

"Madhesis Are Fighting For Themselves, Their Identity And Nationalism"

- Bimalendra Nidhi

Bimalendra Nidhi, General Secretary of Nepali Congress (Democratic), Legislature, and former Minister was recently in the United States to attend an International Conference "Nepal Today: Challenges of Inclusive Democracy" organized by India China Institute, The New School. In a luncheon meet hosted by the Madheshi Diaspora in New York, Nidhi gave an interview to **Bindu Chaudhary**. Excerpts of the interview:



Bindu Chaudhary

You were invited all the way from Nepal for a Conference on Inclusion. Do you think such conferences held seven seas across have any impact back home?

Certainly, discussions about issues that are of pertinent importance to Nepal, such as inclusion and democracy, needs discussions and debates at the international level. Its significance need not be over-emphasized in the present context of Nepal which is in the transition phase; we need enriched debates at the national and international level to help raise awareness and influence policies and decisions back home. Besides, international examples and experiences prove useful in shaping our own course of action.

You have had the opportunity to interact with Nepalese Diaspora in North America. What are their concerns about fairness in elections, hopes for representative politics?

The Nepalese Diaspora has been very supportive of the recent democratic movement in Nepal. I would also like to acknowledge their contribution during Jana-Andolan II in which they expressed similar solidarity towards bringing peace and democracy in the country. The Diaspora, Madheshis and Pahadis included, seem to be very concerned and vigilant about the ongoing developments back home. I am impressed by their regard towards consolidating democratic process in the country. They are looking forward to a timely, free and fair election for the constituent assembly with active and equal participation of all citizens, including Dalit, Mahila, Janjati and Madheshi (DaMaJaMa). The Diaspora is positively opinionated about the establishment of federal set-up and regional autonomy as well as proportional representation according to population in the constituent assembly.

How can the Madheshi- Pahadi divide be narrowed down towards building a more cohesive society?

The topography of Nepal, which is divided into Himal, Pahad and Terai was not a human mastermind, it was a geographic bliss. It should thus be understood that Terai (or its inhabitants) belong to Nepal as much as Pahad (or its inhabitants). Identity, Representation and Recognition are the three virtues all Nepalese should be privileged with. Further, Madheshis have as much contribution in shaping the current Nepal as the Pahadis. Madheshis have been fighting for their country all way long, now with honest intentions, they are fighting for themselves, their identity and nationalism. The Madheshi movement is a movement in defense of democracy, and we must acknowledge that there are Pahadi intellectuals who have accepted and supported the movement in good faith. It is absolutely not a good idea to fight an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; in stead, we should try to develop a trustful relationship amongst each other by caring for and healing each other's wounds and trying to befriend each other.

Do you think that Nepal should have federal states as demanded by various political parties and ethnic communities? Will it be in the best interest of Nepal and the Nepalese?

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NC - D General Secretary
Bimalendra Nidhi. (Photo
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By all means. Federalism is indispensable for a democratic society because it provides a structure for power-sharing with a commitment to regional and local autonomy. Federalism assures devolution of power and allows for inclusion and empowerment of the marginalized groups, and serves in the best interest of the entire citizen. In this respect, I contradict the argument that Federalism will cost the national integrity of the country. Political decision has already been made in favor of establishing Federalism in Nepal. We are however, yet to work on the modalities, such as the symmetrical or asymmetrical model which guides power allocation between the Centre and the States; the optimum number and size of the regional states; federal system based on ethnic line, or resource allocation, or based on socio-cultural distribution shaped by history, geography, population etc. We need more debates and discussions before deciding on a final structural and functional modality. I personally believe in giving more power and autonomy to the states, and hence prefer the U.S.A. asymmetric model, where the powers, authorities and privileges of central authority is outlined in the Constitution, while the remaining powers and authorities are bestowed to the States.

You have achieved such an eminent position in the Government. From your experience, was it difficult for you to fit into the political system being a Madheshi?

As far as I am concerned, being a Madheshi did not put me in any disadvantaged position to enter into politics or governance. Of course, I had to face competitions and contests as any others would do, but not that I had to fight any extra battle because of my identity. My father was in politics, and I entered politics during my student life. I am proud to be a Madheshi, and equally esteemed to be associated with Nepali Congress (Democratic), which believes in equality and is open to all citizens, including *Dalit, Mahila, Janjati, and Madheshi*. In fact, realizing that people of *Karnali* are equally disadvantaged, we are aspiring for the representation of *KaDaMaJaMa* in our political party. I would also like to mention specifically that Nepali Congress (Democratic) was the most proactive political party to have accepted Madheshi issue in its political agenda, and therefore I have not yet faced any discouragement being a Madheshi or being opinionated about Madheshi issue. Nepali Congress (Democratic) Manifesto itself symbolizes Nepalese Unity:

*Himal, Pahad, Terai
Sabai ko Nepal, Sabai ko Rajai,
Sabai ko Shanti, Sabai ko Bhalai*

Tell us about your family. We heard of the sad demise of your mother recently. What was her role behind your success?

I grieve the loss of my mother. She had an immense contribution in making me what I am today. My father too was a great inspiration, and I followed his footprints into politics. My mother was bold enough to endure the pains of both her husband and son going to jail, and her positivism and encouragement kept us moving forward. She followed politics and kept herself tuned to the political developments. She had great aspiration from the Madheshi movement, and kept asking me about the developments. She was very hopeful that the Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala would be affirmative in his second address to the nation in February 2007, and when I briefed her after the address, she gladly said, "I was telling you, they have to submit to our demands!", and she died, contented, the very next day. She will remain an ideal for my family, including my wife, and my two sons.

(The author is a Social Worker and a Freelance Journalist advocating for the rights of the voiceless and the unheard. Before going to the U.S., she was associated with a couple of NGOs and INGOs in Nepal and India and can be reached at binduc@gmail.com)

(Editor's Note: Nepalis, wherever they live, as well as friends of Nepal around the globe are requested to contribute their views/opinions/recollections etc. on issues concerning present day Nepal to the Guest Column of Nepalnews. Length of the article should not be more than 1,000 words and may be edited for the purpose of clarity and space. Relevant photos as well as photo of the author may also be sent along with the article. Please send your write-ups to editors@mos.com.np)

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