comprador capitalism and forming national capital, addressing agendas of socioeconomic transformation, ensuring materialistic and cultural preparedness with the formulation of national capitalism, fostering alliances and integration between parties with socialist ideology, and preparing the people to counter and overcome obstacles with clear and defined philosophical commitments.

Bhandari's perspective involves the transition from semi-feudalism to national capitalism, and from national capitalism to socialism, by addressing political, economic, and socio-cultural elements. This process follows the consolidation of the state power through democratic elections or popular mandate, the elimination of feudal practices and discrimination, and the end of external domination, i.e. imperialism. Furthermore, PMPD emphasizes that material and cultural preparation is key to transitioning to socialism in the Nepali context. The ideas, thoughts, and aspirations of PMPD resonated with the Nepali public following the People's Movement of 1990. During this period, Bhandari effectively communicated his message by incorporating elements of Marxism. Bhandari expressed the essence of PMPD through large-scale public gatherings, mass media interviews, and party documents (Aryal, 2023).

The political thought of PMPD reconciles communist objectives with the commitment to promote socialism within a multiparty democratic framework. Consolidated state power in the hands of the people is one of PMPD's core goals, achieved through democratic processes and popular mandates (Thapa, 1992). Another key aspect of Bhandari's thought on socialism is the elimination of feudal practices, discrimination, and external pressures (Upreti, 2008). Khatri (2008) also cited PMPD's policy of dismantling feudalistic, comprador capitalism through socio-

economic transformation. This transformation includes changes in Nepal's sociocultural structure, economic dynamics, production relations, and welfare, emphasizing the importance of material and cultural preparedness for a smooth transition from national capitalism to socialism. Gyanwali (2021) stated that pursuing socialism and communism within a democratic framework exemplifies the ideas of PMPD.

Socialism is the primary aim of the Communist Party of Nepal. There is, however, a significant gap in defining the types of socialism and how Nepal can achieve it. In this scenario, reviewing the ideas of PMPD could contribute to finding the path to socialism in the context of Nepal. Based on these theoretical bases, the article designs its conceptual framework, including its sources, the need to intervene in the superstructure, and its ultimate goals.

The study framework is designed out of the original documents of PMPD. Through this analysis, the study highlights how and why PMPD is theorized, what the ultimate goals of PMPD are, and which areas need intervention to achieve these goals. Based on these questions and gaps, the study framework is designed. The ultimate goal of PMPD is socialism within a democratic framework in the context of Nepal. For this, alliances and integration between parties with socialist ideologies under PMPD are essential for consolidating the state power in the hands of the people through elections. After consolidating power, it is necessary to eliminate all forms of exploitation and oppression, end comprador capitalism, form national capital, and ensure cultural and material preparedness.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Party's alliance and integration**

PMPD is a political ideology that outlines programs and strategies for Nepal's transition from a feudalistic to a socialist country (Pokhrel, 2023). To achieve this goal, PMPD states that the most important requirement is to solidify people's power in the state and abolish all forms of

discrimination and exploitation in all spheres. The consolidation of people's power should end all sorts of feudalism and imperialism in the country and implement socioeconomic transformation programs through government plans and policies based on Nepal's socioeconomic and political reality. For this, PMPD focuses on formulating a stable government, prioritizing the concentration of state power in the hands of the people through the formation of alliances and the merging of leftist political parties with socialist ideologies.

The paper highlights some historical alliances that played significant roles in changing the political system. The political history of Nepal shows the Seven Party Alliance for restoration of democracy in 1990. This was not just a socialist coalition; it also included the center-left Nepali Congress and communist groups (Ninglekhu, 2016). In the 1990s, the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) succeeded in overthrowing the partyless autocratic Panchayat system, which existed before 1990, and establishing a multiparty democracy. Similarly, there was another major alliance between the Maoists and seven political parties known as the Post-Conflict Alliance in 2006, which ended King Gyanendra's autocracy and led to the establishment of the Nepali republic. Reviewing Nepal's political history, many communist and non-communist parties have formed temporary alliances for elections and government formation. However, these alliances were typically short-lived and focused on achieving short-term goals due to ideological differences and power disputes (Thapaliya, 2019).

The political dynamics in Nepal has been characterized by fluctuating alliances among socialist parties, which are formed based on common goals and ideological alignment. The Communist Party of Nepal, Unified Marxist and Leninist (CPN [UML]), and the Maoist Center merged to become the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) on May 18, 2018. This was a major attempt at integration, bringing together the Communist Party of Nepal. However, this merger was against PMPD, as it did not accept

the political ideology of PMPD. Khadka (1995) argued that Nepal's communist parties are experiencing sheer fragmentations and are unwilling and less committed to transitioning the country from feudalism to socialism. During elections in Nepal, political parties frequently establish alliances and coalitions to increase their chances of success, but they are not serious about changing the political system (Dahal, 2016).

Various issues have emerged as barriers to the communist party unification and cooperation, including ideological disagreements, leadership conflicts, personal interests, and a focus on power politics rather than substantive reforms. To truly embody the essence of PMPD, a system for forming alliances and integrating parties to achieve common goals in transitioning Nepal to a socialist state through common discussion and formulating alliances on major issues of political system transformation is necessary. However, this is not happening due to unstable, power-centric politics. There are major differences in the acceptance and promotion of multiparty democracy within the socialist framework compared to previous Marxist-Leninist ideologies, which often advocated for the construction of a one-party state as a transitional phase to communism. In contrast, PMPD consistently favors multiparty democracy as a strategy to develop socialism within a multiparty democratic framework, allowing for the coexistence of different political parties with nationalist and socialist ideologies to collaborate and form alliances to secure an electoral mandate for socialism.

### **The agenda of socioeconomic and political transformation**

Bhandari (1993) in section 3.8 of PMPD stated that the democratic and progressive political system will eradicate all feudal, bureaucratic, and imperial forces, as well as their exploitation and oppression. A united secular state of workers, peasants, and the entire nationalist, anti-feudal, anti-imperialist class will emerge

as a strong nationalist force. Within 31 years, Bhandari's thoughts were included in the interim constitution (2007). Often termed as Nepali Magna Carta, Bhandari's 27-point critique of the constitution (1991) is incorporated into the interim constitution of Nepal (2007). The majority of his proposals for legal, political, and economic reforms related to the royal family and military are integrated into the constitution (Bhattarai, 2011). However, due to political differences, the working modalities of the basic essence of the agendas and issues of socioeconomic transformation are not included in the constitutional plans and programs, implying that the people's power has not yet been consolidated to establish a government of workers, peasants, and nationalists. Nevertheless, the structure and process outlined in the constitution can pave the way for radical changes.

The economic system is explicitly stated in article 3.10 of PMPD has related that after the creation of people's democratic power in the country, the state should emphasize developing and strengthening the economic condition of the people, and materially preparing for the transition to socialism with definite plans. PMPD mentions that by focusing on strong material preparation, the transition to socialism will occur gradually. This will serve as the foundation for the country's macroeconomic and social transformation and development. In this approach, even after the emergence of public power in the political form, all the work will be carried out as planned.

PMPD unequivocally states that the removal of feudal landholdings would end all forms of semi-feudal exploitation. This argument was made 30 years ago. However, the current scenario regarding landholding and its utilization by the proletariat has changed significantly. Small landholding peasants and even landless individuals in agrarian settings no longer seem interested in farming. Currently, uncultivated farmland has increased

significantly, with this negative growth rate evident in 34 districts across the country. Specifically, the land in the mountainous and hilly regions remains uncultivated. Therefore, political parties and the state should classify the land and ensure its proper utilization. Scientific and modern farming techniques need to be developed to boost agricultural output and productivity. The living standards of people who rely on agriculture will rise if farmers benefit directly from state-provided facilities such as agricultural loans at affordable interest rates, organized agricultural markets to obtain fair prices for their produce, improved fertilizers and seeds at concessional rates, irrigation, and technical education. These measures, outlined in PMPD, can address the current apathy of farmers toward cultivating land, especially in the hilly regions of the country.

Moreover, PMPD also specifies a wide range of potential solutions to economic stagnation, detailing likely improvements in various sectors such as industry, agriculture, business, natural resource exploitation, health, communication, education, culture, women's issues, state security, foreign policies, sports, and other elements and concerns of the country. Despite these aspirations and goals, substantial challenges remain in turning PMPD theory into concrete socio-economic plans, policies, and activities.

### **Current debates on socialism**

Today, many people around the world speak and write about socialism from a variety of perspectives. Those who follow socialist ideology are concerned with questions like, "What is socialism?" It can be defined from various angles within the context of socioeconomic reality (Bernstein, 2018). Anyone who seeks to understand socialism will notice how difficult it is to define. Whether something is considered socialism or not remains a constant topic of hot debate. However, there are some common characteristics of socialism agreed upon by many ideologues across the socialist spectrum.

When we investigate the practice of socialism, we discover that it has a long history dating back to ancient times. In this context, Alvey (2011) argued that the Greek philosopher Plato advocated for the equal distribution of resources and the abolition of private property. Similarly, Avila (2004) stated that Christian societies practiced communal ownership and resource sharing. Henri de Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier championed utopian socialism, which was merely the concept of socialism without a political ideology. It was an alternative approach to sharing resource ownership (Abensour, 2017).

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels conceptualized socialism as a comprehensive economic and political system. This was the major distinction between utopian socialism and Marxism (Engels, 1968). In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels discussed that socialism and communism have an inverse relationship to historical evolution, which they called scientific socialism. Marx was the first to develop scientific socialism. Roemer (2017) stated that in a capitalist system, individuals are encouraged to own the means of production privately and are allowed to profit by exploiting the proletariat, or workers. Equal distribution of means of production and services is an essential feature of socialism. However, Marx stated that social inequality is an inevitable dimension of the capitalist world. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a socialist political system for the equitable distribution of means of production.

Priestland (2002) argued that after the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, created and practiced democratic socialism in the Soviet Union until its demise in 1991. China, Cuba, North Korea, Laos, and Vietnam have practiced socialism within their own political and economic contexts, but this is not the scientific socialism outlined by Marx (Jeffries, 2002). This indicates that the model of socialism has varied between countries and socioeconomic conditions. Brandal (2013) stated that social democrats would never complete their

task and that there was no utopia at the end of the journey. We can find social democratic regimes in Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland that are free of communist ideology. There exists a distinction between a social democratic regime and democratic socialism. Social democrats believe that welfare programs should be implemented by a democratically elected government, whereas proponents of democratic socialism believe that the means of production should be nationalized for the economy to be run democratically (Brandal, 2013).

McNally (1993) stated that many European and Latin American countries have implemented socialist policies, believing that workers should control the bulk of the means of production while adhering to the desires of the free market and capitalist classes. They implemented socialism through democratic methods rather than revolution. One of the primary characteristics of socialism is anti-capitalism. Marx's socialism is revolutionary socialism that emerged in response to the Industrial Revolution. Marxists frequently refer to socialism as the first necessary step in the transition from capitalism to communism. They aim to eliminate private property, private ownership of manufacturing facilities, competition, and so on.

Lebowitz (2016) argued in his "Twenty-First Century Socialism" that the essential assertion of socialism is that the world should not be ruled by a small clique of capitalists acting only in their interests, but by all people on earth working and thinking together for the common good. Using the green socialism model, the socialist, progressive governments of this century should actively seek to encourage cooperative models of ownership.

Crossman (2021) defined socialism as a philosophical, political, and economic system. The government is responsible for managing the production and distribution of commodities

and services, including citizens' basic needs such as clothing, housing, education, health, and employment. The social system promotes collective ownership of means of production such as machinery, tools, farms, factories, infrastructure, land, labor, money, and natural resources.

Similarly, Larson (2021) asserted that socialism can be defined in two ways based on ideology: property rights and economic redistribution. History has labeled socialism as communism and democratic socialism, also known as the welfare state. These two definitions of socialism represent different political methodologies for reaching the socialist ideology. The property rights definition, or communism, cannot coexist with a democratic government. The redistributive definition, or democratic socialism, is at least theoretically compatible with parliamentary democracy.

Democratic socialism is a form of socialism characterized by a socially owned economy. It contrasts with authoritarian and undemocratic practices. Democratic socialism is committed to the systematic and structural transformation of the economy from capitalism to socialism. Although it originated from Marxist political ideology, it is different from scientific socialism. While it accepts a socialist economy and collectively owned means of production, it operates within a democratic framework. The PMPD idea is strongly linked with democratic socialism because it promotes pluralism and socialism within a democratic framework.

### **PMPD and its path to socialism**

The politics of any country has its sociological foundations. In Nepal, the social aspects of PMPD are significant, given that Nepali politics, since the restoration of democracy, has revolved around Bhandari's political philosophy (Luintel, 2023). The argument in the constitution (2015) demonstrated that all Nepali parties involved in its formulation were

equally committed to transforming Nepal into a socialist state by embracing democratic norms and values such as good governance, civil liberty, and other fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution.

The Nepali people have high expectations for changing the political and economic system because the basic character of Nepali society has changed with the end of the feudal monarchy after seven decades of people's struggle, culminating in the 2006 peaceful revolution. Since then, Nepal has constitutionally adopted socialism (Pandey, 2023). Pandey further mentioned that PMPD is the most remarkable contribution of Bhandari, incorporating the aspirations of the socialist feminist perspective. It has not only included special provisions for equitable rights for women but has also influenced all subsequent movements and constitutional and legal provisions (Pandey, 2023).

This ideology seamlessly melds democracy and socialism with distinct Nepali societal characteristics. Originally introduced as a political program, PMPD has evolved into an indispensable guiding principle in shaping political developments following the restoration of democracy in 1990. Since the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) by Marx and Engels, Bhandari's PMPD stands as a profoundly innovative contribution to communist political philosophy (Pokharel, 2023). In this regard, Paudel (2023) stated that the setting of socialism in Nepal is diverse, with citizens demanding that elected governments execute the genuine spirit and objectives of socialism. Nepali communist parties, including the CPN (UML) and the Maoist Centre, have adopted the idea and practice of a multiparty system that recognizes periodic elections and elected administration although the later one does not believe on PMPD underscores the importance of industrialization and adequate physical development to construct a socialist society that provides 'work according to merit and pay according to work.'

Giri (2015) stated that the context of socialism in Nepal is diverse, with voters demanding that elected governments carry out the true spirit and goals of socialism. Nepali communist groups, such as the CPN (UML) and the Maoist Centre, have embraced the concept and practice of a multiparty system that acknowledges regular elections and elected government. The essence of PMPD is that it consents to the existence and operation of various political parties and considers that a communist party should also compete in elections to have legitimate mandates to run the government and rule the country. Paudel (2023) explored the expectations of the Nepali people towards socialism and its contradictions in practice. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) promises socialism as the guiding political-economic principle. However, major political parties in Nepal are heavily influenced by liberal capitalist principles, implementing neo-liberal policies that align with the interests of the comprador bourgeoisie. This contradicts the socialist principle that the Nepali people expect. The text calls for serious discussions on achieving socialism and urges political actors to take immediate and radical actions to achieve socialism in Nepal.

Chaulagain (2021) stated that the 2015 Constitution legally established socialism as the nation's overarching geopolitical principle. Despite a written vow to socialism in the constitution, Nepal is heavily impacted by the feudal and capitalist economy, and the authorities are victims of neoliberalism. The documents of major political parties demonstrate that they are attempting to go forward on the path of social democracy, but they must make significant changes in their practical behaviors and performances to develop a socialist eco-political culture in Nepal.

Pokhrel (2023) examines the politics of Nepali communist parties, particularly the Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist and Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal

(Maoist Centre), using a Marxist perspective. Pokhrel argues that these parties have adopted appropriate social policies but have deviated from their early stages, becoming fascinated by consumerist capitalist culture. The deviation is attributed to their failure to properly analyze Nepali society, their leaders' double-faced behavior, and their inability to bring about socio-economic change due to parliamentary politics.

Shakya (2010) stated that vocational distinctions among cultural groups have a substantial impact on economic disparities as well as political and social movements. Business elites, who benefit the most from economic and social change, are known for their rigid commitment to monetary calculations, which makes them an impediment to social progress. Despite their cooperation with political regimes, their interactions with the government are not necessarily culturally neutral.

The establishment of a socialist state in Nepal is the ultimate goal of Bhandari's PMPD and has become the primary objective of all leftist political parties in Nepal. Bhandari, the then General Secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist and Leninist (CPN-UML), presented a working paper entitled "Contemporary International Situation and Relevance of Marxism" at an international seminar of communist parties held in Calcutta, India, in 1993. In this forum, the road to the People's Democratic Revolution was a major topic of discussion on how communist parties could construct socialist systems in their nations (Bhandari, 2021). Bhandari discussed Nepal's political movements and the historical role communist parties played in developing multiparty competitive democracy. Bhandari claimed that the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) took ownership of the achievements resulting from these movements. Bhandari dubbed this process PMPD and emphasized the need for competition, human rights protection,

and the strengthening of the constitutional system and rule of law to qualitatively enhance the framework. This approach differs from the one-party system in socialist countries, as it allows for the creation and operation of multiple political parties and believes that a communist party should also compete. Paudel (2023) stated that PMPD was a crucial document that contributed to changing the political landscape. The idea of PMPD is a broad approach to analyzing its socialist concepts and current practices in Nepali politics.

PMPD is a political system that emphasizes socialism, social ownership, economic equality, and the role of the state in accomplishing socialist ideals. Its founding principles are rooted in socialism, as evidenced by major papers, speeches, and writings by leaders affiliated with this ideology. This concept is reflected in the Nepali government's policies and programs, which include specific measures aimed at achieving socialist goals. Social and economic reforms influenced by the PMPD philosophy are analyzed, focusing on wealth distribution, social justice, and economic structure. The government's connections with other countries and international organizations are also examined, particularly how diplomatic ties and foreign policies align with or diverge from socialist ideas. The public reception of socialist ideas in Nepal is assessed, highlighting obstacles and successes. Bhandari's enduring legacy is also analyzed, focusing on how his theories influenced political debate and policies beyond his lifetime.

From the above discussion, we can further analyze that the debate on socialism has become very active among scholars, academicians, politicians, and other areas of civil society. However, it has mostly remained a topic of debate, and the path forward is still unclear. Models of socialism vary worldwide; for example, China practices socialism with



Chinese characteristics. In this context, the idea of PMPD as a guiding principle aims to transform capitalism into socialism with Nepali characteristics. For this, alliances and integration within the parties under PMPD's principles to place government power in the people's hands, end all forms of exploitation and oppression, and achieve cultural and material preparedness are fundamental steps toward transforming socialism.

## Conclusion

The major issues, ideas, and ideologies of PMPD are incorporated into the constitutional framework of Nepal, but they remain to be fully addressed in the government's periodic plans and programs due to the current unstable political scenario. Control of the government mechanism by the people through popular votes and public support is the primary entrance point to the path of socialism in Nepal.

The ultimate political ideological goal of PMPD is to promote socialism in the socioeconomic context of Nepal. It advocates socialist values such as social fairness and inclusiveness within the dynamism of a multiparty democracy. The path of PMPD is to transform society by accepting the core values of multiparty democracy, consolidating state power in the hands of the people, eliminating all forms of oppression and exploitation by feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism, enhancing living conditions, promoting social values and fairness, achieving collective ownership and control of resources by the people, and ensuring material and cultural preparedness. Considering the different models and arguments of socialism, we aim to transform our political, social, and economic systems into a uniquely Nepali model of socialism following the guiding principles of PMPD. However, implementing this system necessitates careful consideration of Nepali sociopolitical dynamics, cultural sensibilities, and economic and political realities.

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