

## Revolutionary Nepal: Introduction

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The Nepalese People's War is now over and a page in the history of Nepal has been turned. Why go back over it? It is true that by turning back the clock we are going against the current, and probably against the wishes of many Nepalese people who are intent on forgetting what they endured and on looking to the future.

This is the lot of every post-war or post-revolutionary period. Yet it provokes a thirst for knowledge as the facts themselves grow more remote as time goes by.

Any "rebuilding" made during the revolutionary period will be more difficult to decipher while history takes a definite turn. Only a few historians will develop new theories on the basis of the written documents dating back to this time and of any testimonies left by survivors. For these reasons, we believe that working on the revolutionary period today is of real use, now that fears have dissipated, and that collecting various testimonies and points of view to help understand what happened, especially at a micro level, poses no difficulty.

The set of contributions in this volume barely acquaints us with the international dimension of the conflict or with the military strategy the two opposing parties followed: we even came to the conclusion that there was no point in yet again summarising the Nepalese People's war in the Introduction. Instead, our aim is to give impetus to filling an important gap in the corpus of studies devoted to the subject by focusing on micro-studies, by scrutinising daily life, narratives, life stories, in various regions of Nepal –all of which has rarely been documented.<sup>1</sup>

The volume starts at the beginning: the birth of the ideologist Mohan Bikram Singh, his legendary youth in Pyuthan district, and his founding role in the creation of the Nepalese Maoist movement. The article, written by Benoît Cailmail, is very personal, and makes extensive use of original interviews with the first Maoist actors, including Mohan Bikram Singh himself. The author sets out to shed light on the charismatic figure of MB, whose photograph has never been circulated, and to understand where

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<sup>1</sup> Fieldwork for the research of B. Cailmail, P. Ghimire, M. Lecomte-Tilouine and S. Shrestha-Schipper was financed by the ANR programme "La Guerre du Peuple au Népal", which aims at producing an ethnography of the conflict.

his aura derives from. This portrait is charged with a mixture of intimacy and analytical lucidity, leading us to share in the emotions of the peasants who witnessed MB forcing his father, for the sake of equity, to redistribute his land to his own detriment.

Mohan Bikram stepped down from leading the political scene after various internal splits in his party and the creation of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in 1995, which launched the People's War on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1996. The second contribution, by Krishna Hachhethu, then takes over by retracing the history of the CPN (M) from its creation and its transformation from an underground organisation to the main political party in Nepal, then to governing the country, all within the space of 13 years. In these pages Krishna Hachhethu gathers together a mine of information, and offers an overall synopsis essential to our understanding of the recent transformations in Nepalese society.

We then meet the political parties in the field with the following contribution by Pragya Dhital, who focuses on the forms of collective violence that emerged in post-1990 Nepal, through a very fine analysis of all the actors and factors involved in two riots that occurred in Nepalganj, South-Western Nepal. The author highlights the link between mob and mobilization, and argues that collective violence became "a standard way to achieve political change and to demarcate ethnic and territorial boundaries" in Nepal.

The scale of the study narrows further with the following contribution by Satya Shrestha-Schipper, who depicts the Maoist techniques of recruiting women in the valley of Hat Sinja, in Jumla, and shows how it shares similarities with secret wedding arrangements. The author also documents the exclusion Maoist women are subjected to in their native village community and the disparities between the Maoist rhetoric on women and the actual local situation.

The next contribution by Pustak Ghimire is also made at a micro scale, within a village and its surroundings, in the middle of the district of Khotang, at the other end of the country. The author's intimate relationship with the community he studies provides the reader with an unprecedented portrayal of Nepalese rural life, its major events and its ceaseless social interplay. The author documents a phenomenon which is at the same time remarkable, yet which passes unnoticed: the sudden outburst of female possession (which started in post 1990-Nepal) during the most violent period of the People's War. The simultaneity between possession and political violence is striking and its causality is clearly expressed by these messianic oracles, who offer original solutions concerning the status of women and Dalits, such as a means of occupying a new place in their community through this practice.

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The perspective is further narrowed in the following contribution by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, who focuses on a narrative: an account of what happened in Dullu in 2004 given by a local villager. Through this narrative and its confrontation with Maoist accounts we are offered a fascinating insight into a “funny people’s War” in which spirit possession, music and sparring matches are used as the weapons of the weak.

Lastly, the final contribution is by Carine Jaquet who paints an enthralling and unique portrait of a Maoist child soldier.

We have come full circle with these two portraits which respectively open and close this special issue. The latter shows the impact the ideas of the former figure, when implemented, actually had on a little girl. No matter what she really experienced, whether true or not, she offers a testimony of a rare form of violence, which reflects (at least) the new type of culture in which she grew up. This culture of violence now seems deeply anchored in society. Yet, it has also given rise to a multitude of inventive and spontaneous reactions, which offer other types of stimulating paths.

I would like to end by mentioning that this volume benefited from the expertise of several very young researchers, who have not yet completed their thesis. The quality of their work augurs extremely well for future research on Nepal.